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August 2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisors, Dr. Abdulaziz A. Sachedina and Dr. Peter W. Ochs and the committee members, Dr. Ahmed H. al-Rahim and Dr. Richard Barnett, for their guidance, patience and efforts that made possible completion of this dissertation. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Department of Religion at Davidson College, especially Dr. William Mahony, Dr. Trent Foley, Dr. Karl Plank and Dr. Greg Snyder who were all immensely encouraging and supportive. Without the kind of support I received at Davidson College, completion of this project in a timely manner would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari, Director Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, and Research scholars, especially Dr. Qaiser Shahzad who generously provided facilities at the Institute and access to the library during my stay there. The research conducted at the Institute was critical to the development of the dissertation. Special thanks to Maulana Syed Mustafa Hussain Aseef Jaisi of Noor-e-Hidayat Foundation (Lucknow) whose assistance in the collection of primary texts was indispensable. Insights of my colleagues at the University of Virginia, Matt Munson, Dr. Ron Bentley, Dr. Jacqueline Brinton and Dr. Robert Tappan provided countless inspirations and remained a constant source of motivation and encouragement. Numerous friends assisted me during different stages of this project, in editing, and in reading drafts and providing feedback. They include Fuad S. Naeem, Zachary Markwith, Betsy Mesard, Ali Galestan and most of all Reza Hemyari who went out of the way to help me. I thank them all. I owe my studies in the United States to the unwavering trust, prayers and confidence of my mother Mrs. Razia Zamir Syed and sister-friend Dr. Um-e-Salma Rizvi. Their support and encouragement was vital to the successful completion of my studies. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the living memory of my beloved father Dr. Syed Zamir Hussain.

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twentieth century ‘Ali>Naq̣ī> is the most prominent representative of this family; from the point of view of communal fame, among the greatest.

Yet even within this family of eminent scholars ‘Ali>Naq̣ī> is unique. First, it was during his lifetime the Indian subcontinent went through unprecedented sociopolitical and religious transformations. Second, while training as a scholar in the seminaries of Iraq, for thirteen years he also taught at Aligarh University, the hub of Islamic modernism in India. Third, rarely has a Shi’i scholar of his stature spoken directly to the masses as he did, making use of the pulpit and public lecturing. This dual engagement with Islamic traditionalist (the ‘ulama’ scholarly tradition) and modernist circles (the new intellectual elite) seems to have profoundly shaped the thought of ‘Ali>Naq̣ī> making him particularly relevant in understanding the relationship between Shi’i traditionalism and modernism. The varying subjects that he wrote or spoke about include Qur’anic exegesis, theology, history, jurisprudence, political thought (including treatises on war and martyrdom), intra-faith debates (for example critiques of Wahhabism, Bābīyah, and Aḥmadiyah), defense of Muslim (and Shi’i) personal law (including topics such as gender roles, veiling, and temporary marriage), and numerous social issues such as the relationship between religion and culture. These writings and sermons constitute over two hundred titles (mostly in Urdu but also in Arabic and Persian). This study of ‘Ali>Naq̣ī>’s life and his theological thought is the first on any scholar of the “Household of *Ijtihād*,” and for that matter, of any Shi’i scholar of the

family see pp. 128–77. In light of the significance of this family one awaits a study comparable to Francis Robinson’s on the Farangi>Maḥl family (2002).

Indian subcontinent.⁴ The study seeks to introduce ‘Ali>Naqvi> to the scholarly world by way of a systematic textual study of his key ideas in the domain of Islamic theology and sociopolitical thought and his efforts to popularize his message.

Biography of ‘Ali>Naqvi>⁵

‘Ali>Naqvi> was born on December 26, 1905 in Lucknow in the family of esteemed religious scholars of the Household of *Ijtihad* (See Appendix A). Between the age of 3 and 4, to complete his studies in Islamic religious sciences, his father Sayyid Abu al-Hāsan (*Mumtaz al-‘ulama*) took him and his family to Iraq. In Iraq at the age of 7, ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s formal education began with Arabic and Persian grammar and basic learning of the Qur’an. In 1914, the family returned to India and he continued his religious education under the supervision of his father and later at the Sultān al-Madāris seminary. He also studied Arabic literature with Mufti>Muḥammad ‘Ali> In 1923 he passed the exam for certification of religious scholar (‘*alim*) from Allahabad University and soon also gained certification from Nazhmiyyah College and Sultān al-Madāris. In 1925 he was awarded a degree in literature (*Fazl-i adab*). In 1927, ‘Ali>Naqvi> departed

⁴ For studies of Sunni Islam in the modern Indian context see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmed Riza Khan Barelvi and His Movement, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Francis Robinson, *The Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2001); Schimmel (1963) on Iqbal; Troll (1978) on Sayyid Ahmad Khan; Aziz Ahmed (1967) on Islamic modernism in India; Reetz (2006) on various Sunni>religious movements in first half of the twentieth century; and Vali Nasr (1994 and 2001) on Mawdudi>and Jama’at-e-Islami>

⁵ For the purpose of compiling ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s biographical information, I have relied on the following sources: Salamāt Rizvi> *Sayyid al-‘Ulama’: ḥāyat wa kaḥnāmay* (Publishing City: Publisher 1988), a biography of ‘Ali Naqvi> (Author’s name) “Ḥāyat-I Sayyid ul-‘Ulama>,” *Khandan-i Ijtihad* (November 2010): 46-82; ‘Ali>Naqvi> introduction to *Faṣl al-Khatīb* (Karachi: Publisher name, 1986), his Qur’anic commentary; Salamāt ‘Ali> Rizvi> “Sayyid al-Mufasssiriā, Sādr al-Muḥāqqiqiā, Ayatullah al-‘Uzma Maulana> Sayyid ‘Ali>Naq>Naqvi>” in *Khandan-i Ijtihad* (December 2005): 80-4; and ‘Allamah Sayyid Sa’id Akhtar Rizvi>Gopalpuri> “Sayyid ul- ‘Ulama> ‘Allamah Sayyid ‘Ali>Naq>Naqvi> mujtahid” in *Khandan-i ijtiḥad* (February 2004): 74-7.

for the seminaries of Iraq, then the most prestigious place for religious training in the Twelver Shi'i world. During his stay there, he studied Islamic jurisprudence with Ayatullah Na'ini, Ayatollah Abu Ḥasan Isfahani and Ayatullah Sayyid Dīya' Iraqī, Ḥādīth with Shaykh 'Abbas Qūmmī and Sayyid Ḥusayn Ṣadr and Islamic theology (*Kalām*) with Sayyid Sharf al-Dīn, Shaykh Muhammad Ḥusayn Kashif al-Ghita', Shaykh Jawād Balāghī, Sayyid Muḥsin Amīn Aḥli. As it will be noted later, while studying in Iraq 'Ali-Naqvī also wrote a few works in Arabic. After completing his seminary education and receiving certification (*ijaza*) for *ijtihād*, in 1932 'Ali-Naqvī returned to India. Immediately upon his return he began preaching regularly on Fridays.

In 1933 he was appointed as professor in the Oriental College Department of Lucknow University, where he then taught Arabic and Persian for over two decades. In 1959, Aligarh Muslim University invited 'Ali-Naqvī to take up the position of Reader in the theology (*dīniyat*) department—which as yet did not have teaching faculty. The department also created two parallel streams of Sunni and Shi'i theology and 'Ali-Naqvī began to oversee the affairs of the Shi'i branch. Between 1967 and 1969, 'Ali-Naqvī became the dean of Shi'i theology eventually retiring from the university in 1972. Post-retirement, from 1972-1975 'Ali-Naqvī was given a research professorship through the University Grants Commission (UGC) and he decided to permanently stay in Aligarh. He died on May 18, 1988 in Lucknow and was buried at Ḥusayniyah Jannat Ma'ab.

The Crisis of Religion and 'Ali Naqvī's Reconfiguring of Islamic Tradition

Writing about 'ulama' Qasim Zaman (2002) notes:

The 'ulama have not only continued to respond -- admittedly, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and success -- to the challenges of changing times; they have also been successful in enhancing their influence in a number of

contemporary Muslim societies, in broadening their audiences, in making significant contributions to public discourse, and even in setting the terms of such discourses. In many cases, they have also come to play significant religio-political activist roles in contemporary Islam...[The ‘ulama]are hardly frozen in the mode of the Islamic religious tradition, but this tradition nevertheless remains a fundamental frame of reference, the bases of their identity and authority...What makes the ‘ulama of the modern world worth studying is not merely that they have continued to cling to lay claim to and self-consciously represent a millennium-old tradition of Islamic learning... Their larger claim on our attention lies in the ways in which they have mobilized this tradition to define issues of religious identity and authority in the public sphere to articulate changing roles for themselves in contemporary Muslim politics. The ‘ulamas tradition is not a mere inheritance from the past, even though they often argue that that is precisely what it is. It is the tradition that has to be constantly imagined, reconstructed, argued over, defended and modified.⁶

Zaman goes on to show how ‘ulama’ have not been completely aloof to the challenge of modernity and have adapted in numerous ways to reassert their authority through their legal thought, and by reconfiguring their institutions. Building on Zaman’s seminal work on ‘ulama’ legal and institutional reforms as a response to changing circumstances, Brinton shows how preacher- ‘*alim*’ such as Shaykh Sha‘rawi have posited a theological renewal.⁷ While the issue of ‘ulama’s authority is central to both studies, Zaman’s work examines the role of ‘ulama’ as legal scholars, Brinton of a popular preacher- ‘*alim*’ as a religious intermediary and a teacher. The present study not only corroborates the claim of Zaman and Brinton that the ‘ulama’ are still relevant and have adjusted their discourse to the changing circumstances, it also seeks to show by way of illustration that in isolated cases (like that of ‘Ali>Naqvi’) the adjustment from the ‘ulama’ has been of enormous proportions. ‘Ali>Naqvi’s life and writings display an “adjustment” similar to what has been described for Tha’vi> by Zaman (2008) or

⁶ Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 2-10.

⁷ Brinton, Jacqueline J. “Preaching Islamic Renewal: Shaykh Muhammad Mitwalli Sha’rawi and the Syncretization of Revelation and Contemporary Life” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 2009).

Sha'rawi>by Brinton (2009); yet the uniqueness of 'Ali>Naqvi>lies in the ambitiousness of his intellectual project. This is to say that his writings and sermons on disparate subjects ranging from Qur'anic exegesis to Islamic history, from Islamic law to Islamic theology, from Shi'i apologetics to Indian sociopolitical issues are rather unified in purpose, geared towards a comprehensive rethinking and reconfiguring, not only of Islamic theology but of Islamic social and political order as well. His efforts to publish his writings in over twelve languages, establishment of the Imamia Mission to oversee these publications and many other activities, and extensive public lecturing during Muharram and beyond (a rare phenomenon for a scholar of his religious stature) are in turn illustrative of his labors to popularize this reconfigured Islamic tradition. This study illustrates that underlying the immense diversity of subjects that 'Ali>Naqvi>chose to write or speak about is a unity of intent and purpose, an attempt to comprehensively rehabilitate the status of religion in the Islamic society. Through a closer reading of 'Ali>Naqvi>'s multifaceted life, activities, writings, and sermons, this study hopes to elicit this underlying unity of his religio-intellectual project.

Many of his works open with remarks about a characteristically new religious crisis for Muslims and various challenges to the Islamic tradition and its theological, legal and sociopolitical teachings. In the introduction to his seven-volume Qur'anic commentary he writes:

The new ideas that reach this land by sailing from the shores of Europe seize over the hearts and minds of many [here]. In their hearts these ideas insinuate the kind of doubts (*shubhaḥ*) about every facet of religion (*mazhab*) the resolution of which, if not presented in accordance with their mindset (*zahniyat*) and their taste, would result in them becoming captivated by the doubt, which will then turn into belief (*'aqidah*) and [be the cause of] their turning away from religion (3).

Much of what he wrote or spoke about, therefore, displays an awareness of ‘this new crisis’ to the Islamic tradition and a conscious attempt to recast the message of Islam in a way that would speak to this new mindset. His response to this crisis displays a rethinking and reorienting of tradition in which reason (*‘aql*) plays a central role. ‘Ali Naqvi>clearly hints at this project quite early in his career. Writing in 1941 on the relationship between reason and religion he noted:

Since there are hundreds of religions in the world and each one of these calls all others misguided, it is a duty upon one who is a seeker of truth to weigh all these [religions] with reason, and to whatever extent the length of one’s life permits, continue taking steps forward until he understands one [religion] fully. Turning away from research and helplessly saying goodbye to all [religions] because of the anxiety caused by the multiplicity of paths is intellectual laziness, whose consequence could never be satisfactory. In the order of existence [*nizām-i hastī*] there is wisdom which is perceived by the eye, understood by the reason and assented to by the heart. There is a Being which is the nucleus of this wisdom and which is directly related to this cosmic order. That the mind assents to Him is its grasp of reality...Beliefs are guarded by reason...on this basis ‘Religion and Reason’ (*Mazhab aur ‘aql*) is presented in a book form so that the reality of the divorce between reason and religion, about which so much fuss is made, may be unveiled, the mirror [of it] be cleansed and one could see the true face of reality.⁸

His writings, therefore, are aimed at teaching his Shi’i community ‘one religion fully’, in this case, Shi’i Islam. Yet this teaching is not a straightforward reiteration of his learning but a thorough reworking of it along rationalist lines. It appears to be his assumed premise that the teachings of Islam in the wake of this crisis had to be presented in rational terms, and to be spoken of in these terms alone. Thus a rational presentation of Islamic theology and sociopolitical thought is central to his rethinking and reconfiguring of the Shi’i Islamic tradition. This rational reconfiguring is a result of his assessment of the intellectual, structural, and communal resources at hand (such as

⁸ *Mazhab aur ‘aql*. (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qāumi>Press, 1941), Introduction.

his *usūbī* intellectual background and the powerful symbolism of Karbala and martyrdom of Hūsayn which he appropriates quite extensively), and the challenge of modernity which beside insinuating a religious crisis, also presented new opportunities for him to reach out to the masses (through, for example, the print-medium). It is refashioning, reconstructing, or reconfiguring of this tradition because his attempts to respond to modern circumstances pushed him towards a certain selective endorsement of particular aspects of tradition,⁹ for example rationality, over and above others, such as intra-communal discords, and also led him to reach out to the Muslim masses directly. As a religious authority to whom the Shi'i community would turn for guidance in times of crisis, he saw this rethinking and reconfiguring of Islamic teachings as central to his role.

In all of this 'Alī-Naqī's also stands apart from the broader 'ulama' scholarly tradition for which the encounter with modernity has usually resulted in uncompromising reactionary intellectualism.¹⁰ Although a strong sense of crisis looms large in 'Alī-Naqī's religio-intellectual project (consciously informing most of his works and sermons) his response to its various challenges is rational, calculated, and a result of his rethinking. In his thought and efforts is witnessed a confluence of the need to respond to modernity both as a philosophical and theological challenge to the Islamic

⁹ I borrow this term from Sherman Jackson's analysis of tradition in the introduction to his *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abū-Hamid al-Ghazālī's Fayṣal al-Tafriqa* (Oxford: 2002).

¹⁰ "At the same time, even if we discount the partisan criticisms of opponents, it seems impossible to deny that in the attitude and outlook of the ulema [sic] and their followers there is a disturbing weakness. They are losing touch with the thought of the age. Their arguments, however just, fail to carry conviction because they are expressed in thought-forms which arouse no response in the minds of educated men. Even the very language which they generally use has an antiquarian flavor that strikes curiously upon the ear and strengthens the feeling that they have no message for today. Above all, their public pronouncements displayed a rigid formalism and reliance upon authority which, as the modernists see truly, are but feeble weapons of defense in the struggle with the forces arrayed against religion throughout the world" (Gibb, 1947). The "new Muslim intellectual elite" has time and again attacked these non-critical and out-of-date prescriptions of the 'ulama'.

worldview, and to its legal and sociopolitical teachings. Needless to say the categories of rethinking, reconfiguring, and popularizing are drawn to help a clearer understanding of his intellectual project. In actuality, there is an overlap and confluence of all these elements in his writings and sermons, which resist this clear-cut classification.

Since the study deals with the intellectual and religious thought of a contemporary religious scholar through his writings and sermons, the method of study is, first and foremost, textual. Through textual study, extensive translations from his numerous writings, contextualization of information (technical terms, ideas, and historical data), and careful analysis it presents a well thought-out reading of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s intellectual project. The publication of Shi’i literature in the Indian subcontinent tends to be on the margins of the mainstream publishing houses. For this reason and also because much of what ‘Ali>Naqvi>wrote is now out of print, or still in manuscript form, the textual study and research involved extensive archival work, accessing manuscripts from libraries, and personal collections of his family and disciples and the broader Shi’i community of India and Pakistan.

Although an explanation of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s communal fame is not central to this study, it was still of concern and relevance. To explore this dimension and his legacy in the Indian subcontinent interviews were also conducted with his disciples, students and the broader Shi’i community.

Outline of the Chapters

It is the central claim of this study that as a religious scholar and a communal leader in his writings, thought, and sermons, ‘Ali>Naqvi>was consciously responding to a deep

sense of crisis within his community which lead him to rethink, reconfigure, and popularize Islamic (more precisely Shi'i) theology and sociopolitical thought. It argues that 'Ali>Naqvi's rethinking of the problem involved a careful assessment of the intellectual, social, and institutional resources at hand, and lead him to take a decisively rationalist stance in his thought whereby response to the intellectual problems (theological or sociopolitical) or the refashioning of the Islamic universe could only be carried out along rational lines. In addition to the centrality of the intellect, 'Ali>Naqvi> consciously saw his Shi'i community's love for the family of the Prophet and the Karbala narrative as major resources which he employs in the service of this reconfiguration, and even more so in popularizing the reconfigured Islamic tradition. In addition, he sees his *usuk*>intellectual training as a crucial resource for his religio-intellectual project.

With this general outline of the main argument in mind, the study opens with an overview of the underlying concerns and worries that led 'Ali>Naqvi>to embark upon this religio-intellectual project. Without a clear understanding of 'Ali>Naqvi's reception of the religious crisis, his writings and other intellectual and social activities could not be properly contextualized. Chapter 1 therefore examines how 'Ali>Naqvi>articulated this strong sense of religious crisis within the Indian milieu, and measures he sought urgent for his Shi'i community.

Chapter 2 through 5 look at 'Ali>Naqvi's response to the crisis of religion. In this regard, chapter 2 discusses the hermeneutic of the religio-intellectual project which was crucial to his project and was consistently employed to the task of rethinking and reconfiguring. Since in 'Ali>Naqvi's intellectual milieu the question about the

relationship between reason and revelation was of critical import, his solution to this debate played a vital role in his rethinking and reconfiguring of the Islamic tradition. My discussion of the hermeneutics of the religio-intellectual project therefore revolves primarily around this subject. Chapter 3 then turns to ‘Ali>Naq̣vi’s thought and the content of his writings and speeches. Here, I examine ‘Ali>Naq̣vi’s reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis in view of the crisis of religion. This chapter shows how ‘Ali>Naq̣vi effected his rethinking in his theological works, systematized the Shi’i creed, and refashioned Islamic theology and praxis based on his awareness of the crisis of religion and appraisal of the way out of it.

Throughout his life Karbala and martyrdom remained a key motif in ‘Ali>Naq̣vi’s thought and he wrote numerous books and essays on this subject. Chapter 4 examines these writings and shows how these writings not only complemented his reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis, but also supplemented it. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses ‘Ali>Naq̣vi’s sociopolitical thought and his social reform of the Indian Shi’i society. It also illustrates the interconnectedness of this aspect of his thought to his reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis.

Although the main claim of this study—the underlying unity of ‘Ali>Naq̣vi’s thought and activism—were observed on numerous occasions throughout, it is in the conclusion that I return to discuss it in comprehensive terms. The conclusion also analyzes ‘Ali>Naq̣vi’s attempts to popularize his message and his legacy and influence in Shi’i South Asia.

Literature in the Field

This study contributes to the growing literature on the 'ulama', contemporary Islamic intellectual history, Shi'ism, and Islam in South Asia.

Building upon the pioneering studies of Metcalf (1982 and 1984) on Muslim traditional scholarship ('*ulama*'), Robinson's and Zaman's works (2001 and 2002 respectively) have affected a renewed interest in the '*ulama*' and their institutions. This study is a contribution to this growing literature on '*ulama*'. Although these works did prompt article-length studies of Sunni '*ulama*' such as Thaḥvi (Naeem 2005), 'Ali Nadwi (Reixinger 2009), Taqī Uthmani (2008 and 2009), edited volumes such as by Hatta (2009), and in the case of Shi'i Islam of '*ulama*' such as Allameh Ṭabāṭba'i (Algar 2007), Mutḥhari (2008) and Miṣbah Yazdi (Siavoshi 2010), this revival of interest still brings to light only aspects of the writings of an '*alim*'; rarely has the thought of these figures been studied comprehensively (for exceptions see Zebiri 1993 and Brinton 2009). Furthermore, it is their seminary institution and the transformation of their religious authority that has received the most attention: Jamal Malik's study of madrassas (2008), Qasim Zaman's numerous recent essays on the '*ulama*' (e.g., in Krämer 2006 and Salvatore and Masud 2009) and his study of Maulāna Ashraf 'Ali Thaḥvi (2008) are a case in point. Yet since '*ulama*'s authority over the Muslim masses derives primarily from their perceived knowledge of the Islamic sources, their role as interpreters of religious faith and ritual deserves close attention. In view of this, the current project gives central attention to this role of '*ulama*' as religious interpreters for their communities. As has already been noted the study of Shi'i '*ulama*' is rare in the field and that of the Indian origin, non-existent.

Regarding literature on Islam and modernity, scholarship has mostly dealt with Islam's encounter with modernity as a civilizational and sociopolitical challenge (e.g., Hunter [2008], Tibi [2009], Bennett [2005] and Masud and Salvatore [2009]). Yet, for many Muslim intellectuals, the primary example being Muḥammad Iqbal (d. 1938), modernity was first and foremost a theological and philosophical challenge. As the example of 'Ali-Naqvi shows, modernity for Muslim intellectuals was a comprehensive challenge which had both a theological and sociopolitical dimensions. His example not only expands our knowledge of the subject of the encounter of Islam with modernity but also suggests the kind of revision needed in its scholarly narrative.

The study of contemporary Shi'ism has mostly been restricted to the Iranian revolution and how it has led to the politicization of Shi'i Islam (Arjomand 1989) and vice versa, as well as with the devotional practices (e.g., Pinault 1992 and 2000, Aghaei 2004 and 2005, Howarth 2005, and Hyder 2006) and political thought of figures such as Khomeini (Algar 1981), Shari'ati (Rahnema 2000) and Mutahhari (Davari 2005). Studies dealing with religious thought, theology (*kalam*), philosophy (*falsafah*) and mysticism (*'irfan*) are still rare. Abdulaziz Sachedina's translation of Ayatullah Khu'i's *Prolegomena to the Qur'an* (1998) and Reza Shah-Kazemi's translation of Ja'far Subhani's introduction to Shi'ite theology (2001) are still exceptions in the field. This project helps to fill this gap in scholarship by studying the religious thought of a contemporary Shi'i scholar comprehensively. The method of study employed also rectifies the scholarly oversight of the important intersection between the intellectual thought of 'ulama' such as 'Ali-Naqvi and the lived experience of the Shi'i community.

Finally, although Shi'ites are a significant minority in the Indian subcontinent, estimates varying from 5 to 15% of the Muslim population, their intellectual tradition is mostly absent from the scholarship. Except for S. A. A. Rizvi's works (1982 and 1984), all the studies of Indian Shi'ism pertain to the devotional life and mourning culture and practices (for example Schubel 1993 and Pinault 2000). Furthermore, there is yet to be written an account of how modernity has shaped the Shi'i tradition of the Indian subcontinent; Rizvi 1984's discussion of the subject does not include the Shi'i 'ulama' and is far from comprehensive. This study, the first one of any major Indian Shi'i *'alim*, responds to this need for studying the Shi'i intellectual life of the Indian subcontinent and especially the Shi'i response to modernity. In that the study, on the one hand, augments the recent publications on Shi'i modernism (Brunner 2001 and Sabahi 2007), and on the other, complements Hatta, Metcalf, Zaman, and Robinson's study of the transformations within Sunni Islam in modern India.

CHAPTER I: 'ALI>NAQVI'S RECEPTION OF THE CRISIS OF RELIGION

Introduction

In 1937 'Ali>Naqvi>was invited to Madrasah al-Va>iz}n (Lucknow) to deliver a series of yearly Muharram lectures. In the context of his intellectual life, these lectures signal nothing less than a critical turning point. For they reveal that within a few years of his arrival in India, his understanding of the problems that confronted his Shi'i community had led him to embark on a new religio-intellectual project, whose first unambiguous and orderly account is to be found in these very lectures. 'Ali>Naqvi's undertaking emerged as a result of two interrelated factors: first, his perceptive detection of the immediate, contemporary religio-communal needs of the Indian Shi'i Muslim community, and second a clear sense of his role as an *'alim* and religious leader of that community. Moreover, for Naqvi> the tasks of diagnosis and response was geared towards responding to what was unmistakably a deep feeling of crisis (Arabic *azmah*, Urdu *boh}an*). It is a central claim of this study that much of what 'Ali>Naqvi>wrote or spoke about from this point onwards was a response to numerous interrelated crises which he outlined in this and many other essays that he wrote between 1932 and 1945. Yet the crisis that forms the common thread weaving all of his writings together is that of religion. Without a thorough appreciation of this perceived notion of crisis, it is almost impossible to grasp why he wrote or spoke about the subjects that he did, or the way in which he chose to do so. In this regard, these Muharram lectures are our most accessible resource for an appreciation of issues deemed by 'Ali>Naqvi>as most pressing

and deserving of his attention. A compendium of his religio-intellectual project these lectures are also ‘Ali>Naqvi’s most lucid statement of the underlying worries, anxieties and motivations that prompted it, and would drive his intellectual energies for the rest of his life: It is in fact the reception of these “new challenges” by Naqvi>and his community that would inaugurate a prolific writing and speech career that would continue until his last days, providing the underlying thematic unity to his diverse intellectual activities. The Muharram lectures are his first public announcement of his project, and therefore, a major step forward on the new path he has laid out for himself.

Not everything in these lectures was new to his audience’s ears, however. Allusions to the various issues of concern to him and to his community had sporadically been given before. That is to say, that the signs of this reorientation are already found – though mostly scattered – in his earlier writings. What separates these lectures from the earlier writings and is most relevant for our purposes is the systematic nature of the presentation of these problems. Here, for the first time, he pieces together the various themes into a narrative centered around the question of *islah*¹ and *fasad*.² And compared

¹ *Islah*/in scholarship is usually translated as “reform” and has come to be identified in contemporary times with the modern reformist figures and movements in the various parts of the Islamic world. Often coupled with *tajdid* (i.e., revival), *islah*/continues to be an important construct for contemporary Islamic discourse. In this regard see Abu Khalil, As’ad. “Revival and Renewal.” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed., John Esposito. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, Dallal, Ahmad . “The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1993): pp. 341- 359, Voll, John. “Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: Tajdid and Islah.” *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. Ed., John Esposito. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, Lapidus, Ira. “Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms.” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40, no. 4 (1997): pages 110-155. Readers on contemporary Islam such as Donohue, John J., and John L. Esposito. *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982; Euben, Roxanne Leslie, and Muhammad Qasim Zaman. *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009; Kurzman, Charles. *Liberal Islam: A Source Book*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998 and ———. *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002 are also replete with issues related to revival and reform, while also highlighting clearly many of the issues ‘Ali>Naqvi>addressed during his intellectual life. In the Indian context, mention may be made of Metcalf, Barbara Daly. *Islamic Revival in*

to the previous instances, he decided to flesh out these concerns most clearly on this occasion.

A few words are timely regarding the translation of the two terms, *fasaḥ* and *islah*. Derived from the Arabic the dictionary meaning of *fasaḥ* in Urdu includes depravity, iniquity, wickedness, mischief, violence, war, horror, mutiny, sedition and rebellion; and *islah* *islah* *karna*>correction, amendment, and emendation (Shakespear) or to make better, correct, or improve (Chohan and Bukhari).³ I have already discussed the contemporary import of the concept of *islah*. Given the extensive lexical range of the terms themselves and subtleties with which ‘Ali>Naqvi>employs them, translation (or consistency therein) has not always been possible. Occasionally, however, and when the context would allow a clear and precise rendering, I have provided the English equivalent.

This chapter is based on a close reading of these Muharram lectures, and many of his earliest writings. The contents of these early writings and speeches reveal this sense of deep predicament (or predicaments) as perceived by ‘Ali>Naqvi>. The chapter endeavors to explore the nature of this crisis, his articulation of it, and the various strands that constitute it. For this purpose I have endeavored to capture the very language and categories in which he expresses his concerns. In the process I consciously refrain from

British India: Deoband, 1860-1900 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), and Naeem, Fuad S. "Sufism and Revivalism in South Asia: Mawlana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanvi of Deoband and Maulana Aḥmad Raza Khan of Bareilly and Their Paradigms of Islamic Revivalism." *The Muslim World* 99, no. 3 (2009): 435-51. Regarding why this term was not translated in this chapter, see the ensuing paragraph of the main body of the text.

² The phrase *fasaḥ* occurs in Qur’an on numerous occasions (for example 2:11, 7:56 and 7:85). Often it is accompanied by the word *islah*. ‘Ali>Naqvi>often makes reference to this Qur’anic juxtaposition in his lectures, for example the Qur’anic verse 2:220, “God knows well him who works corruption (*mufsid*) from him who sets aright (*muslih*)”.

³ *Dictionary, Urdu-English and English-Urdu* (Lahore: Sang-i Meel Publications, 1980) and Chohan and Bukhari (2009)

interpreting and labeling – more than what is inevitable – his understanding of the crises in the familiar and ubiquitous scholarly categories of modernity or modernism. The purpose for this restraint is to avoid hasty judgments that will forestall a cautious hearing of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s words, and in turn, hasty generalizations about their meaning and significance. What his sense of crisis ultimately is and what his prescriptions entail from the point of view of scholarly study of Islamic intellectual history will be addressed at length in the closing chapter. With these caveats in mind, let me now proceed to outlining his articulation of the crisis.

For the occasion of his Muharram lectures, he chose to speak about the Qur’anic phrase *La>tufsidu>fi>al-‘arz* (“Do not [spread] corruption in the land”).⁵ It had been almost five years since he had returned from Iraq after finishing his seminary studies and obtaining the certification (*ijazah*) to engage in legal interpretation (*ijtihad*). He had already spoken from this venue before. Yet the choice of the topic and the method of exposition, when situated within the context of what he had written or spoken about so far, reflect a certain reorientation in his intellectual career. His choice of subject seems strange at first, and for several reasons: Until now he had not spoken on a subject of this sort; nor his manner of approaching it was conventional, both from the point of view of the usual format of Muharram lectures, and the particular discursive approach he takes to expand on it. He seems aware of the unusualness of his choice of subject and his lecture:

My expositions (*bayana*) if they prove to be offensive, tasteless, uninteresting and non-captivating (*ghayr dil awayz*) – and they will indeed – it is because in

⁴ *La>tufsidu>fi>al-‘arz* 3rd ed., Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1998.

⁵ Unless stated otherwise, all the translations are based on A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation*, 1st Touchstone ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

this valley of interestingness is non-existent. This is a garden of thorns in which pleasant sceneries of enjoyment are impossible. But one should not lose heart due to this. In all my discourses I always invite my audience by asking them to listen without expecting something interesting. I do not want to deceive you with words about greener pastures by eliciting hope that my discourse will be of interest to you. Rather I approach you through an understanding that I have to present something that is uninteresting. I invite listeners with this understanding that in reality they will listen to something that is not interesting. Yet, insofar as the benefit of listening is concerned, if some [of you] listen to me and benefit from it, then I will see it as the reward for my effort. If no one pays heed I will have to say: Whether someone listens or not I will do my talking (*kas bishanavad ya nashanavad man guftogu>mi>konam*) (11-2).

What is it about his discourse and the choice of topic that he sees as so eccentric and even uninteresting and uninviting to his audience? The answer lies primarily in his audacity to experiment with the established blueprint of these *majalis* in which usually the virtues (*fazl>il*) and sufferings (*mash>ib*) of the family of the Prophet are narrated with Shi'i piety as their raison d'être. The communal response of praise for the former (virtues) and mourning for the latter (suffering) in this piety is considered a mark of devotion and loyalty to the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*). For example, a vivid account of a Muharram lamentation assembly (*majlis*) which is quite representative of traditional Shi'i mourning practices notes the following:

At a certain point in his presentation his [the speaker's] demeanor shifts. He begins to tell a story – the tragic account of the martyrdom of Husayn. Although his audience has heard this tale many times before, its impact has not diminished in the countless retellings. At the first mention of the field of Karbala, some of the men in the audience begin to cry uncontrollably and beat their chests. The sound of women's voices wailing can be heard rising up from the other side of the curtain which divides the room. The man on the *minbar* [i.e., pulpit] begins to sob as he speaks of the heat of the desert and the thirst of the innocent children... *To the extent to which the man on the minbar – the zakir – was able to elicit tears and impart information, he has succeeded in his task* (12, emphasis added).⁶

⁶ Vernon James Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam : Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993). This text is a comprehensive ethnographic account of South Asian Shi'i religious culture.

Similarly, writing about the women's participation in these *majlis*, an ethnographer notes:

The *majlis* is a blessed occasion, for it is popularly believed that Fatimah, the mother of the martyred Husayn and the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, visits each home or *ashurkhanah* where people gather to weep for the martyrs. Comforted and reassured in her personal loss by the passionate love and devotion which she witnesses, she (like Husayn) is believed to intercede with God on behalf of the faithful. Thus, every tear which a mourner sheds out of love of the Prophet's family brings the believer closer to the mercy of God and ultimate salvation...Although weeping holds out a promise of eternal salvation, it would be a mistake to see this as the main motivation behind Shiah's participation in the *majlis*. Much more immediate is the testimony to people's loyalty to the beloved family of the Prophet. Weeping for their suffering is a way to demonstrate love for and solidarity with these blessed souls (192-3).⁷

In divergence from this conventional ritual of narrating the virtues and the sufferings of the family of the Prophet, 'Ali>Naqvi> had chosen to speak about a much-debated contemporary subject among Muslim communities. Even though the main subject of his discourse is *fasaḥ*, it is clear from the text that the discussion of *fasaḥ* was also a stepping stone for him to converse about the question of *islah* which due to the Qur'anic juxtaposition of these terms, permitted him an easy transition to the latter.

These discourses were also somewhat an anomaly when situated within the context of what he had written thus far. Until then, and since his student days, he had approached topics that were mostly either commentaries on classical texts or those that dealt with intra-religious debates, controversies and mounting heresies. The latter included rebuttals of Wahhabism, the Baha'i faith, 'Ibadiyyah, and Christianity⁸, and

⁷ "Gendered Ritual and the Shaping of Shi'ah Identity" in *Shared Idioms, Sacred Symbols, and the Architecture of Identities in South Asia*. ed. Kelly Pemberton and Michael Nijhawan (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁸ Not all these texts are available to us for perusal but in his writings and that of his biographer they are mentioned.

the former, his response to the controversy in the Shi'i Arab world regarding the permissibility of extreme forms of mourning and self-flagellations.⁹ But by then he seems to have consciously decided to respond to challenges faced within the local Indian milieu alone. Never again in his life would he write another seminary-style commentary on a text, nor anything substantial in Arabic or Persian, languages that would have allied him intellectually to the broader Shi'i intellectual universe of the seminary 'ulama'. He was instead concerned, almost exclusively, with the intellectual and social problems of Indian Muslims, especially his own Shi'i followers. It is worth noting in this context that of all his Arabic writings, the rebuttal of Wahhabism¹⁰ and the Baha'i faith were the only two works that were later translated into Urdu. For of all the different sects that he had written about, only Wahhabism had a real and growing relevance in the Indian context.¹¹ This is further corroborated by the fact that among his earliest writings is also included a response to Ahmadiyyah movement¹², whose origin and influence at the time was confined predominantly to the Indian subcontinent. This further confirms

⁹ The work is titled *Iqḥāt al-'aḥīr fī-iqḥāmat al-sha'a'īr al-Hūsayniyah* (Najaf: Maṭba'ah Ḥāydarīyyah, 1929). For an account of this controversy please see Ende's essay "The Flagellations of Muharram and the Shi'ite Ulama'" in *Der Islam*, 55 (1978), 19-36. The title of the book and author's name appears on page 24 where Ende refers to him as 'Ali>Naqvi>Laknavi> Thus far besides Sachedina's brief mention of 'Ali>Naqvi's *Shahīd-i insāniyat* in his essay "The Eternal Meaning of Hūsayn's Martyrdom" in *Alserāḥ: Papers from the Imam Hūsayn Conference London, July 1984* (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1984), 198 and of the same work in Syed Akbar Hyder's recent *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York: Oxford, 2006), 80 this is the only other citation of 'Ali>Naqvi's writings that we have found in the western sources. Sources referring to 'Ali>Naqvi>himself have been discussed in the context of his biography (*Introduction*).

¹⁰ It was published under the title *Rebuttal of Wahhabism (Radd-i Wahhabiyah)*.

¹¹ It is unclear why the work on Baha'i faith had to be published. As far as socio-religious history of India is concerned the Baha'i faith had not make any substantial inroads in the Indian subcontinent. The anomalous character of this publication should not take away what is evident from both the general outline of his published writings and his intellectual project which will be delineated as we proceed.

¹² The original edition *Ushū-i dīn aur Qur'aḥ* does not mention the date of publication but since it is 4th in the Imamia Mission's series of publications and the 5th publication is dated 1932 this text perhaps appeared in the same year. It was a response to a 1928 pamphlet circulated by Ahmadiyah movement regarding the inadmissibility of the Shi'i principles of religion, especially the doctrines of Imamate and Justice from the Qur'anic point of view. See the Introduction to the text.

that after his return to India from Iraq, ‘Ali>Naqvi> had restricted his intellectual engagement to issues most pertinent to the Indian environment, and within this context, to his Shi’i community primarily.¹³

His earliest years of arrival from Iraq in 1932 also saw his efforts – in collaboration with his community – to establish Imamia Mission.¹⁴ This was also the beginning of the Imamia Mission publication project some of whose earliest publications were authored by ‘Ali>Naqvi> himself, including:¹⁵

1. *The Religion of the Killers of Hūsayn (Qātilān-i Hūsayn ka>mazhab*. Lucknow: Manshurāh Imamia Mission and Sarfaraz Qāumi>Press, 1932)

A response to a polemical treatise which claimed Shi’ites to be the real killers of Imām Husayn.

2. *The Truth about Alterations in the Qur’an (Tahfif-i Qur’an ki>hāqiqat*, discussed in footnote 14)

3. *The One Born in the House of God (Maulūd-i Ka’bah*, 1936?)

A treatise on ‘Ali>bn Abi>Tālib, the first Shi’i Imam.

4. *Existence of the [Divine] Proof (Vujūd-i hujjat*. Lucknow: Imamia Mission and Sarfaraz Qāumi>Press, 1932

A detailed discussion of the doctrine of Mahdi>in Shi’ism and a rational defense of Shi’i understanding of his occultation (*ghaybah*), including answers to various criticisms leveled against this doctrine.

¹³ I say primarily because the broader Islamic community was always among his perceived audience and the general tone of reconciliation and accommodation is evident in his writings. At its proper occasion we will have an occasion to discuss this dimension of his intellectual life more fully.

¹⁴ We will discuss the details of this project extensively in a latter chapter on popularization.

¹⁵ From the publisher’s introduction of *Vujūd-i hujjat*.

Between 1932 and 1937, Naqvi also published works along the lines of perennial Sunni-Shi'i polemics, such as a clarification of the centrality of the Qur'an to Shi'i piety,¹⁶ a defense of Shi'i practice of temporary marriage¹⁷, and *Husayn and Islam (Husayn aur Islām)* and *The Battle of Karbala (Ma'araka-yi Karbala)*, the first in the series of many reflections that he would write about the meaning of Imam Husayn's mission and the symbolism of Karbala.¹⁸ As evident, all of these works pertain mostly to intra-faith debates and polemics (issues that have been contested by various Islamic sects throughout centuries) and those that pertain to customary discourse of the 'ulama'. If anything, they are a continuation of a long-standing polemical conversation and mostly within the conventional parameters of the intellectual discourse of the 'ulama'. In sum, these works are intra-faith polemics and representative of classical scholarly trends among the 'ulama'.

India Going through Unprecedented Change

What is it then, that prompted 'Ali Naqvi to choose this subject and depart from the established practice? His response is simple: the gravity of the social circumstances demands this discussion. As Naqvi states,

These days the whole world is replete with calamities. These are not restricted to any single group, particular social class or specific location. Every person seeks [the answer] to how these calamities could be removed and how to live a life that is peaceful, secure, happy and tranquil. If then in these [troubled] times someone

¹⁶ In Sunni-Shi'i polemics there has been perpetual criticism from the Sunni side that Shi'is downplay the importance of the Qur'anic revelation. Among the various arguments put forth in this regard is one that posits lack of memorization of Qur'an among the Shi'ites. 'Ali Naqvi presents evidence from biographical dictionaries to rebut this criticism in *Tazkirah-yi Huffaz-i Shi'ah* published in 1935 and responds to the question of alteration (*tahfiṣ*) in *Tahfiṣ-i Qur'an ki-Haqiqat*.

¹⁷ *Temporary Marriage and Islam (Mut'ah aur Islām)*. Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qāumi Press, 1933).

¹⁸ *Husayn aur Islām* (Lucknow: Manshūrāh Imāmiyah Mission, 1931). Discussion of Naqvi's writings on the theme of Karbala are examined in chapter 4.

attempts to bring about a realization (*ih̄sas*)¹⁹ regarding the ills (*amraz̄*), the ways to cure them, the means to attain peace and serenity, and regarding how to change the worldly era lived in restlessness into one of tranquility and calm, then certainly these words are worth listening to (11-2).

More importantly for ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> in those years India was at a crossroads, and so was its Muslim community. In the context of the broader political and social developments in India during these decades, this should not come as a surprise.²⁰ The Muslim community was living through historical times characterized by immense change, both unusual and unique in scope and nature. From the political and educational institutions to intellectual thought, literature and culture, everything was going through profound change. Robinson’s remarks, for example, succinctly summarize the severity of crisis felt among the Indian Muslim communities and intellectuals:

[In 19th century] Muslims were coming to realize the extent to which, after six hundred years of domination on the subcontinent, they had lost power: they were coming to understand the severity of their competition with the European

¹⁹ Literally feeling or emotion...

²⁰ How immense the changes had been in India during the 19th and 20th centuries is well-documented in scholarship. For a general account of the diverse intellectual and theological trends during this period see: Ahmad, Aziz. *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964* (London: Oxford, 1967). Associated with this text are primary readings in the companion volume: Ahmad Aziz and Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan 1857-1968* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1970). For an account of the huge impact of the print-medium in religious transformation during the late 19th and early 20th century please see “Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia” and for impact of changing sociopolitical circumstances on Indian Muslims’ religious consciousness see “Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia Since 1800” both in Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

The awareness of these problems, social, political, religious and cultural would only intensify in the twentieth century, leading Muslims toward unprecedented religious and political activism. For how political activism via communalism would result in the formation of the Pakistani state and for a comprehensive account of development of Muslim political consciousness please see Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (London: Routledge, 2000). On the plane of theological and religious activism, Robinson’s comments are further corroborated by recent scholarship, Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (New Cambridge History of India). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 and Dietrich Reetz, *Islam in the Public Sphere : Religious Groups in India, 1900-1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). Regarding the intensive character of socio-religious reform movements Jones notes, “By the end of the nineteenth century, Muslims of the Gangetic plains had produced socio-religious movements designed to restore their community to its rightful position in society. All, save the Barelwis, advocated various alterations in contemporary religion, and legitimized their programs through different versions of religious authority (82).”

civilization which ruled them, and the Hindu world which rivaled them. They were undergoing an intense period of religious revival in which there was strong pressure to renew Islam both inside and outside South Asia. They were faced with rapid economic and social changes as their colonial rulers sought to harmonize their productive and consumptive activities more closely with the international economy. They were faced, too, with marginalization of much that made sense of their world and gave meaning to their deepest beings, as European science, literature and Enlightenment thought filled the public spaces of their lives, becoming the meat of the educational system, offering the route to success in life and informing the substance of the dominant political discourse. Indeed, they were faced with the problem of how they could still be good Muslims and at the same time enable their community to survive under foreign Christian power (75).²¹

For 'Ali>Naqvi> this historical moment is above all, one of crisis; immense and unprecedented. In the concluding sections of the lecture, he exhorts his community to live up to the incredible challenges brought on by a significant new moment in the history of Indian Islam lest it perish: "At a time when new law is being promulgated, at a moment when India is passing through a new phase of life (*naya>daur-i zindagi*), when everyone is concerned with enhancing power, we [Muslims] are busy in reviving our old conflicts" (206).

This idea that the Muslim community is passing through an unusual historical moment is not new to his thought. Speaking in 1932, having returned from Iraq the first Muharram lectures delivered by him from the same venue (Madrasah al-Va'iz) under the rubric of "*Amraz-i qhumi>aur un ka>'ila*" (*Communal Diseases and their Cure*) later published as *Islām aur tijārat* (*Commerce and Islam*, 1933), Naqvi>notes the following:

We were possessors of greatness (*'azhmat*) and power (*iqṭada*). Our immense power and its name were well-known, most valuable, and the world bowed [to our greatness]. Our [notion of] morality was a lesson for the world, and our

²¹ Francis Robinson, "Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia since 1800" in *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

support communally established economic enterprises so they may prosper. He also urged preachers and religious scholars to talk Muslims out of their inertia and indifference towards worldly wealth and power thus inhibiting their willingness to fully participate in such activities.

To my knowledge this is the only time that ‘Ali Naqvi construes the problem his community faces in terms of the rise and fall of its political fate, or in terms of progress, regress, or decline of economic and political power. With the passage of time, he moved away from these categories – widely popular at the time.²⁷ In other words, the way in which Naqvi frames the crisis afflicting the Indian Muslim community, its emergence, and the requisite response – quite differently, as will be shown in the later chapters. Our purpose, therefore, in mentioning this text is not to highlight these categories, but the deep sense of calamity that has already taken hold in *Tijarat aur Islam (Commerce and Islam)* and would pervade his religio-intellectual activity until the end of his life, the only difference being that in subsequent years, the analysis of how the crisis emerged and the type and measure of response it demands would change.

What are the various challenges posed by these extraordinary circumstances that constitute the predicament of his community and deserve a response from him? What is it that needs be done? In answering these questions the subject of his discourse, that is *fasad* and *islah* and an outline of his arguments is worth considering. The introductory remarks of “Do not [spread] corruption in the world” (*La tufsidu fi al- ‘arz*) open with a clarification of why the articulate Qur’an adds the expression “in the world (*fi al ‘arz*)”

²⁷ See, for example various selections from the readers on modern Islam (already cited) and Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi. *Islam and the World* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1967). The text was originally written in Urdu and the 2005 edition was published with the full Urdu title, adding the subtitle “The Rise and Decline of Muslims and Its Effect on Mankind to it”.

in this verse; after all, corruption always occurs in the world making the expression “in the world” superfluous. To explain the Qur’anic point of view ‘Ali>Naqvi> makes the distinction between individual (*infaradi*) and communal (*ijtima’i*) corruption and general welfare (*rafah-i’amm*). Whereas committing individual moral or immoral acts are limited to one’s private space and do not affect the community, moral or immoral acts that affect the general welfare of the community are public. For ‘Ali>Naqvi> it is in view of the latter that the Qur’an uses the term “corruption in the world” (*fasad fi al-’arz*), that is, corruption that harms the cause of the general welfare of the community.

Having clarified the meaning of “corruption in the world” (*fasad fi al-’arz*) ‘Ali>Naqvi> then proceeds to classify its different types,²⁸ offering four categories to do so. The first classification is based on the identification of those types of corruptions that could impact the collectivity, these including mental, social and collective, moral and practical, and political and cultural corruptions. The second approach pertains to the means used to spread corruption, and can be divided into material and military methods on the one hand, and non-military and non-material on the other, the latter implying perhaps psychological ways of prompting corruption. The third way to categorize corruption derives from the people and human groups who could be perpetrating it, including religious scholars, political leaders, kings and rulers, poets, and newspaper journalists. In his analysis, religious scholars and kings and rulers are much more effective in spreading corruption than any of the other identified groups. The fourth and final classification pertains to the objectives of spreading corruption, and could include personal or family benefit, revenge, or even taking pleasure simply in spreading chaos.

²⁸ *La-tufsidu* 31-34.

In the ensuing pages, ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>introduces two inter-related concepts, namely reform (*islah*) and reformer (*muslih*) that will be indispensable for understanding the rest of the treatise (37). The terms are first introduced in the context of the following question: since no one really likes to be called corrupt/mischief-maker (*mufsid*), and everyone thinks he or she is actually in the service of reforming the society – thus blaming those opposed to one’s viewpoint for being corrupt/mischief-maker – how can one properly distinguish reform from corruption? I will return to the answer Naq̣vi> provides at a more appropriate juncture.²⁹ For now, it is important to note that from this point onwards in the text, the term reform (*islah*) will be frequently juxtaposed with corruption (*fasad*) and both discussed relationally.³⁰

The subsequent section of the treatise, entitled “The Criterion for [establishing] the Constructiveness of Reformist (*islah*) Efforts” is especially important, for it not only lays out the central themes of the text, but also provides the context within which the work itself can be situated. ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>begins his discussion in this section with the following comment:

The world is founded upon existence (*kaun*) and decay (*fasad*). No mark is made on the world until an old one is erased. A new wall cannot rise unless the previous one crumbles...In other words, the foundation of this world rests upon death (*fana*) and deterioration (*zava*)...So if we attempt to reform this world, unless a building is spoiled, until some groundwork is made weak (*fasid*), and until the day some mark is made to disappear, we cannot carve a new mark that could be called reform (41-2).

Naq̣vi>then again raises the question that in the process of dissolving one formation before the establishment of a subsequent one how could one distinguish reform from corruption/mischief, answering which he hints at some important issues deserving of our

²⁹ Please see chapter 2.

³⁰ See footnotes 1 and 2.

attention. He presents the example of two human beings who are holding spades in their hands to apparently construct a building. Now although both seem to be razing the building but whether they are both intent on constructing a new and better one afterward could only be known in the future. At the time when razing is done, one would not know if the activity was destructive or constructive. By analogy then, he wrote:

From this you will know that how meaningless and purposeless is this war that goes on around you between traditionalism (*q̣ḥdamat parastī*) and modernism (*tajaddud parvarī*).³¹ This is so because modernism *qua* modernism is neither worthy of praise nor blame. The world is based on change (*taghayyur*)...The old established building is not worthy of praise simply because it is old. It is possible that it requires repair (*islah*). The basis of repair is undoubtedly novelty (*tajdiḥ*) which cannot be considered blameworthy [by virtue of being an innovation alone] because it is quite possible for the change to be destructive [at times], since destruction is also caused by change and innovation (43).³²

Elaborating further on the subject, Naqvi concludes the discussion with the following remarks:

It must be remembered that destruction (*takhrīb*) is easy, rebuilding quite difficult. Corruption is easy and reform difficult. If the need for reform is felt, then carry it out in such a way that the existing edifice is kept [intact] and the faults in it are removed slowly and gradually, not in such a way that the existing structure is razed to the ground and the dream of building a new one also remains unfulfilled.³³ In any case, the criterion for building and destroying is as follows: compare the old condition with the new one. If the old condition has faults then please do try to remove those...

That both reform and destruction are the result of renewal (*tajdiḥ*) is also evidenced in the Qur'an....Then what has [really] happened here? Who can [really] claim to have the truth,³⁴ traditionalists (*q̣ḥdamat parast*) or modernists

³¹ Could be rendered as revivalism or renewalism but the context makes it clear that here the notion implied is the dichotomy between persistence on older ways of things (*q̣ḥdamat pasandī*) and seeking new ways to respond to the challenges faced in the modern age (*tajaddud parvarī*). The dictionary meaning of *tajaddud* and *tajdiḥ* includes novelty, reform and renewal.

³² The text is ambiguous on what it means. I have rendered the translation rather freely and am quite confident that the translation is able to capture the gist of the argument.

³³ This idea of gradual and conscious *islah* as the proper way of reforming societies will recur again in his other writings. See the later sections of chapter 5 where it is discussed at length.

³⁴ Literally, "who is on the side of truth".

(tajaddud parvar)? No, no one is! The conclusion is that the old need not be kept simply because it is ancient; nor is the new (*jadia*) to be rejected simply because it is new. The old needs to be viewed from the standpoint of the [social] welfare, and the new from the point of view of its [capacity to offer] improvement. If the old order (*nizām*) is more appropriate for human kind then changing it will amount to destruction. And if the new one is more appropriate, then to adopt it would be the establishment of reform. To be a hurdle in the way of this would be corruption (47-9).

The excerpts clearly demonstrate ‘Ali>Naqvi’s utter dissatisfaction with the rhetoric and hostility between the camps of traditionalists (*qādamat pasandān*) and modernists (*jiddat pasandān*). The intense clash between the two camps had been raging for more than 50 years, having started with the reform movement initiated by Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his colleagues.³⁵ For ‘Ali>Naqvi the debate between the two sides had continually neglected a crucial point: The old cannot (that is, should not) be glorified simply because of its age; nor should the new be celebrated merely by virtue of its novelty. Something more fundamental was at stake. The determination of *what* changes needed to be made (as well as *how* they were to be implemented and to what extent, that is, *how much*) depended on the larger issue of communal welfare. Without making reference to communal welfare and ways in which old or new ways facilitate it, a conclusive comment could not be made about their respective significance or relevance. Needless to say, both the traditionalists and the modernists claimed to be veritable champions of renewal and designated harbingers of reform, all the while denouncing the other side as instigators of corruption/mischief. ‘Ali>Naqvi himself pointed out how each reformer saw those opposed to his plan of action as a mischief-maker; thus the confusion for an outsider to decide who is the authentic reformer and who is actually a

³⁵ On the origins and development of contemporary revivalism and modernism, please see Ahmad Aziz. *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

mischief-maker. “No one”, he noted, “likes to be known as a mischief-maker” (10 and 37-39). Transitioning to the next section, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> states that in his days it had become quite difficult to differentiate between a sincere reformer and a mischief-maker. This is so because increasingly mischief-makers of the world (*mufsadīn-i ‘ālam*) had come to use – the same sources that bring about reform in the world –for their aims of spreading corruption. For example, although “*the greatest source of reform in the world is religion (mazhab, emphasis added)*”, its fake forms are utilized for these machinations. Similarly, political power and culture, the other two important sources for reforming a society, are abused and misused to spread corruption in the world. ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> observes that “the power of religion is declining in the world” but that does not mean that the other two sources are any more intact: “the same culture [that could reform] can become a tool with which the peace of the world is turned to dust, so that instead of peace, chaos is created”³⁶ Hence counterfeits of true religions, abuse of political power and cultural disorientation had all turned the reforming function of these sources of reform into that of corruption.

The aforementioned remarks can be viewed as a summary argument of the whole text: In this world, there are corrupt people and there are reformers, there is corruption and then there is reform. Of course, the latter is preferred and former requires elimination. The problem, according to ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> is first, how to distinguish one from the other, and second, what to do when the most fundamental resources for propagating peace and harmony and countering corruption –namely, religion, political power and culture– are themselves co-opted by the forces seeking to spread corruption. As

³⁶ *La-tufsidu*>80-1

mentioned earlier, we will turn to his analysis of the first problem at a later point. Given that the rest of the treatise identifies the sources of corruption and reform (and ways to counter the former and promote the latter), it is this second problematic that concerns us here.

The Crisis of Religion (*mazhab*):

In the next section, entitled “The Reformist Powers of Religion and Power and Their Use in Spreading Corruption in the World”, ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> embarks on a discussion of the ways in which religion and politics are sources of reform and corruption and the ways in which these forces have been undermined in the service of spreading corruption. It is here that one can detect Naq̣vi>’s immense anxiety about the contemporary state of religion and its declining influence:

The greatest power responsible for reform of the world is the power of religion...Nothing has rendered greater service in reforming [societies] than religion. But how often has this same religion been employed to stir up heinous corruptions? *When one witnesses these corruptions, the heart wishes to turn its eyes away from religion insofar as some people say that religion deserves to be banished because it is the fountainhead of corruption.* There is no doubt that world history is replete with such horrific injustices (82-3, emphasis added).

His argument is simple enough: although religion is the greatest means of reforming a human society, history provides ample evidence that religion has also been frequently used to spread discord and corruption. Many who had similar view of religion – and here ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> is only acknowledging what was a widespread opinion about religion among the educated Muslim elite of his time – felt disgusted by religion and leaned towards abandoning it. But this is not the whole story. For as ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> observes, it is not at all rare for individuals or collectives to appeal to, and in many cases co-opt, the prominent and influential role of religion in society to accomplish their own agendas. Anyone who

is interested in success of his objectives invokes a power that is influential and immense. In a society where religion is the most influential force, “ill-intentioned (*bad niyat*) provokers of revolution” would inevitably seek assistance from religion. Furthermore, since people associate holiness and purity with religion they refrain from criticizing it. Both points ensure that in a society where religion is cherished, one’s personal agenda and ideology would best meet success if it is made to bear a religious garb, or carry a flag of religion (83).

‘Ali>Naqvi> goes on to interpret the political and cultural means of propagating reform and corruption. Throughout his life, he would have more to say concerning both, but it is the crisis of religion that would preoccupy him as an intellectual and as leader of a religious community. ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s central religio-intellectual concern was to investigate and devise a multi-faceted response to what he fundamentally diagnosed as the following crisis: for a variety of reasons, people of Naqvi>’s era were withdrawing and turning away from religion. In the ensuing pages (and while setting aside other issues) I hope to provide a reading of his understanding of this crisis by interweaving the various texts he wrote between 1932 and 1945, the defining years of his intellectual project.

In “Current Affairs or Corruptions of the Contemporary World”, ‘Ali>Naqvi> proceeds from a discussion of the historical manifestation of corruption wearing a religious, political or cultural garb to its contemporaneous causes. He argues that forces of righteousness (*shlah*) and corruption have always warred with one another, and in each phase of human evolution they keep changing one form to another. But past is dead and one has to pay to attention to the contemporary forms of righteousness and

corruption. For ‘Ali>Naqvi> “In today’s world, insofar as the general benefit (*mufaʿ-i ‘ammah*) [of people] is concerned, the most dangerous corruption is the flood of irreligiosity (*la mazhabiyat*) (195-6). What does he mean by irreligiosity? He does not provide a definition of this term but elsewhere in the text he juxtaposes this term with the term religion (*mazhab*): “By religion we do not mean any specific religion (*mazhab*) but what is called by everyone “religion” in contrast to “irreligiosity” (*la mazhabiyat*) (83)”. In other words, irreligiosity is lack or absence of adherence to *any* mainstream and well-known religion. His frequent comparisons of Islam with Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism in several texts and other comments strongly suggest that ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s notion of irreligiosity stands opposed to these mainstream and well known religions of the world; he did not consider new religious movements – whether within or outside the Islamic world – religious in the same sense, but as fake imitations of these major religious traditions.

What is it about irreligiosity that makes it, in ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s viewpoint, the “greatest corruption”? Since religion is the greatest source of reform in a society, the power that dismantles religion the most would by corollary be the greatest corruption. In other words, irreligiosity is the principal means for the elimination of religion, the biggest resource for human welfare. But how does irreligiosity spread and topple religion from its esteemed status within a human society? According to ‘Ali>Naqvi> it thrives by discrediting religion, by presenting religion to be the source of violence and corruption, by blaming religion for social problems, and by presenting it as irrational and backward . Elaborating further on the various ways in which irreligiosity has displaced and discredited religion, ‘Ali>Naqvi> observes:

This irreligiosty with all its unprincipledness is growing these days. What are its causes and what are the arguments that are presented against religion? On what ground does this collision (*tashadum*) between irreligiosity and religion stand and what is its solution? This is a subject unto itself which deserves a separate treatment. For now, I want to concentrate on an aspect which relates directly to my subject of lecture. One reason that is given for opting for irreligiosity is that religion is a source of corruption, and that is why religion deserves to be abolished from the face of earth. The world needs tranquility, peace and harmony, and religion is an enemy of this peace and harmony. Religion causes conflicts, it generates turmoil, and that is why religion should be banished... But in my previous lectures, I have made clear who made religion the source of corruption, showing that precisely because religion is the best source of reform, it has been used to spread corruption. I offered examples to support that point, noting that the more precious a thing is, the more it will be imitated and its false form deployed to deceive ...

But why do people intend to declare religion a source of corruption and turmoil? ‘Ali>Naqvi’s reply is, precisely due to religion’s power to reform: “...Abolishing true religion is to hinder the resistance it puts up against corrupt practices (*fasaadi>karvaiyan*) on the one hand, and on the other to nullify the reforming benefit of a true religion – the most effective source of reform (197).” A religion is inherently reformative; reform is its essential function. This fact is well-known, and that is why when the word religion is heard, no one suspects corruption-eliciting intent (*fitnah pardazi>niyat*) (197).³⁷ But fake religions have often replaced true ones and thus have given the true ones a bad name. But one must understand that, “Truth is truth and gold is after all a precious thing. Water is the source of life, and every real object that is beneficial for the world is beneficial. What is needed is clear discernment (with open eyes), between the real and the unreal (197).” In other words, fear of falsehood should not be permitted to be a cause of destroying truth: “Does water deserve to be expelled from the ground simply because it can take the form of a mirage and can deceive those who are thirsty”, he asks his

³⁷ ‘Ali>Naqvi>goes on argue why falsehood and caricatures of a real thing should not be a cause of rejecting the truth.

reader. Similarly, although he openly accepts that name of religion has often been invoked to perpetrate corruption, still, that does not take away the essential reforming reality of religion: “In the world [we live in], the name of religion has been deemed a source of corruption. I have no qualms about accepting it. I myself have raised a prolonged complaint about that.³⁸ But religion does not, for that reason, warrant removal. It is because of religion that, in the world, civilization is reformed (198). Surely, true teachings of a true religion responsible for reforming culture need to be appreciated (196-8)”.

It is evident that the principal worry for ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> is that in his era, the growing tendency within Indian society was to blame religion for a good number of societal problems, to the extent that many had come to accept that there is hardly anything worthy in religion for which it should be preserved or celebrated. According to that emergent viewpoint, it is only by liberating the society *from* religion that the society could attain greater peace, progress and overall success. In a word, it is not only the teachings of religion or its particular theological doctrines that were viewed with skepticism; the very value of religion itself had begun to be questioned.

Notwithstanding ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s claim about irreligiosity as the greatest threat to social wellbeing, his writings during this period reveal a complex understanding of religious crisis which cannot be reduced to the problem of irreligiosity alone. Therefore, perhaps a more apt and preferable expression for the problematic that concerned Naq̄vi> was as follows: Concern for the (Indian Shi’i) community losing its grounding in religion and finding it increasingly difficult to uphold its various beliefs and practices.

³⁸ Reference to the early sections of the treatise.

But what are the various factors that have generated this crisis in religion? The next section discusses ‘Ali>Naqvi’s response to this question.

Missionaries, Religious Pluralism, and Attacks on Islam:

The intense missionary activity initiated by Christian missionaries in India in the 19th century provoked a corresponding response from both the Hindu and Muslim communities, resulting in movements such as Arya Samaj from within the former, and Tablighi>Jama’t from the latter. By early in the 20th-century, all such organized religious communities had evolved into fully established Christian, Hindu and Muslim missions. The threat of Christian and Hindu missionary activity was real and ‘Ali>Naqvi>himself wrote an essay entitled “The Message of Islam for the [Economically] Underprivileged Nations” (*Islām ka paygham pas uftalah aqḡam kay nam*) whose foremost intent was to proselytize. This 38th publication of Imamia Mission was written by ‘Ali>Naqvi>to highlight the egalitarian teachings of Islam to the untouchable class of the Indian society and was freely distributed among them.³⁹

Strong missionary activity on all sides, in terms of the exacerbation of the crisis of religion, posed two interrelated challenges: on the one hand, it brought to light the phenomenon of religious pluralism – that is, competing truth claims on the part of Islamic, Hindu and Christian religious traditions – which created doubts among Muslims as to the validity or truth of their own viewpoint; on the other, the vociferous attacks

³⁹ See *Islām ka paygham pas uftalah aqḡam kay nam*. Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1936. In publisher’s words: “At a time when the untouchables in seeking true egalitarianism (*masawaḡ*) are trying to be familiar with the realities of the world religions (*mazahib-i ‘alam*) and there is a conference of religions in Lucknow on May 22 we felt the need to introduce the world to the true picture of Islam through its true egalitarianism. This treatise is being distributed among the untouchables for free. It is hoped of those Shi’as of strength that they purchase as many as they could and distribute it in their neighborhoods.” The back cover also exhorts the community to financially help a far and wide free distribution of this text.

from Christian and Hindu missionaries helped undermine the Islamic theological worldview, thus further weakening its authority upon its adherents. ‘Ali>Naqvi>is aware of both challenges and refers to them on a number of occasions. Notice the introductory remarks from the following text, in which he exhorts his audience to not be overwhelmed by the exclusive claims of truth posited by these religions, but to the extent one’s life permits it, carefully weigh those in the light of intellect: “Turning away from investigation and helplessly saying goodbye to all [religions] because of the anxiety caused by the multiplicity of paths is intellectual laziness, whose consequence could never be satisfactory”.⁴⁰ Discussing the challenges facing the contemporary world in the final sections of *La>tufsidu>fi al- ‘arz* ‘Ali>Naqvi>makes similar observations.⁴¹

Similarly, on numerous occasions, ‘Ali>Naqvi>refers to the frequent attacks made on the foundations of Islamic religious tradition, in undermining the religious authority of the Qur’an, or the character of the Prophet of Islam. In the introductory remarks of his second Imamia Mission publication, he explicitly mentions in very strong words the Christian and Aryan Missionaries in this regard. He observes how through shameful accusations (*ilzām*) these groups were sparing no chance of openly criticizing Islam, or undermining its foundations, the Qur’an and the Prophet: “In their factories, every day

⁴⁰ *Mazhab aur ‘aql*. Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qāumi>Press, 1941, “Introduction”.

⁴¹ I consider it intellectual laziness when a person comes to a junction, and goes back because he does not know what way is the right way. It will result in him moving as far away from his destination as he had come close to it. It is incumbent upon him to inquire which way leads to the destination.

Similarly, whereas the disagreements among religions in the world will definitely stir anxiety and qualms in the mind regarding what/who a human being is and where he should go, this does not mean that he should stray from the very point of convergence from which arise branches of various religions. What is this [attitude of thinking that claims] “no one [can really] know which one is a true religion and which one false, which a source of peace and which of discord, so we [must] keep away from religion”? This is indeed a sign of intellectual laziness. The real progress of humans is in putting [his intellect] into practice and exerting intellectual energies. It cannot be a mark of his mental progress that when confronted by religious diversity (*ikhtilāf-i mazāhib*), a person surrenders (*sapar indakhtan*) [to it] without exerting his distinguishing power (*qūvvat-i imtiāz*). Rather he should investigate (*tahqīq*) the true teachings of religion (199-200)

manufactures novel criticisms [against Islam], which if not answered, will lead people of weak and fleeting belief (*bay sabat aqidah*) to wash their hands of Islamic beliefs when confronted by these [objections]”.⁴²

Similar concerns led Naqvi to undertake the project of Qur’anic exegesis in Urdu, a task he began in 1940. He raises the issue of attacks on the Qur’an here: “In today’s world, the question of whether Muslims need a complete Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsir*) in Urdu can be gauged by looking at the day-to-day objections (*‘taraza*) leveled against the Qur’an, responses to which are available in books in the Arabic language but remain inaccessible to lay people. This is why they [the lay people] feel intimidated (*mar‘ub*) by such questions”.

It is evident that the intensified missionary zeal that pervaded the Indian subcontinent in the late 19th and early 20th century did not merely bring to the fore the presence of other religious traditions. It evoked an even bigger question: what probability is there that one’s religion is true when there exist in the world (and not simply in India!) so many different religions which all subscribe to different beliefs and practices?

Finally, it is important to remind ourselves of the colonial context in which these political, religious and social developments were taking place. The shared bias and superiority complex of the British colonialists and evangelicals vis-à-vis indigenous beliefs and institutions (religious or otherwise) of natives left an indelible imprint on all socio-political and religious developments in the Indian subcontinent for decades to

⁴² *Tahqiq-i Qur’an ki-haqiqat*. Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1932, 3

come. As Van der Veer has noted⁴³, the decisive shift in terms of active interventionist policies occurred in 1835 with the famous address of Lord Macaulay in the British parliament. In light of his findings about the state of education in Colonial India, Macaulay proposed radical educational reforms, thus opposing the East India Company's (and orientalist's) earlier practice of supporting local culture and institutions.⁴⁴ Van der Veer notes that after 1835 "despite the official policy of religious neutrality, the British interfered with every aspect of Indian religion and society" (43). Moreover, the ubiquitous loss of political power of Muslim to Europeans – widespread through intensified means of communication in the twentieth century – had only deflated Muslims' confidence in their political and social structures, and religion as well. There were strong reasons to imitate western ways of thought and culture.

⁴³ See Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters : Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Though der Veer's analysis is restricted to the Hindu India he observes that the case with Islam or Sikhism was no different (43).

⁴⁴ His often-cited words became the foundation of the new colonial mission from this time onwards:

I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanskrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education. It will hardly be disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the Eastern writers stand highest is poetry. And I certainly never met with any Orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanskrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But, when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same... We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. See M. Edwards. *British India 1772-1947* (New Delhi: Rupa Press, 1967).

So whereas irreligiosity, according to Naqvi, posed the greatest and most comprehensive challenge in undermining the influence of religion from the society, missionary activity and fervent attacks of the colonial officials from its religio-intellectual impact also had a huge part to play in extenuating religious commitment of the Indian Shi'ites. Besides, a gradual (though persistent) decentralization of religious authority had only reinforced this predicament further.

The Crisis of Religious Authority

Scholarly literature has pointed out that in the modern period of Islamic and Islamicate civilization coincided with western military, intellectual and cultural influences on Islamic lands (including Muslim India) creating a crisis of religious authority that persists to this day. By 'Ali Naqvi's time, the "new Muslim intellectual elite", with the help of the changing means of communication (such as the print-medium in its various forms) had fully worked out and popularized an alternative prescription for the direction that Islamic societies would (or should) take in the wake of this encounter with western thought, institutions and culture.⁴⁵ It is well-documented that this alternative vision of Islamic future was a response to, and reaction against, what was perceived as the stagnation and backwardness of the scholarly enterprise among the 'ulama'. The democratization of Islamic religious knowledge meant that the 'ulama' no longer held the same position of esteem, authority or say in matters that concerned the religious

⁴⁵ Robinson, for example, notes: "The authority of much scholarship from the past, has been rejected; the authority of the traditional interpreters, the *ulama*, has been marginalised. New claimants to authority have come forward with none of the finely-honed skills of traditional scholarship, indeed, for growing numbers of Muslims Islam has become a matter of individual conscience, individuals have come to interpret the faith for themselves. No one knows any longer, as the saying goes, 'who speaks for Islam'. See his "Crisis of Authority: Crisis of Islam?" in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (2009), v. 19, 340.

masses. ‘Ali>Naqvi’s writings display an acute awareness of this crisis of authority, references to which are found interwoven in his discussion of many topics under consideration. Already during his sojourn in Iraq, he had written a treatise on *taqlid* (following the juridical edicts of a qualified jurist).⁴⁶ The first series of lectures that he delivered from Madrasah al-Va‘iziyah also contain subtle allusions to this problem. On the occasion, he compared human spiritual health to its physical counterpart. Human physical health rests on balance (*a‘itadā*) of a body. Illness occurs when this balance is disrupted and carries symptoms for diagnosis which only an expert and knowledgeable physician could detect. Earlier the illness is diagnosed easier it is to cure it. At chronic stages, it is hard, if not altogether impossible, to cure the patient. Furthermore, for an illness to be cured properly, the patient must consult a qualified physician, listen to him and act upon his advice. He must give the physician’s advice precedence over his own uninformed opinion. If he resists the instructions of the physician, mocks him and deems himself self-sufficient, that attitude would only cause disastrous results and impairment and destruction of his health would be inevitable.

For ‘Ali>Naqvi>the spiritual and moral states of the Indian Muslim society were hardly any different. Unaware of its plight, not only had it reached a chronic stage that was quite hard to cure, there was also a strong resistance to turn to the authority of those who could diagnose it and advice on it. Consequently, it was unwilling to believe in the prescription. Society’s ignorance of its state was only nurturing the illness, making it worse with the passing time. Still, ‘Ali>Naqvi>remarks, it is the physician’s duty that when he becomes aware of the disease, “he should make his opinions known,

⁴⁶ Although we have not been able to access information about this text, reference to it is found in his biography.

irrespective of whether they are heeded or not” (3-5).⁴⁷ Although not made explicit in his exposition, ‘Ali>Naqvi> is clearly hinting toward the significance of the role of the ‘ulama> in diagnosing illnesses faced by the Muslim community and prescribing cure for it. That Muslims had refused to consult them was only leading them to a communal disaster.

La>tufsidu>fi al- ‘arz also contains an elaborate discussion of this socio-religious pathology, in which ‘Ali>Naqvi> highlights the inevitability of authoritative religious teachers, and ties the fate of religion to that of religious authority, and vice versa. Since religion is the most fundamental source of reform in a society, religious scholars (*‘ulama>-i mazhab*), those who have the authority of religion⁴⁸, should also be respected for their indispensable role: “If in reality the world needs religion, then it also needs religious scholars. For it is impossible that everyone could be the master of everything” (174-5).

Later in his discussion, he clearly identifies the ongoing decline of the religious authority of the ‘ulama> and the various attacks leveled against them:

[It is argued that] religion instigates conflicts, it generates turmoil, and that is why religion should be abandoned. A necessary corollary of this is that the rule of religious scholars should also be dissolved. For [in this opinion] it is this group that has been the source of violence (*takhrib*) and it is this legion (*tahqih*) that has always led people towards violence. In reality, these two things are inseparable from one another⁴⁹; that is, if religion is the source of violence, then without a doubt, the rule of the scholars of religion also deserves undermining (196).

⁴⁷ *Tijarat aur Islam*. Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1933.

⁴⁸ I have translated the word *tahqih* as authority rather than as power. Though literally power will be more accurate, contextually it is more appropriate to use authority because it helps avoid the negative connotation of the word power.

⁴⁹ Literally religion is to scholars what hand is to the neck, idiomatically inseparable.

We will have occasion to see how ‘Ali>Naqvi>attempts to restore to the ‘ulama> what he sees as their rightful privilege of interpreting religion for the Muslim communities. For now, it suffices to note that one strand of the crisis of religion, as identified by ‘Ali>Naqvi> was the crisis of religious authority; a predicament resulting in charges of irrelevance (and mistrust) of the ‘ulama> and their scholarship with regard to the issues faced by the Muslim community.

More significantly, for ‘Ali>Naqvi>the crisis of religious authority had led to various misunderstandings among his community. These misunderstandings were burgeoning because of a disconnect between the informed and authoritative teachings of the ‘ulama> and the understanding of their community. In the introduction to his Qur’anic exegesis, Naqvi>writes:

Everyday new religions are born, new prophets and imams emerge, and new creeds and foundations (*ushū*) of religion are laid. All of this is accomplished by changing the meaning of a few or many Qur’anic verses, which are then presented to people to obtain unlawful gains. Then there are people who, to complete their exalted display of Qur’anic understanding (*Qur’an fahmī*), claim that they can prove everything from the Qur’an and make use of such [strange] interpretations (*ta’sīlā*) that a person unfamiliar with them [the interpretations] cannot help but applaud, although in reality such interpretations have nothing to do with the words of the Qur’an. Sectarian polemicists (*munazẓirīn*)⁵⁰, preachers (*va’sīzīn*) and Shi’i popular preachers (*zakārīn*) have helped expand this circle [of religion-inventing] and have provided great opportunities for this (4).⁵¹

The same disconnect was also responsible for ungrounded and self-invented religious interpretations and prescriptions that had created a divide between various spheres of life. From ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s perspective, these divisions were superficial and ran against the holistic worldview of Islam, geared as it is towards attaining equilibrium in all human

⁵⁰ *Munazẓrah* in the Indian Islamic context usually refers to Sunni-Shi’i public polemical debates. See for example Sultan al-Vaizin Shirazi, Muhammad. *Shiah Islam in Sunni Traditions: A Translation of Peshawar Nights*. tr. Hamid Quinlan ed. Charles Ali Campbell (Dallas: Texas Islamic Press, 1997).

⁵¹ Literally, “[they] have opened the door for it quite wide”.

affairs. For example, ‘Ali>Naqvi>notes a common misperception among many Muslims about the separation between the life of this world and that of the Hereafter. He observes that for some, for whom human life is limited to this worldly existence, life in the world becomes everything, with no consideration of the hereafter. That is why upholders of this opinion encourage people to they proclaim, “live in this world, enjoy it and take pleasure in it, nothing is going to happen afterwards.” Then there are those who are found on the other end of the spectrum. For them the life of the world is inevitably worldly, lowly and meaningless. A human being should abandon the world and worldly activities. The only consideration should be of the hereafter. For ‘Ali>Naqvi> both points of view are equally erroneous and un-Islamic; the Islamic perspective is concerned with both this life and the hereafter and does not undermine the importance of either one (73-5).⁵²

If on the one hand, people had created an unbridgeable gap between this life and the one to come, on the other they had also invented a similar gulf between religious faith and works (*‘aqidah* va *‘amal*). ‘Ali>Naqvi>notes: “These days, the opinion is spreading fast that for the wellbeing and salvation of human beings, it is enough that in their daily life they do good deeds, for example, not tell lies, be honest and trustworthy, favor justice and detest oppression, be peace-lovers, and refrain from corruption. [According to this perspective,] whoever possesses these [praiseworthy] qualities deserve salvation, and beyond this, no religious belief (*‘aqidah*) is necessary”.⁵³ The perceived tension created by those people who came to emphasize faith over works, or vice versa, was observed on numerous occasions by ‘Ali>Naqvi> Over the years, he

⁵² *Islam ki-hikmah nah zindagi* (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1935).

⁵³ “Ma‘ya-i falah va nijat” in *Zinda savakat* (Aligarh: Aligarh University Press, 1974).

argues with both camps to prove that Islamic understanding includes both proper belief and proper action.⁵⁴

Irreligiosity, Materialism and Westernization

In preceding paragraphs, we have tried to show that ‘Ali>Naqvi>s claims about irreligiosity should not be accepted at face value without further investigation. His writings reveal much evidence that what we have called “the crisis of religion” was a consequence of multiple, interrelated factors. Yet the centrality he gives to irreligiosity – calling it the greatest corruption of his times – should not be downplayed either. Extending that discussion, it is crucial to note that for ‘Ali>Naqvi>the particular strand of the religious crisis that he calls irreligiosity is tied directly to a perceived influx of western ideas and lifestyle(s). To put it in another way, the challenge of his community abandoning its religion was caused (among many other reasons already noted) most fundamentally by a growing influence of western thought and culture. For him the “new doubts” had come about due to European influence and were a result of people’s fascination with, and (mostly blind!) imitation of, the western modes of thought and culture. For ‘Ali>Naqvi> this was by far the greatest challenge that confronted all Indian Muslims, though his immediate audience always remained the Shi’ites of the subcontinent. In the introduction to the Qur’anic commentary, he notes:

These objections [leveled against the Qur’an] are themselves the result of the new age (*naya>daur*) and that is why the ancients (*q̣udama*) did not consider them. The new ideas that reach this land sailing from the shores of Europe seize over the hearts and minds of many [here]. In their hearts these ideas insinuate the kind of doubt (*shubaha*) about every facet of religion (*mazhab*), the resolution of which, if not presented in accordance with their [i.e., of those seized by western

⁵⁴ ‘Ali>Naqvi>s response to these binaries, this life/hereafter and faith/works is extensively discussed in chapter 2 of the study.

ideas] mindset (*zahnīyat*) and their taste, would result in them becoming captive to the doubt, which will then turn into doctrine (*'aqīdah*) and [become the cause of] their turning away from religion. Especially in (the country of) India, the deluge of sectarianism and inventing [new] religion (*mazhab tarash*)⁵⁵ have reached such heights, that may God protect us! (4-5)

Furthermore, although irreligiosity is presented as a threat to human welfare because it seeks to unravel religiosity (the greatest source of peace and betterment of human society) from society, its impact is understood to be so penetrating as to affect religious orientation while spanning across the spheres of social and cultural influence. That for 'Ali>Naqvi> the crisis of irreligiosity is much more comprehensive than simply theological or intellectual is absolutely crucial for understand his intellectual project as well as his later writings. In fact, 'Ali>Naqvi> sees irreligiosity as eventually leading to an ethical and cultural revolution: "... [Irreligiosity] does not pertain to only one aspect of life; instead it is the source of every kind of intellectual, social and cultural corruption. It means that the world is passing through a great revolution: there are changes everywhere in the minds [of people], in thinking, in societies, in ethical norms and habits. And this is simply because irreligiosity has taken the place of religion" (196). His book on the relationship between reason and revelation makes similar observations, juxtaposing intellectual irreligiosity with revolution in cultural norms and seeing them as parallel phenomena and the result of the same cultural process:

Without doubt, certain customs (*ravasim*) that have gained currency through imitation of neighboring nations are today emitting [elements] that pollute the air, hinder progress, harm the religion, and deprive the intellect. They need to be changed... Intervention in beliefs, alteration in social life, changes in customs and adjustments in law are sometimes necessary and appropriate on the basis of protection of truth (*hāqīqāt parvar*); on the other hand, they are simply adopted from the point of view of "fashion". [If done in this latter way] they do not

⁵⁵ The metaphor means attempts to change religion.

reflect the philosophy of a civilization or its self-adornment in the mirror. The air that has spread is polluted by modernists (*jiddat pasand*) and has come from across seven oceans like cholera and the plague. The virus of “fashion” is common. Men get rid of their moustaches, women of the hair from their head. Thus the battle with nature (*fitnat*) is commonplace. In Russia God was expelled from the rule. In India as well, an anti-God society has emerged. In the face of this virus, it is difficult to protect the well-being of human civilization. Still, the consolation is that whatever it is, it is temporary. After all, nature would dominate and the viruses will cease (8-10).⁵⁶

The aforementioned excerpt also brings to light an important point: For ‘Ali>Naqvi> there existed a strong connection between the growing tide of irreligiosity and the westernization of Indian society. This perceived correlation will be an enduring theme in his writings, informing many of his later discussions. For instance, writing in 1961 while discussing the question of veiling, he notes:

Since western culture has begun to exert influence on eastern nations, the question of veiling has gained much significance. The more these influences have increased, the more importance this question has gained currency. In my view, among all the issues that pertain to the old civilization (*tamaddun-i qadim*) and the new civilization (*tamaddun-i jadid*) and have come under discussion, this question has special significance. That is because the other questions pertain to particular classes [of society] and specific situations (*hala*). But this is a matter whose impact affects half, [or] even more than half of humanity and its way of life (*tarz-i zindagi*). From the time that the revolution against veiling arose in Muslim countries – among which Egypt was the first, Turkey the second, and in the time of the Shah, Iran third, and other countries – such as Iraq, Syria and the Hijaz have also come under the influence [of the West]. It was inevitable that the impact of these influences would be felt in other countries, and especially by the Muslims of India.

People who had become carefree from religion, for them it [i.e., abandoning veil] was easy; they say that religion is a combination of superstitions (*kharaḥ*) and illusions (*auham*). [For them] the [religious] ruling (*hukm*) to veil is considered to be one of those illusions (*tavahhamat*). As for those who seemingly view their connection with religion as necessary, [when it comes to] defending their modernist ideas (*tajaddud pasandanaḥ khayalat*) and behavior, they resort to wrong interpretations of the verses [of the Qur’an] and the sayings of the Prophet (*ahadith*). [On these bases] they try to offer insight and teach that veiling is no Islamic injunction. In particular, Pakistan – because

⁵⁶ *Mazhab aur ‘aqf* (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qaumi Press, 1941).

it was founded in the name of Islam, since westernism (*maghrib parasti*)⁵⁷ and modernism (*tajaddud pasandi*) is in [some] people's every vein –no modernist (*mutajaddid*) can quite openly express opinions against Islam. To show compatibility of religion to this modernism, what else one can do but to find a way of blaming Islam itself and try to prove that veiling does not exist in Islam?⁵⁸

The claim that the western way of life influenced Indian cultural norms is easy to understand because evidence in this regard is widespread and empirically visible. In fact, such tendencies were widespread throughout the entire Islamic world. Writing in 1933 and almost around the time when 'Ali Naqvi's intellectual career had begun, Sir Hamilton Gibb, basing his comments on the regional review of religious and political trends within the Islamic world, makes the following astute observation: "The most remarkable feature of the Moslem world in these early decades of the twentieth century is not that it is becoming westernized, but that it desires to be westernized. It would be difficult to point to a single Moslem country which entirely rejects the contribution of the West in each and every field of life and thought" (319).⁵⁹

For our purposes, it is important to reflect on the particular influence of western thought on Indian Muslim intellectual milieu. If a major factor constituting the crisis of religion was irreligiosity, the source of which were ideas sailing from the farthest shores of the West, how did irreligiosity result in generating doubts among Indian educated Muslims? What was new in these ideas that the ancients had not been exposed to? What are the sources of these ideas? To put these interrelated questions differently, what is

⁵⁷ Literally, "West-worshipping".

⁵⁸ *Isbat-i pardah* (Lahore: Imamia Mission, 1961).

⁵⁹ H. A. R. Gibb, *Whither Islam? A Survey of Modern Movements in the Moslem World* (New York: AMS Press, 1973).

the nature of these doubts and in what way did they lead to confusions about religion and even its disavowal?

‘Ali>Naqvi’s description of these new intellectual doubts is tied to empiricism (*mushakaydah pasandi*) and materialism (*ma’liyat parasti*). Though *prima facie* two different terms, in his analysis they have a common premise: only that which is observable through the senses can be proven or believed in. On numerous occasions – and right from the first Imamia Mission publication – he notes how during those days, people had come to believe in only what was empirically evident, thus denying the unseen altogether. Denial of the unseen posed two major challenges to foundational pillars of Shi’i theology: the belief in the existence of God and that of the Twelfth Imam, the Mahdi. Hence, the fact that some of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s earliest writings attempted to provide an intellectual defense of these two doctrines is not a mere coincidence. In 1932 he wrote a treatise on the doctrine of the Mahdi in Shi’i Islam⁶⁰, answering various doubts that had arisen in accepting his existence. Some of these doubts, he notes, are old and have always been there. Some, however, are new and the result of materialism and empiricism:

...The existence of the absolute authority, the proof of the times (may God hasten his return), and his occultation is one such matter where ideas have become terribly confused and most people are far from reality. [This is] especially [true] in the present world where materialism is widespread and spirituality is more and more [deemed] worthless (*taqvin parinah*). By assuming that the foundations of contemporary philosophies are empirical, people deem metaphysical (*ma-fauqjal-tabi’ah*) powers and their blessings (*baraka*) imaginary ideas (*khayat-i mauhum*). It seems that they expect everything to be gauged with the criteria of the external senses (*zahir-i hivas*). [Because of this] the sphere of rejection [of belief] in the existence of [God’s] proof (*vujud-i hijjat*) keeps expanding. That is to say, besides those who deem it necessary to reject his existence due to their religious affiliation (*mazhabi-maslak*), a huge number [of

⁶⁰ *Vujud-i hijjat* (Lucknow: Imamiya Mission and Sarfaraz Qaumi-Press, 1932).

people] has emerged which, reckoning beliefs like these against enlightened thinking (*roshan khayal*), consider rejection [of belief in Mahdi's existence] a criterion of high thinking (*buland nazari*). Then there are sincere Muslims who are neither affected by the wave of materialism, nor opposed to belief in his existence from a religious point of view. They have lost their firm belief in the face of the struggles of life and the testing of their patience due to the prolonged length of occultation. If they have not entered the sphere of rejection, they are at least wavering. And then there are people, who for their personal benefit or enjoyment take pleasure in playing with the beliefs of Muslims. They created and presented their own Mahdi to the world⁶¹, and even when he himself passed away while the world continues to exist – which is by itself a defeat of their claim – their simple-minded followers continue to use profound influence to attract more followers [to the path] of their Mahdi. For them, a Mahdi is no longer necessary. In their view, the coming of Mahdi is a fiction of the past. Due to this situation, the need is felt to properly present the issue of the Mahdi to the world (4-5).⁶²

The idea that contemporary modes of thought reject admittance of non-empirical evidence is again pointed out in his essay *Iman bi al-ghayb*, written to explicitly address this issue: “Today's civilized world (*mutamaddin dunya*) takes pride in the fact that people believe in only what they see. They say that our knowledge is dependent on the empirical (*mushahada*). They do not consent to considering things unseen (*an daykhi*) although if one is vigilant, then it will become clear that to limit knowledge to [merely] the empirical is not something proper to human uniqueness” (9).⁶³

A word needs be said about who (in terms of social, intellectual or political class) 'Ali-Naqvi>has in mind when he points to the rising tide of irreligiosity and modernism (*jiddat pasandi*). Could one somehow identify within the Indian Muslim Shi'i community one particular group who was more directly under the sway of western

⁶¹ This is a clear reference to the founder of the Ahmadiyah movement in India.

⁶² It is crucial to note that 'Ali-Naqvi>mentions more than one intellectual doubt that had led to a growing disbelief or wavering vis-à-vis Mahdism. Furthermore, not only does he call attention to ways in which some of these doubts were old and some new, but also indicate how each had arisen from a different intellectual context. This observation will be critical to our discussion in the ensuing chapter.

⁶³ *Nigārshat-i Sayyidul 'ulama'* (Lahore: Imamia Mission, 1997). This text is a collection of his essays and does not provide the original date when they were written.

ways of thought and culture in the historical milieu of 1930s and 1940s? Do such distinctions and identifications emerge from within ‘Ali>Naqvi’s own writings? Generally speaking – and this is true for most of his writings – ‘Ali>Naqvi>refrains from naming his intellectual dissenters, thus making it difficult to pin down his intended audience. Yet, the firm bond between growing a-religiosity and westernization assumed by ‘Ali>Naqvi>suggests that the implied target of his critique were Muslims who had studied in western-style educational institutions, and by virtue of their curriculum or institution’s ideological leanings, were most exposed to western thought and culture. With the establishment of Aligarh in late 19th century, this model of education (and institutions built according to its precepts) was the one most receptive to western ideas and thought. By the time ‘Ali>Naqvi>appeared on the scene, Aligarh had already established itself as the hub of modern Islamic reformism, including nationalist consciousness and political activism.⁶⁴ By no means restricted to the Aligarh movement alone, western-style educated Muslims and the economic elite, therefore, appear to be the most clearly identifiable social group whom Naqvi’s writings critique.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Aligarh was to become a town with a predominantly Muslim image (though not with a majority Muslim population) through the existence of a powerful Muslim landed gentry and the influence of elite qasbah culture. The background lent itself to Aligarh becoming the focus of political attention during the first half of the 20th century. Its transformation from a small, but important, military qasbah town notable as a fort and trading center, came with the growth of separatist politics and a rising spirit of nationalism. Events up to Independence in 1947 influenced the way in which opinions and attitudes were formed, and which are Aligarh’s uncomfortable legacy today. From 1870, an institution was founded and developed which was to have a profound effect on the region and on Muslim attitudes in north India. This was the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, now called Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)” See E. A. Mann, *Boundaries and Identities: Muslims, Work and Status in Aligarh* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992). Various studies have been carried out examining the role of Aligarh movement in reforming Muslim theology. See, for example, in this regard Christian W. Troll. *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publ. House, 1978).

⁶⁵ In this context, in ‘Ali>Naqvi’s writings I have only found two brief references of Muslim figures: Sayyid Ahmad Khan (*Masa’il va dala’il*, 59) and famous revolutionary Shi’i poet Josh Malihabadi>in his essay “*Khuda>ka>sa>but*” (*Nigارشاه>i> Sayyidul ‘ulama>*, 1997). Intellectual leanings of the two figures and the context of discussion supports my claim that primarily the people ‘Ali>Naqvi>had in mind were from among the “new intellectual elite”.

Construed in this way, 'Ali>Naqvi's argument, in a nutshell, is as follows: a movement towards irreligiosity or weakening of religious sensibilities is a result of Muslims' (mostly the educated elite's) fascination with Western thought and lifestyle. The growth of religious indifference or irreligiosity feeds on scientism and empiricism, whose basis is rarely a careful deliberation over intellectual ideas. Most often, these intellectual currents were a consequence of blind imitation of the various intellectual fads that were popular in the west. Yet, under the powerful socio-political and educational influence of the economic and educated elite of India, the religious masses and non-educated people too were increasingly susceptible to falter in their religious commitments. This was so due to lay Muslims' inability to intellectually navigate through a plethora of novel, bold and even audacious assertions against religious foundations and truths. The mounting tide of empiricism, materialism and scientism had, therefore, displaced religion from its elevated social rank. Instead, religion had become the prime symbol of dogmatism, backwardness and irrationality.

It is worth repeating once more that such undermining of religion in its various modalities was, in 'Ali>Naqvi's viewpoint, the single most significant threat to a society's well-being and constituted a strand separate from other, more familiar challenges. Muslims' inability to cope and come to terms with the novelty of these ideas and doubts in a clear and effective manner was, however, the key issue in this particular dimension of the crisis of religion.

The Problem of Muslim Disunity

The crisis of religion preoccupied ‘Ali>Naqvi>his entire life. In many ways, his intellectual career could be portrayed as a continuous grappling with its various dimensions and elements. But this is not to say that there was nothing else that concerned him. On different occasions, he would discuss issues which, though not directly tied to the core (faith and practices) of religion, were still deemed important by him. I say “indirectly” because in ‘Ali>Naqvi>s view, there is nothing that stands completely outside the realm of religion. As we will demonstrate later, he refuses the dichotomy of the religious and the secular, the sacred and the profane. For him, if anything, there is a hierarchy of priorities, issues that are more fundamental and of more central significance than others. His political writings are a case in point. He rarely spoke about contemporary political problems, and except for a couple of occasions, did not take up questions pertaining to political philosophy. And yet, because in the 1930s the question of Muslim unity was of central importance to him, in the introduction to one of his earliest texts, he notes:

The urgency of the moment demands that all Muslims create a united front to counter these opponents in a unified manner and use all the collective resources on hand to defend the shared principles of Islam against the attacks of the enemies of Islam. But it is tragic that some people take pride in creating rifts among Muslims, themselves, and in expanding the gulf of differences. Every day, they deem it necessary to bring up issues responsible for fracturing the walls of Islamic unity. Who does not know that there are certain foundational principles of Islam, belief in which is collectively known as Islam? In those [foundational principles] all sects of Islam (*firaq̣i Islāmīyah*), despite their mutual differences, participate equally.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *Tahjīf-i Qurʾān ki-hāqīqat* (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1932).

La>tufsidu>fi al- 'arzfi itself ends with a trenchant critique of the Muslim community on this issue and a strong warning concerning the dire consequences that discord among Muslims could cause:

I speak honestly. These days, whosoever asks [you to] fight for religion is wicked (*mufsid*). A reformer (*muslih*) is one who brings [people to] a unified path and asks [of them to] dissolve their differences (*ikhtalaf*). This does not mean that any [single] party should abandon its religious position (*maslak*). The intellectual differences that have not been resolved for centuries cannot vanish overnight. This does not mean, however, that one should change one's opinion and abandon one's faith. The point is not to simply throw these differences around. Rather, it is to struggle in a unified manner and with unified aims and objectives, not to fight with one another or create possibilities for conflict. It saddens me, and it is shameful for Muslims, that in the internal affairs of Muslims, decisions are made by non-Muslims. This is, in fact, a disgrace and humiliation for Muslims. It is profoundly disgraceful for Muslims that their reformist energies are so much in abeyance, their rectifying and unitary powers so disabled and the spirit of Islamic unity so meager that Muslims can no longer agree on any point. Non-Muslims [therefore] feel the need to resolve matters among Muslims. That is to say, the reformers of Muslims turn out to be non-Muslims. This is a situation that should be heeded. If in these circumstances there is no change, and Muslims continue to proceed this way, then may God protect Islam. Muslims may as well recite *fatihah*⁶⁷ on their own existence.⁶⁸

As evident from his scathing criticism, he detects the source of the problem of disunity within the ranks of Muslim intellectuals and the Muslim community itself. This was a call for Muslim unity, and in concrete terms, of Indian Muslim unity, against the challenges faced by them in changing times. It is unclear how it ties in directly with the religious dimension of the communal problem. Yet the historical circumstances bring to light the political and social centrality of the question of Muslim unity. But 'Ali>Naqvi> did much more than just write about this issue. His efforts extended to finding ecumenical avenues for serious dialogue and a conscious refrain from the polemical

⁶⁷ Reciting *fatihah* refers to the Muslim ritual of reciting the first chapter of the Qur'an upon a person's death.

⁶⁸ *La>tufsidu>206-7*

language and sectarianism. This is a theme that he will pursue off and on in his later writings, but as the time passed, Naqvi's efforts on the front of Indian Muslims unity diminished, perhaps due to a growing realization of its sheer impossibility.⁶⁹

Finally, in addition to the aforementioned dimensions, a defense of Shi'i faith and practice against polemical attacks constitutes a major strand of his religio-intellectual effort. This strand, however, is nothing new when it comes to the thought of a Shi'i scholar, especially one from the Household of *Ijtihad*. From the time of the publication of *Tuhfaḥ isna' ashariyya* by Shah 'Abdulaziz, son of the famous Indian scholar and Sufi, Shah Waliullah, the scholars from the Household of *Ijtihad* had incessantly written rebuttals of this text and many treatises inspired by it.⁷⁰ Occasionally, 'Ali Naqvi also took upon himself the task of defending Shi'i positions on these issues, examples of which have already been noted in our discussion above.

Concluding Remarks

Whereas the perennial, inter-sectarian topics would continue to constitute an important strand within the massive corpus of his writings, the core of 'Ali Naqvi's intellectual life from this point onward would be aimed at responding to the challenge posed by the burgeoning influence of western thought and culture on the Indian Shi'i community.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Yet this is not to deny that the tone of his writings and speeches and his overall method of argumentation continued to be non-polemical, and from the point of view of Sunni intellectuals, respectful, engaging and accommodating.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of some of these polemical tracts, please see Sayyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz: Puritanism, Sectarian, Polemics and Jihad* (Canberra: Marifat Publishing, 1982). For a discussion of the ongoing exchange between Sunni and Shi'i 'ulama' see the same author's, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Ithna' Ashari-Shi'ism in India*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1986).

⁷¹ We recur one last time that although his primary audience has always remained the Shi'ites of India, his ecumenical discourse always sought to speak to the broader Muslim community with which he would also

‘Ali>Naq̣vi’s religio-intellectual project was aimed at a comprehensive rehabilitation of Shi’i faith and practice in the face of the intellectual challenges from both within the Muslim community (for example the ongoing Sunni-Shi’i polemics) and from without, that is, the growing influence of western thought and culture in India.

I hope it is clear by now that the immense crisis of religion – ‘Ali>Naq̣vi’s anxiety about the Muslim community’s struggle to uphold their religious beliefs and practices – was a result of a multitude of factors. From his point of view, the external factors – the threat of missionaries, attacks on Islamic foundations, materialism, and scientism – had led to a new and unprecedented crisis of religion which had made it difficult for Muslims to uphold their basic religious beliefs and practices. With the cultural and intellectual influence of the West, doubts of all sorts and of an entirely different kind and order, had appeared. The ‘westoxification’ (*maghrib zadagi*) – blind imitation of western thought and lifestyle – prevalent among the intellectual and economic elite was only helping it spread far and wide. For ‘Ali>Naq̣vi these new doubts, and the underlying intellectual and psychological causes, deserved more attention than anything else. That is what he detected and identified, calling it the most formidable contemporary challenge for the peace and reform of Indian Shi’i society. Yet the multiple factors leading up to this religious crisis, as put forth by ‘Ali>Naq̣vi were not entirely new to his intellectual activity and context. Its seeds can be found within the latter part of the 19th century. In what is now considered a standard account of the intellectual history of the Indian Muslims community, the historian Shaykh Muhammad

engage intellectually in explicitly non-sectarian way. This point will be discussed at a greater length on appropriate occasions.

Ikram depicts the picture of this crisis in a manner that is almost identical to ‘Ali-Naqvi’s diagnosis:

In the 19th century, especially after the war for Independence [in 1857], Islam in India faced three threats (*khattray*). The first was from the missionaries who were hoping that with political decline would come religious decline as well, so that the followers of Oneness [of God] (*Tauhið*) would accept the Trinity (*Taslis*). The second threat concerned those ideas in Europe and India that were of a nature that, in the words of Sir Sayyid [Ahmad Khan], “one would wish to die”. These people deemed Islam the enemy of reason and ethics as well as a hindrance to human progress. This group included not only missionaries but professors of western universities as well as English rulers, to whom God had entrusted the destiny of the Indian Muslims. The worst book about Islam and its founder was of William Muir who was the Governor General of the united provinces of India. He summarized his book in two sentences: “The two greatest enemies of humanity (God forbid!) are the sword of Muhammad and the Qur’an of Muhammad.” The third big threat which would only increase later on was the birth of all kinds of doubts among Muslims. The people who had seen the books by missionaries or other Christian writers, or those by freethinking (*azað khayað*) western thinkers would come to see the descriptions of certain Islamic matters as commonly presented by the ‘ulama’ opposed to reason. The fear was that even though these people might not leave Islam to accept Christianity but will [most probably] be estranged from religion. Sir Sayyid himself writes: “If God had not guided me and pulled me out of my blind following [of religious scholars] (*taqlid*) and if I had not paid attention to the verification of truth, I would have certainly left religion (*mazhab*).”⁷²

To conclude the discussion, let me emphasize again that of all the different challenges that Shi’i Muslims of the Indian subcontinent faced, for ‘Ali-Naqvi it was the *religious* challenge that posed the greatest danger. For him, the religion of Islam called for a fresh appraisal, one which would be convincing to its wavering adherents. If religion is the greatest asset of a society, in times of religious crisis nothing is more worthwhile than breathing a new life into it. It is understandable then, that in 1941 ‘Ali-Naqvi would write:

⁷² Ikram, Shaykh Muhammad. *Mauj-i kausar* (Lahore: Idarah Saqafat-i Islamiyah, 2000), 156.

...[C]asting off of false doubts with respect to beliefs and the correction of harmful customs are needed. That is why the reality of established religious practices (*marasim*) and the knots of wrong interpretations of beliefs are opened [in this text]. This [opening of knots] is a safeguard against the seditiousness behind the veil of “reform” (*islah*), a rebuttal to the challenge of the wishful objectors, an answer to the warnings from hypocritical *belle-lettres*, and an ultimatum for an exchange of views with those claiming wisdom.

In this industrial age, all old and new doubts are molded in the factory of imagination. It is the duty of the reformers of the nation (*muslayhaan-i qaum*), folks of understanding, possessors of insight (*ahl-i nazh*) and writers that they bring to the fore the reality of these doubts (8-9).⁷³

And this is why the closing paragraphs of *La>tufsidu>fi'l 'arz* impart an emphatic statement of intent on his part, laying out the trail his intellectual life would henceforth tread: “If there is a religion [i.e., Islam], which with respect to its teachings is a supporter of peace and harmony and of generating a milieu of tranquility and concord, then such a religion deserves to be preserved for the reformation of the world...The real struggle for reform (*islah*) [therefore] will be the spreading (*tarvij*) of the teachings of religion and the attempt to turn people into its adherents” (200-1).

⁷³ *Mazhab aur 'aq* (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qaumi Press, 1941).

Chapter II: Hermeneutics of the Religio-Intellectual Project and the Relationship between Intellect and Revelation

Introduction:

By the time ‘Ali>Naqvi>rose to social prominence, in the early 1930s, Muslim India was already in midst of a period of intense political and social activism. The preceding chapter showed that ‘Ali>Naqvi>was quite aware of these sociopolitical developments. It also explained that among the various crises—and there were many, ranging from political and communal to social and economic—faced by the South Asian Shi’i community, it was the religious crisis that concerned ‘Ali>Naqvi>the most. His audience included, on the one hand, Muslims who had abandoned any active affiliation with Islam, and on the other, those haplessly caught between the criticisms of Islam and religion (both from within and from without), and unable to intellectually respond to these censures. The latter situation had forced many to waiver in their religious beliefs and practices. From ‘Ali>Naqvi>s writings, the preceding chapter also delineated a detailed account of the underlying anxieties that motivated this religio-intellectual project. This religious crisis occupied his intellectual energies for the rest of his life. Presenting an articulation of these issues in his own words, the chapter also discussed how he examined and understood the contours of this crisis of religion, and why he saw a careful response to this crisis as essential to his role as a religious leader. ‘Ali>Naqvi>s multi-faceted writings and intellectual career are, therefore, a response to this religious

dilemma. Beginning in this chapter then I turn to ‘Ali>Naqvi’s response to the religious crisis.

Before turning to that however, let me recapitulate the picture that emerged from his perception of the religious crisis. Early in his intellectual career ‘Ali>Naqvi>was witness to harsh criticisms of religion, claims such as “religion corrupts society”, “hinders its progress”, especially because “it is dogmatic and irrational”. Based upon these opinions, many among the Indian Muslim political and economic elite had sought to eradicate religion from society. Though he accepted many of the criticisms made against religion, ‘Ali>Naqvi>disagreed with the overall diagnosis of the problem, as well as the suggested solutions to it. For him, religion was society’s greatest asset and must not be conflated with its false and corrupt imitations. As the greatest source of peace and *islah* it deserves to be cherished and protected simultaneously from its false imitations and misplaced criticisms.

In engaging his secular interlocutors (those who had abandoned religion altogether or those who were skeptical of religion’s ability to meaningfully contribute to society) it is this concept of *islah* that he finds his best hope of convincing them. Since *islah* of society was a major concern of his time and shared even by modernists and the secular western elite, it is through this idea ‘Ali>Naqvi>sought to find common ground with them. In *Religion and the Intellect*¹, for example, ‘Ali>Naqvi>invokes *islah* and reminds these interlocutors that human nature is comprised of two powerful forces, animality and ignorance on the one hand, and the intellect (‘*aqil*) and knowledge on the

¹ *Mazhab aur ‘aqil* (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qaumi>Press, 1941); the translation of ‘*aqil*’ as ‘intellect’ instead of reason is to forestall lack of attention or comprehension due to the preconceived notions of what reason is or is not. ‘Ali>Naqvi’s exposition of the nature, role and limitations of ‘*aqil*’ is quite intricate. Extensive discussion of this subject in this chapter will clarify this point.

other. Suspended between these two, it has always been religion's foremost function to employ the latter to overcome the former. Religious ideas such as accountability and reward/punishment in the hereafter are nothing but ways to accomplish this and to suppress destructive forces of animal passions and sentimentality within human reality. Furthermore, he argued, irrespective of any religion, the intellect has itself acknowledged the naturalness of this method of accountability and this need for overcoming human animality. Therefore, the proponents of *islah* of the Indian Muslim society should not downplay these religious concepts and must reckon religion their ally in the *islah* of the human society.² It will then be 'Ali>Naqvi's burden to prove to these interlocutors why religion is necessary for social reform and indispensable for a healthy society.³

Turning now to 'Ali>Naqvi's response, it is pertinent to describe, albeit in a summary fashion, the lines upon which it was formulated. For 'Ali> Naqvi> the effectiveness of this response rests upon its ability to penetrate and persuade the new Muslim mindset. If the core of the problem is his audience's complete fascination with the western ideas and scientific achievements, then the intellectual response could barely ignore it. A relevant passage where 'Ali>Naqvi> most clearly expresses this concern has already been cited.⁴

² Ibid., 13-5.

³ How 'Ali>Naqvi>enacts it in his writings will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

⁴ The passage reads as follows:

These objections [leveled against the Qur'an] are themselves the result of the new age (*naya> daur*) and that is why the ancients (*qudama>*) did not consider them. The new ideas that reach this land sailing from the shores of Europe seize the hearts and minds of many [here]. *In their hearts these ideas insinuate a kind of doubt (shubha>) about every facet of religion (mazhab), the resolution of which, if not presented in accordance with their mindset (zahniyat) and temperament [i.e., of those seized by western ideas], would result in their becoming captive to the doubt, which would then turn into doctrine (aqidah) and [become the cause of] their turning away from religion.* Especially in (the country of) India, the deluge of sectarianism and inventing

And what constitutes this mindset? It demands *reasonableness* of faith-based commitments and practices, and is skeptical of religion's ability to meet this criterion any longer; it is so because for this mindset religion stands for nothing more than ages-old withered dogmatism: "They say that religion is a combination of superstitions (*kharaḥāt*) and illusions (*auḥām*)", noted 'Ali-Naqvi in his early writings.⁵

This widespread opinion about a natural conflict between the intellect and religion meant that no meaningful effort to revive religion could avoid attending to it. In the formative years of his intellectual life 'Ali-Naqvi would tirelessly return to it—mostly by addressing it directly, but sometimes as a note on the side too—clarifying the meaning of religion and the intellect, and arguing for their inherent compatibility and complementarity. In fact, his discussion about the relationship between religion and the intellect is the groundwork upon which the task of theological reconstruction will be carried out. More pertinently, 'Ali-Naqvi's resolution of the debate surrounding the relationship between the intellect and revelation became the cornerstone of his entire intellectual corpus: the inherent compatibility and mutual necessity of revelation and the intellect was not simply stated and argued for to silence criticisms of "irrational religion" from "progressive intellect", but thoroughly enacted in his writings. Unless the interlocutor or the nature of argumentation explicitly demanded textual proofs, 'Ali-Naqvi invariably provided intellectual arguments in support of his point, followed then by the textual proof. In consistently following this method of argumentation, there is an explicit privileging of the intellectual arguments over the textual ones. Being a

[new] religion (*mazhab tarāsh*) has reached such heights that may God protect us! (4-5, emphasis added).

See 'Ali-Naqvi, *Muḥaddamah-yi tafsīr-i Qur'ān* (Lucknow: Idārah 'Ilmiyah and Nizāmī-Press, 1940), 31.

⁵ See Chapter 1, 49.

permanent feature of his writings that shaped the way response to the religious crisis was articulated, and given the pivotal significance of this hermeneutical aspect of the theological project, it is best to begin the discussion of his response to the crisis of religion with it. A proper understanding of this hermeneutic foundation upon which this religio-intellectual project was carried out will not only provide a clearer understanding of this project, it will also enable the comparison of 'Ali>Naqvi's project with that of Muslim intellectuals of his contemporaneous era and beyond.

Relationship between the Intellect and *Mazhab* (Religion)

The Indispensability of the Intellect:

In our discussion of the religious crisis, I noted ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s positing the problem of distinguishing between a true reformer (*musjih*) and a mischief-maker (*mufsid*). In *La>tufsidu>* ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> admits straightforwardly that the task of discerning corruption from reform is quite onerous: First, it is not always possible to separate the spheres of sincere reform and corruption since both are carried out in the same domains, both attempt to change the status quo (whether it be social, economic, political or religious); for example, killing a person could be simultaneously an act of reform or corruption depending upon the point of view from which it is viewed. Second—and this follows from the first—that a reformer is usually blamed for being an instigator of mischief and every mischief-maker presents himself to the world as the true reformer with a positive cause. Third, both reformers and the corrupt use the same methods and techniques to persuade people to their program, for example, “preaching and counsel (*va ‘z va nas̄ḥat*), chastisement and reproach (*zjir va taubik̄h*), and admonition and criticism (*sarzanish va malamat*)”; finally, even when a mischief-maker knows in his heart that his program is to bring corruption and mischief, he would never accept that he is mischief-maker. He will always defend himself saying, “I want to stop this world from following its wrong ways and make it tread upon the right way. That is why I am not a mischief-maker but a true reformer.” Therefore, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> notes, “Every mischief-maker can be seen as a true reformer and vice versa...” It becomes extremely difficult for those who are unaware of

the intentions of a true reformer and a mischief-maker to form an opinion about the veracity of their respective agendas.⁶

Yet that is not all. Making reference to the Qur’anic verse, “When it is said to them do not [spread] corruption in the world, they say indeed we are sincere reformers. But they are indeed mischief-makers but they are not aware,”⁷ and the example of Imam H{usayn, ‘Ali>Naq{vi> further argues that the task of discernment between a mischief-maker and a sincere reformer becomes even harder due to the accusations and propaganda of the former against the latter. The mischief-maker employs every opportunity to discredit the sincere reformer, as it happened in the case of Imam H{usayn throughout the Karbala episode who was accused of “insinuating chaos and stirring up disturbance within a peaceful environment.”⁸

Yet notwithstanding the difficulty entailed in the process of discernment, ‘Ali>Naq{vi> insists that given how crucial it is for the wellbeing of a healthy society—that corruption be separated from reform—it is both desired and obligatory for a society to carry it out with patience and diligence: “If intimidated by this mental struggle [of distinguishing between a sincere reformer and a mischief-maker] a human being refuses to ponder altogether [this matter], and deems the calls of a sincere reformer untrustworthy (because they can be those of a mischief-maker) ...[then] the aim of the world’s reform will die out.”

But how does one accomplish this task of discernment? For ‘Ali>Naq{vi> the litmus test of this discernment process is whether the claimant of reform invites

⁶ Naqvi> *La>tufsidu>* 37-8.

⁷ Qur’an, 2:11-12.

⁸ Naqvi> *La>tufsidu>* 38-39. The section contains an extensive historical analysis of how Imam H{usayn was portrayed as mischief-maker in the Umayyad propaganda, a discussion which is irrelevant here.

thinking and careful reflection over his or her claims, or simply demands blind adherence to the proclaimed agenda. If it is the latter, for ‘Ali>Naqvi> it is definitely the voice of a mischief-maker:

Remember! This is a great criterion of a sincere reformer’s veracity. If a sincere reformer asks of the world to close its eyes and ears and accept what is said out of intimidation then understand that there is a defect in that *islah*. And if a sincere reformer presents his plan of action by saying, “Carefully think about what I say, ponder over it, and then if you are willing to accept it, accept it”—that is to say, [the sincere reformer] awakens the powers of the intellect, and lifts the veils of doubts—it will mean that he trusts his truthfulness and he is sincere to people, not disingenuous. Now it is up to the world to ponder over his teachings and guidance and to seek signs of reality in it. On the other hand, if there is a group that has attempted to silence the voice of this plaintiff of *islah* and barred people from thinking, he will be the sincere reformer and these people, the mischief-makers.⁹

In brief, navigating the competing claims of those claiming the status of sincere reformer requires proper application of one’s intellectual resources, namely the intellect itself.

The chapter on religious crisis also brought to the fore the crisis of religious authority. Here we turn to explore this issue in more detail. For ‘Ali>Naqvi> the ‘ulama> are part of the third division of *fasad*’s four-fold division, the third being constituted by peoples or groups responsible for perpetuating *fasad*. ‘Ali> Naqvi>’s arguments to emphasize the significance of the religious authority of the ‘ulama> parallel his arguments for religion itself. Similar to his comments about true religion and its false imitations, he makes a distinction between the real ‘ulama>, and those who appear in their guise but are undeserving of this title; just as one needs to disband mischief from

⁹ ‘Ali>Naqvi> *La>tufsidu>fi>al-‘arz* 3rd ed. (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1998), 40. In passing I must note that the same argument was used by ‘Ali>Naqvi> to demonstrate the veracity of H̄usayn’s mission at Karbala: ‘Ali>Naqvi> contends that H̄usayn never lied to his followers and always made it clear to them that following him meant nothing less than martyrdom. This, for ‘Ali>Naqvi> was a great lesson from H̄usayn’s exemplary behavior that Shi’i followers needed to pay heed to. Please see chapter 4 for details.

sincere reform (while they may both appear in the same guise) sincere ‘ulama’ need to be distinguished from their fake imitators. It is through the hands of these phony ‘ulama’ that mischief occurs and religion and religious scholarship is discredited.¹⁰ In any case, according to ‘Ali>Naqvi> since religion is indispensable, religious scholars are indispensable as well. Therefore, argues ‘Ali>Naqvi> the real ‘ulama’ are absolutely needed: “If religion is needed then there will certainly be a group that is knowledgeable of its rulings, and others who are not. In this case, it is necessary that those [ignorant of religious rulings] consult with those who are knowledgeable... [People of] the latter group are called imitators (*muqallid*) and [those of] the former, jurists (*mujtahid*)”.¹¹

Similarly, for ‘Ali>Naqvi>the burgeoning suspicion of ‘ulama’s sincerity is due to the presence of charlatans(claiming to be ‘ulama’). Contrary to this widespread opinion, their presence and ability to influence society only proves how crucial a role ‘ulama’ have played throughout Islamic history: more valuable and important something is, more frequent and dangerous will be its false imitations. It follows from that that if religion and religious scholars were powerless and of negligible import, their imitations could hardly cause any harm to the cause of sincere reform.¹²

But the same problem presents itself again: how does one distinguish the sincere and real ‘ulama’ from their fake imitators? Again, ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s answer emphasizes the centrality of the intellect in the process: instead of blindly following a religious scholar, one should employ one’s intellect to assess the character of these scholars and their juristic abilities, in other words, their knowledge and practice. ‘Ali>Naqvi>further argued

¹⁰ Naqvi> *La>tufsidu>*32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 176-77.

¹² *Ibid.*

that even ‘ulama’ have never claimed that following a religious scholar should be a blind process in which one should withhold one’s critical and analytical faculties. It is only after careful assessment and upon assurance of confidence in a religious scholar’s knowledge and right practice that one should follow him. One cannot entrust responsibility of one’s practice to someone without first developing trust in that person’s abilities, a trust which can only occur through careful deliberation and research (*tahqiq*). Islam that forbade blind imitation of popular fads and social trends would also forbid such undiscerning attitude.

Therefore, the decision to follow the opinion of someone more qualified in a particular domain of expertise is possible only after the intellect has carefully weighed and consented to the reasonability of the judgment. This claim that one cannot follow anyone simply because others follow him is a result of Islam’s emphasis on employing one’s God-given faculty of the intellect. No human can be completely relieved of using this gift in a proper manner and satisfying the criterion set by it in intellectual matters.

‘Ali>Naqvi>notes:

Remember! This is not a religion that blinds your eyes, and snatches away your powers of thinking and reflection [or] asks you to discard your mind and intellect. Instead it has defined the limits and has put conditions to encourage critical understanding and discussion. Before they decide to say an enthusiastic “yes” to someone’s call, Islam has invited people to utilize their intellect carefully, and to see [for themselves] who is a sincere reformer and who a mischief-maker.¹³

‘Ali>Naqvi>gave the intellect an even more crucial role in resolving confusions that had arisen due to the widespread missionary activity, and ever-growing awareness of religious communities presenting competing truth-claims. Every religion claims itself to

¹³ Ibid., 187-190.

be the absolute truth calling all others false, sees itself as the true reformer and others as mischief-maker. For ‘Ali>Naqvi> there is but only one way to judge the veracity of these religions: careful weighing of all these religions with the intellect, and ongoing research in understanding one religion fully. In any case, “[t]urning away from research and helplessly saying goodbye to all [religions] because of the anxiety caused by the multiplicity of paths is intellectual laziness, whose consequence could never be satisfactory”.¹⁴

If the benchmark of the veracity of an *islahi*>program is its invitation to open examination of this program (and not demanding blind submission to it) then it has to be true for these religious claims as well. Only a religion that invites human beings to reflect on its claims and freely examine its teachings could truly be the source of reform of a society. This idea of freedom of the intellect in general, and vis-à-vis competing religious truth-claims is an important facet of his treatise *The Sagacious Life [prescribed by] Islam (Islam ki>hikmah nah zindagi)*¹⁵ that was written a couple of years before *La>tufsidu>fi>al-‘arz*. The treatise not only devotes separate chapters on the subject [e.g., under the titles of “World Religions and Human Progress” (*mazahib-i ‘alam aur insani>taraqqi*) and “Islam and the Autonomy of the intellect” (*Islam aur huriyat-i ‘aql*)], but presents it as the central theme of the whole text. Consistent with his previous arguments, here again ‘Ali>Naqvi> calls upon his audience to examine whether a particular religion invites research and reflection or demands blind following of the beliefs and practices of that religion. A religion that is uncomfortable in lending itself open to assessment and forbids its adherents religious conversations is one which

¹⁴ *Mazhab aur ‘aql* (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qāumi-Press, 1941), 3.

¹⁵ *Islam ki>hikmah nah zindagi* (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1935).

is insecure in its foundations and realizes that it would fail to uphold its grounds upon such examination. ‘Ali>Naqvi> argued that all other religious traditions especially Christianity have always kept their adherents in darkness as to their scriptures, restricting access to a select few only.

In contrast to these other traditions, ‘Ali>Naqvi> presents the intellect as the hallmark of Islam. Briefly put, this text is ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s argument for Islam’s sagacious teachings for human wellbeing and overall a healthy individual and communal life. Islam’s open invitation and challenge to think, reflect, and investigate are evidences of Islam’s refusal to demand blind adherence from its adherents. It is also by the same token proof of Islam’s veracity as a religion. For ‘Ali>Naqvi> there was no other religion that had put so much stress on the freedom of thinking and reflection or had taken this freedom as the basis for religious commitment itself: “...Islam did not come to the world and just say, “*Accept* whatever is said to you”. Instead it said, “*Understand* what I say” (40, emphasis added).¹⁶

The same argument is more fully developed in another text. Here Naqvi> maintains that for centuries Christianity and Judaism (and modern religious movements such as Baha’ism) have actively discouraged intellectual reflection on their scriptures and religious doctrines. He concludes that: “In fact, it is only Islam that can honestly claim that as a religion it has invited the world to tread the path of knowledge. Go examine every religion of the world; nowhere will you find encouragement [in the gaining] of knowledge [like that] which is found in the Qur’an and hadith. Hence, no

¹⁶ Ibid.

other religion can compete with Islam in the way that it is a true guide for progress in [the field of] knowing the world.”¹⁷

At a time when religious, political and social activism had swept India from all corners, the task of unraveling laudable activism from one shallow and destructive had become all the more taxing and decisive. Indisputably, this intense activism owed much to the deep predicament in which Muslims had found themselves—confronted with criticisms of Islam from both within and without, economic and political disempowerment and marginalization. But above all this activism was taking place in a milieu in which skepticism about religion’s prestige and service to society and demise of traditional religious authority was undermining their religious worldview. In the face of this unprecedented situation, ‘Ali>Naqvi>insisted that his Muslim audience think through these issues very carefully, make cautious choices that should grow out of a careful application of the God-given intellectual faculties. In his process—and in all three cases, discerning true religious scholar from a fake one, a sincere reformer from a mischief-maker and true religion from a false one)—‘Ali>Naqvi>accords the intellect a pivotal role.

In stressing the centrality of the intellect he did not even spare something as fundamental as his own juridical authority (*vilayat al-faqih*) upon which rests any Shi’i jurist’s social influence and power (and often economic base as well). To determine whom to follow as one’s source of imitation (*marja’ at-taqlid*) ‘Ali>Naqvi> categorically

¹⁷ Naqvi> *La>tufsidu>* The argument that Islam more than any other religion invites reflection runs throughout the text of *Islam ki>hakkimanah zindagi>* (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1935), especially pp. 25-60. ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s claims about Islam’s emphasis on the intellect and critique of other traditions for their opposition to rational inquiry invites analysis regarding his understanding of the other religious traditions. This discussion, however, falls outside the scope of this chapter.

posits the responsibility of careful rational deliberation on the part of a lay Shi'i Muslim.

Why Intellect, Whence its Centrality?

Enough has been said already to demonstrate the pivotal role 'Ali>Naqvi> assigns to the intellect in meeting the various challenges confronted by the Shi'i community in the modern period. But why intellect? According to 'Ali>Naqvi> its origin lies within Islam's central emphasis on knowledge whose foremost source is the intellect, as mentioned in the Qur'an on numerous occasions. Even more important is the Qur'anic understanding of human reality in which the intellect emerges as the distinctive mark of being human. It is the intellect that separates humankind from the rest of creation. 'Ali>Naqvi> makes this point often in his treatises written during these years.

However, a more lucid understanding of the intellect's reality and significance becomes apparent only when the intellect is situated within the broader context of the meaning and purpose of human life. The whole text of *Islam ki>hikmah nah zindagi>* [The Sagacious Life [prescribed by] Islam] is geared towards addressing this issue. Given the central role of the intellect in 'Ali>Naqvi>'s hermeneutics and his reconfiguration project, let me present an outline of this text.

Since the text is an exposition of the sagaciousness of Islamic teachings about human life, 'Ali>Naqvi> opens the discussion with the meaning of life and death: it is only after the meaning of life and death in their most general senses is comprehended—as they apply to everything in existence—that this meaning could then be applied to human life and death. According to 'Ali>Naqvi> within its created limits everything in

existence has been endowed with its potential perfection and striving for and realization of that potential is what constitutes life for that existent:

For an exposition of [the meaning of] life and death, it is important to keep in mind that in the limited nature of every [created] class [of living beings]¹⁸ (*jins*), nature has kept certain abilities (*shlahiyat*). Each one of these [abilities] has an acme of perfection. By passing through the various stages of these abilities the class [of living beings] can reach that point. Insofar as a [living] thing is a possessor of this perfection set by nature, or in the process [of acquiring this]... that thing is alive. When it loses these capabilities or becomes bereft of perfection then it is dead.¹⁹

If this is the definition of life and death, then applying it to human life would entail determining what is true human perfection, and in turn, what a human being is to begin with?²⁰ Thus begins the following section titled “Reality of a Human Being” (*Insaan ki haqiqat*) where he attempts to define human reality and the meaning of human life and death by way of discussing his natural ability and perfection.

For ‘Ali>Naqvi> human life is not altogether different from the rest of the created order. Just as attributes of excellence in inanimate bodies (*jamaat*) are already contained within vegetative bodies (*nabatat*), and those of inanimate bodies and vegetative bodies within animals (*hayvanat*), in a human being, the crown of God’s creation (*ashraf al-makhlukat*), the attributes of excellence of all three are already contained. It is because, ‘Ali>Naqvi> notes, a human being is a sum composite of the whole universe. Furthermore, not only a human being possesses all the attributes of excellence (*sifat-i kama*) of these lower orders of existence, since it is the crown of creation, in him these attributes are also elevated to higher perfections. In other words,

¹⁸ In theological-philosophical parlance the word *jins* can be translated as genus but here ‘Ali>Naqvi> employs it in a general sense of the word.

¹⁹ *Islam ki haqiqat* (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1935), 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

“a human being is in reality a composite of perfections of [all the] possible genera.” Yet, convergence of all these orders of existence within the human reality is the reason why it becomes difficult to understand it: “What is the outcome [of this idea]? It is that the more the elements were conjoined in [forming] a human being, the more ambiguous became his reality. This is a [universal] principle that the more parts (*ajza*) [something] has, the more difficult it will be to understand.”²¹

‘Ali>Naq̣i>notes that this complexity of the human reality and the fact that it contains various elements are reasons why people are misled in their judgment regarding who he is essentially. Some are led to believe that a human being is simply an inanimate body; others see him as a vegetative being; and then there are those who reduce him to the level of animals. It is rare that a human being is not reduced to these individual lower elements or seen in his true light, as a ‘human’ being. Consequently, the view of ‘human life’ is contingent upon the vantage point with which he is viewed: if he is an animal the means of discovering and assessing human life (and its quality) will be akin to those employed to assess the life of animals; if just matter, it will be interpreted from the material point of view. From ‘Ali>Naq̣i>’s point of view, this assessment will be partial, only encompassing the respective animal or material dimensions of human reality and therefore erroneous.

Extending his analysis of the human reality, ‘Ali>Naq̣i>argued that even when a human being is reckoned to be simply matter—and his life therefore only material—one never comes face to face with it: “even when we look at a mirror we see our bodies, their color and shape.” We observe only the accidents of corporeality (*jismaniyat*); the matter

²¹ Ibid., 11.

qua matter escapes our sensory experience. The same is true for all beings of lower orders of existence—the vegetativeness of the vegetative bodies and the sense-experience and movement of an animal will evade plain sensory observation. If this is true for vegetative and animal domain, how could one understand human reality then by simply employing empirical observation?

Furthermore, 'Ali>Naqvi>notes that if the human being is the crown of creation, it cannot be so vis-à-vis the material, vegetative or animal aspects of his makeup. When compared to mountains in material greatness, it falls way short; if growth is the criterion then a plant takes a much shorter span to reach its full blossoming; and if it is by virtue of sharpness of sensory perceptions then many animals would outdo human beings in these domains. 'Ali>Naqvi>notes the example of newly born animals which in many cases possess perfections of movement and self-sufficiency much greater than a human child who is completely dependent upon his mother. At the time of birth, a human child cannot even control his eyes, hands or feet. In sum, in all these domains a human being falls short of the beings in these other orders of existence.

Yet, a human being remains the crown of creation. That is why one will have to admit that human perfection and excellence originate from elsewhere, some quality or substance that is other than his body, growth or senses possessed by him and not by other creatures. A further consequence of this analysis is that if a human being was simply a sum-composite of all these elements and nothing more, his life would entail preservation of these elements, and his death simply their scattering. Since his life is more than simply sum-composite of these elements, preservation of it would also entail something else besides rescuing these elements.

In the light of these observations ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> begins to formulate his hypothesis about the subject in the following words: “To the extent that I have pondered over it, I have come to realize that the distinctive perfection of a human being is his self-willed advancement in knowledge and deeds (*khud ikhtiyari> ‘ilmi>va ‘amali>taraqqi*). This is that [unique] thing due to which a human being has a superior merit, not only over the inanimate bodies, vegetative bodies and animals, but also over angels”.²²

Having established the superiority of human beings to other orders of existence ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> now compares human beings to angels who according to the Islamic teachings are sinless and infallible. Although angels were accorded great status by God due to these and other reasons, nevertheless, in their very constitution God has protected them from sin. In other words, committing sin is not even a possibility for angels: “When the capacity to sin and the emotions that cause sin are not even created in them, their infallibility does not carry [the burden of] fighting oneself (*jihad bi>an-nafs*)”. The case of a human being is different however. Caught between the powers of the lower self (*nafs al-‘ammaḥ*) on the hand, and the divine gift of an inherently good intellect, he is always in a state of inner battle to consciously choose a side. In this constant struggle one who chooses the path of the intellect to overcome his lower self is really the one who is victorious. For ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> in fulfilling divine commands angels are not confronted with—as is the case with human beings—desires or emotions that present difficulties. Therefore, in comparison with angels whose success owes to their constitution—not to their effort—a human being earns his victory. The comparison between the two, however, does not end here. According to ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> in the case of

²² Ibid.

angels, both their knowledge and devotion are limited to what has been bestowed upon them. Fulfillment of duties does not alter either their knowledge or their devotion. In the case of human beings, however, “when a human being earns something, then through his capacity to act he augments it”. In other words, a human being is able to add to his knowledge and devotion through his will and effort. His progress in life is “self-willed progressed” (*khud ikhtiyari-taraqḥ*). This is what distinguished a human being from all other creation and can be reckoned as his essence: “Thus we learn that a human’s “self-willed progress” is really the thing that gives him merit over the angels... In this way the merit of a human being is proved: everything advances but that advancement is not self-willed. In all things other than a human being, this progress is created [for them] (*takvini*), while that of a human exists through his own hands, his own will and choice (*iradah va ikhtiyar*)”.²³

Furthermore, in comparison with human beings all other things in existence have a certain limit to their progress. In other words, every other creature in existence can only go so far in its progress. Inanimate bodies after accomplishing their own perfections, if attempt a further step (e.g., growth), they will already be outside their own constitution and enter the domain of vegetative bodies. Same is the case with other realms of existence. The higher realms of existence put a limit on the progress of the lower domains. For human beings there exist no such limits. Being the crown of creation, it can extend his progress to the farthest limits of possibilities:

It is the human being alone who carries out an unlimited progress. This is because he is the pinnacle (*nuqṭah-yi akhir*) of the possible world. No *telos* is beyond his reach. That is why the door for [unlimited] development is wide open for the human being. His advancement does not stop at any particular point. It is

²³ Ibid.

so because there are no limits to the possible world and a human being is at its [farthest] end. Since the limits of possibility are joined to necessity and the latter is without limits, the meaning of the end of possibility will be that if it is raised [just] one more level, then it will be the level of necessity.

Concluding his discussion on the life and death of human life, Naqvi>posits his final word on human life in the following words:

So what is human life then? To be situated at higher stations of knowing and deeds, seeking to attain those, or striving for them. And what is his death? The destruction of these pathways of development, the closing of his mind in such a way that he becomes content with ignorance, and the deep-sleeping of his conscience so much so that he becomes satisfied with his lowly character. It is easier now to see what [religious or intellectual] framework²⁴ has the ability to become a complete regulatory code (*z̤h̤bit̤h̤-yi h̤ya̤*) for [this vision of] the human life.²⁵

Therefore, the true life of a human being is in the advancement in knowledge and deeds. In ensuing pages, ‘Ali>Naqvi> devotes separate chapters to the subjects of the advancement of human knowledge and human deeds. According to Naqvi> in the human quest for the former,²⁶ the intellect, is the human being’s foremost resource and companion: “for advancement in knowledge, nature had bestowed the substance of *the intellect* to the human being.”²⁷ He further argues that the Qur’anic narrative of human beings’ victory over angels was precisely on the grounds of knowledge for which the intellect was human beings’ primary instrument. The Qur’anic narrative proves further, argues ‘Ali>Naqvi> that to forbid seeking knowledge or using the intellect in this process is absolutely against the nature of things: “if it was more appropriate for human beings

²⁴ Literally constitution (*dastṳ*).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ It is worth noting here that ‘Ali>Naqvi> does not give the intellect a similar role in the human advancement in deeds. This dimension of human life will be discussed later in the chapter.

²⁷ Ibid., 25.

to keep their eyes shut, why has nature bestowed upon them eyes?”, he asks.²⁸ In sum, according to ‘Ali>Naqvi> it is up to human beings to use this gift of the intellect bestowed by nature to accomplish the self-willed progress. The proper use of the intellect further means that one could no more blindly submit to old habits, ways of the forefathers, or to one’s desires and emotions that violate the discerning judgments of the human intellect. In sum: “The kernel of a human being’s humanity (*insaniyat*) lies precisely in employing intelligence and acumen and in recognizing the right path...Those who had put restrictions on human beings, saying “Don’t use your intelligence,” that “faith is one thing, intelligence another,” and that “the intrusion of the intellect [in faith] is a sin” ... those are the ones who have tried to demolish the intellect.”²⁹

So how does the intellect aid in the human flourishing of knowledge, and especially of religious knowledge? It is so because all religious doctrines are based on rational principles. According to ‘Ali>Naqvi>Islam’s foundational creed, for example, belief in One God and prophethood are first and foremost vouched by the intellect:

Religious principles are in fact grounded in the intellect. If that were not the case then how could we have faith in God’s existence? Could we have searched for God in the Qur’an? Until the belief in God is proven what could [the status of] the Qur’an be? ... Could we have believed in the prophecy of the Prophet [Muhammad] by simply hearing him [speak]? In truth, the first affirmer of prophecy is the intellect. Had it not been for the intellect the voices of the prophets and messengers would have been tired of calling [people towards religion], [their voices would have] fainted, and the world would not have heeded. It is the intellect that brings the world towards a prophet; every reality of the world is proven by it. [The opinion of] those who say that we base our

²⁸ Ibid., 27-29

²⁹ Ibid., 33.

knowledge upon the senses is wrong: senses can never lead us to reality, unless the intellect makes its contribution in the process.³⁰

To establish this claim of the intellect's absolute indispensability in human advancement in knowledge (and especially as it pertains to religious knowledge) 'Ali>Naqvi> had to do more than simply state it as a self-evident truth. It required exposition and clarification at many levels, including answers to questions such as what is meant by the term 'religion' (*mazhab*) and 'the intellect' ('*aql*'). Connected to this discussion is also the question of the relationship between the intellect and religion (for example, how religious creed such as belief in one God, in the institution of prophecy and Imamate, and the Final Judgment are perfectly acceptable for the intellect), and what are the intellect's limits, if any. 'Ali>Naqvi> has much to say about these matters and *Islam ki hakiqat nah zindagi*> extensively discusses these issues. The task is clearly laid out by him: it is to demonstrate that Islam is perfectly competent in speaking to and guiding human beings on their quest of advancement in knowledge. In principle, Islamic doctrinal foundations are quite consistent with the judgments of the intellect. If with advancements of knowledge truths of Islam had become less acceptable, the fault then is of Muslims' and Muslims' alone: they have failed to demonstrate to others that the true appeal of Islam is in its grounding in knowledge and consistency with the demands of '*aql*'. It is also because Muslims have not been attentive to the task of seeking knowledge and research.³¹

A fuller account of the same argument would follow soon. To deal with these interrelated questions at length and the various arguments first outlined here, 'Ali>Naqvi>

³⁰ Ibid., 45. Literally, unless the intellect puts its step in between (*jab tak 'aql ka-qadam darmayan main nah*)

³¹ *Mazhab aur 'aql*, (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qāumi-Press, 1941), 37.

wrote a treatise *Religion and the Intellect* (*Mazhab aur 'aql*, 1941)³² which was followed by *[Intellectual] Issues and Arguments [for Those]* (*Masa'il va dala'il*, 1942), the latter text being a response and clarification of the questions and criticisms raised against the former. It is to these texts that I turn now.

Mazhab aur 'aql is much more than simply a straightforward defense of the Islamic creed: it is conceived with a much broader purpose: as a text it was intended to rectify the widespread confusions about religion that had led to harsh criticisms and rejection of Islam. If on the one hand, *Mazhab aur 'aql* was geared toward spawning a religious understanding which would return to religion its true *islah*-function of remedying these decadent theologies and praxes, and defending religion against criticisms of backwardness and irrationality, on the other, it was intended to demonstrate to its audience an inherent alliance between religion and the intellect in the task of human self-willed advancement and excellence, both in the domain of his intellectual and practical life. In content, it systematically presents religious creed, the most fundamental religious principles, and an explanation of how they are quite consistent with the conclusions of careful rational deliberations. In the preface 'Ali-Naqvi notes:

... A casting off of wrong doubts with respect to beliefs, and a rectification of harmful customs are needed. That is why [in this text] the reality of the established practices (*marasim*) and the knots of the wrong interpretations of beliefs have been untangled. This [opening of knots] is a guard against the seditiousness (*mufsidah pardazi*) behind the veil of "reform" (*islah*), a rebuttal to the challenge of the covetous criticizers, an answer to the notice from the hypocritical *belle-lettres*, and an ultimatum for an exchange of views with those claiming wisdom.³³

³³ Ibid., 8.

‘Ali>Naqvi’s intentions with this treatise are even clearer in remarks that follow: Although the specific topics under discussion are the relationship between faith and the intellect and an intellectual defense of religious convictions and creed, they are actually in the service of reforming society through a revival of religion itself, which is for ‘Ali>Naqvi> the most indispensable source of social harmony and interests.³⁴ Read this way, the natural progression of his thought from *La>tufsidu>* to this text and the underlying unity of his religio-intellectual project are unmistakable:

Without doubt those practices which go against intellectual judgments and have become established simply out of custom, changing those, destroying those, and breaking [those] habits is necessary. Everyone must be ready for this revolution and should seek it. Indeed, reforming the society vis-à-vis these customs is necessary in order to make one’s life pleasant. This is no time to waste in unnecessary fetters, nor a place to be ruined in [irrational] practices. That is why [we have] pointed to the true reality of the beliefs and the errors of practice.³⁵

Yet before the task of reforming praxis and social customs could be addressed the dichotomy of religion and ‘*aqf*’ had to be overcome. The structure of the treatise and Naqvi’s argumentation reveals that his intended audience includes those who have completely rejected religion and seek its eradication from society, with the claim that it can no longer achieve the task of reforming society. To a mindset that sees an inherent tension between the intellect and revelation—often carving independent spheres for each—religion could hardly be reasonable.³⁶

³⁴ I have discussed this extensively in Chapter 1 of this study.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁶ Akin to other Abrahamic traditions, the relationship between reason and revelation has been much debated in the Islamic world in recent times. From the rational theology of Mutazilites versus the Ash‘arites, Ghazali’s *Tahafut al-falasafah* directed at the Muslim peripatetic philosophers as a scathing critique of their philosophical doctrines that were in conflict with the Qru’anic point of view, or the *ushli>akhbari>* divide in the Shi’i world, it remained a major theme in the pre-modern period. The modern age brought this old rivalry between the camps of reason and revelation to new heights, making it a subject of intense debate within Islamic intellectual circles. See in this regard, for example, Clinton Bennett, “Islamic Epistemology,” chap. 5 in *Muslims and Modernity: An Introduction to the Issues and Debates*, (New York: Continuum, 2005); “Of Concordance of Reason and Revelation” in Abd al-Karim Soroush,

It is only after this objection is addressed that ‘Ali>Naqvi>turns to religious praxis and social customs. Naqvi>reiterates many of the claims already posited in *Islām ki>hākīmānah zindagi>* foremost being the symbiotic relationship between religion and the intellect.³⁷ This issue is addressed immediately in the introductory remarks of *Mazhab aur ‘aql*. Here ‘Ali>Naqvi>notes how he intended this text to rebut the imagined opposition and dichotomy between religion and the intellect “about which so much fuss is made.” According to ‘Ali>Naqvi>the intellect guards religious beliefs and the true reality of religious wisdom and truths manifest themselves in the mirror of the intellect. Yet for this witnessing to occur properly the mirror of the intellect needs to be cleansed and polished, otherwise the image formed will be distorted. Although the fault would be the intellect’s, it is religion that will be reproached.

It is [therefore] desired that religion be discussed in the light of sound intellect so that pure (*pakizah*) Islam is relieved of wrong accusations (*tavahūmah*), [so that] false objections (*i’tarazah*) [may] not appear true and flawless, and [so that] the imagined discord (*tafaruqah*) between the intellect and religion may be put aside. It is so because *the intellect and religion are absolutely interdependent.*³⁸ *religion calls for the intellect and the intellect proves religion.*³⁹

As noted in the emphasized passage, in convincing the audience of the mutual necessity of religion and the intellect, ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s task is two-fold: to show ways in which religion depends on the intellect, just as the intellect depends on religion. In these earlier

Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush, ed., trans., and intro. by Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 126ff; Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism, and the Philosophy of the Future*, Islamic Futures and Policy Studies (New York: Mansell Publications, 1985), 34, where the author carves a distinction between reason and intellect. For the Indian context one may mention Abul Kalam Azad’s short excerpt “Reason and Revelation” in Aziz Ahmad and Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan 1857-1968* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1970) and numerous essays in the already cited readers on modern Islam.

³⁷ For the sake of brevity and avoiding unnecessary repetition I have refrained from citing these passages here.

³⁸ Literally tied to one another like a body to a skirt (*choli-daman ka saṭh*)

³⁹ *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, 11.

writings such as *Islam ki-hakimanah zindagi* the former receives more emphasis. In fact, ‘Ali>Naqvi’s definition of religion itself incorporates reference to the intellect: “an aggregate of firm realities (to whose truth the intellect has borne witness to), accepted by [human] mind, and essential for cultural reform (*tamadduni>islah*) of the world, is true religion.”⁴⁰ True religion meets the criterion of a sound and discerning intellectual judgment. It is reasonable, thoughtful and invites careful assessment and reflection upon its truth claims. The intellect however is defined without any reference to religion. According to this definition the intellect is “the name of the faculty (*qiyvat*) that reflects, passes judgment on matters unseen with [the help of] those seen, [comes up with] big universals and on the basis of these universals, and draws conclusions.”⁴¹ In other words, intellectual judgment begins with what it knows through experience and then proceeds with the assistance of that knowledge entering into the domain of the unknown. According to ‘Ali>Naqvi> this movement of human intellect from the known to the unknown is also unique to the human race; the encounter of Adam and angels demonstrates that Adam was able to go beyond what he was taught while the angels submitted that they only knew what they were taught.⁴²

It is because of this [faculty] that a person has a taste for seeking (*jostaju*), and with this striving then increases his intellect. Then with the blessings of the intellect he increases his pool of knowledge: [through] conversations with those present, learning lessons from the old books, thus including his own voice in the midst of voices from a thousand years, and desiring that it may reach out to a thousand years to come.⁴³

⁴⁰Ibid., 12. The ensuing chapter will take up a more comprehensive discussion of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s definition and exposition of the scope and function of religion (*mazhab*) in human life.

⁴¹ Ibid., 15.

⁴² Reference to the Qur’anic account of the creation of Adam.

⁴³ *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, 15. In this context ‘Ali>Naqvi> also defines *the intellect*, a definition which is reminiscent of what he had noted in *Islam ki-hakimanah zindagi* “Other than humans all other animals only have senses and within the limits of senses they are able to recognize good and evil, benefit and harm. But the power that is called the intellect is specific to a human being (15).”

In sum, the essence of true human life is willful progress in knowledge and deeds in which the intellect plays the most pivotal role.

Despite the unique contribution and essential role of the intellect in human life, for ‘Ali>Naqvi> there were widespread confusion in his time regarding the reality of the intellect and intellectual doubts (*wahm*) had replaced judgments of the intellect. Wearing various deceptive guises, doubts have misled the intellect from its path. Although the conflict between doubt and intellect was ages old, there was something novel about contemporary doubts: in the old days, doubts occurred due to ignorance (*jahalat*) and thus it was easier to remove those. The contemporary doubts however are “a result of epistemological arrogance (*‘ilmi>pandar*) of the ‘new light’ (*na’i>roshni*). Because science has progressed much, the coating [of these doubts] is quite thick”⁴⁴. Therefore, it was crucial to separate the doubts about religious matters from true judgments of the intellect regarding religion. In other words, doubts of the new age were a threat to both religion and true intellect, and circumstances demanded a renewed understanding and clarification of what intellect is (or is not), what religion is (or is not), and the true relationship between the two:

For this reason, true judgments of the intellect and religion about God, the Prophet, the Book, the Spirit, beliefs and established practices (*marasim*) are presented [here] so that doubts are denied the opportunity to enter into intellectual matters (*ma’qulata*). Without doubt, certain customs (*ravasim*) that have gained currency through imitation of the close by nations are today emitting [things] that are polluting the air, obstructing progress, harming religion, and robbing the intellect. It is necessary to change that.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Literally the word translates as “good” (*acchi*).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 7-8.

Limitations of the Intellect

Until this point the intellect appears to be a self-sufficient entity that does not require any help from religion. The issue, however, is not that straightforward. Knowing his audience whose confidence in the intellect far exceeded that in religion, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> perhaps wanted to establish common grounds acceptable to his interlocutors. He attempted this by acceding to the intellect’s centrality first: after lauding the excellence of the intellect, tirelessly arguing about how it is the essential attribute of a human being, and drawing attention to the intellect’s absolute indispensability for religious understanding, he turns then to note the intellect’s limitations, which according to ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> the intellect will itself frankly admit. The very fact that human beings have come so far in their cultural, intellectual, and civilizational achievements is evidence that they are *still* moving forward and only future will reveal how much or how little human beings have covered in their understanding of things. An intellect that is aware of these basic facts cannot but be humble. It would acknowledge that given the shortsightedness and other limitations, the intellect cannot be absolutely confident of its current state of knowledge and understanding. The intellect must also be aware that the history of human progress in knowledge is also marred with errors and instead of moving forward has often been held back. So while always taking positive strides in fulfilling the task of self-willed excellence in deeds and practice, these observations of the intellect should ensure that human intellect is aware of its limitations, and it does unnecessarily extend its claims beyond its sphere of understanding. In fact, “[human] intellectual excellence (*‘aqli>kamaḥ*) is precisely in his acknowledgment of the limitedness of his knowledge.

That is why in many matters the intellect refuses to provide any ruling and deems those matters beyond its scope.”⁴⁶

Within the intellect vs. revelation debate, the status of miracles constituted perhaps the most persistent and thorny issue in ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s intellectual milieu. How could religious claims for miracles (*mu’jizat*) of the prophets be understood on intellectual grounds—let alone endorsed or defended. In the texts and speeches made during the early years of his life, he often turns to the issue of miracles.⁴⁷ Here as well, the relationship between the intellect and religion boils down to the settlement of this debate. According to ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> the intellect entrusts many issues to hearing (*sama’*). While doing that it relies on its judgment regarding logical possibility (*imkan*) and logical impossibility (*mahal*) of an issue. Once the intellect settles that a particular phenomenon is not “logically” impossible—the fact that it appears unusual or exceptional will be irrelevant—it is then no longer settled through intellection but rests on the reliability of the source from which the claim is heard. If understood this way the intellect should not have any qualms accepting the miracles of the prophets:

Much of that which simple imagination has not seen with its own eyes, the intellect called impossibility (*ghayr mumkin*), thus its refusal to accept the miracles of the Prophets. But the intellect that has lifted the veils of materialism and broken the shackles of the world in its quest for reality has distinguished between occurrence (*vuqū’*) and possibility (*imkan*), and has created distinctions for habitual impossibility (*mahal-i’adī*) and intellectual impossibility (*mahal-i’aqli*). It reckoned possible events that seem unusual (*ghayr ma’mū’*) and different from regular order and laws. [With that] it [also] validated the miracles of the prophets.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁷ See especially his *Prolegomenon to the Qur’an* (discussed in Chapter 5), *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, *Masa’il va dala’il*, and *La’tufsidu*

In support of his distinction between logical/intellectual impossibility and impossibility perceived due to unusualness of the occurrence of a particular event, ‘Ali-Naqvi reminds his reader that modern inventions would have appeared to ancients as intellectual impossibilities. Yet these things are indeed normal for a contemporary person. Accomplishments of modern science are way beyond the imagination of the ancients and in that way carry the weight of miracle for their limited understanding. In other words, modern developments in science and technology far from discrediting miracles in fact provide an opening for those who uphold religious claims for prophetic miracles: “These workings have not turned prophetic miracles to dust; instead they have proven them....How [then] could a human have a right to assume the impossibility of something simply because it happens to be beyond the domain of his observation (*mushahadah*)? This is human prejudice (*sukhan parvart*) that he sees these realities, yet calls prophetic miracles stories”.

‘Ali Naqvi notes many examples regarding how human intellect has been wrong in its findings: “There used to be a lunar era, and idols were [deemed] gods, now it is a solar era and cosmic order rests on attraction among bodies, and light from moons. Before, the heavens were in movement, and the earth static (*sakit*)⁴⁸; now the heavens have disappeared and the earth is a whirlpool.”⁴⁹ If the human intellect is true to its constitution and self-aware of his strengths and limitations it has no option but to be patient and persevering in its research, and not confuse logical impossibility with what appears to be impossible simply because it comes across as unusual and out of the ordinary.

⁴⁸ *Sakit* literally means quiet and calm but in Urdu also used with the connotation of being motionless.

⁴⁹ *Mazhab aur ‘aqf*, 18.

According to ‘Ali>Naqvi> in the debate of religion and the intellect, delusive conjectures (*tavahhuma*) have always been arrayed against religion. But religion through the help of the world of nature and the intellect has always been able to overcome these doubts. Although nothing in existence remains static—from weathers, seasons, and crops to forms, faces, and stature of things, the world is in a constant state of flux—the basic realities of religion comprehended and vouched by the intellect had always remained firm. For ‘Ali> Naqvi> “Islam’s advocacy is precisely for these realities.”⁵⁰

Yet, if left to side with the lower self and brutish nature, human beings turn anything into their god. In doing that they fall short of their dignified status, worshipping in error, sometimes even their fellow human beings. They may fall further and worships trees, stars, mountains, or fire. According to ‘Ali>Naqvi> in the modern world materialism had become the new deity: “Now that he is a claimant of progress, he considers matter (*ma’addah*) to be everything and worships the hidden forces of the world.”⁵¹ If he remains true to his calling, employs and listens carefully to the counsels of a sound intellect, he would not disbelieve in the unseen world (*ghayb*), the existence of a metaphysical God (*ma’fauq al-tabi’at khuda*) who sends His prophets to guide humanity and validates their mission with special arguments and signs called miracles. The intellect should not have a problem in accepting those.⁵²

The limitations of the intellect were also addressed in *Islam ki haki manah zindagi*. There ‘Ali>Naqvi> addressed a question that was in wide circulation among his

⁵⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁵¹ Ibid., 20.

⁵² Ibid., 20.

Muslim audiences: “the people of the world who invented airplanes and trains, and many other things [many among them] did not accept the existence of God, so did they not have the intellect? Why don’t they accept [God]?”⁵³ ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s response is as follows: the power of a faculty, in this case the intellect, is dependent on how much it is put in use and to what domain it is consistently applied. Like every other human faculty, the more it is put to use, the stronger it becomes. Furthermore, every faculty has a spectrum of functions that it performs and depending upon which particular function(s) it is most consistently applied it would excel in that domain. “...The power of a thing is with respect to what it has been applied to. A wrestler may be so powerful that he will overcome very powerful wrestlers, but it does not follow from this that he could stand on a stage and deliver a long speech.”⁵⁴ Western people employed their intellectual resources to materialistic pursuits and therefore made much progress in that domain. They did not extend their intellectual pursuits, however, to spiritual questions and therefore the progress in that domain remained quite minimal.

‘Ali>Naqvi> extends this argument further, claiming that underdevelopment of the intellect is only one reason why those who have progressed in science and technology have not acceded to the belief in God. According to ‘Ali>Naqvi> a related and more profound cause for this is the particular point of view with which the intellect approaches the world of nature. According to ‘Ali>Naqvi> “the point of view [with which] a human being approaches something alters the conclusions [reached about it].” He cites the example of a mirror: if in looking at a mirror the person focuses on his own face, he will learn about the contours of his face. The more time he spends on this, the

⁵³ Naqvi> *Islām ka-hāki-manah zindagi*>35.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 36.

clearer his perspective will be about his looks. If the same person looks at the same mirror, but this time not at himself, rather concentrating on the make of the mirror, his analysis will be more insightful regarding the mirror. About his looks however, he would not learn much. According to ‘Ali>Naq̄i>the case of the natural world—mirror that it is of the divine realities—is barely any different: a scientist’s witnessing is concentrated on understanding the object of inquiry but with little attention to its divine roots:

The same is true for natural realities. In these things there is a dimension which is *qua* their natural and material [makeup]; then there is one which sheds light on them about their creator. If the eye of the beholder is fixated on the beauty of the mirror and is lost in it, then it cannot see this [other] reality which is hidden in it. Such is the situation today: a human being is so entangled in his material desires that he cannot see this light that is so shimmering from these natural existents. He saw these things and saw them with close attention, but by only looking at their particular natural attributes. That is why this beauty that was hidden in them remained invisible.⁵⁵

It is clear from these excerpts that to tackle the perceived divorce between religion and the intellect (and of demonstrating the reasonableness of religion), the first step had to be carving an opening for a belief in the Unseen (*ghayb*), upon which could rest then the most fundamental religious belief, the idea of an Almighty God. All other faith commitments would only come later. Here, therefore, ‘Ali>Naq̄i>argues with the upholders of the intellect (who reject religion) on their own turf; he contends that a careful application of the intellect upon theoretical and historical data would inevitably confirm that, far from being a self-sufficient and autonomous entity, the intellect seeks assistance from without. And that help inevitably comes from religion. If this much is

⁵⁵ Ibid., 39-40.

conceded by the other side, then the floor is open to debate God's existence, to which 'Ali>Naqvi>could now turn.⁵⁶

Concluding Remarks on the Relationship between Religion and the Intellect

If, as 'Ali>Naqvi>contends, "true religion and the intellect are united [in their claims]," it must be concluded that "the religious God and the God of the intellect are not separate."⁵⁷ The question still remains: in exactly what ways are they connected? If the intellect is simultaneously so central and so marred with limitations, what would its correct functioning look like in a religio-intellectual project like 'Ali>Naqvi>'s? In other words, if the essential relationship between the intellect and religion is that of symbiosis and mutual cooperation, then how do they actually work together?

The nature of the intellect's collaboration with religion is best comprehended when seen in the light of 'Ali>Naqvi>'s comprehensive definition of religion. In preceding pages we have already noted one definition. Yet that definition lacks specificity. On other occasions, for example in *Mazhab aur 'aql*, 'Ali>Naqvi>uses the term *diin* for religion and lays out the essential contents of religion (specifically Islam): *Diin* according to him is defined by its principles (*usul*) and branches (*furu'*): in the former he enlists doctrinal beliefs in Divine Unity and Justice, Prophecy, Imamate, and the Returning, while the latter incorporates active religious life involving prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, mandatory charity and *khums*, and *jihad*.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Here we are more concerned with 'Ali>Naqvi>'s method of argumentation and epistemology than the actual working out of theological creed. In the ensuing chapter we will discuss the reconstruction of Islamic theology based on this hermeneutic.

⁵⁷ *Mazhab aur 'aql*, 20.

⁵⁸ Naqvi> *Mazhab aur 'aql*, 101-6. That this is 'Ali>Naqvi>'s standard definition of religion is further confirmed from his later writings such as *Usul va furu'-i diin* (1973, introduction).

This *ushl-furu'* distinction is crucial to 'Ali>Naqvi's account of the way the intellect becomes religion's partner in leading a human being and human society to achieve its goal of willful progress in intellectual and practical matters and social peace and happiness. According to 'Ali>Naqvi, the task of understanding and assenting to the religious doctrines belongs to the intellect. Under no circumstance religious creed should be accepted without careful deliberation of the human intellect. The sphere of religious practice however is different. If true to its calling, here the intellect should submit to the authority of the revelation and the teachings of a divinely guided prophet. In other words, once the intellect acknowledges the necessity of prophecy, it should not have any difficulty in willfully accepting its prescriptions for human practical life.

The crucial point in this argument is that in the domains of its inapplicability the intellect should humbly accept its limitations. To apply the intellect to something where it does not belong will be against the decision of the intellect itself: "the conclusion reached by using the intellect [in this case] will be a decision that will not be based on the intellect." So what then are these limitations? 'Ali>Naqvi points out that human intellect deals with the universal principles but is unable to prescribe principles that are particular in their scope. When it comes to legislating for the entire human order that deals with the varying temperaments of different individuals, the intellect finds itself helpless in prescribing an all-encompassing plan of action. Thus aware of its limitedness in figuring out each and every particular detail, the human intellect accepts the necessity of prophecy whose scope embraces the whole of the human order. Applied to the religious domain, the upshot of this analysis is well summarized in the following passage:

...Principal [doctrinal] beliefs are those whose responsibility rests solely on the intellect. These doctrinal beliefs and foundations of religion (*mazhab*) need to be understood through the intellect. In the [domain of] the branches of religion—in their principles and laws—however, it is not necessary that the intellect is able to arrive at every correct opinion. The intellect has accepted the necessity of the prophecy of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) because for human and social order it is a necessity that a law and constitution is promulgated by someone who truly knows the temperament of the human collectivity and is truly familiar with the human order.

Once the intellect that is conscious of its limitations truly submits to its own calling it then no longer questions the particulars prescribed by the prophet. It no longer asks why the units of prayer in the morning are two and those in the afternoon are four. Since the human intellect has resolved the necessity and criterion for prophecy it happily accedes to the judgments of that prophecy in the domain of law and particular prescriptions. Akin to the person who understands why there needs to be some formal etiquette and customs in a king's court and displays it according to the will of the king—without questioning the particularities—a human being who acknowledges the intellectual necessity of prophecy also does not dispute the particularities of the prophetic prescriptions. It accepts those as it is: “If someone acted against these court customs... he would be punished. But what is this etiquette and these customs of the court, this will not be decided by the intellect; the intellect itself acknowledges that these customs and etiquette will be decided by the ruler,” observes ‘Ali>Naqvi>⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Naqvi> *Islām ki> ḥkīmahāh zindagi>* 48. On another occasion ‘Ali>Naqvi> argues that although observations of particulars could never lead to a universal conclusion, in the contemporary period it is a common mistake to draw universal principles from particulars observed empirically (*mushāhidah-yi juz’iyyāh*). See *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, 65. An example of application of this *usūl-furūṣ* distinction and cooperation of ‘*aql*’ and revelation/religion/prophecy is noted towards the beginning of the same text. Hinting at the reasonability of the doctrine of an afterlife, he notes: “Nothing comes in existence and then perishes completely. In some form it lasts forever. [Therefore], there is some future for human beings as well upon which rests reward and punishment. This is the intellect’s judgment: even if events from the past are not in memory, how could one deny the news coming from those [who are] trustworthy, especially when you don’t remember anything and the intellect has [already] certified the truth of these [trustworthy] voices. Similarly regarding the future, some details intellect understands by itself, and for

In sum, religion needs the intellect to establish its truth-claims, its creedal beliefs in the Oneness of God and the necessity of Prophecy and the Judgment Day. In practical matters dealing with proper action (those that fall under the rubric of branches of religion), it is the intellect that is in need of religion, and therefore of prophetic guidance. Understood this way, the intellect and religion complete one another, assisting proper ordering of human life so that the highest and most essential purposes of human life, both individual and collective, are successfully accomplished. In confirming the essential truth-claims of a religion, the intellect provides the necessary intellectual edifice, upon which would rest the detailed prescriptions of religion for practical ordering of human life toward meaningful ends.

I have suggested that for ‘Ali>Naqvi>religion (*ad-dīn*) is constituted by mutually exclusive (yet complementary) content-categories of principles and branches (*ushūl-furuʿ*), to which correspond exclusive and complementary epistemological categories of intellect-revelation. A careful examination, however, brings to light a more complicated picture in which the intellect plays an important (albeit limited) role even in the branches of religion. The privileged status assigned to the intellect—to the extent that it was called the distinctive mark of human nature—meant that the intellect could not then be made completely aloof to the details of religion; its absolute freedom in intellectual matters also ensures that it could not blindly submit to anything, even if they are prescriptions of extremely specific nature. That is to say, the intellect even while acknowledging that court-customs are result of the ruler’s command and need be obeyed, cannot help but reflect on the underlying wisdom that resulted in this (and not

some it turns towards the faces of those who are able to tell. Whatever they say, [the intellect] submits to that because it does have a ruling which is in opposition to those [made by these trustworthy voices] (5).”

some other) particular set of prescriptions. All the more so because, as ‘Ali>Naqvi>has contended, the intellect has already determined that the created order is the handiwork of a Wise-Creator: “In the order of existence [*nizām-i hastī*] there is wisdom which is perceived by the eye, comprehended by the intellect and assented to by the heart. There is a Being which is the nucleus of this wisdom and which is directly related to this order.”

In arguing for the existence of God, the argument that ‘Ali>Naqvi>employs most frequently is the cosmological argument.⁶⁰ His version of this argument emphasizes the wisdom that underlies all of creation: without much effort and most readily it is the human intellect that best observes the harmony, beauty, and order that underlie the cosmic order. The intellect’s witnessing of this harmony is neither conjectural, nor its assent mental construction (*takhliqī zihin*) but its true grasp of the reality itself. The intellect also grasps that this order, harmony, and beauty is not an accident, rather a consequence of the manifestation of the Reality itself that we call God.⁶¹ Nature is a signifier not only of its createdness, but also of its measured and sagacious fashioning by an Almighty God. An obvious corollary of the argument is that particular prescriptions and laws revealed by this God could not but be beneficial to human society and attentive to its deepest needs. Without any skepticism, the intellect assents to the same measure of wisdom and order that it witnesses in the world of creation for the laws and principles prescribed by the Wise par excellence for the human order: “None of His actions are without wisdom and guidance. Therefore, whatever injunction He may prescribe, whether it pertains to worship (*‘ibādāt*) or interpersonal dealings (*mu‘āmalāt*),

⁶⁰ See for example Ibid. 20-31, *Islām ki-shākimanāh zindagi*, 48, and *Usul va furu‘-i din* (1973), 6.

⁶¹ *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, 3-4.

there will be in it some wisdom and guidance.” With this theological presupposition one could not but accept that “...there be wisdom in everything [prescribed by God]. But what it means is that every command that has come from the Venerated One and is proven to us [is from Him], then we should generally agree that there is some guidance in it. If that were not the case, it would not have come to us.”⁶²

The limitations of the intellect pointed out by ‘Ali>Naqvi> imply that there is no guarantee that one who uses it will be able to fully appreciate the underlying wisdom and guidance in these prescriptions. The task of discovering the underlying sagacity of the Divine prescriptions is still worth carrying out, in truth inevitable, given the God-gifted nature of the intellect. Again the modern advancement in knowledge and scientific discoveries prove that human beings are still limited in knowledge and there is much room for improvement. Who can really be certain that the human intellect is not in the state of infancy with still a long way to go? Consequently, human understanding may lag far behind in figuring out the underlying wisdom behind each and every divine command of a God whose knowledge encompasses everything in existence until now, and until eternity. Yet, the human intellect is constituted such that it cannot help but always endeavor to discover that wisdom endlessly. That is only natural and very much in the spirit of the human quest for self-willed progress in knowledge. What is however not called for is rejection of divine injunctions simply because the human intellect is unable to find satisfactory purpose or wisdom behind these commands. In conclusion ‘Ali>Naqvi> notes:

⁶² Naqvi> *Islām ki>ḥākimaḥ zindagi>* 48. The reader should immediately notice the Mu‘tazilite-Imami> theological positing of the objectivity of action and rejection of Divine command theory of ethics. Aware of this, all these matters, however, will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this project.

There should be obedience because [the command] is [from the] Divine, and [there should also be] reflection because it is prescribed by the Wise One. If we understand the wisdom then it is a success of knowledge. That is why the pure Imams explained reasons for laws. The Qur'an also mentions the wisdom alongside its commands in many cases. This is because, on the one hand, we adhere [to these commands] from a practical point of view, and on the other because there is no harm in the progress of knowledge.⁶³

A very interesting observation follows this passage. According to 'Ali>Naqvi> in understanding the underlying wisdom of the particulars of religion (for example, those laid out in Divine law), even the 'ulama' could not claim any certainty. He notes that these days many modern people inquire from the 'ulama' regarding the basis and reason for this or that divine injunction. 'Ali>Naqvi> replies that 'ulama' may well be able to discover the divine command correctly but that does not guarantee that they will be equally at home in laying out the divine purpose for instituting that command. One should not be surprised then if the meaning and wisdom of these commands would evade their understanding as well. For 'Ali>Naqvi> in this matter all Muslims are on an equal footing. If these 'ulama' have any advantage over lay people, it is simply that they are much more learned in the hadith literature which might clarify some of these questions (49-50). Therefore, given the specific nature bestowed upon the human faculty of the intellect, it is inevitable to apply it to all religious matters, theological or practical. On the other hand, it is next to impossible for it to exhaust the wisdom contained in *every* Divine command, especially those that pertain to the practical lives of human beings. It is Islam's ongoing invitation to the human intellect to take up the challenge of discovering this hidden wisdom in these prescriptions. Thus 'Ali>Naqvi>'s conclusion that: "From the point of view of knowledge the door is open for reflection on

⁶³ Ibid., 49.

these Divine commands. It is so because Islam carries the flag of human advancement in knowledge. It is its call that without the intellect worship is defective because worship only comes alive through intention ... and the more perfect the intellect is, the more perfected the intention will be as well".⁶⁴

'Ali>Naqvi's Hermeneutics: Some Concluding Remarks

Throughout his life Ali Naqvi was preoccupied with the task of constant engagement with the injunctions of Islamic Law in order to draw out deeper reasons and wisdom. He would write extensively on subjects related to the various branches of religion, from laws of worship (e.g., purpose of ablution, why prayers are five) to personal law and interpersonal transactions, explaining to his audience what he saw as the sagacious divine purpose in legislating these specific injunctions. The seeds of this hermeneutic are already present in *La>tufsidu* where 'Ali>Naqvi>had explained the law of divorce in light of this hermeneutic scheme. There he provides a summary version of the argument about the relationship between religion and the intellect; in the process he argues for the necessity of obeying divine commands, and of expending intellectual energies to discern underlying wisdom.⁶⁵

Given 'Ali>Naqvi's hermeneutic commitments—and to be truly consistent with the arguments put forth by him (about the relationship between the intellect and religion) in these early writings—his religio-intellectual project could only be carried out along specific lines: the theological reconfiguration of Islam—those pertaining to

⁶⁴ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁵ See p. 52-61. The issue and his arguments will be presented in the following chapter.

the principles of religion—needs to be consistent with the conclusions of the intellect. This means that although the type of theological argument employed may vary with his intended audience, it must invariably be based on the intellect.

His reconfiguration of Islamic praxis (issues pertaining to the branches of religion) however, was carried out along a very different trajectory: Here, the intellect was given a role—a significant one to be sure—but in no way is it deemed autonomous. Aware of its limitations—though never giving up its striving—it cannot but seek cooperation of revelation, and seek teachers and role models. Ultimately, for ‘Ali>Naqvi> a meaningful religious life is one that results, not from the intellect-religion divide, but through their mutual alliance, support, and symbiosis.

In regards to his hermeneutics, note must also be made of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s appropriation of the Shi’i intellectual tradition. First, the *usuli-furu’* distinction to which he returns frequently has become standard in contemporary Shi’i traditional scholarship. In positing it as the core religious faith and practice, ‘Ali>Naqvi> is clearly drawing from this widely accepted formulation of Shi’i Islam in modern times.⁶⁶ For example, the religious beliefs for which he makes an intellectual case in *Mazhab aur ‘aql* are respectively the Divine Unity, Justice, Prophecy, Imamate and the Judgment day, a standard list of what are considered core Shi’i beliefs. Similarly, ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s nuances regarding the intellect aside, his definition of the intellect and its role in religious life also owes much to the same heritage, especially the *usuli*-synthesis of 18th century

⁶⁶ For examples of similar formulations in the modern Shi’i religious scholarship please see, Muhammad Husayn al-Tabatabai, *Shi’ite Islam*, Persian Studies Series, No. 5 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975); Ja’far Subhānī and Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Doctrines of Shi’i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices*, (London: I.B. Tauris; London: Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001).

through the present.⁶⁷ The centrality accorded to the intellect in the *ushūhī*-Shi'i juridical and theological thought made possible for 'Ali>Naqvi>to extend its role to discovering the divine intentions behind various legal prescriptions.⁶⁸

Finally, any discussion of 'Ali>Naqvi>'s hermeneutics could not ignore the relationship between the chronology of his writings and his method. This is because the chronology of 'Ali>Naqvi>'s writing offers critical insights into his religio-intellectual project and his hermeneutic. More importantly, it reveals his project's underlying unity of intent and purpose. Familiarity with 'Ali>Naqvi>'s reception of the crisis of religion (chapter 1) and his overall hermeneutical method aid in drawing out the hermeneutical significance of chronology.⁶⁹

Earlier in the chapter we noted that towards the end of the 1940's, 'Ali>Naqvi> had already substantially developed his intellectual response to the religious crisis. In the decades that followed, the main contours of this response (its hermeneutical basis and key contents) would not undergo major alteration. Read this way, his "later writings" (authored between late 1940s and his death) are, at best, an elucidation and systematization of the arguments already set out during this formative period of the

⁶⁷ On *ushūhī*-Shi'ism, please see Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Just Ruler (Al-Sultan Al-Adil) in Shi'ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), especially p.136ff, and Hamid Inayat, "Aspects of Shi'i>Modernism" in *Modern Islamic Political Thought: The Response of the Shi'i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century*. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

⁶⁸ Note, for example, a contemporary *ushūhī*-definition of the faculty of the intellect: "Entrusted within a [human] soul, the intellect is intended for acquisition of knowledge and understanding. That is why it is a spiritual light, with which the soul grasps the speculative and theoretical sciences" (*al-'aqlu muda'atun fi al-nafsi-mu'addatun li-qibul al-'ilmi>wal al-idraki>wa lidha>qā'innahu nuṣūn ruḥāni>tudraku al-nafsu bihi>al-'uluma al-dhru'iyya wa al-nazāriyyah*). See Al-Shaykh 'Ali>al-Mashkini.>*Isfalah> al-ushūhī*, 5th ed. (Qom: Daftar-i Nashr al-Hādī>1993), 170.

⁶⁹ Given the context of discussion making comments about the significance of the chronology of his writings was almost unavoidable. A fuller appreciation of this claim would, however, only be possible towards the conclusion of this study, while discussing and evaluating his project in a comprehensive manner.

early decades. During this period he also delves into other religious sciences such as Qur'anic commentary, early Islamic history (his positing of a careful reading and a continuation of his ongoing reflections to draw out multifaceted dimensions of the events of Karbala), and writings on the sociopolitical issues confronted by his community. It is important to note that read through the lens of his presentation of the nature of the religious crisis (chapter 1), the "later writings" accomplish a task that could only be secondary in import to this more fundamental project of the reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis. These shifts in emphasis, taking up new topics of discussion and fields of study which characterize these later decades, further confirm that by late 1940s the project of the reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis had substantially been accomplished.

In concluding our discussion of the hermeneutics of this religio-intellectual project it is also appropriate to make a few comments about 'Ali>Naqvi's audience, how it relates to his method, and what role if any it plays in the way he develops his arguments. If the preceding chapter was successful in demonstrating that 'Ali>Naqvi's analysis of the Indian Shi'i Muslims' intellectual plight (and its sociopolitical ramifications) had identified an audience which was far from being monolithic, then his method of argumentation would inevitably also reflect that. His awareness of the complicatedness of his audience (and of its sources of confusion about religion) is a critical part of his hermeneutical method and played a huge role in the success of his religio-intellectual project. Explicit identification of this multi-layered audience (examples of which were cited in Chapter 1), deliberate and perpetual shifts in tone, and the types of proofs employed to persuade his audience only confirm this. Nevertheless,

despite being quite patent in his works, this hermeneutical dimension evades straightforward presentation or analysis. Certain factors seem to contribute to this situation: First, often there is an intertwining and overlapping of audiences (for example of atheists and those who still believe in God, yet are shaken to core in their religious beliefs). Furthermore, although ‘Ali>Naqvi>clearly describes the diversity of his intended audience (and nature of doubts that characterize each group within it), in his argumentation the textual transitions from argument intended for one group is not entirely severed from the other; sometimes a single argument is put forth to persuade one, two or all groups of audiences. For example, in his discussion of the proper relationship between the intellect and religion, irrespective of who might have been his intended audience, often intellectual arguments were presented by him as conclusive and without any supporting proofs from the textual sources. So whereas the audience-specificity of his arguments is unmistakable, almost always intended and therefore crucial to be pointed out, it is not always possible to neatly map his writings (sometimes not even particular arguments) onto this multi-layered audience, or to show how a particular argument corresponds to a particular audience. In view of these observations, to the extent realistic and possible, I have and will continue to examine this dimension of “audience-argument correspondences”. All this implies that in the end my remarks about a particular “audience-argument correspondence” must be read as suggestive, not conclusive.

If an outline of this hermeneutical scheme is patent from the foregoing discussion, it is appropriate now to examine how ‘Ali>Naqvi>applied this hermeneutic to specific theological and legal topics in his reconfiguration of Islamic theology and

praxis. The next chapter is an exploration of this dimension of 'Ali>Naqvi's religio-intellectual project. Furthermore, although in discussing the relationship between religion and the intellect I have attempted to examine 'Ali>Naqvi's understanding of the concept of the intellect, my discussion of his concept of religion has remained cursory. Yet, in many ways his discussion of the definition, nature, scope, and function of religion takes us to the heart of his religio-intellectual project. Given the centrality of this subject and its magnitude it deserves to be explored at length. The ensuing chapter is also dedicated to that task.

Chapter III: Mapping Religion onto Life: Religion as Sagacious Ordering of Life

Introduction

When 'Ali>Naqvi>arrived at the intellectual scene of India, his community was faced with criticisms of Islam from both within (Muslims influenced by western thought) and without (Christian and Hindu missionaries, Imperial rulers, and Orientalists). These criticisms had led to burgeoning skepticism toward what used to be religion's preeminent status and role within Indian society. Consequently, it had become increasingly uncertain what relevance religion could potentially have for the welfare of a human community. Many had come to see religion and its teachings as passé, to be dispensed with altogether, especially when it came to issues concerning the ordering of communal life. This persistent questioning of the worth of religion for human civilization had increasingly put religious communities (in Naqvi's case, his Shi'i audience) on the defense, often leading to loss of conviction in religious beliefs and practices. We have already noted in Chapter 1 the various factors that led to this religious crisis. There, we also noted that these criticisms against religion's relevance had invariably constructed an inherent and insurmountable opposition between the dictates of religion and those of the intellect. Chapter 2 was a reflection on ways in which 'Ali>Naqvi>tried to overcome this perceived dichotomy. According to 'Ali>Naqvi> the intellect is the mark of human excellence which plays a crucial role in humankind's self-willed advancement in knowledge, the ultimate aim of human life. No other creature, even the angels, shares in this distinction reserved exclusively for humans.

Since for ‘Ali>Naqvi> religion’s decisive aim is human *islah* both individual and collective, a central faculty like the intellect could not be indifferent to it; instead, in accomplishing this task, it is called upon to be religion’s foremost ally.

Yet, for his aim of preserving and reviving religion, overcoming the religion/intellect divide, although necessary, was far from being sufficient. Given the distinctiveness of the critique leveled against religion in his milieu (details of which have already been laid out in chapter 1), for ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s rejoinder to be really effective and satisfying for his interlocutors, something more fundamental remained to be accomplished: he needed to demonstrate to them (and to his Shi’i audience) how religion is indispensable for the ultimate interests of individual human beings as well as human communities. While querying the religion/intellect binary (noted in chapter 2), the early 1930s also saw ‘Ali>Naqvi> beginning to carefully address the problematic: why and how is religion indispensable for human societies? His various writings during this period return to this theme often and address it at length. Furthermore, this problematic was critical in shaping the direction that his restructuring of Islamic theology and praxis would take from this point forward.

If on the one hand, ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s religion is not man-made and is validated and endorsed by sound intellectual judgment, it is also inherently reforming (*islah*) for a human collectivity. In fact, the task of reform is necessary and pivotal to the reality of a true religion. He presented religion’s immense ability to positively transform a society as one of the key features of a true¹ religion:

¹ One may recall how ‘Ali>Naqvi> makes a distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’ religions or between true ‘ulama’ from their fake imitators.

True religion is the aggregate of firm realities upon whose truths the intellect has provided witness...[and] appears necessary for the *islah* of the world's civilization...Without doubt, a true religion contains principles of society-formation (*mu'asharat*), cultural axioms, decrees for enjoining good and forbidding wrong. [It also has] the power of force (*jabaruti>taqat*): reward and punishment, [Divine] wrath and anger, and mercy and forgiveness are realities to whose importance the intellect bows down...[T]rue religion is one that is a flag-bearer of peace and serenity in the world, the best guide for the formation of society, an honest advisor of culture, a good teacher of civilization, a nourishment of [human] self, the prevention of evil and what is forbidden, a protection from sedition, a preserver of peace and tranquility, a hindrance to crimes, and the best *islah* of [human] nature.²

By the same token a false religion in essence will be destructive for society. It would demand blind adherence to the way of the forefathers, instigate sedition and corruption, and instead of calling intellect to confirm its veracity, will misguide and hinder its activity. If true religion sides with knowledge and intellect, false religions side with ignorance and human emotions and passions. That is why although false religions also make claim to civilization (*tamaddun*), “they are culture’s (*tahzib*) worst enemy”.³

It is evident from the quote that for ‘Ali>Naqvi> religion is indispensable for the *islah* of human society. Yet this ‘indispensable religion’ is not one that opposes the intellect but instead sees the intellect as its key collaborator in formulating principles that are beneficial to human societies. In positing the religion-intellect companionship in forming a healthy society, ‘Ali>Naqvi> has clearly laid out a criterion for true religion. Thus, for him to convince people of the truth of Islam—the preservation and revival of religion rests on this—he has to demonstrate to his audience how Islam is really the religion that meets this criterion completely. ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s many writings during this

² *Mazhab aur 'aql*, 12.

³ *Ibid.*

period attempt to prove precisely that. In these early years, ‘Ali>Naqvi>is witnessed assertively claiming that no religion other than Islam meets this criteria fully. One such pronouncement is found in *Islam ki>h̄kīmānah zindagi>*:

The legal code and religion that has paved the way for human flourishing in knowledge and deeds and has guided him to this path is the one that could truly be the guide of human life; and religion that bars this flourishing in knowledge and deeds needs to realize that its legal code is worthless. Put Islam to this criterion in comparison with all other religions and see [for yourself] how Islam has taught lessons of knowledge and practical deeds and cleared the way and how other religions have chained the human being and blocked his flourishing. On this criterion it will have to be admitted that Islam alone is the complete code of life (*mukammal z̄bīṭa-yi h̄yāh*).⁴

In brief, his reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis was sensitive to the religion-intellect divide on the one hand, and to the question of the significance of religion for human flourishing on the other. The former has already been addressed in the preceding chapter. What remains to be shown is how ‘Ali>Naqvi>applied his solution to the religion-intellect divide to concrete theological problems. In the present chapter, therefore, we will look at how ‘Ali>Naqvi>renovates Islamic theology and praxis in view of this perceived divide between religion and intellect, while ultimately attempting to demonstrate to his audience the absolute indispensability of religion for human civilization. In the process we will also examine how ‘Ali>Naqvi>develops his arguments to show that through Islam’s rich and sagacious teachings, human beings flourish at both individual and communal levels.

⁴ *Islam ki>h̄kīmānah zindagi>*(Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1935), 23.

PART I: Overcoming Dichotomies: ‘Ali>Naqvi’s *Islah* of the Concept of Religion

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored in detail the centrality of the intellect in ‘Ali>Naqvi’s religio-intellectual project and provided his generally employed definition of ‘religion’. We noted that ‘Ali>Naqvi>divides religion into two parts: the principles and the branches. Whereas we extensively discussed how intellect relates to this two-fold religious division, our discussion of his concept of religion by virtue of necessity and relevance remained cursory. An examination of his attempts to prove the ‘indispensability of religion for human civilization’, however, calls for a more comprehensive account of his concept of religion. This is all the more important because a critical strand of his reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis was precisely to rectify widespread confusions about the phenomenon of religion. As he saw it, during his own time, the prevalent conception of religion had become progressively more simplistic and too reductive to do full justice to its proper definition and scope, and to what it truly entails for human life and civilization. It is in light of his *islah* of the concept of religion on the one hand, and that of intellect on the other (together which form the foundation of his religio-theological project) that a comprehensive understanding can emerge of the way he proves to his interlocutors and audience the necessity of religion for human flourishing and civilization. In the first place then, let me turn to his concept of religion.

What Religion is not? Prevailing Misunderstandings about the Reality of Religion

In laying out a detailed account of his rejoinder to ‘what is religion?’ it seems appropriate to examine ‘Ali>Naqvi’s allusions to opinions he cites as erroneous or reductive. The religious crisis witnessed by him was a result of these widespread confusions about the conception of religion. In discussing “what is religion?”, ‘Ali>Naqvi>was responding to a multitude of positions on the nature, meaning, and purposes of religion. His early writings make extensive references to the misunderstandings and confusions that had become widespread in his milieu. Already in 1933, in one of his earliest writings, *Tijarat aur Islam (Commerce and Islam)*, he seems baffled by the extent to which his community had dichotomized the concerns of the present life and that of the hereafter, a distinction usually characterized as *diin/dunya*>(life of the world/afterlife). In the section “Mindset of the Individuals of the Community and the Fruits of Wrong Beliefs”, he noted two major errors regarding people’s understanding of the Islamic point of view: First, some presumed that between religion (*diin*) and the world (*dunya*), Islam has chosen religion and has taught abandonment of the world (*dunya*). In these people’s view, religion and the world could not coexist and one has to give up worldly life for the sake of religion. In support of this view, ‘Ali>Naqvi>observed, these people cite the famous saying of the first Shi’i Imam, ‘Ali>ibn ‘Abi>Talib, in which he divorced the world three times.⁵ ‘Ali>Naqvi>noted how emphasis of certain “old-style educated [people]” (*purana>maktab*)⁶ on religion at the expense of the

⁵ Reference to a famous saying of ‘Ali> the first Shi’i Imam. See *Nahj al-balaghah*, (Qom: Dar ul-Intisharat, n.d.), 480-1.

⁶ To be read as “traditional Muslims”.

world only draws more criticism of religion for its backwardness and hindrance in the cause of human progress from the “new-style educated” (*naya-maktab*).⁷

The whole treatise is then ‘Ali-Naqvi’s attempt to remedy this and many other erroneous views that brought about this religion/world (*diin/dunya*) divide. For ‘Ali-Naqvi many of the problems faced by his community, including the economic concerns, were precisely due to this dichotomous view. In this work, it is the application of this divide in the economic realm that concerned him the most.⁸

Although the text discusses various dimensions of the problem, especially as they relate to economic activity, his anxiety over this matter was far from being resolved with this text alone. Written two years later in *Islam ki-hakimānah zindagi*, ‘Ali Naqvi returned to this subject again, addressing it this time in more comprehensive terms. Here he tackles the religion/world divide not from the economic point of view alone; instead this time he draws the dichotomy’s full intellectual, social, economic, and most importantly for us, religious ramifications. Although the fundamental problem is still the same (dissevering of world and religion by his contemporaries of various intellectual and religious orientations), the religion/world divide now appears in the guise of the world/hereafter (*dunya-akhirat*) dichotomy. In simpler terms, whereas the

⁷ *Tijarat aur Islam*, 13-4. The distinction is perhaps between a Madrasa education and English-style school education that was introduced in the subcontinent during the second half of the twentieth century by movements such as Aligarh University.

⁸ In 1941 he would posit the problem in similar terms:

[Our] reform of the economy is such that we have abandoned all sources of income and wealth. Business, factories, crafts and labor, these are things essential for life. *Based on false conjecture that they are shameful, we have forsaken them all.* As a result, on the one hand we are reliant on foreign hands for our necessities, and on the other, all our wealth has become a gift to them. They kept getting richer, and we poorer, so much so that our [economically] powerful people and families are living hand to mouth and in need of bread, while their wealth has made thousands of common people [in these foreign lands] millionaires (emphasis added). See *Hāyat-i qhumi* (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1941), 14-5.

world represents this worldly life, religion was now identified exclusively with the other-worldly (*akhirat*) concerns.

According to ‘Ali>Naqvi> this dichotomization had forced people to posit varying prescriptions for the ideal human lifestyle,⁹ two of which had dominated during his time: either seeing this life as the be-all and end-all of human life, or denouncing the life in the world for the sake of the afterlife. Whereas the former viewed human life restricted to the life of this world with nothing to follow, thus the emphasis on enjoying its blessings and gifts, the people of the latter view chose ascetic and monastic lifestyles, renouncing all pleasures of this world, from the point of view of spiritual success in the hereafter, deeming these pleasures with utmost suspicions. ‘Ali>Naqvi> saw both solutions erroneous: “In the story of this world, these people actually saw only one side. They only saw the afterlife and only took that into account. [Consequently,] they deemed the present life quite unreal and worthless, as if this life created by God was absolutely in vain.”¹⁰

For ‘Ali>Naqvi> despite these dichotomous views, the Muslim community also suffered from other misperceptions about the nature of the religious worldview and commitments, and their pertinence for human life. An example of this was noted in Chapter 1 where ‘Ali>Naqvi> expresses his disapproval toward the construal of religion in a manner that severs the organic relationship between religious doctrine and practice. He notes that during his time, the opinion that human salvation and wellbeing is dependent solely on performance or non-performance of good deeds: it is correct action that saves and makes a human being good or bad. Prescriptively, good deeds would

⁹ ‘Ali>Naqvi> uses the term “plan of action” (*la>hji ‘amal*)

¹⁰ *Islam ki>hki>manah zindagi>* 73-4.

imply things such as being honest and trustworthy, favoring justice and detesting oppression, and being peace-loving. Beyond these righteous deeds, no religious creed is necessary. Religious beliefs (*'aqh'id*) such as the Oneness of God, the prophecy of Prophet Muhammad and the Judgment Day are entirely superfluous.¹¹ That 'Ali>Naqvi> in pointing out this erroneous view had fellow Muslims in mind becomes clear from the ensuing passage: "If this opinion were posited by those who do not uphold the Qur'an or hadith, then discussion on this subject would have been [presented] in different terms. But because this opinion is found within religious circles, in deciding on this matter, it is appropriate to first refer to the Qur'an."¹²

Besides overemphasizing faith over works (or vice versa), for many, religious doctrines were absolutely useless and theology no more than futile intellectual acrobatics. From the point of view of the welfare of human society, it really had no real relevance. 'Ali>Naqvi> explicitly refers to this position in a text published in 1938.¹³ In a section titled "*Khuda>ki>ma'rafat ki>z̤h̤urat aur insān ki>'amali>zindagi>par us ka>aṣar*

¹¹ "*Ma'yar-i falah'va nija'*" in *Zindah savak'* (Aligarh: Aligarh University Press, 1974), 27.

¹² Ibid. In the final section of the chapter on his hermeneutics (Chapter 2) we observed how 'Ali>Naqvi>'s method of argumentation invariably attempts at being attentive to the needs and disposition of his intended audience. In other words, on any given subject, the kind of arguments he imparts is a function of the audience he aims to reach out, and his overall assessment of their intellectual orientation. On rare occasions, an example of which is this quotation, he acknowledges this hermeneutical strategy himself. Another example in this regard is the following: while discussing the issue of veiling, 'Ali>Naqvi> notes the following:

My opinion is that to the first type of people who have openly denounced religion, talking about the branches and particulars of religion is futile. If we were to debate with them at all, then it will be to explain the veracity of the principles of religion, [inviting them] to those intellectual aspects that pertain to religion's benefits and deficiencies. See *Isbat-i pardah* (Lahore: Imamia Mission, 1961), 8.

In a nutshell, with those who do not believe in religious doctrines—though still insist on arguing against *hijab*—one need not argue about this matter, but first convince them of the basic religious doctrines. Only after that task is accomplished can one demonstrate how particular religious prescriptions such as veiling could be rational and beneficial.

¹³ *Khuda ki>ma'rafat*. (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1938), 52-54.

(The Necessity of the Knowledge of God and its Effects on the Practical Life of a Human Being)” he cites the various arguments posited by people who question the utility of the belief and knowledge of God:

1. To attempt to know God is akin to the digging of a mountain that results in nothing more than a tuft of grass. An onerous task indeed, the benefit of exerting so much intellectual energy on this complicated matter is quite unclear. One learns that He exists but so what? What is the gain of this knowledge? What harm follows from the absence of this knowledge?
2. Our belief or unbelief in God has no bearing on the reality of God. If he exists belief in Him would not make him non-existent. Yet, human life in the world pertains to human character and deeds; beliefs have nothing to do with it.
3. God is not like human beings, where he is affected by whether people recognize and praise Him or not. He does not desire praise, nor is He vain like human beings. Therefore, He remains indifferent to the belief in Him and does not avenge those who do not believe in Him.
4. Finally, the life of this world is all there is and whatever betterment there could be, it is to be pursued here. It is the life of this world that needs to be ordered for which certain restrictions on certain acts seems quite reasonable. Beliefs, however, hardly impact the cause of *islah*. Therefore, emphasis on right belief is hardly justifiable.

In sum, according to this burgeoning view, the one saved will be the one with good deeds regardless of whether he is a believer or unbeliever.

Similarly, in another essay ‘Ali>Naqvi>notes the prevalent reductionism about the reality of religion, but this time in much more comprehensive terms, and in a particularly Shi’i fashion. Here he compares the dire situation of Islamic religion to that of a dream that has been over-interpreted (*kasrat-i ta’bi*): Some reduced Islam to the pillars (arkan), prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, etc., with no reference made to morality. In this interpretation, a Muslim becomes a person who performs these rituals but could possibly have the most horrendous evil character. Others reacted to this other-worldly simplicity of interpretation, and came to identify Islam with power and political dominion; it turned a military system into Islam or vice versa: “If [this conception] is deemed correct, then famous oppressive monarchs who had a deep desire for lordship will be reckoned as true Muslims and the term “Muslim” will become lacking [in meaning]. Napoleon, Tamerlane, Nadir [Shah], and these days Hitler and Mussolini will be the greatest Muslims. But can Islam’s purity (*pakdamani*) and peace-making [disposition] bear out this explanation? Absolutely not!”

Yet Muslims may well dwell in the markets, participate in battles, study in the mosques, performing a whole variety of activities of routine daily life: “The truth is that all these [various groups of] people [that I have mentioned] took one part from a broad and comprehensive meaning of Islam and by making it all-encompassing have taken it [i.e., the meaning of Islam] beyond its limits.”¹⁴

Cumulatively, these prevailing misapprehensions about religion were responsible in limiting its scope, either by excluding or downplaying certain essential aspects. This worried ‘Ali>Naqvi>and invited from him an *islah* of these misconceptions. Yet, in ‘Ali>

¹⁴ “*Hāqīqat-i Islām*” in *Nigāshat-i sayyidul ‘ulama’* (Lahore: Imamia Mission, 1997), 55-6.

Naqvi's diagnosis, the problematic "what is religion?" is far from being merely a scholastic puzzle. For him, beliefs carry serious practical consequences in all human domains—religious, moral, social, economic, and political. Therefore, for him much more was at stake in this debate than simply amending an intellectual error. As early as 1935, he clearly expresses what he saw as an organic relationship between belief and action, or intellectual and practical life: human behavior is subordinate to the human mindset. Weakness in action owes not only to lack of will, but to erroneous ideas that come to dwell within the mind and heart of an individual, or among the members of a community. For 'Ali>Naqvi> like the sickness of mind that paralyzes human body, erroneous ideas that emerge out of someone's pen or tongue come to paralyze a human community. To cure the illness of laxity in practical life, these ideas need to be diagnosed and treated.¹⁵

So what, according to 'Ali>Naqvi> were these ideas that were causing lethargy in action? A passage from *Islām ki-hākimanāh zindagi* lays out his diagnosis quite clearly. Here 'Ali>Naqvi> notes that individuals of human communities have made varying criteria of distinction and nobility from their own points of view. For materialists, what bestows honor and nobility are wealth and power. Then there are those who see filial association as the mark of nobility. Others see race as the criterion of excellence. Depending upon the perspective, human beings are led to pursue these "goods": wealth and power, or racial, or filial affiliation. The case of lineage is particularly curious: here nobility is earned without effort; no military campaigns or effort is needed. 'Ali>Naqvi> rejects each of these principle because all of these downplay the significance of human

¹⁵ *Tijarat aur Islām*, 13.

virtue. None of these entice a human being into embellishing their souls with positive qualities and habits. They encourage spiritual apathy. The cause of human excellence in character and virtue is further hampered by erroneous Christian beliefs such as the idea of atonement and a misconstrued meaning of worship, that is, to worship means to live in solitude and away from the life of this world. For ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>the Christian belief in a Messiah who died for the sins of all human beings obstructs human will from taking full responsibility of its actions. Finally, he notes the example of the Jewish community which reckons itself as a special nation and relies on this charisma over and above right action. Together, for ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>“all these ideas were bringing down the quality of people, making them apathetic in action.”¹⁶

Applied to the problematic of religion, for ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> misconceptions about religion had barred an effective application of religious principles to practical life. To rectify these misconceptions, the concept of religion itself needed to be clarified. If these were the sorts of confusions prevailing among his audience, what then, according to him, was the correct view of religion, the normal relationship between faith and works, and between the life of this world and the hereafter? The ensuing section takes up these questions.

The All-Encompassing Ambit of Religion:

For ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> religion is not a department of human life; its ambit is all-encompassing, providing guidelines for all aspects of human existence. He calls it “the code of [human]

¹⁶ *Islam ki-hākimānah zindagi* 53-4.

life” (*z̤h̤b̤it̤a-yi h̤aya̤t̤*).¹⁷ The most questionable facet of the religion/world binary (analogous to which was the pitting of the world against the hereafter) for him is that it leads to the compartmentalization of human life. If it is acceded to, ineluctably one will wind up stressing one dimension over the other: religion over the world, or vice versa. Eventually, for those who have internalized this partitioning of human existence, the binary would compel mundane choices. Given the high stakes, his first step in rectifying the definition of religion was to address this matter. Quite early in his intellectual career he tackled it in depth in *Tijarat aur Islam* (Commerce and Islam) and *Islam ki h̤akimānah z̤indagi*. In contrast to the prevalent dichotomous view, ‘Ali>Naq̤vi>argued for what he took to be essentially a complementary relationship between the aims of these two lives. ‘Ali>Naq̤vi>questions those who belittled the life of the world on the grounds that if it did not mean much and was insignificant, why did God create it in the first place? If death is what God wanted then why did He create life anyway? According to ‘Ali>Naq̤vi> a Purposeful God’s intention of creating life could not be to destroy it, but to maintain it. That is why any teaching or perspective that runs counter to this basic intention witnessed in the world of nature is running counter to the purposes and order of creation, and thus to be rejected on these grounds. One can be certain of this

¹⁷ During the contemporary period, many Muslim thinkers have come to assert this unity of life and religion, often presenting Islam as a complete system, and constitution for Islamic societies. For example, see Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, (New York: Islamic Book Services, 2000) in which he makes similar comments:

[T]he faith of Islam, which deals with the whole field of human life, does not treat the different aspects of that life randomly, nor yet does it split up the field into a number of unrelated parts. That is to say, Islam has one universal and integrated theory which covers the universe and life and humanity, a theory in which are integrated all the different questions; in this Islam sums up all its beliefs, laws and statutes, and its mode of worship and of work. The treatment of all these matters emanates from this one universal and comprehensive theory, so that each question is not dealt with on an individual basis, nor is every problem with its needs treated in isolation from all other problems (37).

because a Wise God would hardly create something without any purpose: “A successful teaching is only that which fulfills the purposes of nature. The only teaching that can be correct is the one that protects the human [race] from extinction.” Therefore, Christian monasticism is erroneous in its point of view. If universalized, it will lead the human race to extinction. That is why it is unnatural and unacceptable.

‘Ali>Naqvi>objects to the false dichotomy between the life of this world and that of the hereafter. People deem one of the two real whereas, “true teachings could only be those which protect human existence on the one hand, and also keep an eye on the hereafter”. It is in contrast to these extreme views that ‘Ali>Naqvi>posits the Islamic point of view as consistent with the call of nature, balanced and accommodative of both this life and that to come. It is precisely the equilibrium contained within Islamic teachings that it can be universalized for all:

It is to the pride of Muslims that their teachings are so comprehensive and compatible with the requirements of nature that if they are presented to the world, then every person can claim that “I can act on these”. This division was created [by people] between this world and the other world. Some saw this world as everything, ignoring the other world. Others deemed the other world everything and this world nothing. Islam came to present [a position of] equilibrium. [God says] that if we have established the present life for you, then [we have] not made forbidden drawing benefits from it. Thus, [Islam] sanctified the existing life. It made the present life full of dignity, so much so that if the human being under the sway of temporary emotions tries to take life away, then Islam bars him [from doing that].¹⁸

What constitutes this equilibrium between the life of this world, and the life of the hereafter, and how are they related in ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s resolution of this dichotomy? His solution rests on a careful distinction drawn between the life of the world (*h̄yaʔ ad-dunyaʔ*) and a worldly life (*al-h̄yaʔ ad-dunyaʔ*). In ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s perspective the life of the

¹⁸ *Islam ki h̄kiमतnah zindagi* 75-7.

world needs to be viewed as a station on the human journey to the hereafter. It needs to be “respected and spent in anticipation of the life to come.” He notes how criticisms of the world found within the Shi’i hadith-literature is often construed to be an outright rejection of the life of this world. ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> rejects this interpretation; it is the worldly life, not life of the world that was censured by the Holy Imams: “Remember, this critique is of the ‘worldly life’ (*al-h̄yaṭ ad-dunya*). ‘Worldly life’, its meaning is ‘a life that carries a lowly rank.’ ‘Life of the World’ (*h̄yaṭ ad-dunya*), [however], is an *izh̄fah*-construction, its meaning is ‘the life of the progress of the world’ (*insha’-yi dunya>ki> zindagi*). [From the Imams,] there is absolutely no criticism of it. This life instead carries a lofty status.”¹⁹ It is when the life of the world is cut off from its larger context—as a step in the journey—that it becomes a worldly life, without any purpose or direction. So long as this life is lived with the vision of the life to come and is used to work towards it, is it noble, praiseworthy, and of a lofty status. In fact, states ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> “the Islamic teaching is that you spend the life of this world in such a manner that it no longer remains ‘*al-h̄yaṭ ad-dunya*> (the worldly life); [instead], the world should itself become religion .”²⁰ That is the reason why when funerals pass by Muslims are called to pray “Thank God who has not put me within the group that is dead”. For ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> the fact that even prophets and Imams had to bear this life is evidence as to its centrality. Not only does it need to be taken seriously, it is also a “fountain of all blessings and goodness.”

Naq̄vi>’s rejection of the religion/world divide served a two-fold purpose: to argue with those who had come to make success in the worldly life as the solitary aim for

¹⁹ Ibid., 77-8.

²⁰ Ibid., 78.

human communities, and with those who, in seeking success in the afterlife, had forsaken the present life. The former group was constituted of materialists (*maʿdah parast*) and the irreligious (*la-din*) for whom this life was the only life, with nothing to follow. For him, the latter group included not only Christians and Hindus, but also a huge number of members from his own community. Misconstruing the relationship between this life and the afterlife, these communities had given up on seeking the goods of this life, viewing these as materialist and worldly pursuits. Especially concerned with the plight of his community and given the political and economic crises it confronted, ‘Ali>Naqvi> saw this other-worldly disposition of Muslims as a hindrance to their success in this world. Whereas he would remind his community of the indivisibility of religious life—by virtue of which seeking the goods of this world becomes a religious duty—with those prone to rejecting any conception of an afterlife (i.e., materialists and the irreligious), he would argue for the intellectual legitimacy of the life to come. *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, written to explain basic religious doctrines to such an audience (including Shi’i Muslims who are affected by these perspectives), provides one such example.

In the section titled “Reward, Punishment, the Judgment Day” he begins his argument by noting that all human thoughts and actions carry good or bad consequences. Goodness invites rewards and evil punishments. The Judgment Day then is “the occasion upon which one faces the final reward or punishment for his acts.” When the human heart is filled with desires, it is the intellect that comes to teach it the good from the bad. Yet, this voice of the intellect is only heard when one’s conscience is alive and functioning. Habitual criminals whose conscience is dead will not pay heed to the call of the intellect. They in fact reckon their sins as skills. Therefore, no feeling of

sorrow or guilt issues forth within them and thus they are devoid of the suffering for their sins: “[Fast] beating of the heart, anxiety of the conscience, the terror of punishment: if these are punishments for the crime, then the result is that a novice criminal sinner’s punishment is severe and that of habitual criminals less so—[and with passing of time] comes to be absent.”²¹

Which system of justice would uphold the principle that the more the crimes are committed, the lesser the punishment, ‘Ali>Naqvi>inquires. In other words, if sins result in anxieties, fears of punishment, and the fast beating of hearts, then a professional criminal has long since buried these concerns. ‘Ali>Naqvi>further points to the immense injustices that are found within this world, where the powerful continue to rob, oppress and exploit the weak and governments prove helpless or even supportive of these acts. Since in these systems justice is hardly ever implemented, these robbers and exploiters get away with everything. So neither these robbers suffer from any commensurate punishment, nor do they bear the burden of guilt within their consciences. Even bad reputation hardly stops them from carrying out mischievous acts. In fact, criminals often take pride in their destructive activities. Accordingly, anyone who believes in true justice and fairness has to look elsewhere than the existing systems of justice for a proper resolution of the just consequence of one’s actions, the Judgment Day:

If a decisive dividing line between good and evil is necessary in the courtroom of justice and equity, then beyond these temporary consequences you will have to admit a permanent and final reward and punishment. That is the Judgment Day. Those who truly believe in it cannot dare to sin. Those who are free from belief in returning [i.e., eschatology], [simply] protecting [the rule] of law by keeping

²¹ *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, 56.

them at bay from committing crimes cannot be enough. This is because they do not abhor crimes; instead, they always desire safety for themselves.²²

Akin to the religious belief in the Judgment Day, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> illustrates to his audience a sagacious and intellectual basis for other religious doctrines. In these illustrations, intellectual arguments are given centrality through demonstrating the superiority of the religious creed over other perspectives.

Overcoming the Faith-Works Dichotomy

Similar to his objection to the religion/world divide, he also rejects the faith/works (*‘aql̄dah/ ‘amal*) dichotomy. For him, religion is neither simply doctrines, nor actions that occur in isolation from proper understanding. It is instead an indivisible unity comprised of both faith and works that encompasses concerns, both of this world and the hereafter. At times he argues with those who deem faith sufficient for religious purposes;²³ at others, with those who had overlooked the doctrinal dimension. His *islah* of the concept of religion would therefore be through a clarification of the organic relationship between faith and works. Let us look closely at his response to the faith-works divide.

Argument I: Principles and Branches of Religion (*Ushūl-furuṣ*) and the Complementarity of Faith and Works (*‘aql̄da wa ‘amal*)

In countering the faith/works divide, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> resorts to two major arguments. In his first argument he addresses the issue upfront. In chapter 2 we presented ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s

²² Ibid., 60-2.

²³ I will extensively discuss this problem, its particular Shi’i manifestation and ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s response to it in the ensuing chapter (Chapter 4).

classification of religion under principles (*ushūl*) and branches (*furuʿ*) of religion.²⁴ In his first rejoinder to the prevalent misunderstandings, he amply uses this traditional principles-branches distinction and maps it onto the faith/works divide.²⁵ He begins his discussion by providing a textual proof from the Qurʾān for a mutually harmonizing and necessary relationship between faith and works. Textual proof was needed because according to ‘Ali Naqvi this opinion had become widespread among Muslims themselves. He draws the attention of his audience to the frequent juxtaposition of faith and righteous action (*imān va ‘amal-i shāhīh*), arguing that this concurrence is evidence to necessity of both for salvation (*nijāh*) and blessings in the afterlife. Furthermore, he presents the Qurʾanic verse 2:177²⁶ as conclusive proof that piety is not limited to action alone; it also demands religious beliefs in the Oneness of God, angels, the prophets, and so on. In the Qurʾanic verse it is in fact presented as prerequisite for activity: it is only after the beliefs are listed that the verse turns to things that are within the domain of action. He specifically notes the absence of the conjunction “or” between faith-related and action-related items in the verse: the verse does not present an option for human beings to choose either faith or action. It instead demands both: “Here they are all [listed] with ‘and’, ‘and’....It means a collection of attributes (*ijtimaʿi aushāʿ*)....It means that all these attributes have a part to play in making a human pious.

²⁴ See pages 29-30.

²⁵ See for example Naqvi *Nizhām-i zindagi*, 4 vols. (Lucknow: Imamia Mission; Lucknow: Al-Vaʿiz {Sāfdar Press, 1940); Naqvi *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, 101ff.; *Ushūl aur arkan-i dīn*, (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1973); Naqvi *“Ḥāqīqat-i Islām”* in *Nigārahāt-i sayyidul ‘ulamaʿ*, (Lahore: Imamia Mission, 1997), 59ff.

²⁶ “It is not piety, that you turn your faces to the East and to the West. True piety is this: to believe in God, and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets, to give of one’s substance, however cherished, to kinsmen, and orphans, the needy, the traveler, beggars, and to ransom the slave, perform the prayer, and pay the alms. And they who fulfill their covenant when they have engaged in a covenant, and endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship and peril, these are they who are true in their faith, these are the truly godfearing”.

If some [attributes] are present yet others are lacking, then piety cannot be attributed [to such a person].”²⁷

So much for the textual (*naqli*) proof against the faith-works divide. As with his other arguments and in full awareness of the needs of his audience for whom intellectual justification had more force than textual citation, ‘Ali>Naqvi>now turned to a discussion of this issue on intellectual grounds, spending the rest of this short treatise articulating a persuasive intellectual proof. His argument rests on the distinction between actions that are performed habitually (*‘ada*) and those that are performed with understanding (*fahm*). Finally, he compares and contrasts the impact of each on the human soul (*nafs*) and its character-formation (*kirda*). Whereas habitual acts according to ‘Ali>Naqvi> bestow limited results, actions performed with understanding are much wider in scope and quite effective in transforming the human soul. Let us look at this argument carefully.²⁸

‘Ali>Naqvi> begins by positing the absolute indispensability of cooperation between belief and action. This cooperation owes to the organic relationship between human body, intellect, and will. Since beliefs belong to the domain of the human mind, and action to the human body, it is conceivable that occasionally mind and body may remain severed from each other, and the body would act independently of the mind. This

²⁷ “*Ma ‘yar-i falah va nija’*” in *Zindah savakat*, (n.p.: Aligarh University Press, 1974), 28.

²⁸ Ibid. Although this text was written toward the later part of his life, the argument essentially is the same as that which he presented in his 1938 text, *Khuda-ki-ma ‘rafat* in *Nizhm-i zindagi*, vol 2, 81ff. Our preference of this text over the earlier one is simply due to the clarity and terseness of this version. This is ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s standard exposition on this matter. Interestingly, as this example shows, on many matters there appears to be a remarkable consistency in ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s arguments. This supports our contention so far that essential groundwork for his theological project was largely accomplished in the first two decades and the later decades are simply an elaboration or exposition of arguments which were worked out in the early years. In any case, one scarcely witnesses a noticeable shift in his theological positions and his articulation in the later years.

independent action of the body could occur especially when the act is performed out of a habitual behavior, unconscious and routine.

The case of non-habitual, conscious, and deliberate willful act is completely different however. In an act based on conscious intention and willful choice, the mind and the body bond with one another, the mind governing the body during the process. In other words, it is human volition that combines the human mind to the human body: “Human merit is contained within the substance of [his ability to make a] choice. Choice is connected to his soul whose activity occurs through the mind and the brain.”

‘Ali>Naqvi>extends his analysis further: acts that are based on habit and habit alone, their fruitful results at best could only be partial, never complete. He cites the example of a child who is taught by his parents to pray on time and since that habit was instilled in him over a long period of time, the child would feel restless if and when he breaks it. Once the call to prayer has been made, he will not be at peace until he would pray. Such is the power of habit on human soul. Yet, since the domain of the child’s habit is limited to prayer alone, it would never branch out to encompass other spheres of life. He would not feel the same kind of restlessness if he steals, lies, or does not pay his debts. The case of worship is quite similar: “...[I]f this worship is simply a habit, then its effect will be confined to prayer alone. It will not influence his character beyond this act.” Furthermore, by itself, a habit-based act does not guarantee complete success even in its own domain: a tongue that is trained to be truthful—a laudable act indeed—cannot by virtue of its truthfulness ensure that it does not cause the most destructive rows among people. Backbiting could well be based on truthfulness yet in certain

scenarios can lead to the complete breakdown of human relationships. In sum, the results of habit-based activity are quite inadequate.

What is the alternative to this habit-based human behavior and action? Having noted the limitations of habitual practices, ‘Ali>Naq̣i>now presents an alternative and more effective way of accomplishing more wholesome results. He argues that the central abode of all human activity is the human soul. The human soul rules over the body and all the acts gather at that place: “It is the eyes that see but the person who says ‘I saw’; what heard something were the ears, but the person states ‘I heard’.” Since the human dominates all parts of the body, anything that will influence it will also influence all these body parts. If that is the case, observes ‘Ali>Naq̣i> then there will be no need to separately train each part of the body. This is where the role of correct mindset and intention becomes so crucial.

For ‘Ali>Naq̣i>there is an inherent wisdom in the emphasis that Islam puts on proper intentionality. Because people do not pay attention to the intention of worship which is usually pronounced in the Islamic rituals—to the extent even that sometimes that pronouncement itself becomes a habit—the effects of their prayer does not extend out to other domains of life that demand righteousness and piety. Just as the tongue which has been trained to not lie can easily backbite or instigate a feud, a person whose prayer life emerges simply out of a routine, one could not expect it to transform acts that lie outside of it. By itself, the act of prayer and the habit of praying is good, but its impact quite limited.

What is needed therefore is mindfulness and right intention. For ‘Ali>Naq̣i>the necessity of a proper mindset and intentionality demonstrates to us the need for proper

doctrinal understanding, thus the necessity of the religious principles or creed. Those desiring to go beyond the limited results offered by a habit-based human life to arrive at a “holistic and total” transformation of human life and societies would find religious doctrines, therefore, indispensable.

Having demonstrated the necessity of religious creed and understanding for proper action, ‘Ali>Naqvi>now turns to the process by way of which religious faith affects the human soul and concomitantly actions: “Faith and beliefs are such things that leave a deep impression (*sikkah jamāa*) directly on the human soul. When faith conquers the soul, a mould for the character is created. In accordance with adherence to the order and discipline and preservation of higher [human] aims, all [human] actions are fashioned into this mold. In Qur’anic terminology this mold is known as “godfearing” (*taqvaā*)²⁹. Without faith, it cannot come into existence.”

In the process, he also clarifies how beliefs and actions naturally correspond to the principles-branches (*usūl-furuʿ*) distinction made by religious scholars. Faith characterized by the principles of religion sets the background, “the mold”, within which religious activity takes place. ‘Ali>Naqvi>uses the analogy of a tree to elaborate this point. Akin to the roots of a tree³⁰ that remain invisible but hold the whole tree together, religious faith provides the foundation upon which human action grows. If the branches of religion (which in this analogy correspond to human actions) do not appear on the tree, it reveals that the roots of the tree are weak. Furthermore, if the branches exist but become dry one must not start sprinkling water on the leaves. The proper way

²⁹ *Taqvā* is an important Qur’anic concept that has a range of meaning. For its centrality to the Qur’anic perspective, see Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), especially 28-31 and 127- 128.

³⁰ That the Arabic word *as* also means root is not coincidental to this analysis.

to breathe life into the tree then will be watering the roots. In the same manner, when human actions fail to show fruits, one should cultivate and strengthen intellectual understanding of the principles of religion. In conclusion then,

Fruits can only be [obtained] from those branches that are connected to the root (*as*). The mutual relationship between doctrines and actions replicates the same situation. If there are no actions, then either there is no faith, or it is so weak that it cannot lead to any revolution in life. And if actions are without correct beliefs, then they are temporal, have no durability, and one cannot reap [the fruit of] salvation from them. They are either due to habit or are ostentatious for a particular strategic reason. Hence, deriving righteous actions from these will not succeed.

If on some occasions, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>argues for the necessity of the principles of religion (*usūl*) for the branches of religion (*furu*), at others he illustrates how the latter in turn preserves the former, thus the inseparability and consonance between the two. ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>uses the example of canonical prayer (*ṣalāt/namaz*) and other pillars of religion. Here again his analysis rests on a crucial distinction between the conception (*tasavvur*) of the object of worship (*markaz-i ‘ibādat*) and the manner of worship (*t̄ariq-i ‘ibādat*) and brings to fore the centrality of human intention in acts. Whereas the manner of worship relates to the bodily acts, the Object of worship (which is God) concerns the human mind and intentionality. Insofar as the litanies (*azkār*), recitation of the Qur’anic verses, and bodily movements such as bowing and prostrations are concerned, they involve human body parts such lips, tongue, limbs, and so on. These acts relate to the branches of religion. The conception of the Object of worship relates, however, to the principles of religion. Like other human habits, if acts of worship were to be performed out of habit alone, the mind would remain detached to these acts and will hardly be affected by these actions. That is why according to Naq̄vi>the sagacious teachings of the Shari’a has made proclamation of intention mandatory: “But when intention was made

prerequisite for worship, its consequence was [the prescription] that every act be performed with this conception [of the Object of worship], that is [to reflect on questions such as]: what is the foundation of this act and for whom is it performed? Therefore, worship is the name of an act which involves this conception. Fasting is a thing associated with this conception; otherwise, it is simply abstention from eating.”

Therefore, through the intention the manner of worship is tied to the Object of Worship and the purpose of worship preserved in the act of worship. That is how, for ‘Ali>Naqvi> principles of religion are preserved through the branches of religion. A further consequence of this underlying wisdom of Shari’a rulings is that if intention remains unknown or uncomprehended—as has been the case with many rituals of other religions such as Diwali or Holi—that with the passage of time the community would completely forget the basis for that ritual. By invoking the intention in every Islamic ritual, a Muslim is always reminded of the ultimate purpose behind these acts. It ensures that these acts are not performed out of custom—following the ways of the forefathers—but with purposefulness and clarity of vision.³¹

Despite reciprocity and complementarity between the principles and branches of religion as noted above, for ‘Ali>Naqvi>, the principles do have a priority over the branches, and thus, understanding over action. For him, correct understanding is the prerequisite for proper action. Human action is a result of the human mindset and intellectual errors will inevitably result in improper behavior. In a section titled “*Islami> ‘aqā’id ka>aṣar-i af‘al va a‘mal par*” (Effects of Islamic doctrines on [human] deeds and actions), he writes: “Human actions and deeds are subordinate to the human mindset,

³¹ ‘Ali>Naqvi> *‘Ibādat aur t̤hriḡi ‘ibādat*, 2nd ed. (Lucknow: Nizami Press, n.d.), 36.

and formation of that mindset occurs through beliefs and views. All the beliefs taught by Islam are such that they elevate human horizons and are the reason for ennoblement and propriety in one's actions and deeds."³²

It goes without saying that in mapping intellectual and practical dimensions of human life onto the scholastic principles-branches distinction, 'Ali> Naqvi> also attempted to illustrate to his audience the efficacy of these scholastic categories, their inherent reasonability, and commonsensical nature.

Argument II: Widening the Meaning of Worship

The distinction of matters of worship (*'ibadat*) and socio-economic transactions of everyday life (*mu'amalat*) has become standard in Islamic Law.³³ The former include the well-known five pillars of Islam (*arkan al-Islam*), and the latter human transactions that range from socioeconomic contracts to matters pertaining to family law. 'Ali>Naqvi>'s alternative argument was to widen this standard view of worship (*'ibadat*). For 'Ali>Naqvi> the Muslim community had increasingly confined the meaning of worship to basic religious rituals such as the five prayers, fasting, alms tax, and pilgrimage to Mecca and had often identified religion as such with these pillars of religion. From the legal point of view, for 'Ali>Naqvi>, this way of defining worship is not entirely inaccurate, yet to limit the concept of worship to this definition alone is quite problematic. Therefore, he attends to the *islah* of the concept of worship, construing it as a "deep sense of responsibility/duty (*farzshanasī*)" that pervades and steers all human

³² 'Ali>Naqvi> *Nizām-i zindagi* vol. 1 (Lucknow: Imamia Mission; Lucknow: Al-Va'iz{ Sāfdar Press, 1940), 71.

³³ Wael B. Hallaq, *Shari'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 225 ff.

affairs. ‘Ali>Naqvi>s description of this sense of duty would encompass the classical categories of the rights of God (*ḥuquq Allah*) and the rights of people (*ḥuquq an-nas*). In expanding the concept of worship from religious rituals to this “strong sense of duty” encompassing human affairs related both to God and other human beings, ‘Ali>Naqvi> attempted the integration of all aspects of human life into the ambit of religion. A brief allusion to his intention of correcting the misconception and his *islah* appears as early as in 1935: “There is a misunderstanding about the Islamic injunction to worship. For some people, there is a misconception that worship is simply prayer and alms-tax. But the truth is that this is not the correct meaning of worship. The meaning of worship is to perform duties. Its meaning is to achieve God’s pleasure through one’s actions and includes all those facets of life that human beings need to work on.”³⁴

In his early career, ‘Ali>Naqvi> frequently makes similar statements, succinctly but without making a clear intellectual case for them. These statements occur within a broader context of his attempts to articulate correct principles for the Islamic way of life, or the Islamic sagacious ordering of life.³⁵ In these writings, ‘Ali>Naqvi> clearly highlights the prevalent confusion about worship and its meaning, while also summarily stating his position on this issue. However, the full version of this argument appears much later in his writings. In dealing with the proper definition, nature, scope, and purpose of worship, *Ibaʿdat aur ṭarīq-i ‘ibaʿdat* [Worship and the [Proper] Manner of Worship]³⁶ is a short but important treatise of ‘Ali>Naqvi>s liturgical theology. Here, he accords human intention a central focal point in religious life relating it to the

³⁴ Naqvi> *Islām ki ḥākīmānah zindagi*>93.

³⁵ See for example *Islām ki ḥākīmānah zindagi*>or *Nizām-i zindagi*>or *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, page 113, where in his page-long discussion of ritual prayer, he calls worship (*‘ibaʿdat*) a consequence of a “sense of duty” (*farz/shanasi-kānatijah*).

³⁶ Naqvi> *Ibaʿdat aur ṭarīq-i ‘ibaʿdat*, 2nd ed. (Lucknow: Nizami Press, n.d.).

previously noted idea of worship as a sense of duty. In expanding the meaning of worship from prayer and fasting to a deep sense of responsibility, ‘Ali>Naqvi> is also aware of a seeming contradiction: if worship in legal classification³⁷ pertains to basic religious rituals, then how could it have such a wide-ranging meaning? Does that not mean that worship is everything, thus making the distinction itself inane? ‘Ali>Naqvi> accepts that the common meaning of worship is the pillars of Islam, recitation of the Qur’an, supererogatory prayers such as visitation prayers (*ziyara*). Yet in Islam, notes ‘Ali>Naqvi>, the meaning of worship is quite broad and in fact includes fulfilling of the responsibilities of every sphere of life. This is so because Islam is a complete religion that oversees all aspects of life. That is why Islamic Shari’a encompasses all aspects of the human individual and communal lives and legislates issues as trivial as how to sit, stand, or sleep properly. It does not leave out affairs that would otherwise be seen related to a human being’s animal desires such as procreation and sex.³⁸ In brief, in this second meaning everything is part of worshipping God. But how so? For ‘Ali>Naqvi> every human act that is performed in seeking divine pleasure turns into an act of worship: “From the point of view of a particular conception (*mafhum-i khas*), worship is the name of a combination of actions put together in a particular arrangement and is created for the sole reason of exhibiting spiritual poverty (*nayaz mandi*)³⁹ towards God. For this purpose, an action is not an action unless it contains striving to be nearer [to God] (*qasd-i taqarrub*) or carries an intention seeking Divine pleasure.”⁴⁰

³⁷ M. H. Kamali, “Law and Society: The Interplay of Revelation and Reason in the Shariah” in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 110.

³⁸ Naqvi, *Ibadat aur t̤riq̤i ibadat*, 39.

³⁹ *Nayaz mandi* could also be translated as devotion.

⁴⁰ Naqvi, *Ibadat aur t̤riq̤i ibadat*, 41.

Understood this way, observes ‘Ali>Naqvi> even the most basic human arrangements to stay alive, drinking water, eating food, protecting oneself from danger (so long all of these things are done with the intention of pleasing God), are acts of worship. It is so because God desires for us to live until the time when He decides to take this life away from us. Every act that is in accordance with this will of God and for his sake then fulfils the duty prescribed by His will expressed through the Islamic Shari’a. On the other hand, if a person regularly does all that it takes to protect his life, but for any reason other than obeying or pleasing God, although Divine will for that human person to stay alive will be accomplished, these acts will not be reckoned as acts of worship.⁴¹

The key idea for this argument is God’s intention for human beings to stay alive: If staying alive is what is expected by God, then everything that is necessary for the continuation of this life would logically become religiously mandatory, and every act carried out for its preservation will transform into an act of worship. One is immediately reminded of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s arguments against the religion/world divide where ‘Ali>Naqvi> emphasizes how Islam, in asserting a holistic perspective on this matter, celebrates this life and considers it a gift of God. It refuses to take it for granted or ignore it for otherworldly concerns. Instead, the Islamic ideal is to integrate it fully within the higher purposes of human life. By relating every human action to the ultimate Divine intention, ‘Ali>Naqvi>brings the whole of human life under the umbrella of religion. Akin to the first argument, if understood correctly, no human domain can escape the ambit of religion.

⁴¹ Ibid., 39-42.

Concluding Remarks: Toward a Renewed Understanding of Religion

During ‘Ali>Naqvi’s time, the prevalent reductionist view of religion had extricated certain crucial spheres of human life (such as economics and politics) from religion’s ambit. The concept of ‘privatized Islam’ that emerged due to this view meant that for many, Islam dealt only with religious rituals and basic beliefs, with no significant import for day-to-day human affairs and decisions. The overall impact of this concurrent compartmentalization of life into many spheres on the one hand, and then allotment of a particular territory to religion (via its privatization) meant that the Islamic religion, in this new scheme, had only a limited relevance for the society. Similarly, a good Muslim became someone who believed in certain abstract ideas, and performed certain acts such as prayers, paying alms-tax, and fasting, among others. None of these, however, translated into a comprehensive worldview or a way of life. Nor was this religious life supposed to weigh upon society in any serious way.

By overcoming the religion/world and faith/works dichotomies, ‘Ali>Naqvi> asserted what he saw as the all-encompassing scope of religion—one that guides every human action, no matter how trivial it may seem. In ‘Ali>Naqvi’s alternative, every human action performed with a sense of duty and with the intention of seeking Divine pleasure became a religious act. The cumulative effect of various rectifications offered by ‘Ali>Naqvi>brought about a renewed understanding of the nature and reality of religion, in which religion could no more be reduced simply to certain religious rituals, or privatized to a department or aspect of life; nor could life be neatly compartmentalized into two isolated sectors of this world and the hereafter. Whatever

concerns a human being, individually or collectively, concerns religion as well: Since the human life is an organic unity, created for ordering it sagaciously, religion's mark could not but be total, touching its every aspect. In other words, for the human collectivity, religion became life itself, and a complete code. Hence, the totality of life corresponded to—especially in the case of Islam—a totality of religious prescriptions which were contained in its constitutive elements of proper belief and action.

In view of everything that has been noted thus far, it is not surprising that 'Ali> Naqvi> would summarize and express his definition of religion (and Islam in specific) in the following terms:

The “Reality of Islam” is a lofty and complete objective in which are included the proclamation [of the testimony of faith], prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and alms-giving; protecting the higher aims, bravery and sacrifice are also its constituents; the military system is also needed for protection of these aims; and obedience to the ruler under rules that are protective of the realities of Islam are also made essential. *And there are many other domains which are not related to these aforementioned limits.*

Islam is an aggregate of beliefs and actions: beliefs that stir up the consciousness to act and such actions that help refine beliefs; beliefs that will result in self-confidence and dignity over all other creatures, and actions that will bring together the world; beliefs that enhance the collective order [of human society] and call [humans] toward *islah* and actions that will complete the purpose of *islah*. If we look for one comprehensive word to describe the reality of Islam then it will be “sense of responsibility/duty” (*farzshansi*). If you extend this term, then the whole world of beliefs and actions will appear [before us] (emphasis added).⁴²

According to 'Ali> Naqvi> for the human intellect religious doctrines provide a framework that awakens and sustains the fervor for a strong sense of duty. Through its prescriptions for the practical life, these religious convictions are then enacted and put in practice. These practical duties are constituted by both individual and collective responsibilities, towards God and towards fellow human beings, and together carrying

⁴² 'Ali> Naqvi> “*Hāqīqat-i Islām*” in *Nigāshat-i sayyidul 'ulama'*, (Lahore: Imamia Mission, 1997), 56.

out of these responsibilities reforms an individual and strengthens the public order. An important conclusion to be derived from this analysis is that Islam is neither simply thought, nor just action. It is not to be reduced to a military system or to empire building. It is simultaneously prayer, alms-giving, and recitations of the holy scripture on the one hand, and honesty, justice, and protection of one's life and honor. Viewed from the comprehensive definition of Islam as principles and branches of religion, it includes content for the mind, for the body, and for the heart. No aspect of human personality is left out of it.⁴³

'Ali>Naqvi> goes on to argue how everything that he has listed above is religiously intended and an integral part of the vision of Islam. That "there are many other domains which are not related to these aforementioned limits" shows that he kept the list deliberately open to further possibilities. Since the possibilities in life are infinite, the list of what the religion of Islam comprises need not be made exhaustive either; new situations may always arise. The important point, however, is simple: Nothing in existence is or can be outside the scope of religion.

Once religion's ambit is extended to include all human domains, individual and communal, it is easier, then, for 'Ali>Naqvi>to delve in matters that would usually be (under the influence of misunderstandings, according to him) considered worldly such as earning income, doing business, running governments, and so on: "In both individual and collective life, concerning the rights of God (*ḥuqūq Allah*) and that of humans (*ḥuqūq an-nas*), in everything fulfilling whatever duty a human has is part of worship. Those things which are considered separate from worship, for example, attaining income

⁴³ Ibid, 57.

and wealth, if sought in a [legally] permissible way, is not separate from religion (*diṅ*)”.⁴⁴

The purpose of ‘Ali>Naqvi>s many writings on sociopolitical and economic matters can only be appreciated when situated within this larger project of rehabilitation and *islah* of the concept of religion. We have already noted in chapter one how ‘Ali>Naqvi> exhorted his community to take full part in economic activities and see economic effort as part of their religious duty. In the same vein, in 1941, he is found at pains again to encourage his followers to pursue their economic interests.⁴⁵ While we will return to these writings in the following chapter, the most significant aspect about these writings for us is that no aspect of human life remained divorced from religion: the irreducibility of religion to this or that sphere of life prevented this religion-secular dichotomization. Religion in this transformed understanding was comprehensive and guided everything: the human body, mind, and spirit; and for a human society from family relations to economic and political matters and everything in between.⁴⁶ In sum, the fundamental premises of the Islamic revelation—the organic relationship between worldly life and the hereafter, binding correlation between faith and works, and the balance between human individuality and community—provides an excellent prescription that could embrace and tackle the inherent complexity of human life with perfect care and profundity.

The reader may remember that the litmus test of the success or failure of ‘Ali>Naqvi>s response to the religious crisis was illustrating the indispensability of religion

⁴⁴ Naqvi> *Islām ki ḥākīmānah zindagi*>93.

⁴⁵ Naqvi> *Hāyat-i qhumi*>(Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1941).

⁴⁶ There is another sense in which ‘Ali>Naqvi> would extend his definition of religion in which religious guidance is not restricted to human beings alone, but part of a larger whole, of a broader plan for the created order. The ensuing section will discuss that as well.

for human society to his interlocutors. One may grant ‘Ali>Naqvi>the argument of the inseparability of religion from every aspect of human life; by itself, however, this was far from admitting that religion is indispensable for human societies. At a time when religion’s necessity or benefit for human communities was under intense scrutiny and doubt, something more was still to be accomplished. He had to prove to his community that not only is religion concerned with all aspects of human life, but it improves them immensely. Furthermore, he also needed to show that such a religion is unmistakably ‘Islam’. In this regard, ‘Ali>Naqvi>appears very confident when he proclaims:

The life of people living in a house, within a city, within a country, and then that of people of the whole world, Islam has not left any aspect of life yearning for teachings. In every department of life, religion has established its own theoretical and practical imprint (*‘ilmi>va ‘amali>nuqush*), acting upon which is truly necessary⁴⁷ for success. What can one say about the comprehensiveness of Islamic Law in the realms of household management (*tadbir-i manzil*) and city-politics! [They are so comprehensive] that scholars of the science of ethics are compelled to say, “What can we do, the Islamic Shari’a has fulfilled all needs.” A book of Islamic jurisprudence that is comprehensive on Islamic rulings is also comprehensive in the science of virtue. All the spheres of life are completely contained within the Islamic Shari’a.⁴⁸

Now that a comprehensive picture of the religious crisis, his conception and *islah* of the concept of religion, and the relationship between religion and ‘*aq*’ has been presented, we are in a position to examine how ‘Ali>Naqvi>would defend this view and convince his interlocutors that the Islamic religion is the greatest source of *islah* for human societies.

⁴⁷ Literally, “truly responsible for success”.

⁴⁸ Naqvi> *Islām ki>ḥkīmānah zindagi>*97.

PART II: Indispensability of Religion for Human Civilization: Religion as Sagacious Ordering of Life

The previous section brought to the fore ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s insistence on Islam as an all-encompassing religion. The question still remains: in what ways is this claim true? How do Islamic teachings encompass and address all the needs of human societies? An interrelated second question is about the shifting nature of human cultures and societies. How does a religion like Islam stay relevant and keep up with these shifts which are sometimes of unprecedented intellectual and cultural scale? This latter question was even more pressing within the context in which ‘Ali>Naqvi> lived. As ‘Ali>Naqvi> himself noted,⁴⁹ during these years India was passing through a cultural, political, and intellectual revolution. How could Islam be seen as relevant and its teachings sufficient in addressing the needs and conditions of these colossal transformations?

‘Ali>Naqvi> addresses both questions at length, at times in conjunction with one another. This subject was a prominent theme in his early writings, especially in *Islam ki hākimānah zindagi> Nizām-i zindagi> Mazhab aur ‘aql, Hāyat-i qāumi>* and his various essays on the Islamic doctrine of God.⁵⁰ Given the nature and magnitude of the religious crisis, ‘Ali>Naqvi> was never content with simply laying out the correct religious creed or practice. He was always demonstrating to his audience ways in which these prescriptions contain wisdom and become necessary for the *islah* of the society. I will return to this point later. For the moment, let us examine his answers to these two pressing questions.

⁴⁹ See chapter 1, p.9ff.

⁵⁰ See in this regard *Khuda-ki-ma‘rafat* (1938) and essays such as “Divine Essence and Attributes” (*Zat va sifa*), *Manifestation of Divine Power (Asar-i qudrat)*, and *Proof of God (Khuda-ka-sabuh)* in *Nigārshah-i sayyidul ‘ulama’* (1997).

PART I: Religion and the Order of Life: Mapping Religion onto Life

Although the seeds of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s arguments are already found in his earliest writings, with *Islam ki>hākīmanāh zindagi>* he begins to respond to these questions in a more systematic manner. His first step was to point to the absolute necessity of orderliness for human life. This necessity is a logical corollary of the patterns of order and harmony witnessed in the natural world which is also proof of a Wise Creator: “In the order of existence (*nizām-i hasti>*) there is wisdom which is perceived by the eye, understood by the reason, and assented to by the heart....In the created things (*shana’siyunā*), there is a manifestation of power through which a powerful artisan is known.”⁵¹ In a later text and along the lines similar to those of *Islam ki>hākīmanāh zindagi>* he returns to discuss this harmony and order of the whole world of existence, this time, however, making this assertion of orderliness explicit. Akin to his arguments about the life and death of a human being in which the interconnectedness of the world of creation was assumed, here again the ideas provide the basis for his analysis: “The human being is part of the chain of creation. That is why he is not exempt from the laws of life and death that are operative in everything else [in creation]. *Acts of nature are a school for education and training for the human, from where he could draw many useful lessons for his life* (emphasis added).”⁵²

It is worth noting for ‘Ali>Naqvi> the harmony in the world of nature is replete with definite lessons which carry momentous consequences for human life. This is because human beings reside very much within this cosmic order. We have already seen this line of argument from him: In chapter two where we discussed ‘Ali>Naqvi’s

⁵¹ Naqvi> *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, 3-4.

⁵² Naqvi> *Hāyat-i qhumi>*

discussion of the “meaning of human life” vis-à-vis the life and death of inanimate bodies, plants, animals, and angels.⁵³ Here again, after having shown the meaning and significance of this orderliness and the interconnectedness of the world of creation (that includes human life as well), he turns to various lessons that humans need to learn from this order. ‘Ali>Naqvi>notes that in the order of inanimate bodies, there are forces of attraction and repulsion that keep things together. If one attempts to break a piece of iron, or press it, he would feel repulsion, something within the iron piece resisting that external force. This is because of the attraction of its parts towards the center. A cotton piece of a much bigger size would not present any comparable level of resistance. This is because its parts do not possess the same level of attraction towards its center. The same iron piece after having rusted loses these forces of attraction towards the center, and can be pressed and broken easily into pieces. Thus, observations of inanimate bodies teach human beings the importance of attraction towards the center.

In the case of plants one learns that the plants that grow are the plants that remain attached to their roots. No leaf or branch can survive once it is uprooted from its source. Thus the importance of the roots. In the animal kingdom, the intellect witnesses another phenomenon, absent from the domains of inanimate and plant kingdoms: here, simple connection of a part to the whole—like that of a branch to the tree and its roots—would not keep the part alive. An animal’s hand or eyes that are never put to use or are sick due to illness would be useless for the rest of the body and result in defectiveness of the whole. Here the key lesson is that a part needs to keep unity with the whole and should be functioning. In brief, from the domain of the world of matter

⁵³ See page 13ff.

The rest of the essay draws numerous lessons pertinent for the life of a community, which are not central to my argument here. An earlier four-volume text *Nizām-i zindagi* (*The Order of Life*) takes the argument to yet another level. Here, the harmonious order of the natural world no longer remains simply an educator of human beings, but points to the vital necessity of orderliness and harmony for human societies as well. ‘Ali-Naqvi argues that it is this natural order and harmony that makes possible sciences such as zoology, botany, and physics, upon which in turn rest the various crafts and practices such as medicine. In discerning and discovering the underlying order these sciences rely on universal principles (*kulliyat*). Accidents (*ittafaqat*), since they are without criterion, hardly play any significant role in these sciences. The crucial point is that the order that is witnessed in the cosmic order and vouched by these sciences point to a Wise Creator (*ḥakīm khāliq*) Who has placed laws and regulations for the natural world. If so much is affirmed by the human intellect, ‘Ali-Naqvi argues, then it would be inconceivable that the same Wise Creator would leave His chief creation (i.e., human beings) without any guidance for ordering their day to day life and managing their affairs: “It is wrong for a human being to think that he will be left alone in this world—just as he is, without any order (*nazm*), guidance (*qaṣidah*), or law (*qanun/aṣin*). This

[human] body parts is the heart that pumps lifeblood to the body’s various parts. Human communal life should also have a center. So what could be this center? It is necessary that it is the high point from within the human genus, a treasury of human attributes, [similar to] the heart of a human, and fountainhead of human perfections. It is the “universal man” (*insān-i kāmil*) who could be the communal center for the human world, and all human community can benefit from the advantages of the collective life by being connected to it (7).

Noted in the passing here a comprehensive account of his political philosophy will be presented in chapter five.

would only have been possible if his Creator were lacking in understanding, was without consciousness (*shu'ur*), or incapable of bringing about order and law for action.”⁵⁷

But there is a slight difference: Whereas, to the natural order, the Creator’s guidance has come in the form of laws that constitute its very existential makeup (*takvīnī*), for human beings it has come in the form of a divine law (*tashrī*). Human beings, since endowed with choice and freewill, can then choose either to accept or reject this guidance. The status of this law is therefore the same as that of other natural science in which universal principles (not accidents!) play a crucial part: “Now when everything is principled and part of an order, then why should a human being be without order, without principles,” he argues.

It is at this point that we can see ‘Ali>Naqvi’s resolution to the problem: “how does religion guide?” According to ‘Ali>Naqvi, religious guidance comes in the form of a Shari’a, a Divine law. Akin to the whole created order, the guidance for human existence and flourishing is also comprehensive and contained within this Law. In other words, the essential needs of humanity are all addressed in the Islamic Shari’a, which is formulated by the Creator and revealed to human beings through the channel of prophecy. Yet, unlike the rest of creation, human beings can choose to accept or refuse it. In a nutshell then, ‘Ali>Naqvi’s argument is as follows: the necessity of order in human life is self-evident, but since human life occurs within a larger whole that includes all of creation, there is an organic bond between humans and this larger whole. That is why, in many ways, the laws that govern these other planes of existence also rule human life. It is therefore mandatory for humans to pay heed to the underlying

⁵⁷ ‘Ali>Naqvi, *Nizam-i zindagi* 3.

tidiness and harmony witnessed in these other modes of existence by pondering over them as ‘signs’ (*ayaḥ*). However, notwithstanding humanity’s existence within the broader harmonious universe—to which it must not stay indifferent—its own unique stature, nature, and mission also deserve guidance that corresponds uniquely to these. A complete account of this specificity of human nature—taken to be “willful progress in knowledge and deeds”—was discussed at length in chapter two.⁵⁸ For the accomplishment of this ultimate calling of human life, religion provides direction and guidelines. And it is in this process that the divinely gifted faculty of the intellect comes to play such a crucial role. It is through the intellect that the patterns in nature are observed and their lessons are drawn. Yet for affairs that are beyond the capacities of the human intellect, religion functions as the intellect’s foremost ally.⁵⁹ For ‘Ali>Naqvi> religious guidance—especially in its Islamic formulation—is contained within the prescriptions of the Shari’a and covers in its scope all human actions, whether related to the human-God relationship (*‘ibadaḥ*) or human-human relationships (*mu‘amalaḥ*).

Furthermore—and this is crucial to ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s argument—the *raison d’être* of this Law is precisely to guarantee harmony and order for human life. Religion exists for the reforming human societies, countering corruption, and bringing peace and tranquility to the human order. Almost all of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s writings—whether on theological or praxis-related questions—stress this point: religion is the source of reform (*islah*) and peace within human societies and society’s wellbeing is religion’s highest calling: “There is no doubt that [it is] *for the islah* of people that the founders of religion

⁵⁸ See chapter 2, p.13ff.

⁵⁹ I have discussed this notion of “alliance” at length in chapter two.

preached the realities of [Divine] Unity and the Returning (*ma'aḥ*).” (emphasis added)⁶⁰

In the same vein, notice how he relates belief in One God to peace and tranquility in human life: “*To live a peaceful and tranquil lifespan, accepting and understanding an infinite power greater than the human being, and conforming to certain principles, is religion. To submit to God, the Sender of the message, is called Islam....Practical teachings for islah of people kept changing according to the program [intended].*” (emphasis added)⁶¹

‘Ali>Naqvi’s insistence that religion is the source of social peace and tranquility is not a coincidence. The circumstances of the time demanded it. As was noted in the introduction, many of his interlocutors and the growing waves of Westernization and secularization had put a huge question mark on the relevance of religion for human society. For ‘Ali>Naqvi to be successful in persuading his audience that “religion is still relevant”, it was not enough to show that it was reasonable, and that it can be upheld on intellectual grounds. He had to prove to them that not only it is not at odds with reason, but in actuality is very beneficial to the well-being of human communities.

Let us look at one of his representative texts in this regard, one that captures in a nutshell ‘Ali>Naqvi’s religio-intellectual project and its already discussed various strands, especially reflecting the discussion about religion’s role in the human order of life. If *Mazhab aur ‘aql* (1942) was his clearest statement of his hermeneutics—his assertion of the inherent compatibility of religion and reason, and the former’s reasonability—the four-volume *Nizam-i zindagi* [The Order of Life] written around the same time (between 1940 and 1942) completes his reformulation of Islamic theology

⁶⁰ Naqvi, *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, 79.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 62-3.

and praxis. That it is a practical manual for his followers for the ordering of their lives is only obvious from the content of this work. Besides this overt aim of teaching his community the proper religious attitude towards life, in many ways this work goes beyond proving Islam's inherent reasonability: it is 'Ali>Naqvi's attempts to "illustrate" to his audience that not only is Islam quite reasonable, but more importantly, its sagacious teachings are absolutely indispensable for human societies. In what could be construed as the culmination of his religio-intellectual project, this is the task he lays out for himself.

To persuade his audience of this assertion, 'Ali>Naqvi>takes upon himself to show *how* religion encompasses all spheres and stages of human life. *Nizhām-i zindagi* [The Order of Life] is his most comprehensive attempt in this regard where, to demonstrate the sagacious teachings of Islam for ordering human life, 'Ali>Naqvi>would systematically "map" Islamic religion (comprised of the faith-works division) onto human life. He walks his reader through the complete lifespan of a human being—beginning from even before he was born—illustrating along the way how in every Islamic prescription made for the various stages of human life, there is immense wisdom that is both beneficial for the progress of humans and guarantor of peace and stability in their lives. An implicit argument in this schematization is about the comprehensiveness of Islamic faith and the Shari'a: in dealing with human life, nothing whatsoever has been left out. *Nizhām-i zindagi* also deals with many of the issues discussed thus far—the relationship between intellect and religion, beliefs and praxis, and the centrality of knowledge—all again in the context of broader interests of the purpose of human life. Furthermore—and this is a crucial point in understanding the significance of this text—

by demonstrating the underlying wisdom of the Islamic faith and practices, he is attempting to highlight how Islam is still very relevant for Indian society.

If it is deliberated further, it appears that ‘Ali>Naqvi>was not content with simply proving that religion is *a* great source for reform. He asserts instead that, if understood properly, religion would prove to be *the* greatest source of reform. That is why in discussing theological matters, he always returns to the “so what” question, the issue of the advantages of believing in God, prophecy, the Imamate, the afterlife, and other such central religious doctrines, and shows that there is no source other than religion that could bring about a comprehensive peace for human societies. *Nizām-i zindagi* [The Order of Life] is not unique in this regard: almost every text—even those that are intended toward his committed and believing followers—would include some claims along these lines, in pointing toward the wisdom and practical efficacy of these beliefs and rituals.⁶² All these points and ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s intention are clearly summed up in the preface:

Without doubt, under the rulings of Shari’a, arrangements have been made to adorn the practical life of such a human being in every way. From birth [onwards], every era of human life has been addressed so that human being could truly follow a principled orderliness and law. For him, through Shari’a directives, God has provided a complete “Document of [Sagacious] Ordering of Life” (*Nizām namah-yi zindagi*) or “Charter for Practical Life” (*Dastur al-‘amal-i hāyat*), in following which fully is contained our reform and success.⁶³

In content, *Nizām-i zindagi* seems intended as a follow-up commentary and concrete illustration of the various claims he had already put forth a few years ago in *Islam ki*

⁶² Note for example *Khuda>ki>ma‘rafat* (written before *Order of Life*) where similar discussions occur under section titles “*Marfat-i Khuda>ki>zharurat*” (The Need for Knowing God) and “*Ma‘rafat-i Khuda>ka>‘amali>natijali*” (Practical Consequences of Knowing God).

⁶³ Reference, 4.

ḥākimaḥah zindagi> The reader may recall that *Islām ki-ḥākimaḥah zindagi*> was a statement that Islam—more than any other religion—is in unison with the demands of the intellect and provides excellent guidance for human advancement and peace within human communities.⁶⁴ But in that work, he mostly discussed the broader principles that underlie the Islamic point of view. With *Nizḥam-i zindagi*> he builds and expands on those arguments and takes his analysis to a more concrete illustrative level. Since it is impossible to present all of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s step-by-step reflections on all the different phases of human life, we will restrict ourselves to presenting the general outline of the work and a few examples.

I have already presented how in the “Introduction”, he ties the need for order and guidance in human life to the cosmic natural order.⁶⁵ The opening section of the first volume is entitled “Laying down the Initial Foundations of The [Sagacious] Ordering of Life” (*Nizḥam-i zindagi-ki-ibtada’i-dagh bayl*). Here, ‘Ali>Naqvi>claims that, if followed properly, Islam’s sagacious teachings ensure that all the necessary material and spiritual provisions needed to welcome a human being into the world are in place, thereby creating a solid foundation for his flourishing.

When did these arrangements made for the human life commence? ‘Ali>Naqvi> refers to the Qur’anic covenant of *Alast*⁶⁶ in the “world of pre-eternity” (*‘alam al-dhar*) where human spirits before joined to their bodies were taught certain lessons and oaths. He accepts that many may not remember that covenant but one should not be surprised

⁶⁴ See Introduction of this chapter where we have noted one such claim.

⁶⁵ See p.34ff.

⁶⁶ “*Alastu>bi-rabbikum qḥku>balā*” mentioned in the Qur’anic verse 7:172: “And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify concerning themselves, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes, we testify’.” The verse refers to what Muslims see as the primordial covenant between human beings and God in the spiritual world before creation.

to find a soul strong enough that it would still recall that covenant. That possibility should not be discounted.⁶⁷ Yet those who do not believe in the existence of the spiritual world would reject this. For them one has to begin with this life, and examine how “the rulings of the Shari’a have drawn attention toward *islah* of his future practical life” even before an individual is born into the world.⁶⁸

In the ensuing section ‘Ali>Naqvi>begins with Shari’ite prescriptions for proper marriage, which, on the one hand, is the origin of a child’s life, but on the other, is responsible for an enduring impact on the child’s character. He goes on to discuss issues such as “Consideration of the [child’s] future in the marital relationship”, “The choice of mother for the child” (6), “Establishment of the proper human mindset in the etiquette of marriage” (11), “Rulings for the time of birth” (14), “Arrangement for the [child’s] suckling” (15) and the early years in which the child does not need any training (18). Throughout these sections ‘Ali>Naqvi>is at pains to demonstrate to his readers that at every step of the reception of a child into this life, Islamic Shari’a has laid out careful teachings to ensure that the child has all that he needs for his physical, psychological, and spiritual nourishment.

‘Ali>Naqvi>then turns to what he calls the “Age of the [child’s] moral training” (*Tarbiyat ka>zamāna>* 19): at the age of 6 or 7, his education and moral training begins during which Shari’a teaches that a child’s moral character and activities are reformed, he is taught his religious obligations (*fara’iz*) and also made familiar with the Shari’ite

⁶⁷ Naqvi, *Nizām-i zindagi*, 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

rulings. This is because the time when the child will be under legal obligations (*ḥukm-i taklīf*) is not that far, and he needs to be prepared for it.⁶⁹

Yet in the remarks that follow, ‘Ali>Naq̣vī>claims that the sagacious ordering of the Islamic Shari’a has as its aim human success in this life as well: “At the same time, the Shari’a has not neglected the necessities of this world. [There is] a saying of the Prophet: “Teach your children swimming and archery.” ‘Ali>Naq̣vī>spends some time further emphasizing the significance of moral training for children while also highlighting the negative consequences that would follow from its absence.

Hierarchy of Knowledge and Primacy of Religion

These reflections on moral training are followed immediately by a discussion of the meaning and significance of knowledge (*al-‘ilm*). This topic is of immense significance, not only because it acts as a transition to turn to more central issues and sets the tone and agenda for the rest of the treatise, but also because it sheds light on ‘Ali>Naq̣vī>’s general assessment of the role of religion in human life. It is through a clarification of the proper concept of knowledge that ‘Ali>Naq̣vī>paves the way for a discussion of religious beliefs, and later, of religious praxis.

‘Ali>Naq̣vī>begins by noting the immense emphasis put by Islam on seeking knowledge. He cites the hadith report, “Seeking Knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim [man],⁷⁰,” and the Qur’anic verses, “Say: Are they equal—those who know and

⁶⁹ Ibid, 19-22.

⁷⁰ I have put man in parenthesis because ‘Ali>Naq̣vī>stated that many people tended to think that the hadith also mentions woman which he rejects. See his discussion of the issue on page 31, especially his discussion of women’s education from p.38ff.

those who know not?”⁷¹ to demonstrate this point. ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> observes that people have taken this call for education as absolute and unconditional—assuming that all forms of knowing are at an equal pedestal—with no thought ever rendered to discover the nature of this prescription within Islamic sources and Shari’a law. He argues that although absolute, the emphasis on knowledge is limited to specific fields of knowledge. Knowledge is deserving of merit (*faz̄ilat*) but that could not mean all forms of knowledge. Given that every human being has specific knowledge in his own field of life (*shobah-yi zindagi*)—for example, a farmer knows things about agriculture that a blacksmith would not, and vice versa—this point of view collapses all distinctions among the various forms of knowing. After all, everyone knows something that another person would not be aware of. Even a beggar living in a forest knows more about trees and plants than a philosopher or a physicist. In brief, this erroneous views turns everyone into a scholar (‘*alim*) after which the Qur’anic distinction between a knower and an ignorant person becomes pointless. It follows from the argument that the Shari’a intends some specific form of knowledge for all Muslims. The intellect also confirms that it has to be some type of useful knowledge (*kaḥ amad ‘ilm*).

Yet what is useful differs from perspective to perspective, what a physician deems useful knowledge for himself is seen useless by a musician, and vice versa. Therefore, notes ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> it is important to attend to the point of view of the Law-giver (*Shah*). He reminds his reader that the Law-giver is interested “in the perfection of the doctrinal (*a taq̄d̄li*) and practical (‘*amali*) life of humans.” In this quest for perfection there are multiple levels, some lower and some higher. Like other religious

⁷¹ Qur’an, 39:9.

acts prescribed in Shari'a, various forms of knowledge draw various kinds of Shari'ite rulings, mandatory, recommended, neutral, reprehensible, and forbidden. In the same way, there is a level of knowledge that is obligatory for all. There are forms of knowledge that are recommended and praiseworthy, and then there are those that are neutral, reprehensible, or forbidden.⁷²

At the most basic level everyone is obliged to have faith with some general proof (*ajmali-dali*), and knowledge of the obligations (*vajaba*) and prohibitions (*muharrama*) in the realm of deeds and actions. After one reaches the age of adulthood and rational understanding gathering knowledge at this basic level will be an individual's responsibility. Then comes the level of recommended knowledge where in-depth familiarity (*tafsihi-vaqfiyat*) with the principles of faith is situated. Here, one masters matters of religion with deep insight and extensive proofs. Not every individual is called upon to master that level. Since different people provide for different necessities of life, not everyone can be expected to attain this level. It is necessary, however, that within a community, certain people exist who attain that level so that those at the basic level may consult them for their religious needs. 'Ali>Naqvi>calls this level, the level of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), and deems ensuring that such people exist within a community, a collective responsibility.⁷³ In the same vein, presence of physicians is necessary within every community so that bodily illnesses could be cured and Law-

⁷² Here 'Ali>Naqvi>is employing Islamic legal categories obligatory, recommended, neutral, reprehensible, and forbidden. See Wael B. Hallaq, *Shari'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 84. For Shi'ite juridical tradition see Muhammad Baqir Sadr, "Shari'i Rulings and Their Divisions" in *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence: According to Shi'i Law*. tr. and ed. Hamid Algar and Saeed Bahmanpour, (London: ICAS Press, 2003), 54ff.

⁷³ It is evident that 'Ali>Naqvi>is employing here the legal distinction of the individual and communal legal obligations (*farj al-'ayn wa farj al-kafayah*). For a discussion of these concepts in Islamic legal thought, see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), p.215.

giver's intention of preserving human life be fulfilled. In brief, knowledge associated with things that preserve human life at the spiritual and material level are at the level of obligations.

'Ali>Naqvi>then turns to recommended forms of knowledge: providing food, dress, and housing, etc.—since these are not necessities of life—the status of knowledge that makes those possible is that of recommended. Because these things assist the order of life intended by the Law-giver, they may still be pursued and when in consciousness of this intention, they also carry reward. Turning to the neutral forms of knowledge, he classifies there fields of knowledge that are neither necessary, not recommended, yet contain information which is also not harmful. Factual information such as the distance between two countries, population of a country, its economic situation and system of governance or historical information about kings and their conquests or empires, etc. is information that one may gather in one's spare time, but is neither useful nor harmful.⁷⁴ Finally, expertise associated with magic and playing music is characterized by him under forbidden forms of knowledge from which one should stay aloof.⁷⁵

The spectrum and hierarchy of knowledge that encompasses poles of “useful” and “harmful” (and everything in between) allows 'Ali>Naqvi>to assert the primacy of religion for human life. According to 'Ali>Naqvi> beginning with adulthood and lasting till one's death, religious knowledge in both its theoretical and practical dimensions is an absolute necessity. At the most fundamental level, it is this knowledge that is

⁷⁴ 'Ali>Naqvi>cites the following hadith in support of his argument regarding the status of neutral knowledge: This is the same thing as when the great Prophet [of Islam] was sitting in the mosque and saw that there was a huge crowd surrounding a person and asked: “Who is this person?” The people said; “He is a great scholar (*'allamah*).” He asked, “What kind of great scholar is he?” The people said that he is knowledgeable about genealogies, history, and the wars of Arabs. The Prophet replied that this knowledge is such that it is neither beneficial nor harmful.

⁷⁵ Naqvi> *Nizhām-i zindagi*>31-37.

indispensable. There are other important forms of knowledge but nothing is quite like religious knowledge, which he defines in concrete terms of faith (*a'taqhāt*) and works (*'ama*). Notice also that in the whole discussion 'Ali>Naqvi>barely uses transmitted proofs; even the verse or hadith-report cited is commented upon and explained on purely intellectual grounds. Nevertheless, once the hierarchy of knowledge has been established, 'Ali>Naqvi> could turn—after having discussed other relevant issues regarding the early years of human life—to the age of adulthood and its responsibilities, where he clearly makes use of this worked-out hierarchy: “After reaching the boundaries of adulthood, there are many responsibilities for a human being, which can be divided as principles of beliefs (*usūl-i 'aqh'id*) and practical obligations (*'amali>fara'iz*). In the latter, there are further two divisions: One, the rights of God, that is, the individual obligations of a human being, and two, the rights of people, that is, collective obligations. We now turn to a detailed exposition of these.”⁷⁶

At this juncture, one notices how by carving these distinctions within religious obligations, 'Ali>Naqvi>has begun to relate religion to life, and map Islam onto the human order of life. Although this framework would be crucial in setting the tone and direction for the ensuing pages (all four volumes), he prefaces it with an important discussion: his interlocutors' deep concern about the relevance and benefits of religion for the human order of life. He addresses it in a section entitled “Importance of Religion in the Order of Life” (*Nizām-i zindagi>main mazhab ki>ahammiyat*).

'Ali>Naqvi>begins by noting how every human being desires supremacy and eminence so that he could fulfill his wishes. It is also true for human beings that they are

⁷⁶ Ibid., 64.

never content with what they have, and continue to seek more and more. Even when the whole of world is thrown at their feet, they would desire yet another. Yet, the world is limited and one person cannot have it all. If the resources of the world are to be divided amongst the human collectivity, uninhibited human desires would only result in limitless clashes and conflicts. The powerful will decimate the weak. But even that does not settle the matter once and for all: “But worldly power, force, and weakness keep fluctuating like passing seasons. A person who is powerful at one time becomes weak at another and vice versa,” which ensures perpetual and endless conflict in the human order. The powerful continue to dominate while the weak wait for their turn to retaliate. Given this human dynamic is well illustrated in history, there is no way that every human being could receive one’s rights. What then is the solution?

‘Ali>Naqvi>argues that either everything is given to one person and all others imprisoned which is hardly possible; or one may seek some authority that is over and above the shortsighted selfishness of human individuals, an authority that does not base its justice upon nepotism or favoritism (*janabdari*) preferring one’s own over all others. Such an authority and power in ‘Ali>Naqvi’s words is the traditional concept of God: “Therefore, it is needed that there be a being that is uniformly related to all humans. Only the laws that are established by Him could be trustworthy for all. Such a law that allots freedom for everyone is called religion and its patron God....”

Such is the benefit of religion: “In ignoring religion, we do not have a right to demand from a powerful [person] that he should not benefit from his power. This is because everything in the world is for gaining benefit.” Why should a powerful person withhold his power? Why not pursue one’s desires? Without the force of religion which

speaks to and molds the human heart and conscience which in turn dominates the human mind and actions, the task of defeating human arrogance and passion for power could hardly be accomplished. That is why it is religion that provides breathing space for the weak, ensures proper boundaries, and rights among different groups; it is religion alone which is responsible for “keeping peace, tranquility, and communal order in the world.” ‘Ali>Naqvi>reminds his audience that one should not be misled by false imitations of a true religion, nor blame religion itself for mischief carried out under its banner. A discerning and reflecting intellect will be able to separate the true from the false forms of religiosity.⁷⁷

The rest of the first volume is a systematic presentation of the standard *usūl-i* Shi’i creed of belief in God (*tauhīd*, with emphasis on Divine Justice), prophecy (*nubuwwah*), Imamate (*Imāmah*), and the Returning (*ma‘ad*), with many interrelated topics discussed along the way under each heading. What is characteristically different about this presentation of Islamic faith is the emphasis on the wisdom of each belief which he strives to make attractive to thinking minds and to the human intellect. He executes it by highlighting the various benefits of religious commitments for human beings, both at the individual and collective levels. Notice, for example, how he commences his argument for the doctrine of Divine Unity: “The first gift that religion has presented to the world of humanity is the affirmation of One God. Due to that, all human individuals come to be molded into the same mold and dwell in the same state (*kayfiyat*).”⁷⁸ He goes on to show that without belief in God, equity and social justice cannot be achieved. The language of “religion as a gift for the world” only confirms that

⁷⁷ Naqvi, *Nizām-i zindagi*, vol. 1, 65-70.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

proving the relevance and significance of religion to his interlocutors is a central concern of this text.

It should be clear that if volume one was his mapping of Islamic theology (*ushūl ad-dīn*, the principles of religion or faith) by way of illustrating its indispensability for human flourishing, volumes two through four attempt to map Islamic praxis onto life by systematically moving through the basic rituals, the pillars of Islam (*arkan ad-dīn*) and other associated practices. In the opening pages of volume two, ‘Ali>Naqvi>sets up this discussion under the title “A human’s practical obligations” (*Insaan kay ‘amali-fara’iz*) in the following words:

The evident result of the strengthening of beliefs is a sense of duty in deeds and actions. With adulthood, this responsibility becomes serious for a human being. From the point of view of the Shari’a, he was free until this time but has now become bound (*muqhayyad*). Now, every [act of] movement or the absence of it, the movement of lips and the turning of the gaze is tied to accountability. Legal obligations (*takliḥ*) now apply and there is a strong supervision over deeds and actions.⁷⁹

The inherent dependency of actions upon faith is unmistakable. The volume goes on to discuss all the Shari’ite rulings associated with the proper performance of prayer. Volume three continues the discussion of prayer and the benefits of the various Shari’ite rulings in ordering human life. Finally, volume four is dedicated to fasting and its rulings. It is relevant to note that ‘Ali>Naqvi>did not include a section on religious pilgrimage (*Hajj*). It is perhaps that this journey is undertaken once in a lifetime and is not part of a Muslim’s ordinary day-to-day activities and normal order of life. It is prayer and fasting that punctuate a human’s normal order of life. Akin to his discussion in the first volume, he continues to reflect and illustrate *how* in each ruling associated

⁷⁹ Naqvi> *Nizām-i zindagi*>vol. 2, 3.

with these rituals is a wisdom that can be unearthed if one employs one's intellectual resources in a proper manner.

Returning to the first question⁸⁰, the following concluding remarks need to be made. Although *Nizhām-i zindagi* by itself, is not comprehensive in dealing with all the aspects of human life, leaving out important domains such as economic and political activities, it lays out an overall framework with which 'Ali>Naqvi> approaches these subjects in his later writings. And in his treatment of these other issues, the ideas laid out in this text regarding religion's relationship with life—its mapping onto the latter through the *ushūl-furu'* distinction on the one hand, and the rights of people and the rights of God on the other—provided him with a scheme through which to discuss these issues. His definition, scope, and the overall scheme mentioned above remain quite standard for his later works, as we shall see in the following chapter. What is most important in all of this is the all-encompassing nature of religion's relationship with the order of life. Neither economic activity nor politics are outside the domain of religion; in fact, no aspect of life is. When broached in view of this underlying framework, it becomes clear that his writings on other subjects are a part and parcel of the same religio-intellectual project and display remarkable consistency of ideas and method. The significance of this text is precisely due to its representative nature in explicating his theological and hermeneutical schemes. In it, the two strands are clearly intertwined and the underlying intent of preserving, reviving, and teaching religion unmistakable.

Secondly, notwithstanding the centrality of this text in understanding 'Ali>Naqvi>'s broader religio-intellectual project, one should not lose sight of the obvious: at

⁸⁰ That is, how is Islam according to 'Ali>Naqvi>comprehensive?

the most fundamental level, the text is intended as a practical manual for Shi'i Muslims to enrich their religious lives and to strengthen their religious convictions and practice. Needless to say, the two dimensions are not mutually exclusive but instead clearly reflective of his overall aim of religious preservation and revival.

Finally, it needs to be admitted that it was indeed impossible to illustrate fully the myriad ways in which 'Ali>Naqvi>went about drawing out the underlying wisdom of the prescriptions of Islam. It is hoped that our discussion of the structure of the text and some of the arguments—both from this text and those discussed previously—does provide some insight into how he carries out this task.

Part II: Question of Change

Having discussed the first question about religion's significance for human life and the ways in which it interacts with it, it is timely now to turn to the second question, one that pertains to the changing nature of life. In other words, how does Islam as a religion cater to the changing circumstances of human life and the flux that is inherent to it?

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that according to 'Ali>Naqvi> Islamic revelation and its resultant Islamic theology and praxis (expressed through this *ushūl-furu'* distinction, the latter embodied in the Shari'a) is a complete code for human life (*mukammal z̤āyāt-i ḥāya*). 'Ali>Naqvi>acknowledges that change is inevitable for human societies. Speaking to his audience in 1935⁸¹ he stated that the claim "Islamic Shari'a is complete" should not be construed to mean that after the Prophet of Islam

⁸¹ Naqvi> *La>tufsidu>*

declared his prophecy, the world that was incessantly undergoing transformations and modifications stopped changing anymore. It does not mean that with the coming of Islam, the ever-changing life of human beings became somehow static and eternal. This would be a wrong interpretation of the meaning of completeness of the Shari'ite Law. The opinion "the world is changing" (*al-'alam mutaghayyur*) continues to be true after the Prophet's prophecy exactly the same way; it is always changing.⁸²

Yet 'Ali>Naqvi>rejects the opinion that the comprehensiveness of Shari'a is at odds with the flux of human life and civilization. In his view, the reason that some had come to pit "changing times" with the "unchanging static Shari'a" was due to misperceptions about how the Shari'a deals with change in the first place.⁸³ Since change is part and parcel of human life, 'Ali>Naqvi>asks his audience, how could the Shari'a—which was intended by the Law-giver to be all-encompassing—be so naïve in neglecting this self-evident reality.

So how exactly does Shari'a deal with change? According to him, the proper understanding of the way Shari'a responds to "the needs of the times" is through an unending process of *ijtihad*, which is the deliberation of knowledgeable people in

⁸² Reference, 52.

⁸³ The question of Shari'a's ability to respond to the modern challenges has been an ongoing debate within the Islamic world. See Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Islamic Law and the Challenges of Modernity*, (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press and Lanham Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004); Wael B. Hallaq, "Modernizing the Law in the Age of Nation-States," chap. 16 in *Shari'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Muhammad Hashim Kamali, "Adaptation and Reform," chap. 12 in *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008); and John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, "Modernization of Islamic Law" and "Reform of Islamic Law: The Changing Status of Women and the Family" in *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). For the debates on reforming the Shari'a law in the Indian context, please see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Islamic Law and the 'Ulama in Colonial India: A Legal Tradition in Transition," chap. 1 in *The 'Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Scott Alan Kugle, "Framed, Blamed and Renamed: the Recasting of Islamic Jurisprudence in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2001), 257–313.

applying religion to emerging questions of life by way of the fresh application of unchanging principles. Though these principles do not change, their application does. That is why the process occurs not despite the Shari‘a, but within its very confines. According to ‘Ali>Naqvi> it deals with it through principles that are of such a wide scope that they enable those astute in the understanding of the Shari‘a in dealing with all sorts of changes and revolutions at the intellectual, practical, or cultural levels. The key is existence of qualified people who are able to draw correct conclusions from these principles and also have deep insight into the changing circumstances and needs of human beings: “Situations and places change but these changes, differences, and alterations all occur within a vast space that the Shari‘a contains within its limits. It is as if the Islamic Shari‘a is a great enclosure (*ahhathh*) within which thousands of changes can take place, but the enclosure does not change. Surely, it is needed that a human being could draw inferences and deduce rulings from the principles [of Shari‘a]”.

‘Ali>Naqvi> notes that the case of Islamic Shari‘a is not any different from its predecessors: even previous Shari‘a laws such as Judaic or Hindu laws have lasted hundreds of years. Did the world not undergo massive transformations during these times? Did these previous Laws not deal with these overwhelming changes, he asks. Furthermore, that a new law was promulgated by the Law-giver demonstrates that the previous law was intended for a specific and limited period of time, some 100 years, some 300, and so on. Since Islamic Shari‘a is promulgated till the end of times, it means it is absolutely complete in its scope. It follows from this that precisely because it is complete that it is impossible to modify (*tarmim*) or alter (*tabdi*) it.

From this angle, if there is a Shari‘a whose vast and comprehensive principles dominate all possible changes till the end of time, then why should it not remain

established as permanent, and why should there be a need for another prophet for its supersession?

...[T]his [Shari'a] is the Islamic Shari'a. There is no change in it: "you will not find God's *Sunnah* changing, and you will not find God's *Sunnah* modifying".⁸⁴ But our conditions and needs change and in accordance with it, rulings as well, though in every case these are within the limits of Shari'a.⁸⁵

Based on the premise that Islamic Shari'a is the only Shari'a that is complete, 'Ali>Naqvi> calls it as the Seal of the Shari'as (*Khatim-i Shara'i*). At this point, 'Ali>Naqvi> illustrates his point with an example regarding how, although Shari'ite rulings may seemingly differ from case to case, they still fall within the ambit of the Shari'a. he presents the case of a person who has never traveled out of his village and has therefore prayed the five daily prayers always in their full and complete form, and has fasted during the month of Ramadan. Now one day at the age of say 50, he was confronted by circumstances that forced him to journey to another city or country and based on his habit continued to pray and fast like before. Accidentally a person who understands Shari'a was traveling with him and begins to question this person's prayers and fasting. The person's reply will be, "How do I pray two units? Has the Shari'a changed? The Shari'a always stays the same. How come there are two Shari'as now?" It would have to be proved to him that it is not that the Shari'a has changed, but since the circumstances had changed, different Shari'ite rulings were applicable: while at home, the person belonged to a specific category; as soon as he began his journey, he fell into an entirely different one. The ruling did change, but Shari'a did not.⁸⁶ It is entirely another matter that from the parochial perspective of that person it may appear that it is Shari'a that has changed.

⁸⁴ Qur'an 33:62.

⁸⁵ Naqvi> *La-tufsidu*>52-3.

⁸⁶ Naqvi> *La-tufsidu*>55-6.

Based on this example, ‘Ali>Naqvi> goes on to present his conclusions on the topic:

...[S]ometimes rulings originate out of particulars and at others, from universals. If a universal *qua* universal is anything [in its logical force], then particular rulings originating from this universal cannot really be outside the bounds of the Shari‘a. It is so because a universal is always dependent on the existence of particulars; if we ignore particulars, then universals will be absolutely useless. The result of a universal becomes clear only when it is applied to an issue to which it belongs. If we had not considered a particular referent (*mishlaq*) of a universal, or we did not need [to apply it], and then the necessity arose and we came to discover a particular ruling [from this universal], then although this [ruling] will be a new thing, but because it is subordinate to the Shari‘ite ruling, in fact, it will not be new.⁸⁷

This process of deriving particular rulings from Shari‘ite universals as and when “new *particular* situations arise” becomes the way in which the Islamic Shari‘a addresses the needs of changing times, addresses fresh challenges, and remains complete for all time and space. In other words, so long a *particular* Shari‘ite ruling could be seen as a application of a *universal* Shari‘ite ruling—and could be traced back to it—it is completely within the ambit of the existing Shari‘a law and nothing new. On another occasion, ‘Ali>Naqvi> calls this ongoing process of fresh applications of unchanging universal principles of Shari‘a law to changing particular circumstances—Shari‘a’s way of dealing with the flux of life—*ijtihad*. Moreover, indispensability of continuous *ijtihad* also proves a persistent necessity of qualified jurists who could carry it out.⁸⁸

Prima facie, the transition in ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s thought from *Islam* as a ‘complete code of life’ (discussed in the previous section), to *Shari‘a Law* as a ‘complete code’ may prove confusing. In this regard, one must again contextualize these seemingly

⁸⁷ Ibid., 56-7.

⁸⁸ Almost identical arguments are found in other texts during these years. See for example, Naqvi> *Islam ki-hakimānah zindagi*>80-1.

contradictory statements within his broader theology on the one hand and his historical context on the other. First, in ‘Ali>Naqvi’s scheme of religion as principles-branches, notwithstanding that correct faith and understanding precede action, in the realm of day to day life, it is through action that this understanding is best expressed. Although prefaced by true faith, the human order is an order of activity which is in turn guided by the Islamic Shari’a. Faith remains invisible and unexamined—thus the significance of the works. In practical life, therefore, Islam is best expressed through actions legislated by Shari’a, and Islamic code best illustrated by its rulings.

Second, statements such as “[The view] that the Islamic Shari’a is complete does not mean that the way our needs proceed should not change” reflects the historical Indian intellectual and social context within which the nature and role of Shari’a and *ijtihad* and its scope and purpose were persistently contested.⁸⁹ In dealing with the question of change, ‘Ali>Naqvi>was responding to these debates and what he took to be prevalent misunderstandings about the way Shari’a and *ijtihad* address fresh challenges.

Combining ‘Ali>Naqvi’s conclusions on how religion maps onto life, and how it deals with the ever-changing needs of human societies, one may state the following: Islam is a comprehensive sagacious code for ordering human life. This sagacious code guides the human mind, body, and heart at the individual plane and on the social plane, family matters, economic transactions, political structures, and everything in between. The degree of guidance may differ from one domain to another, or sometimes may not even be obvious (or obvious in every case) but it is always present, embedded in the

⁸⁹ For the debates on reforming the Shari’a law in the Indian context please see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Islamic Law and the ‘Ulama in Colonial India: A Legal Tradition in Transition,” chap. 1 in *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), and Scott Alan Kugle, “Framed, Blamed and Renamed: the Recasting of Islamic Jurisprudence in Colonial South Asia”, *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2001),257–313.

revelation, contained in the insights of ‘true’ religious scholars, and those generally well-trained in the Shari‘a law. If it is not to be found, it needs to be deduced from the principles. Circumstances may change but never to a degree where they could circumvent Islam’s all-encompassing sagacious ambit.

Concluding Remarks

In the last two chapters, we have seen that faced with the deep crisis of religion, ‘Ali>Naqvi>undertakes a comprehensive religio-intellectual project that could circumvent abandonment and dissolution of religion from Indian Muslim society. Aware of the intellectual problems that underlie this crisis, such as the pitting of revelation against reason, *din* against *dunya*>and the relegation of religion to an obscure and private space with little relevance for human society’s progress, he addresses all these issues both separately and relationally to mitigate their overall impact on his followers. The overarching aim of this project was to restore religion to its central and privileged status of being the primary determinant of the principles and prescriptions by which human societies could live, in justice and in peace. Toward that end, he attempted to illustrate to his audience (as well as to skeptical interlocutors) the underlying sagaciousness of the Islamic faith and teachings and therefore, Islam’s indispensability for Indian society. In this process, he had to overcome numerous dichotomies, especially the misunderstood relationships between reason and revelation and between the purposes of this life and the hereafter. Most importantly, ‘Ali>Naqvi>had to resist the ‘privatization of religion’, which was reducing religion to a compartment among the many compartments of life, depriving it of its all-encompassing scope of application.

Thus, during the period 1930 to 1945, his writings and speeches carry out a comprehensive *islah* of the concept of religion, responding to all these challenges. It has been our contention that by 1945, he had largely completed his formulation of the response to the crisis of religion. His later intellectual career displays a consistency of application of this overall framework and associated categories that he had worked out during these years. Although he continued to be quite prolific during these later years, there is hardly any noticeable shift in his thought. In fact, the writings of his early years would leave a strong mark on these later scholarly endeavors while also being elaborated in depth and scope during this time.

Before examining these later writings, it is timely to consider from his earlier phase of intellectual life yet another recurring strand within his writings: his ongoing reflections on the theme of Karbala and martyrdom of Hūsayn. Even during the early years of his intellectual life—and while carrying out a comprehensive reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis—‘Ali>Naq̄vi>had frequently returned to this motif. In fact, these writings constitute a major portion of his corpus. The ensuing chapter is an in-depth examination of these writings and the place they hold within his religio-intellectual project.

CHAPTER IV: THE *HUSA YNI-ISLAHI* PARADIGM: REVIVING ISLAM THROUGH KARBALA

INTRODUCTION

Towards the middle of *La>tufsidu*—the text with which I introduced this thesis—one encounters a curious assertion by ‘Ali>Naqvi>. This assertion points us to a dimension of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s thought which has not thus far been explored in this study. It facilitates our transition to examine what may be reckoned as ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s alternative way of preserving, reviving, and propagating Islam. Different from the previously discussed “sagacious ordering of religious and social life” it brings to fore another method and path that he carved in his attempts of reviving Islam. For reasons that will follow soon, this way is momentous enough that a separate chapter be devoted to its study. But let us turn to the quotation first: “Yes, yes, it is true that in *explaining Islam*, [in answering] what is it? I am unable to find a better [historical] reference of personality than H{usayn. If I were to teach the real practical meaning of Islam then there will only be one person in the history of the world whose name is H{usayn (emphasis added)”.¹

Given our contention so far that “explaining Islam to preserve it” is the underlying intent of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s whole intellectual corpus, this statement is quite significant. It assumes even more force when we observe that he was not simply paying lip-service to this thought: In a cursory review of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s corpus one notices the extent to which he wrote on the theme of Karbala and H{usayn’s martyrdom. In fact, if

¹ *La>tufsidu*>115.

we were to exclude his seven-volume Qur'anic commentary, almost one-third of his writings relate to the theme of Karbala directly, and even those whose main subject-matter is not Karbala contain ample allusions and reflections on its various aspects. His writings demonstrate that he drew full implications from this assertion.

The theme of Karbala is with 'Ali>Naqvi>from the beginning of his intellectual career: From his early student days he had started writing on this subject. The earliest work was written in Arabic during his seminary studies in Najaf to defend what were seen as the extreme forms of Shi'ite mourning against criticisms from certain 'ulama', especially Ayatullah Muḥṣin al-Amīn, the author of the well-known *A'yān al-Shi'ah*.² Upon his return from Iraq, the first book³ he authored was again related to the subject of Ḥusayn and Karbala. Coincidentally it is also Imamia publications' first published book. In this context one should also note that a survey of Imamia Mission's earliest publications reveals that—and it is worth recalling that Imamia Mission was 'Ali>Naqvi's brainchild—out of the fifty published works eighteen deal directly with the theme of Karbala.⁴ The next fifty books show a similar pattern with at least 16 books discussing Karbala-related subjects directly. Then there are ample occasional allusions to this theme in many of the remaining writings. Notice in this regard, for example, the quotation cited above from *La>tufsidu>* a text which does not deal with this subject in any direct way.⁵ It is significant that Imamia publication no. 50 to 100 came out during

² Please see "The Flagellations of Muharram and the Shi'ite Ulama'" in *Der Islam*, 55 (1978), 19-36. Please also see footnote 7 of chapter 1 for details.

³ *Qāḍīlān-i Ḥusayn ka>mazhab*, (Lucknow: Manshu'ah Imamia Mission; Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qā'umi>Press, 1932).

⁴ Reader may remember that *La>tufsidu>* was published in 1935 and was the 52nd publication in this series.

⁵ The reader may recall the content of this text from our discussion in Chapter 1. *La>tufsidu>* also provides another interesting example of how he often includes the theme of Karbala and martyrdom of Ḥusayn in

the period that falls between the two key texts *La>tufsidu>*(1935) and *Masa>il va dala>il* (1944). This is the same period during which ‘Ali>Naqvi>carefully completes the reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis and wrote important works such as *Mazhab aur ‘aqJ, Islām ki>hākimānah zindagi>*and all four volumes of *Nizām-i zindagi>*. This means that ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s works on Karbala-related themes were written in conjunction with his writings on his reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis discussed in previous chapters.

A few other facts also deserve attention: From among these first hundred volumes published by Imamia Mission it is only the works on Karbala that were translated into languages other than Urdu⁶; Also, ‘Ali>Naqvi> continued writing on this

his writings and speech. It occurs in the context of a discussion on how a *musliḥ* is often accused by people of being a mischief-maker:

Earlier I had said that religion and state, even if separate from one another, could cause a [complete] destruction of the world. But if religion is subsumed by power there will be no limits to the *fasādāt*. The greatest example of this is the sultanates of Umayyads; here religion and political power—the two things that can be great source of corruption in the world (*fasād fi al-‘arḍ*)—were merged. What was the result of this? Could there be an illustration of corruption in the world greater than [what happened in] the event of Karbala? ...Was there anyone more sincere reformer in the world than Ḥusayn ibn ‘Ali? Absolutely not...Imam Ḥusayn and his followers are blamed for corruption in the world. Ḥusayn presents his defense by action and through this action the result is made clear [regarding whether he was a mischief-maker or true reformer] (86-88).

In ensuing pages ‘Ali>Naqvi>provides a long defense of Imam Ḥusayn’s mission showing how every action of his was to avoid *fasād* and to rectify the religious crisis generated by the Umayyads. ‘Ali>Naqvi>showed how this phenomenon of accusing *musliḥ* to be *mufsid*—examples of which are ubiquitous in the lives of the prophets—is omnipresent in human history. He argues that like all major prophets, especially Moses, Abraham, and the Prophet of Islam who are ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s supreme examples from the Qur’an and history, enemies of Imam Ḥusayn also initiated a campaign to confuse masses about the virtuous and upright ethical stance of Imam Ḥusayn, and his refusal to endorse the power-obsessed Umayyad ruler’s rule. Like these prophets Imam Ḥusayn through his careful measures ensured that this task is not accomplished, not because it would reflect poorly on him, but because that would destroy his efforts towards *islah* of the Muslim society, much needed in times when all sorts of confusions and worldliness had come to dominate Muslim religious consciousness.

⁶ For example *Ḥusayn aur Islām* (1935) was immediately translated into Hindi and English. This work was followed by *Ḥusayn ka>atam balaydan* (1936) and *The Martyrdom of Ḥusayn* in the same year. In discussing ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s popularization of his message, in the conclusion of this study I will speculate on the reasons for this.

subject throughout his life without any noticeable gap, extending his reflections and analysis in both depth and breadth.

As mentioned in the preceding chapters, ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>was somewhat unique in his willingness to speak from the pulpit during Muharram and throughout the year, a forum generally attributed to preachers of limited scholarly training. One may surmise then that the reason for abundant references to the Karbala-narrative in his writings is that many of his writings are transcripts of his Muharram-lectures, where—given the established format of these gatherings—he could not avoid addressing the subject. Yet, a closer examination of his writings shows that his reflections on the Karbala narrative were not simply an inevitable burden carried by a Shi‘i ‘alim and religious leader; in fact, it will be argued that these reflections are an essential pillar of ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>’s religio-intellectual project and were crucial to his attempts to restore Islam to its privileged social status.

Cumulatively then, the preceding remarks illustrate that even at the height of his reconfiguring of Islamic theology and praxis, ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>never stopped pondering over the Karbala-narrative and its meaning. His frequent return to this theme throughout his life demonstrates how significant the Karbala-episode was to him. For reasons both of quantitative magnitude and qualitative significance, this dimension of his thought must therefore be situated within his larger project of reviving and preserving Islam. It is for us now to discover why it was so and to what end? It is even more pertinent to discover, if we are right in asserting that ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>’s writings on this topic are just another approach to preserve, revive, and reconfigure Islamic faith, how this dimension of his work relates to his reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis, as discussed in the

previous two chapters. In other words what is the relationship of his writings on Karbala to his writings on Islamic theology and praxis? How do his reflections on the Karbala-narrative help the reconfiguration task and his overall attempts to rehabilitate Islam in the Indian society in which he lived? The concluding section of this chapter is devoted to this task.

PART I

**HISTORICIZING MYTHOLOGY: ‘ALI>NAQVI’S
RECONFIGURATION OF THE SHI‘I LAMENTATIONS
(‘AZADARI)**

From the point of view of their underlying rationale, ‘Ali>Naqvi’s writings on Karbala can be broadly classified into the following sub-categories:

1. Those that historicize the details of the whole Karbala-episode, or an aspect of it
2. Those that defend the institution of mourning against its criticisms
3. Those that clarify the purpose of mourning (in this there is a strong overlap between 2 and 3)
4. Those which teach faith or inculcate virtue

His Karbala-related texts often display an overlap among one, two, three, or all four objectives. These objectives are profoundly interrelated and this section is an attempt to explain this interrelatedness of these seemingly disjointed discussions. This reading of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s writings on Karbala will illustrate that these writings constitute his larger project of “Reviving Islam through Karbala,” and that the four themes constitute the vital segments of one and the same project. Outwardly distinct, the first three aims are in fact the springboard for the fourth and the most critical one: edification of his Shi‘i community on religious matters.

It is also pertinent to note that in appropriating the symbolism of Karbala for the task of religious preservation and revival ‘Ali>Naqvi>was also revolutionizing Shi‘i

preaching. Put simply, 'Ali>Naq̄vi> made ample use of Karbala symbolism for his simultaneous act of “preaching religious reform” and “reforming religious preaching”.

WHY KARBALA?

Before the interrelatedness of these four themes in his writings on Karbala is illustrated, it is pertinent to ask an even more basic question: Why Karbala? Why did 'Ali>Naq̄vi> devote so much intellectual energy to it, and to what end? Two interrelated answers could immediately be presented: One, as elsewhere Karbala-mourning is the most conspicuous expression of Shi'i piety and devotion in the Indian subcontinent. Scholarly literature is replete with examples drawing out the centrality of this institution for Shi'i religious life; one may call it the lifeline of the Shi'i Muslims: “Perhaps no other single event in Islamic history has played so central a role in shaping Shiite identity as the martyrdom of Husayn and his companions at Karbala.”⁷ Similarly, Heinz Halm's short

⁷ Yitzhak Nakash, “The Muharram Rituals and the Cult of the Saints among Iraqi Shiites” in *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*, ed. Alessandro Monsutti, Silvia Naef, and Farian Sabahi, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p.115. David Cook goes as far as asserting the decisiveness of this event vis-à-vis establishing the Shi'i identity in history:

Al-Husayn is presented as the paradigmatic heroic figure, who cares for his fallen children, tries to obtain water for the non-combatant women and young ones, and fights nobly until the end. When he dies, he said to have received at least thirty-three wounds and killed a number of the enemy. His body is treated ignobly; he was trampled under the hooves of the horsemen, and his head was cut off and presented to 'Ubaydullah b. Ziyad, the Umayyad governor, and eventually to the caliph Yazid in Damascus... Those who fought against al-Husayn are doomed to perdition; the face of one is said to have turned black as a punishment for killing al-'Abbas, a son [sic] of al-Husayn. The event of Karbala was a defining moment for Islam: it is difficult to be neutral about it. Those who fought for al-Husayn are among the saved, while those who fought against him are irredeemably damned.

The trauma of the martyrdom of al-Husayn for Muslims of the time and since can hardly be overestimated....But there are several reasons the martyrdom of al-Husayn was the more powerful of the two stories, capturing the imagination of the Muslim world and provoking sufficient guilt among the Shi'ites as to initiate their sectarianization....[T]he sources present the manner of al-Husayn's death, together with most of his wives, children and close relatives, in a way designed to arouse deep emotion and guilt on the part of the reader. In some of the sources, al-Husayn's death is connected to that of other prophets, most notably John the Baptist... *This exaggerated focus upon the death of Hussein has been the characteristic of all Shiites since the period immediately following his martyrdom, and most especially since the ninth century when*

survey of Shi'i Islam from the time of 'Ali to the Iranian Revolution devotes 37 of the 161 pages to the discussion of what he calls "The Deluge of Weeping Flagellant Procession and Passion Play" in Shi'ism. The work opens with the following remarks:

In 684, four years after the martyrdom of al-Husayn, the "penitents" – committed to performing a collective act of self-sacrifice passed through the plains of Karbala on their march into death. They spent a day and a night at the grave of the Imam, wailing and lamenting with blackened faces. This was not so much to honor the death of al-Husayn...as in response to their own feelings of guilt. They prayed to the martyred imam for forgiveness for their failure. The public display of guilt at the grave of the imam and lamenting over one's own sins are the roots of the larger complex of atonement and mourning rituals of the Shi'ites. Most of these rituals take place during the first ten days of the month of al-Muharram...They recall the martyrdom of the third imam and enable followers to share in his suffering and atone for a portion of their individual sin as well as collective, historical guilt of the Shi'a...The true core of any religion are the rituals carried out collectively by the believers, and not the ideological web that the theologians build around them in retrospect. The community is created not by the profession of belief in dogma but through the process of performing the rituals. For this reason, the rituals of the Shi'ites will be the focus of the following presentation, for this is necessary in grasping the essence of Shi'ism. In contrast to this, the regulatory set of canonical laws of the mullahs and the ayatollahs, the Shi'i religious scholars, are secondary and will be discussed afterward.⁸

the mourning for him became institutionalized. Although there are a number of doctrinal differences between Sunnism and Shi'ism, for Sunnis this focus upon al-Husayn is disturbingly reminiscent of the Christian focus upon Jesus and his redemptive sacrifice...For this reason, the mourning of al-Husayn is one of those elements which serve to drive the two groups apart. There are other social ramifications to the martyrdom of al-Husayn for Shi'ism. Unlike the attitude toward martyrdom in Sunnism, where the martyr is seen as victorious personality, whose death is greeted by joy rather than sorrow...in Shi'ism the dominant attitude towards martyrdom is grief...Concentration upon the divisive history of martyrdom that dominates Shi'ite history perpetuates ancient grievances between Sunnis and Shi'ites, and ensures that the rift in the Muslim community will not be easily healed (if ever). It also serves to focus the Shi'ite community upon its Sunni opponents more than any other target (emphases added). See David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 56-9.

⁸ Heinz Halm, *Shi'a Islam : From Religion to Revolution*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997). See also, Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004);———, *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1978); and Peter J. Chelkowski, *Eternal Performance: Taziyeh and Other Shiite Rituals*, (London ; New York: Seagull, 2010);———, *Taziyeh, Ritual and Drama in Iran*, (New York: New York University Press, 1979).

Though one may not fully agree with the way Helm construes how the Shi'ites relate to this event, he is right in noting how palpable this expression of piety is within the Shi'i religious milieu. In terms of its significance, in shaping communal identity and religious ethos, Karbala and the martyrdom of H̄sayn are the supreme motifs of Shi'i Islam.⁹

From one point of view, therefore, the answer is clear: the reason 'Ali>Naq̄vi> writes about the Karbala-narrative is because of this pivotal place the event has in Shi'i religious consciousness. Given his family's central role in fashioning Shi'i thought and practice in North India (including the institution of Karbala-mourning) 'Ali>Naq̄vi> could not be oblivious to this central emphasis of mourning for Imam H̄sayn. He was fully aware how much the Karbala episode meant to Shi'i Muslims, and how deep their attachment was to Imam H̄sayn. As scholars have noted, it is through these gatherings and institutions of mourning that Shi'ism has thrived in North India and has given the Shi'i believers a strong sense of a community.¹⁰ Given the religio-cultural centrality of this institution and its sway upon Shi'i religious consciousness 'Ali>Naq̄vi> recognized the need of employing it for the task of religious preservation, revival, and reconfiguration.

⁹ "For the majority of Shi'i Muslims, Karbala is the cornerstone of institutionalized devotions and mourning, since it is the substantive component of their historical memory, theological understanding, and religious identity... Karbala bestows on Shiism a sense of legitimacy; it provides the language of martyrdom and suffering, while bolstering the argument that the succession of the Prophet should have remained within his family... The martyrs of Karbala in their surviving family members have remained archetypal heroes for Muslims, as well as non-Muslims socio-religious reformers of the 20th century, who sought to transform their communities in a positive manner." Said Hyder Akbar, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9-11.

¹⁰ See, for example, David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala : Muslim Devotional Life in India*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001); ———. *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); S. A. A. Rizvi. *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Ithna' 'Ashari>Shi'ism in India*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers; New Delhi: Marifat Pub. House, 1986) and Vernon James Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

Second, beyond the appreciation of the unique power of the symbol of Karbala ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> also gives an elaborate alternative answer to the “why Karbala” question: the absolute uniqueness of the Karbala episode and Imam Ḥsayn’s mission in relation to everything else ever witnessed in history. It is to this dimension that I turn now.

Many aspects of Karbala, according to ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> separate this event and the martyrdom of Ḥsayn from other historical heroic tragedies and martyrdoms: First, the universality of its message across space and time and religious frontiers. In 1942 on the occasion of 1300th anniversary of this incident ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> wrote a treatise *Shahid-i insaniyat*, the preface of which discusses this observation extensively. The title of the text *Shahid-i insaniyat (The Martyr of Humanity)*¹¹ itself is intriguing: Imam Ḥsayn is no longer a Shi’i Imam or martyr of Islam alone, but martyr par excellence of humanity as a whole. He is both a unique and a universal figure who cannot (and must not) be confined to any single religious universe. Thus, his message and sacrifice need to be construed in the most universalistic terms.

Whence the uniqueness and universality of Karbala and Imam Ḥsayn? For ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> they are due to various unique characteristics of the Karbala episode. He acknowledges that from the point of view of a particular community, region or class every event can be construed as unique. From this point of view Karbala can also be seen as unique to the land of Iraq, Arabs, and particularly the Hashimites. Yet, for a particular event to be universal in its import, it has to display “attributes and outcomes that relate to the whole of humanity [transcending] the distinctions of religion, race or

¹¹ A huge controversy surrounded the publication of the first edition of this work. Later in the chapter I will have an occasion to note the details in this regard.

nation". It is such attributes that make Karbala a universal incident of humanity.¹² So what are these attributes? 'Ali>Naqvi>notes the following:

1. Hatred of the oppressor (*ẓālim*) and sympathy for the oppressed (*mazlūm*) is part of human nature. Although all prophets and God's friends suffered oppression of one kind or another, in Imam H̄usayn's struggle these various kinds of oppression were all combined. By this token, what he suffered in terms of oppression became unique.
2. It was not that Imam H̄usayn was helpless in the face of this oppression. He was not like a person who was attacked by a robber, robbed, and murdered against his will. He willfully bore all the adversities in support of a righteous cause and in preservation of a principles stance. In other words, his martyrdom is sacrifice.
3. Every religion seeks to raise human morality to its highest possible level; the real axis of all religions is perfection and morality of human beings. Whereas in details certain moral injunctions may differ, in principles these religions share this common moral framework. In this shared vision of human moral perfection there is a moral station upon which all the religions come to agree. Imam H̄usayn's moral stance belonged to that level where no one from another religion would contest the righteousness of his cause.¹³
4. The diverse ethical attributes displayed by Imam H̄usayn and his companions were of such quality that the whole of humanity can benefit from those. 'Ali>Naqvi>cites observations of thinkers from across religious and national heritage

¹² Naqvi> *Shahid-i insāniyat*, 26.

¹³ *Ibid*, 27.

who had unanimously attested to the significance of this event. The veneration for Imam H̄usayn has only grown with passing time, he notes.¹⁴

5. Imam H̄usayn did not intend to defeat or destroy Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah’s worldly government. If that had been his mission he would have opted for material means. His mission was instead to cause an intellectual, moral, and spiritual revolution. To change the human mindset, military power and swords are not needed. His sacrifice was a moral force—not a material one—which was intended to guide and restore the human mindset and morality.¹⁵

In view of these points, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>confidently proclaims that:

To restrict the personality of Imam H̄usayn and his immortal feat (*kaḥnāmah-yi javīd*)—with all the graces and blessings [that pour from it]—to a single group is against the spirit of Islam, [the spirit] that underlies calling the creator of the universe “Lord of the worlds” (*rabb al-‘ālamīn*). When the lordship of God cannot be restricted to any particular group then restricting the sacrifice of a martyr like H̄usayn to a single group is also completely wrong. In fact, the benefit of his martyrdom concerns all those people who desire to draw from him some lesson about human life.¹⁶

Two things stand out in these passages: the uncontested universality of Imam H̄usayn’s ethico-religious message, and universal human sympathy for his immense suffering that follows from it. Interestingly enough, even among the infallible Shi’i teachers, for ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> Imam H̄usayn and his example is unique. Returning to this universal content of the *H̄usayni*>paradigm time and again, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>will draw numerous implications, religious, ethical, social, even political.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid, 28.

¹⁵ Ibid, 536-9.

¹⁶ Ibid, 539.

¹⁷ An interesting short treatise in this regard is *H̄usayn ki>yad ka>azaḥ hindustān say mutḥabbah* [“What does H̄usayn-Commemoration Demand from Free India?”] (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qaumi>Press, 1950). He critiques the post-Christian western obsession with materialist power which is a consequence of the

The universality of this message implies that it can serve numerous purposes to demonstrate to the world the truth of Islam by presenting one of its most-revered and heroic figures whose integrity and the veracity of his sacrifice can hardly be disputed. This was all the more important during ‘Ali>Naqvi’s time when Islam was confronted with polemical critiques from many sides. The *H̄usaynī*-paradigm therefore provided a common denominator for other religious traditions, and even for those who had left religion behind. *H̄usayn ka-paygham ‘alam-i insāniyat kay nam* [*H̄usayn’s Message to Global Humanity*]¹⁸ is one such example:

Listen carefully! The voice of the innocent martyr of Karbala is reverberating in the air. “O those who dwell in my Lord’s spacious earth...I do not call upon you by your sectarian and communal names. It is because with your sympathy for my immense humanity and great oppressedness your mutual opposition dissolves akin to the way rivers and cascades lose their anxiety and restlessness in the serene ocean. I invite you all that you come to learn who I was and why I stood up and why I did it all (3).¹⁹

This dimension of the universal applicability and sympathy for the *H̄usaynī*-paradigm and sacrifice and what it could offer in terms of restoring Islam’s pride and dignity are perhaps the reasons why, during the formative years of Naqvi’s religio-intellectual

underlying materialistic worldview (*maʿdāh parastī*) that has come to dominate western thought and culture. In his view this materialistic worldview had led western writers to study Islam’s political history from the point of view of only those who appear to be “the conqueror-winners”, regardless of the ethical-spiritual criterion of judgment on these conquests. That is why, says ‘Ali>Naqvi, the Karbala-episode has altogether been ignored by such writers and thinkers. He contrasts this view with Eastern or Indian spirituality which sees warfare from a spiritual point of view and therefore has always appreciated the endeavor of H̄usayn as witnessed in the writings and sayings of major Indian leaders and intellectuals such as Gandhi and Nehru, among others. In conclusion ‘Ali>Naqvi notes that:

This proclamation needs to be brought to clear limelight in ‘secular’ (*ghayr mazhabī*) India that this sacrifice [of H̄usayn] is guidance for every sect and regional community (*q̄hum*), even when being ‘secular’ the people of India cannot step out of their [particular] sect and regional community. That is why the commemoration of the sacrifice of H̄usayn b. ‘Ali>can make claims on free India akin to those made by every sect and regional community (10).

¹⁸ ‘Ali>Naqvi, *H̄usayn ka-paygham ‘alam-i insāniyat kay nam* [*H̄usayn’s Message to Global Humanity*] (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Q̄humi-Press, 1959).

¹⁹ *H̄usayn H̄usayn* (?) is another text which introduces H̄usayn’s life and mission at Karbala in a similar and summary manner.

project, it was only these writings on the theme of Karbala and H̄usayn that were translated into other regional languages of India.

While universalizing the message of Karbala and the figure of H̄usayn, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s presentation also often approaches this theme from a very particular point of view, one that pertains to Muslims, more specifically, to the Shi’i Muslims. Within this specific framework the *H̄usayni>* paradigm provides a critical model for imitation and reflection for the understanding of religious ideals. In other words, there is purposefulness to the narrative of Karbala which needs to be brought out, reflected upon and then implemented into one’s life. The message of Karbala is universal and essentially moral:

The event of Karbala and its practical results is a topic that deserves a lengthy commentary. Every sub-event of this incident is a fountain of ethical, social, and religious teachings. Imam H̄usayn had patched together all human perfections (*kamalat-i insāni>*). In fact, the incident of Karbala is an incident that unveils all the characteristics of truth and falsehood (*h̄aq’va baṭl*)...The numerous valuable lessons taught by H̄usayn at Karbala are not such that they should be viewed from a wrong lens and then lost to forgetfulness. *These lessons are such that they should be made the plan of life and constitution for the communal practical life (dastur-i ‘amal-i h̄ayat-i milli>* (italics added).²⁰

It is this dimension of the richness of the symbolic capital contained in this narrative and the powerful emblematic and emotional force that it had within the community that caught ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s continual attention, drawing him to continuously reflect and write about it. This inherent vitality of the Karbala-narrative presented to him an immense opportunity to be employed in the service of religious instruction and the project of preserving and reviving Islamic faith and practice. Though ensuing sections will discuss

²⁰ ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> *Usvah-yi H̄usayni>* (Lucknow: Imāniyah Mission, 1986), 129. *Milli>* can also be rendered national though it is unclear from the context and other writings of ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> if he meant national in the proper sense of the term, thus the word “communal” here.

this dimension at length, it is important to highlight that ultimately for ‘Ali>Naqvi> Karbala has to be understood as “the plan for life and a constitution for communal practical life.”

WHICH KARBALA? ‘ALI>NAQVI>’S ~~ISLAM~~ OF THE KARBALA-COMMEMORATION

Having discussed the “why Karbala?” question it is timely now to examine how the four themes or objectives for writing on Karbala listed earlier relate to one another. Put in a summary fashion the underlying unity of these aims, as witnessed in ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s writings, proceeds as follows: The discussion on the “why Karbala?” question brings to the fore ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s ultimate aim of preserving and reviving religion through these writings. In other words, his objective is to revive Islam through Karbala. Now to revive Islam through Karbala, Karbala must itself be alive in the active imagination and memory of the community; Karbala could only be a vehicle of revival if its own symbolic force is preserved. Without doubt, the avenue most responsible for keeping this memory alive is the Muharram commemorative assemblies (*majalis*). Muharram ritual practice and institutions therefore demanded defense because the ongoing condemnation of this institution from various groups could lead to its destruction. In *Zikr-i H{usayn* [Remembrance of H{usayn] he argues that among the Muslim community there has always been a small group that made a conscious attempt to repress the memory of people (to be read as Shi’i Imams and *ahl al-bayt*) who best embodied the ideals of Islam. Imam H{usayn is one such personality whose endeavors were undermined and made to be forgotten by the community through relentless mental and literary

efforts by these groups. Since opposing Islam is not an option for them, they instead deceive simple-minded Muslims by opposing the religious practices of mourning for H{usayn.²¹

Occasionally, ‘Ali>Naqvi> points out the various kinds of objections and criticisms raised against the Karbala commemorations. He notes that this persistence of opposition to the mourning for H{usayn takes many forms, sometimes calling it bad from an economic point of view. Ironically enough, he argues, the same group bears economic costs of publishing a thousand pamphlets and their distribution. Then there are those who call it an innovation (*bid‘at*), associate *ta‘ziyah* to pictures and criticize crying over a dead body as acts forbidden (*h{aram*) in Shari‘a.²²

‘Ali>Naqvi> further notes that although the opposition to Karbala commemoration had always existed, during his lifetime within sectarian camps arguments of entirely new kind had also surfaced. The ensuing paragraphs of *Zikr-i H{usayn* points to these new objections: These days when Muslims are confronted by a dire financial situation, what is the point of spending so many resources on commemorating an event that occurred 1300 years ago. What benefit would be reaped by remembering the past? They argue that remembering the past is an exercise in vain that distracts people from their present concerns and obstructs their activity to improve it. ‘Ali>Naqvi> observes that these arguments have a special appeal for the progress-minded westernized youth who

²¹ ‘Ali>Naqvi> *Zikr-i H{usayn* [Remembrance of H{usayn] (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, n.p.), 3.

²² Naqvi>*Ta‘ziyahdari>ki> mukh{afat ka>ashl raz* [The True Secret of Opposing Mourning], (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1963), 3-4. The treatise cites examples of the various texts that have put forth these objections to mourning (see p. 7-10). For a scholarly discussion of this criticism in the Indian sectarian milieu please see David Pinault “Shia Lamentation Rituals and Reinterpretations of the Doctrine of Intercession: Two Cases from Modern India” *History of Religions*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Feb., 1999), pp. 285-305. Also see *Zindah-i javid ka ma{am* (1935) which was written to refute the claim that since H{usayn is a martyr and martyrs are always alive, why mourn the death of someone when he is alive.

are deeply desirous of seeing the Muslim community in economic progress at par with the powerful nations of the world. He points out that for this mindset one's heritage is hardly of much worth: what matters the most is dynamism in the present and future.²³ One could immediately notice the similarities to the larger religious crisis delineated in Chapter 1.

For 'Ali>Naqvi>the challenge to the institution of Karbala-commemorations came also from both within and without the community, based on relentless sectarian polemics on the one hand, and the spread of westernized mindsets on the other.²⁴ Added to these two is one more: the Shi'i community's own forgetfulness of the meaning and purpose of commemorating Karbala and the martyrdom of H̄usayn: "Sadly, however, the world does not pay attention to these objectives and from the point of view of remembrance of the Household of the Prophet is divided into two groups: One by way of criticism of its particular details ignore the beneficial side, thus calls everything useless; the other out of devotion separates the particularistic point of view from the objectives and restricts it to ceremonies and rituals, thus [causing] the death of the objectives".²⁵

In view of these challenges therefore, many of 'Ali>Naqvi>'s writings were geared towards defending the institution of Karbala commemorations. Fully conscious of the terms of debate upon which the confusion regarding this commemoration could be

²³ Naqvi> *Zikr-i H̄usayn*, 4-5.

²⁴ For an account of polemical debates within the Indian Islamic religious milieu see Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shah 'Abd Al-'Aziz: Puritanism, Sectarian, Polemics and Jihād*, (Canberra: Ma'rifat Publishing, 1982).

Also, this is not to say that the Shi'i scholarly circles were devoid of controversial debates and polemics. Ende's essay mentioned in footnote 1 is a case in point. One can also mention other controversial debates initiated by the writings of Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Khaḥis}> Musa>al-Musawi> Jawaḥ Mughniyya. For these debates see Rainer Brunner, "A Shi'ite Cleric's Criticism of Shiism: Musa>al-Musawi>" and "The Politics of *Shahid-e-Jawid*" in *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political Culture*, ed. Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

²⁵ Naqvi> *Usvah-yi H̄usayni*>12.

eradicated, his method and choice of arguments were in view of his intended audience and their particular criticism. His arguments ranged from a simple logical/rational, theological, or historical claim to a Qur'an-hadith based proof, or a combination of both intellectual (*'aqli*) and textual (*naqli*) arguments. It is important to note that 'Ali>Naqvi's defense, besides being based on rational and hadith-based arguments, drew immensely from historical data to point out what he saw as historical fallacies in an opponent's criticism of the event's details and construal of meaning in light of these historical details.

A few examples can be cited in this regard. *Qātilān-i Hūsayn ka-mazhab* was 'Ali>Naqvi's response to a treatise published by a Sunni interlocutor blaming Shi'ites for the killing of Hūsayn on historical grounds. Employing extensive historical evidence 'Ali>Naqvi>rebutts this claim. *Qātil al-'abrah* [A Killing Drowned in Tears]²⁶ argues for the propriety and permissibility of crying for Hūsayn and was written against the objections of Wahhabis calling mourning idolatry (see the *Preface*). For this purpose, he cites various Qur'anic citations and examples from the Prophet's life (*naqli*-arguments).²⁷ An example of a historical argument is found in *Hūsayni-iqḥlām ka-pahlā qḥdam* [The First Strategy of Hūsayn's Strategies] where 'Ali>Naqvi>sifts through historical sources to prove that "from the beginning Yazīd had decided that in case Hūsayn did not pay allegiance (*bay'ah*) he should be killed (15)."²⁸ An example of a combination of religious

²⁶ Naqvi> *Qātil al-'abrah*, (Lucknow: Imamia Mission; Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qāumi>Press, 1960).

²⁷ Naqvi> *Ashk-i maḥam*, (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qāumi>Press, 1957) is another example in this regard where 'Ali>Naqvi>provides a combination of intellectual (i.e., mourning is in the nature of things) and Qur'an-Sunnah (including the Sunnah of the revered Companions of the Prophet) based proofs.

²⁸ In a 15-page short treatise he discusses various historical reports on the meeting between Marwān and Walīd. Similarly, in *La>tufsidu*>while discussing Hūsayn's mission as *musliḥ*' Ali>Naqvi>notes: "I will present to you proofs (*shahid*) in which Imam Hūsayn has rebutted this misunderstanding and shown how outcomes have supported Hūsayn...I have only this book in my hand, called *Tarikh-i Tābari*>On such an

and logical arguments to defend Karbala-commemoration is found in *Sir-i Ibrahim va Isma'ik: ya 'ni-ma 'na zibhāy 'azīm* [The Secret of Abraham and Ishmael: The Meaning of the Great Sacrifice]. Here after reflecting on the Qur'anic narrative of the sacrifice of Ishmael (whose culmination is traditionally attributed to the martyrdom of Hūsayn at Karbala commonly called *Zibhay 'azīm*), 'Ali>Naqvi>notes:

Every Muslim should know that our relationship with previous prophets is that of faith (*imān*). It is not mandatory on us to follow their Shari'a. It is something else that some Abrahamic practices have been made part of Islam. Those things are worthy of our practice because they are part of the Islamic Shari'a. If the whole of the Abrahamic Shari'a was part of Islam, then we would have [been required to] bring a son for sacrifice. But this has been abrogated by the Islamic Shari'a and that is why it is forbidden for us to act on this. Thus, the relationship with previous prophets is that of faith, not practice. But the relationship with the Prophet of Islam (AS) is both of faith and practice. If remembrance of the feat (*kaḥnāmāh*) of a previous prophet was kept alive, then how come that of the family of our prophet—with whom we are related both in terms of faith and practice—is not worthy of our memory?²⁹

In *Imprisonment of the People of God's House (Asir-i yi ahl-i ḥaram*, 1940) the response to the sectarian criticism on why Hūsayn chose to take his family along if he was aware that he and his whole family would suffer was deliberately argued on purely logical grounds. 'Ali>Naqvi> also wrote many short treatises simply introducing and summarizing the life and mission of Hūsayn for his Shi'i, non-Shi'i and non-Muslim interlocutors.³⁰

Besides these external criticisms (from sectarian interlocutors and westernized Muslims), for 'Ali>Naqvi> with the Shi'i communal understanding too there was a

occasion I do not use any work other than this. That is why I will present proofs only from this [work], ones that are relevant to my subject. (87-88)." This special status accorded to Tābari's history by 'Ali>Naqvi> is due to its authoritativeness for all Muslim sects.

²⁹'Ali>Naqvi> *Sir-i Ibrahim va Isma'ik: y'ani-ma 'na zibhāy 'azīm*, (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qāumi>Press, 1969), 15-6.

³⁰ See for example, Naqvi> *Mazjūm-i Karbala* (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qāumi>Press, 1941) and *Hūsayn Hūsayn aik ta'iruf* (1964).

bewilderment as to the meaning and intention behind preserving this institution and practicing these mourning rituals. ‘Ali>Naqvi>was never tired of pointing out to his audience this widespread confusion about the true significance of why these practices need to be kept alive. The task of employing Karbala narrative in the service of Islamic revival, therefore, could not be accomplished within the parameters of the customary and popularized forms of mourning-practices. ‘Ali>Naqvi>spoke and wrote many works to clarify the *raison d’être* of keeping the memory of Karbala alive.

What sort of confusion existed within the community about the significance of keeping Karbala alive, and along what lines did the institution of Muharram rituals require *islah*? Scholarly and anthropological studies of Shi‘ism in India have helped document the various ways in which Shi‘i Muslims have tended to relate to this event. For example, in the various conversations held by Pinault (1992) with the Shi‘i community in India, the following responses were given to the question of “why mourn for Imam H(usayn?)”:

1. The Quran tells us to love *ahl-e-bayt* and *maṭam* shows our love for them (101)
2. Beating one's chest is a natural thing, the natural response when one hears about Karbala. We want to feel Husain's sorrow. (101)
3. We do *maṭam* because we want to remind people of what happened to the *ahl-e-bayt*. It is a duty for us (102)...
4. God... Promise[d] that he would create a community which would agree to assume the duty for all time of performing *maṭam* and weeping for Hussain [sic] (102)
5. *The Importance of Weeping and Wailing* by Syed Mohammed Ameen "cites traditions to the effect that the entire cosmos participated in bewailing Husain's death at Karbala....The inescapable conclusion is that weeping and wailing for Hussain [sic] is a matter of extraordinary importance in the eyes of Allah. Otherwise he would not have made all His creatures to weep according to their own natural forms....The life, progress, and glory of any community depends upon the passion for unity among its members and their wise organization....What sows the seed of passion for unity and organization in the community and helps it to germinate and develop is this very practice of weeping and wailing which is earned for us the nickname "the community of weepers" (103)

6. We feel it our duty to shed our blood on Ashura. To prove we are with him, with Hazrat Imam Hussain, we shed our blood, we use implements and cut ourselves....We do *matam* not just to commemorate the Hazrat Imam Hussain but as a way of saying we are Shi'ites...by hurting myself, I show I'm willing to protect my religion and do anything to protect the religion (103).
7. For some men being willing to cut themselves is a measure of their love for the *ahl-e-bayt* (104-5)
8. Doing *matam* today is a form of response to this last call of the Imam Hussain, to show that if we had been there at Karbala we would have stood with him and shed our blood and died with him (105)
9. Fatima is spiritually present at every *Majlis*... *Matam* performed at the end of the majlis will lead her to intercede with God on behalf of the *matamdar* (mourner): She will be moved to intercession by the degree of devotion to her son Hussain shown by the individual mourner.
11. In *The Leader of Martyrs* the author records an Arabic legend to the effect that as Husain lay dying at Karbala he heard the divine voice proclaiming: "O Husain [sic]! Comfort yourself in that, for your sake, I shall forgive from the number of sinners those who are your lovers, so that you may feel gratified" (107)

'Ali>Naqvi>seems to be aware of the various ways in which the community habitually approaches the mourning of Karbala. In the concluding section of *Usvah-yi Husayni* called *'Akam-i insani>ki>islahi* 'amal aur ittaba'>i usvah-yi H^usayni> khatimah-yi kitab ["The Call for *Islah* of the World and Following the H^usayni>Paradigm: Conclusion of the Book"], 'Ali>Naqvi>attempts to remedy these points of view. He points out that shedding tears and expressing sadness upon the incident of Karbala is only natural to human disposition. It cannot be otherwise. But that cannot be the end in itself; it will be illogical to expect that the goal of Imam H^usayn's sacrifice was simply to make people cry over his suffering. Nor should one imagine in a Christian way that Imam H^usayn died for our sins and therefore we are now relieved of all religious obligations. Such

beliefs only stifle the real aims of Imam H̄usayn and of commemorating his martyrdom.³¹

In ‘Ali>Naq̄vi’s assessment, Shi’i Muslims of his time approached the commemoration of Karbala in two ways: either seeing the whole event in Christian terms (i.e., Imam H̄usayn died for their sins and will therefore intercede for them), or assuming that the ultimate purpose of commemoration is the shedding of tears and mourning upon hearing the sufferings of the Household of the Prophet. According to ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>to deem shedding of tears the only and ultimate goal of remembrance was to misconstrue the meaning of commemoration and why these practices were instituted in the first place.³²

³¹ Among the various communal justifications noted by Pinault, only one comes close to understanding the issue in ‘Ali>Naq̄vi’s terms: “Imam Hussain’s objective was to reform the conditions of society and re-establish the forsaken laws of Islam. So we cannot claim to be a true *azadar* [mourner] if we neglect our obligatory duties such as *Namaz* [canonical prayer], fasting, kindness to others, etc. and indulge in forbidden acts such as listening to music, watching obscene films, etc. (107).” This justification occurs in a text *The Importance of Weeping and Wailing* authored by Syed Mohammed Ameen. It is unclear if the author was influenced by the writings of Naq̄vi>or not.

³² Pinault’s (1992) description of the Shi’i mythology sums up the issue well:

What resulted in Shiite thought was the belief that these events had been divinely predeterminedFrom the beginning of time God had known humankind’s future sins; because He is Merciful and Compassionate....He permitted the suffering of immaculate and guiltless victims, who by their acceptance of these trials would gain merit with God and hence the power to intercede on behalf of sinful humanity. To gain access to this intercession, sinners must acknowledge the deprivations and injustice endured by *ahl-e-bayt*; anyone who withholds this acknowledgment is in effect denying the full reality of the sacrifice made by the *Ma’sumin* [pure ones]. Therefore in every age God tests men and women by challenging them to honor the Prophet’s family as fully as possible and to lament the tragedy of Karbala...Shiites with whom I discussed the significance of Karbala emphasized Husain’s knowledge of the siege and the death he would undergo. His defeat in battle was not the result of a fluke or some lapse on his part as a military leader; had he wanted, he could have avoided entrapment outside Kufa. The point of this assertion is that Husain’s sacrifice was voluntary; and it is the willed nature of his loss that made his death meritorious and salvific for others (55-56).

Although this description could not be read as standard and other accounts of what Shi’ism is and how Shi’ites view the Imams could be listed, say for example, from us̄̄h̄>Shi’ism which, without denying the Imam’s intercession, emphasize more his role as a guide and exemplar. The result of his anthropological findings, in deeming popular conceptions as standard, is that Pinault’s analysis is less accommodative to these alternative viewpoints. Nevertheless, the work provides a rich description for us to comprehend the nature of misconceptions ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>deemed problematic and intended to reform.

In view of correcting these widespread misperceptions among Shi'i Muslims, 'Ali>Naqvi>would present convincing arguments to illustrate what he took to be the real purpose of mourning the Karbala-incident. These arguments were worked out along two separate lines, one based on historical data and the other upon the religious sensibilities of Shi'i Muslims. Let me present each individually.

The Historical Argument

'Aza>yi H{usayn par *tarikhi>tabshrah* [Historical Commentary on the Mourning for H{usayn]³³, one of his works from 1930s, presents the historical argument with a subtle polemical tone. 'Ali>Naqvi>notes how Imam H{usayn consciously made arrangements that his mission is well publicized and noticed. Even things which were seen by his enemies as mark of their victory ended up propagating his mission. Imam H{usayn made sure that his enemies could not find a single argument that could be leveled against the Imam's innocence or used as an excuse to kill him. For 'Ali>Naqvi> mourning practices were instituted precisely for the same purpose: propagation of Imam H{usayn's mission by perpetual commemoration. They are in place so his memory and his mission is not forgotten. Yet, from their inception those who were opposed to the Imam tried various ways to divert people's attention from this event and its commemoration—l and by that token from his memory. First, they attempted to forbid these commemorations. When these efforts did not succeed, they instituted competing commemorations of various sorts, none of which were able to draw the same level of attention or devotion. Once those competing commemorations died out the opposition sought to change the form of

³³ Naqvi> 'Aza>yi H{usayn par *tarikhi>tabshrah*, (Lucknow: Manshuraḥ Imamia Mission; Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qāumi>Press, np). The exact date of its publication could not be determined.

Karbala commemoration: instead of mourning that is in tune with the nature of the Karbala event, they argued that Imam H̄usayn's victory deserves happiness and celebration, not mourning. 'Ali>Naq̄vi>rejects this point of view arguing that happiness in the face of suffering of Imam H̄usayn is not only unnatural, it also does not have the same emotional force that sadness has. In all, mourning the events of Karbala is the natural and most effective way of keeping the memory and mission of Imam H̄usayn and his companions alive. Despite all the efforts and propaganda of those who had tried to obliterate Imam H̄usayn's memory, the mourning institution had, for 'Ali>Naq̄vi> continued in its proper form and needed to be still preserved.³⁴

In sum, those opposed to Karbala commemorations attempted various active efforts to obliterate this institution, and with it the mission of Imam H̄usayn. Therefore, if anyone honors the sacrifice of Imam H̄usayn and sees his martyrdom deserving of grief and commemoration, exhorts 'Ali>Naq̄vi>he should do it in ways that will preserve rather than destroy its purpose. Beliefs and practices related to mourning the event should be in line with the mission of H̄usayn and with mourning.³⁵ In the end, it is important that proper mourning practices continue unabated and that their meaning is also understood and preached to others.

The Religious Argument

Here 'Ali>Naq̄vi>draws attention to the absolute need of role-models in one's life. An example of this argument is found in *Usvah-yi H̄usayni*>It should be recalled that 'Ali>Naq̄vi>situates the discussion of the meaning of Karbala in the larger context of the

³⁴ Naq̄vi> *'Aza>yi H̄usayn*, 1-9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

human quest for perfection. Let us look at the argument carefully. ‘Ali>Naqvi>begins by noting that it is to guide human beings on their quest for human perfection³⁶ that God sent messengers and prophets. With the seal of the Prophets (i.e., Prophet Muhammad) the Qur’an was revealed. Although a treasury of divine teachings and source of knowledge for practical life instruction (*tarbiyat*) is needed. That is why the Prophet of Islam was appointed for cleansing of the self and teaching the book and wisdom, and his character and way of life (*kirdar va sirat*) was made model for God’s creation.³⁷ In fact, ‘Ali>Naqvi>points out that God has demanded following the example of the Prophet.

Until this point the argument is standard and without any sectarian particularity. He turns now to point out the absolute necessity of role-models in the human quest for perfection. Coherent on rational grounds, the argument is particularly Shi’i, tied explicitly to the doctrine of Imamate, and made in full awareness of the Shi’i love and devotion toward the family of the prophet: the life of the great Prophet of Islam was limited while the spiritual and moral needs continued. Instruction (*tarbiyat*) and role-models are still needed even after the Prophet and these needs could only be fulfilled by exemplary lives of those who are best qualified to be his successors. In their function thus they complement the Qur’an and are always with it.³⁸

Having asserted the rational necessity of teacher-models, ‘Ali>Naqvi>now turns to discuss certain human psychological tendencies and conditions that would define the human attitude toward these role-models, and how seriously their model will be replicated in one’s individual religious life. In other words, even if teacher-models are

³⁶ Chapter 2 extensively discussed how perfection of human intellect and deeds is the foremost agenda for a human life.

³⁷ Reference to the Qur’anic verse 33:21.

³⁸ Naqvi> *Usvah-yi Hūsayni*, 7-8.

available and could be consulted, what possibility is there that it would actually happen? Is it not possible that human beings—ignorant as they are—will not pay heed to these models? Hence, equally central too is the conduciveness of the human psychological conditions for imitation: It is always burdensome for human beings to act upon duties that are imposed upon them as mandatory. Even when a person undertakes it he does not draw happiness from it but seeks to rid himself of this burden. That is why when confronted with desires, this sense of duty is left behind and sins are committed. But if this sense of duty is in line with human desire a human being would naturally incline towards performance of these tasks, but this time without feeling any burden. Instead he would draw joy and happiness from this performance. In other words, sense of duty out of obligation is difficult but out of natural desire convenient and enjoyable. Based on this distinction, ‘Ali>Naq̄yi>concludes that God and the Prophet of Islam were fully aware of this human disposition and in response to the need for role-models and teachers, they took measures to ensure that those who are imitated are not simply followed out of a burdensome obligation but that human hearts and souls are drawn towards these personalities resulting in love and devotion. The end result is the accomplishment of mandatory duties. In typical Shi’i fashion, ‘Ali>Naq̄yi>points to the family of the Prophet as those role-models: “God and the Prophet had to establish means (*asbab*) which would cause attraction of people’s hearts towards a person. By making [that person’s] sayings and actions the center of attention [these means] would make them intent on imitating and implementing [these sayings and acts in their lives].

Therefore all those reasons and measures that draw people's hearts to imitate and obey one human being were gathered for the family of the Prophet."³⁹

In the ensuing sections 'Ali>Naq̄vi>lists what particular means were deployed by God and His prophet to ensure that the intended prescription of imitation is made easier and pleasing. First, there is the means of love. A person who loves someone carefully observes his or her behavior, tries to imitate his or her ways and finds happiness in doing that. Since a duty performed out of love is easier—as Naq̄vi>had argued before—God and the Prophet emphasized love of the family of the Prophet to the extent that their love was presented as the recompense for prophecy (*ajr-i risālat*), a condition for faith and submission, and a criterion of salvation. The second means employed was abundance of their virtues. When someone's excellence in intellectual, moral, and spiritual matters is imprinted on the human soul, he could no longer be indifferent to those people. By constantly highlighting the virtues of the family of the Prophet, God and the Prophet ensured that people witness their excellence and are drawn to them. Third, every time someone's needs are associated with anyone, he is attracted to that person. Since the Hereafter is much more emphasized in Islam, by calling the family of the Prophet "*saq̄j>yi kauṣar* (pouder of *kauṣar*)⁴⁰, *qasim-i jannat va nar* (distributor of heaven and hell), *shafi'-i khalq*(intercessor for creation)⁴¹ it was ensured that people turn to them for their needs of the hereafter and follow their model . Finally, people's hearts are always attracted towards the oppressed and become interested in knowing the details of their lives. This dimension was also helped the cause of obedience and

³⁹ Ibid., 7-8.

⁴⁰ Reference to *kawthar* from the Qur'anic chapter by the same title.

⁴¹ These are various titles attributed to the Prophet and his household.

imitation.⁴² In brief, whether praising their virtues or mourning their suffering, the same purpose is accomplished: modeling of human life after their example: “There is one spirit that underlies both the world of virtue and praise and that of mourning and suffering: the call for practical implementation (*‘amaḥ*) through which the objective of moral reform (*isḥāḥ* *khulq*) is accomplished. But this is only possible when the events of the lives of the Household of the Prophet are studied from the point of view of deriving lessons from them, and to see what conclusions surface for [our] practical lives”.⁴³

Having discussed these psychological prerequisites for imitation and various ways in which they were provided for by God and the Prophet in the case of all infallible Shi’i leaders, ‘Ali>Naqvi>then curiously singles out Karbala and H̄usayn. They are so because of the importance history has rendered to them, devotion Shi’ites have displayed all throughout the centuries, and the unique commemoration instituted providentially for it. In other words, whereas one could speak at length about the virtues of each and every Imam of the Shi’ites, when it comes to mentioning the sufferings, the events of Karbala by far dominate in human consciousness. In ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s view, this is the key to the understanding of the significance of Karbala and martyrdom of H̄usayn: to the extent mourning of oppression helps the cause of moral and spiritual training—although lives of other Imams could also be referred to—Karbala would be absolutely indispensable. That ‘Ali>Naqvi>is convinced of this uniqueness is evident from the substantial intellectual attention he himself accorded to this subject throughout his life. “Among the Household of the Prophet (peace be upon them all) there is no doubt that

⁴² Ibid., 9-11.

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

the one most referenced and written about is the “*H̄usayni*-paradigm” (*Usvah-yi H̄usayni*)⁴⁴. It is so prominent in history that extemporarily it comes to mind on almost every occasion”.

As expected ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s *H̄usayni*-paradigm is the same paradigm found in the lives and teachings of all of the other Shi’i Imams. Expressing the traditional Shi’i understanding of the essential unity of all the teachings of the fourteen infallibles, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>notes: “But people have not understood the ‘*H̄usayni*-paradigm’ properly...What follows is simply an exposition of this *H̄usayni*-paradigm. It will prove that in reality ‘the *H̄usayni*-paradigm’ is not separate or novel compared to its predecessors; they are in fact one and the same: that which could be named ‘the *Muhammadi*-paradigm’, ‘the ‘*Alavi*-paradigm’, ‘the *H̄asani*-paradigm’ is the one that, upon its own turn, appeared to us in the form of ‘the *H̄usayni*-paradigm’.”⁴⁵

Yet Karbala and H̄usayn remain utterly unique in drawing people’s love and devotion toward the moral exemplars appointed by God. In the incident of Karbala, the virtues and sufferings of the family of the Prophet were juxtaposed like never before or

⁴⁴ The word *usvah* could also be rendered as [H̄usayn’s] model or example. Since ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>attempts to magnify the centrality of H̄usayn’s mission—evidenced by his constant use of parenthetical marks throughout the text and the title of the text itself— I have rendered the word *usvah* grander than usual. Throughout the chapter I have used the phrase *H̄usayni*-paradigm to keep something of the intended force of the expression.

⁴⁵ Naq̄vi> *Usvah-yi H̄usayni*>13. Although ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s writings on Karbala and H̄usayn far exceed in size and number his writings on other Imams, occasionally he did write on other Shi’i leaders. Examples in this case are *Abu-al-a’aymah ki-ta’limat* [Teachings of the First Shi’i Imam] 1938), *Rahnumayan-i Islam* [The Guides/Teachers of Islam], (1961), introduction to *Nahj al-balaghah* (1940), *Haz̄fat ‘Ali>ki>shakhs̄yat: ‘Ilm aur a’ taq̄id ki-manzil par* [The Personality of Revered ‘Ali>on the Stations of Knowledge and Belief], (1969), and in the context of teaching the Shi’i doctrine of Imamate, introduction to each Imam and his life are given separately. It is also worth mentioning that for ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> Imam H̄usayn’s life and martyrdom is not an isolated event but a continuation of the fundamental teachings of Islam embodied by all the Infallible. That is why earlier sections of *Usvah-yi H̄usayni*>discuss the lives of the Prophet, and the first and the second Shi’i Imams whose teachings, according ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> are only carried further by H̄usayn.

after it. That is why no other incident of history is commemorated with the same degree of devotion and intensity.

The Relationship between the Two Arguments

According to the historical argument, even before Imam H{usayn had undertaken the journey to Karbala, Providence and the Imam himself had ensured that the core message for which the sacrifice would eventually occur be made clear to everyone, and propagated inasmuch as possible. In *'Aza>yi H{usayn par tarīkhi>tabsārah* [Historical Commentary on the Mourning for H{usayn] 'Ali>Naq{ī>notes how Imam H{usayn made it impossible for people to falsify or misconstrue his mission and made every effort to make his message accessible to everyone, so that his sacrifice would be remembered not as tragedy but for what it symbolizes. Therefore, the commemoration of H{usayn's martyrdom needs to be in conformity with the Imam's intentions and mission.

The religious argument points out the absolute necessity of role models (read Imamate in the Shi'i world) and imitation of the infallible teachers in every way possible. Either way one is supposed to model one's life after these supreme models. And H{usayn's model, if read correctly, provides all that is needed to live one's life. Whether approached from the historical or theological points of view, 'Ali>Naq{ī>'s analysis leads to the same conclusion: the memory of Karbala is vital for Shi'i religious life, not so that a Shi'i Muslim merely weeps over the tragedy, but because the deep existential attachment (that mourning inculcates and expresses so vividly) provides the best springboard to explore its meaning and symbolism in concrete details, creates a disposition of deep appreciation towards it, and makes possible its eventual imitation

into one's life. In sum, if the memory is lost so will the *Husayni*-paradigm, and with it the whole religious structure edifice.

The Karbala Paradigm and Sociopolitical Activism

In concluding this discussion it must also be pointed out that for 'Ali>Naqvi>the misunderstanding about the meaning and mission of Husayn was not confined to the sectarian religious and pious Shi'i circles alone. In his writings he notes that the Karbala paradigm was also often invoked in support of all sorts of political and social activism:

"People always use Husayn's name and his deeds as a reference-point for any tumultuous revolution (*hangamah-yi inqilab*), [social or political] action, some dangerous endeavor (*khatarnak iqtlam*), or to prompt a movement in a calm setting ."⁴⁶

Reliving Karbala (2006) provides ample evidence as to how the Karbala-paradigm was employed by various groups with divergent sociopolitical agenda (including non-Muslim thinkers and social reformers) who interpreted the meaning of Karbala for their own purposes:

For 19th and 20th century South Asian socioreligious reformers, Karbala is often the medium by which ideal reformist conduct, nation-building endeavors, and class consciousness are shaped and defined. This reformist ideology permeates the Karbala image and revivifies it... The Progressive⁴⁷ and nationalist contexts foreclose an exclusively religious or localized reading of the Karbala event, instead making it the present- and future-oriented ecumenical project that is an outlet for ideas of universal justice, resistance to colonial and postcolonial categories, and the building of transnational solidarity. Many of these writers find themselves in the paradoxical position of rejecting religion for Marxist reasons, while at the same time laboring to use language redolent with religious connotations... The notion that the Karbala motive is the exclusive property of a group or Shias and can only be recited in religiously sanctioned gatherings has deflected attention from the tremendous influence this image has exercised on

⁴⁶ Naqvi> *Usvah-yi- Husayni*>13.

⁴⁷ Refers to the famous Urdu literary movement of the twentieth century

the overall cultural and literary landscape of South Asia, at times quite independently from the idiom of formulaic devotional literature. The attention to self-flagellation and to the icons linked to Muharram has eclipsed the premium that is put on this event outside the Muharram gatherings.⁴⁸

In ‘Ali>Naqvi’s assessment, this widespread use (or misuse) of the Karbala-narrative for certain sociopolitical agendas is only possible when the event is abstracted from the holistic context of H̄usayn’s entire religious career. In other words, according to ‘Ali>Naqvi>the Imam’s mission needs to be situated within his broader complete life and not treated as some isolated incident: “[All of this is done] despite [the fact that] what is called the *H̄usayni*-paradigm is not a tumultuous action of a single day [of ‘Ashurā]. It is rather a poised feat (*mutavazun karṇānah*) of a sagacious life spread over 57 years, whose last act was what we witnessed on the 10th of Muharram.”⁴⁹

In sum, although the Karbala-paradigm was invoked and employed for various purposes, both by devout and pious Shi’ites and by those who see it as a precedent for their own sociopolitical orientations, its meaning and significance was far from being truly appreciated.

⁴⁸ Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*, (PLACE: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11-12. Writing about the ubiquitousness of Karbala as literary motif in the twentieth century, in conclusion Hyder notes:

The presence of the Karbala text invokes two important themes pertinent to socioreligious reform and the progressive discourses. First, by participating in the discursive practices of various resistive agendas, it provides an emotionally charged metaphor through which ideal reformist conduct is shaped and defined. Second, the very memory of Karbala becomes a subversive force. The continuous use of the image Karbala keeps up an unyielding resistance to the status quo. Karbala becomes an important model that demonstrates how those in the minority can redress the asymmetry of power. Whether the ideological spine of the larger resistive projects is provided by Marxism (Josh, Jafri) or refashioned mysticism (Manto), by nationalism (Premchand), or by solidarity forged with the Palestinians (Jalib, Jafri), these projects are subsumed discursively in the Karbala symbol. The symbol of Karbala is universalized to provide a paradigm for all the oppressed peoples of the world (200-1).

⁴⁹ Naqvi> *Usvah-yi H̄usayni*>13.

The True Purpose of Karbala-Commemorations

The foregoing discussion illustrates that the overarching aim of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s *islah* of the Muharram lamentations was to align mourning-practices with the spirit of Karbala, helping it draw out the mission of Imam H̄usayn more clearly. *The essential aim of Muharram lamentations is, therefore, not to lament, but to preserve and preach the message of Karbala and apply it to one’s life.* The practices associated with the mourning of martyrs of Karbala should therefore also be proper and congruent with the aims of Imam H̄usayn’s mission. Eventually though all this effort is geared towards making possible the implementation of the message of Karbala to one’s religious life in the most concrete fashion: “The lofty goal of H̄usayn expects something different from us: that we model our way of life (*sirat*) after the example of the *H̄usaynī*-paradigm.” An even clearer statement in this regard is found in *Usvah-yi H̄usaynī*. He calls Karbala ‘a didactic institution’ (*madrāsah-yi tarbiyat*) from which the world can learn the utmost principles of virtue, etiquette (*adab*), and a sense of duty that can guarantee their implementation into one’s life.

It is important to note that ‘Ali>Naqvi> does not pit mourning for afflictions (*mash’ib*) against its didactic dimension. Instead he sees the former a natural human response to the events of Karbala that only reinforce the profound latter. He reminds his audience that shedding tears carries immense reward and is certainly worship. Still, one should not forget that Islam’s foremost aim is the reform of human character to which this mourning is geared towards. “Blessed are those who—just the way they are affected by the mourning aspect [of this incident]—also gain from its didactic dimension, and

apply and demonstrate these teachings in a manner akin to what Hūsayn envisaged for the world.”⁵⁰

In *Islam ki ḥikmah nah zindagi*, ‘Ali-Naqvi goes a step further in his exposition of the true purpose of commemorating Karbala: Events of Karbala lead to mourning, the mourning in turn becomes commemoration, the commemoration leads to reflection on the meaning and significance of this incident, and finally these reflections paved the way for practical impact in the lives of human beings. For ‘Ali-Naqvi true mourning would naturally lead to these results: “This calling [of Karbala]—from calamity to mourning and practical impact—necessitated by nature, was to institute this [practice] so that the event is not forgotten, the real benefits of the event are preserved and the real objective of the event is established (*qā’im rahay*)”.⁵¹

More significantly, Karbala represents for ‘Ali-Naqvi the highest ideals and core of Islam. He called it the “true embodiment of Islam”. The reason it is remembered is not because the calamities were suffered by the family of the Prophet but because they embody the core teachings of Islam and for the goals for which these calamities were suffered. Even the minutest details are replete with lessons on every subject that concerns human practical life:

The incident of Karbala, despite its brevity in terms of time [in which it occurred], was the center of the core teachings of Islam. Teaching of every

⁵⁰ Ibid., 142.

⁵¹ A similar argument is made in *Shahid-i insaniyat*, 584:

The reason religious leaders have insisted on mourning and crying and have told of its great rewards in the afterlife is precisely that we will try more and more to listen to and memorize the various incidents in view of these rewards. As a result it will have an impact on our actions. *If through [mourning this] calamity the event was not given this importance, then like every other incident of history this event would have as well been limited to history books; that every child of ours knows this event would not have been possible. And if we were not even familiar with it, how could we have gained any lesson from it?*

Interestingly, words in italics are identical with those in the main body of the text.

practical subject—from the rights of God (*ḥuqūq Allah*) to the rights of [fellow] human beings (*ḥuqūq an-nās*), relating to the character-formation of a family (*tarbiyat-i manzil*), the criterion of governance and rule, culture, an individual or society's life, with respect to the conditions of love, in sum all moral, conceptual and practical teachings—are contained within Karbala. That is why even the minute details of the incident carry such importance that they needed to be conveyed to us...⁵²

On 'Ali>Naqvi's part, raising the question "what is the true purpose of mourning and remembering Karbala?" in this religious and devotional ambience is in itself a novelty. The culturally pervasive impulse of crying was (and remains!) so strong among Shi'i Muslims that no matter in what context the name of Hūsayn is invoked the instantaneous devotional response is tears and wailing. *La>tufsidu>* delivered as Muharram-related lectures, contains an interesting passage where in the middle of his argument to highlight an aspect of Hūsayn's life, 'Ali>Naqvi>seems perplexed as how to avoid making his audience overwhelmed by grief which will make them inattentive to his words.⁵³

Interestingly, 'Ali>Naqvi's prescription for reflection on the Karbala episode and deriving moral and social implications from it was not restricted to Muslims alone. Even those among the non-Muslims who are familiar with the Karbala-episode were invited to the same task. In *Hūsayn ka>payghām 'alam-i insāniyat kay nām* [Hūsayn's Message

⁵² Ibid., 67-8.

⁵³ The words read as follows:

I want to narrate this event in words that although would cause grief but that the impact of this grief do not make us neglect the [deeper] meaning and conclusions. Whatever I am saying please pay heed. I want to narrate in words that are appropriate to the calamity [that occurred]. If there is no grief [caused by my words] then it is an insult to the calamity. But if I try to bring about grief then my purpose [of presenting the meaning and symbolism] will be lost. In this situation I am faced with difficulty. I should relate memory of events (*tazkirah*) that would turn this sermon into a religious gathering (*majlis*) because the relating should be such that it should leave a strong impression. But if you are so affected by emotion that you are drowned in grief then there will be no occasion to ponder over the conclusions that I want to derive. That is why I want to use words which would give this narrative of grief an intellectual bent/mold (118).

to Global Humanity] ‘Ali>Naqvi>addresses his non-Muslim audience as follows: “You who celebrate my [Husayn’s] commemoration and revive my remembrance: its outcome should also be that you are also aware of my goal. Strive to follow this [goal] in your practice. Remember! I do not belong to any particular group. Only the one who reflects on my principles and perspective and learns the lesson from it could benefit from me”.⁵⁴

The preceding paragraphs make it clear that the various historical, polemical, or theological reflections of ‘Ali>Naqvi>s are ultimately in the service of restoring Islamic faith and practices. For a Shi’i community confronted with a deep crisis of religion, the powerful motif of the martyrdom of Husayn at Karbala could prove to be an exceptional resource. ‘Ali>Naqvi>s response to those who have come to see it as socially irrelevant and the burden of a bygone age, Islam can be best preserved and revived by demonstrating its inherent sagacity and social relevance. The powerful events of Karbala which had inspired so many who had come to learn about it represent the core teachings of Islam. By tying together the vision of Islam and its most powerful embodiment on the plains of Karbala, Islam could be returned its eminent social status. Yet, the prevalent misunderstandings about the Karbala episode and what it symbolizes impedes this task. Only when its meaning is made clear and aligned with the mission of Husayn could Karbala be used to carry out the task of religious revival and preservation. Islam can be preserved through Karbala, but for that Karbala itself needed to be preserved. Akin to ‘Ali>Naqvi>efforts to preserve Islam by explaining it, he attempts to preserve Karbala by expositing its deeper meaning and purpose.

⁵⁴ Naqvi> *Husayn ka>paygham*, 24.

Regarding 'Ali> Naqvi's rhetorical style, method of argumentation, and presentation of the Karbala narrative upon which he would base his theological reflections, special mention must be made of his underlying hermeneutical strategy: grounding the Shi'i mythology of martyrdom and the Karbala narrative in history, which we have preferred to call "historicizing mythology". Besides being employed in defense of Karbala commemoration, at times he reconstructs the Karbala-narrative irrespective of this intended defense, along historical lines and through extensive engagement with the historical sources. Let us explore this dimension of his writings and the underlying reasons for it.

PART II: MYTHOLOGIZING HISTORY: ETHICO- RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF THE *HUSA YNI-ISLAH* PARADIGM

Broadly speaking, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s reflections on the Karbala narrative and its employment in the religious cause is a result of two hermeneutical moves: first, grounding every detail of the Karbala-event in the historical sources; second, projecting this historically-grounded narrative back onto theological horizons. The first move can be called “historicizing mythology” and the second, “mythologizing history”. As we have shown in the previous section, it is by ‘historicizing mythology’ that he addresses the widespread confusions within the Shi’i community and rebuts sectarian attacks. Furthermore, by situating Karbala within the broader life of Imam H̄sayn and those of the Prophet and other Imams—therefore with the origins and religio-social vision of Islam—he preempts the misappropriation of this narrative for sociopolitical activism prevalent during his times that tended to abstract this event from its wider historical and theological context. For ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> owing to the lack of attention to historical verification, each in their own way, both the Shi’i devotional piety and contemporary sociopolitical activism had come to misconstrue the meaning of Karbala and purpose of Imam H̄sayn’s mission. Therefore, the first three of the four-fold purposes (listed on page 5) were accomplished through this historicizing of the Shi’i mythology of Karbala and H̄sayn’s Martyrdom.

Already, I have noted the special status ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> has accorded to T̄bari> in historicizing the Karbala-mythology. *Shahid-i insāniyat*, published in 1942 upon the 1300th anniversary of the martyrdom of H̄sayn, is one example where a 584-page work

is dedicated to a historical reconstruction of the complete life of H̄usayn from his birth leading up to his martyrdom to the immediate impact in its aftermath. Again, the historical sources are drawn from both Sunni and Shi'i sources in which T̄abari was overwhelmingly given the foremost status. This engagement with historical sources was to provide an historical account that would be acceptable to all Muslims, regardless of their sectarian affiliations. This hermeneutical scheme was applied to almost every text written by 'Ali-Naq̄vi.⁵⁵

Yet this meticulous attention to the historical details should not be interpreted as plain historicism: once finished with the 'straightening of the historical record', 'Ali-Naq̄vi projects his historically-constructed reading of the life of H̄usayn (including the Karbala episode) back onto the theological plane, the hermeneutical move we have termed "mythologizing history." The goal of historicizing was not simply to determine "what happened then, and why?", but what it means for Shi'i Muslims and humanity today, and what lessons can be drawn from this event. His interest in the past is from the vantage point of *islah* in the present.⁵⁶ "The many precious lessons taught by H̄usayn in Karbala are not such that they could be easily disregarded after being

⁵⁵ For example see *Mujahidah-yi karbala* (1933), *H̄usayn aur Islām* (1932), *Ma'rakah-yi karbala* (1935), *Mah̄rabah-yi karbala* (1936), *Bani-umayyah ki adawat-i Islām ki mukhtasir̄ tarikh* (1963) and *Khilafat-i Yazid kay muta'alliq jazā' arā'in* (1953).

⁵⁶ 'Ali-Naq̄vi's appropriation of the Karbala symbolism is an illustration of what Hodgson termed as the strand of *Kerygmatic* orientation within Muslim personal piety. According to Hodgson, the *kerygmatic* mode of piety "...ultimately is sought in irrevocable datable events, in *history* with its positive moral commitments. In response to a revelatory moment, the environment, particularly historical society as it is and is about to be, may be seen as radically other than what it appears, and the individual is challenged to find fresh ways to respond to its reality." (363) Specifically applied to Shi'ism, Hodgson noted: "Other forms of esotericism were available, in Islam, that proved compatible with the *Jama'is-Sunni*-position; notably an esoteric approach to the inward personal experience of mysticism, into which a disciple could be initiated only by an experienced master. What was distinctive in esoteric Shiism was that it presented a privileged vision of history. It was a *kerygmatic* esotericism" (373). See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

That within Twelver Shi'i piety the paradigm of Karbala provided the essential contours of this vision of history is well documented in scholarship, and obvious from 'Ali-Naq̄vi's reflections on it.

interpreted from an erroneous point of view. They are such that they be made the *modus operandi* of life and instituted as the practical constitution of communal life.”⁵⁷

Between historicizing mythology and mythologizing history, therefore, ‘Ali>Naqvi> completes his appropriation of Karbala-narrative to the task of religious preservation and revival. Numerous examples have already been cited vis-à-vis his historicization of Shi’i mythology. In the ensuing pages then let us examine his mythologizing of history.

In providing an account of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s mythologizing of history *Usvah-yi H[usayni]* [The *H[usayni]*-paradigm] is an appropriate place to begin. In ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s presentation of the authentic *H[usayni]*-paradigm the title of the first chapter *Usvah-yi H[usayni]>ka>hamah gir pahluz ravadari>aur aman pasandi>kay sahh h[amayat-i ba[‘al] say ‘alahh[agi]* (“The Universal Dimension of the *H[usayni]*-Paradigm: With [the intention of] Tolerance and Peacemaking Detachment from Supporting Falsehood”) lays out H[usayn]’s mission in a nutshell. He points out two fundamental principles (*usult-i asasi*) that characterize the *modus operandi* (*tarz-i ‘amal*) of the exemplary leaders and guides of Islam. Since in life there cannot be just activism or just passivism, limits are needed to guide human action. These principles ensure a proper balance between activism and passivism in the realm of human activity in the world. These principles are, “First, the necessity for peace and harmony (*amn va aman*) and the second the severance from aiding falsehood” (15). Islam is ‘peace’ and calls its adherents to be peace lovers (*shulh pasand*). Yet this attitude of peace loving should not become a cause for promoting falsehood (*ba[‘al]*). Yes, Muslims are called to do their utmost to support the cause of

⁵⁷ Naqvi> *Usvah-yi H[usayni]*>131.

peace even when it involves great sacrifices. At the same time, when silence and sacrifice begins to lend a freehand to falsehood nourishing and supporting it, that silence needs to be broken and in clear terms one should disassociate oneself from falsehood. It is these two principles that guide human action as to when they ought to make compromise (passivity) and when to rise up and challenge the status quo (activity). Based on these two principles, on the one hand, a Muslim should always be seeking peace—for its sake even willing to forego his supreme interests—on the other cajoling them into aiding falsehood should be absolutely impossible. The key point is that both principles are simultaneously needed. Without those human action will either be cowardly and lacking in fulfillment of one's duty, or socially harmful and destructive. 'Ali>Naq̄vi> sees the concurrent presence of these two principles in human action best exemplified in the model of the Prophet and his household and symbolize the true teachings of Islam vis-à-vis human action.

Unless they were blamed for aiding falsehood, until that moment no matter how many tribulations they may have to bear—even to the point of giving up their personal interests—peacemaking (*aman pasandi*) prevailed. But when silence becomes supporting falsehood, then at that moment the seal of silence needs to be broken and [certain] steps are necessary to separate [this silence] from the blameworthy [act of] nourishing falsehood (*baṣṭl parvari*). This is what is evident from the *modus operandi* of the Prophet and it is also what is clearly illuminated in the life of the family of the Prophet.⁵⁸

For 'Ali>Naq̄vi> it is through these principles that the human intellect can discern reasons for why at times the Shi'i holy figures chose to stay silent and sought peace, and why at others they chose to rise and fight. Misapplication or misunderstanding regarding how these principles are to be brought together in one's active life will only cause those

⁵⁸ Ibid., 15-18.

prone to domination by their sentiments and feelings to err in judgment regarding how these principles are to be properly juxtaposed in one's life and will misapply them in human activity: "...Upon occasions [deserving] of peace, self-conceited temperaments find peace objectionable and upon occasions [deserving] of battle, weak personalities find battles unacceptable", he observes. As best exemplars of all things Islamic, for 'Ali>Naqvi> the Prophet and his family best illustrated and taught their followers how to concretely apply these principles to one's day-to-day life.

In the subsequent chapters, 'Ali>Naqvi> attempts to demonstrate through examples from the lives of the Prophet, the first two Imams and eventually from the life of H̄usayn how their whole lives were infused with these two fundamental attitudes of tolerance and peacemaking and detachment from supporting falsehood, and a fair poise between these two dispositions. In demonstrating this claim he employs his already noted historical method. Yet having established it historically, in the concluding pages he returns to the significance of these historical details for contemporary society. The chapter is titled "The Consequence of the Aforementioned Events or the Summary of this [Moral] Lesson". He notes how lack of national⁵⁹ unity is a major dilemma of his times which had caused outright denigration of "the other" on the one hand, and lack of zeal for action and apathy toward the state of the Muslim on the other. Lack of fellowship and lack of tolerance had lead to self-centered egotism causing a disturbing degree of sociopolitical demise. For 'Ali>Naqvi>the model of Karbala and principles that made possible the incredible fellowship among the martyrs teaches the world a great

⁵⁹ The term *q̄hum* though translated here as national is intended as religious community and should not be understood in the political sense. Almost without exception 'Ali>Naqvi>uses it to identify a particular communal or religious group, in this case the Shi'i Muslims of India.

lesson in this regard. If paid heed to, these lessons could transform the fate of the nation, breathing new sense of unity within the Muslim community.⁶⁰

Speaking to the larger sociopolitical communal crisis first, ‘Ali>Naqvi>then turns to the more specific application of the *H̄usayni>*paradigm. He observes that every politician and leader of a movement that initiates a movement goes at length to persuade people of their mission. This involves making promises, raising expectations of the future, making people daydream about wealth and power and all sorts of other assurances of a brighter future.⁶¹ Imam H̄usayn’s leadership displayed an entirely different character. He never built false expectations nor made any promises to gather support. In other words, “from his *modus operandi* Imam H̄usayn gave a lesson that one must pay heed to veracity, untainted conscience and trust in the world”. Neither did he take advantage of people’s bewilderment or his lofty sociopolitical status, nor deployed deceit or misinformation. He remained instead always transparent and vocal about the nature of his mission.⁶²

Deriving further implications of the *H̄usayni>*paradigm under the chapter title “Various Lessons” ‘Ali>Naqvi>notes that one of the most important features of the Karbala-episode is that it offers a tangible criterion for human beings to discern the meaning of truth and falsehood, whereby the idea of truth and falsehood and virtue and vice become—no more an abstraction—applicable in concrete practical terms:

The Karbala episode and its practical implication is a huge topic. Every sub-event of this episode is a fountainhead of moral, communal, and religious teachings. Imam H̄usayn embodied all the human perfections and in reality the Karbala episode is an event in which all the characteristics of truth and falsehood

⁶⁰ Naqvi> *Usvah-yi H̄usayni>* 115-6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 130.

came forth without any veils. Before this event the semblances of truth and falsehood were ambiguous, [their] traits were unclear. It is the outcome of Karbala that all the exquisite, beautiful and morally good features contained within truth emerged in front of the world. On the other hand, all the wickedness, faults, horrors, and ferocity within falsehood transpired for the world⁶³ ...

Reflecting further on the events of Karbala, he lists numerous lessons that can be drawn from the incident. These include the two key principles governing human action (i.e., peacemaking and support of truth and refusal to aid falsehood), kindness towards friends and foes⁶⁴, and equitable approach towards all regardless of kinship or other considerations. ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>illustrated each lesson through various examples from the events of Karbala. He further illustrated how these lessons were relevant for his times. For example, in pointing out how Imam Ḥusayn treated all his followers absolutely equally, regardless of racial background, tribal affiliation, or social rank, ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> observes that “through this he [i.e., Imam Ḥusayn] taught how a leader, prince, an officer should treat all those with him equally.”⁶⁵

In sum, the Karbala episode is the repository of all moral and spiritual teachings for the needs of a human being or a human community. Therefore, it is now up to people to learn more about the *Ḥusayni*-paradigm and draw these ethical implications for themselves. Since ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>sees Karbala as emblematic of the pinnacle of Islamic teachings, it could not therefore be simply about ‘love of neighbor’ or ethico-social reforms alone; it is also the supreme expression of a willful submission to the Divine Will in which worshipping God has a pivotal role. Karbala not only taught how to

⁶³ Ibid., 131.

⁶⁴ He writes: “To be generous towards friends is part of the natural temperament of a human being and is no extraordinary feat. To be kind towards those who are willing to fight against you, to help those who thirst your blood is not for every human being.”

⁶⁵ Ibid., 131-7.

respond to the rights of people (*ḥuqūq al-nas*), it equally exemplified how best one may discharge the rights of God (*ḥuqūq Allah*). For example, ‘Ali>Naqvi>points out the night before the battle of ‘Ashura when Imam Husayn asked for a night for himself: “The Imam asked for one night. Why, to see his family, to spend ample time with them, or to give them instructions about future? No! None of that: Only to worship God.” For ‘Ali>Naqvi>the fact that Imam’s sense of duty and responsibility stayed with him all throughout even when he was suffering through the severest calamities is the greatest lesson that Muslims can learn from him.⁶⁶

One may recall how ‘Ali>Naqvi>universalized the figure of H{usayn by positing him as the martyr par excellence of humanity. What are the lessons that nations other than Muslims could learn from his life? Evident from its title, *H{usayn ka>paygham ‘alam-i insaniyat kay nam* [H{usayn’s Message to the Global Humanity], here he addresses his global audience. He begins by introducing H{usayn as an utterly Islamic figure: “You may not have pondered over Islamic teachings but you must have heard the name of Islam. This divine message came to my grandfather, Muhammad the chosen one, to be conveyed to the world.”⁶⁷ He moves on to provide an historical account of events that led to H{usayn’s mission whereby the essential universal teachings of Islam were undermined by the Umayyads, leaving him no option but to strive to save the religion that had become distorted and turned into a tool in the hands of the worldly power of Yazid. The same idolatry that the Prophet of Islam had come to abolish was reinstated by this worldly power: “I plainly refused to pay allegiance to Yazid. I knew

⁶⁶ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁷ Naqvi> *H{usayn ka>paygham*, 4.

what would happen to me in that case, and I was prepared for it.”⁶⁸ Going through the details of the later events leading up to the battle of Karbala, ‘Ali>Naq̣i> closes his presentation of Ḥsayn’s message with the following words: “This is my [Ḥsayn’s] message for you: to achieve pious and holy goals do not be afraid of the difficulties of the world. This is the true essence of your humanity.”⁶⁹

It is almost impossible to encompass all the various moral, religious, and social implications ‘Ali>Naq̣i> drew from his reflections on the Karbala episode. In conclusion therefore let me turn to one of the most important works written on Karbala and Ḥsayn in the twentieth century, *Shahid-i insaniyat* [The Martyr of Humanity], where ‘Ali>Naq̣i>’s project of religious revival through Karbala and his hermeneutic of “historicizing mythology and mythologizing history” is witnessed most clearly. After devoting over five hundred pages of historical reconstruction of the whole episode (historicizing mythology), he turns to the various implications of this event for contemporary Muslims (mythologizing history). Without providing all the arguments below I list the various lessons cited by him which, it is hoped, will bring to light in a summary fashion the range of his many reflections on this subject that are dispersed throughout his writings:

1. Change of mindset (*tabdili>yi zahniyat*), 536
2. Demonstration of the power of religion and spirituality, 539

⁶⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 24. In *Ḥsayn Ḥsayn*, ‘Ali>Naq̣i> makes similar observations:

The figure of Ḥsayn does not belong to any limited community or religion but to the world of humanity....Who was this person who without hesitating for a second presents sacrifices with so much planning and ease in support of principles and preservation of the truth? On this basis all humanity is called upon to display sympathy by participating in the 1300th anniversary of Ḥsayn’s commemoration and strengthen the objective for which he gave this unique sacrifice (40).

3. Affirmation and propagation of Islam's veracity, 540

Under moral and cultural teachings he lists the following:

4. Freedom, 543
5. Perseverance, 544
6. Collective discipline, 546
7. Dignity ('*izzat-i nafs*'), 548
8. Patience, 550
9. Sacrifice for others, 553
10. Empathy, 555
11. Good dealings with others, 555
12. Sympathy for human beings, 558
13. Truthfulness, 559
14. Peacemaking and tolerance, 564
15. Sacrifice, 573

Finally, the following were grouped under "Miscellaneous Teachings (574)":

16. Veiling, 574
17. Arranging for a will before death, 578
18. Reverence for Divine laws, 581
19. Remembering forefathers, 581
20. Nobility, 581⁷⁰

The list provided in *Shahid-i insaniyat* is far from being exhaustive of the various lessons 'Ali>Naq̄vi> derived from his reflections. Interspersed in all his writings, be those

⁷⁰ Closing the book, 'Ali>Naq̄vi> reiterates how the true purpose of mourning is neither to seek intercession or to wail H̄sayn's death but to apply his teachings to one' life.

on the Karbala-narrative explicitly or on another subject, are found numerous others. Nevertheless, the summary presented here gives us a sense of how rich the event was in its symbolic depth for ‘Ali>Naqvi> and how wide ranging were his reflections on this subject.

CONCLUSION: The Relationship between ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s Reconfiguration of Islamic Theology and Praxis and the *Husayni>Islah* Paradigm

In the beginning of the chapter it was noted that the *Husayni>Islah* Paradigm is the alternative method ‘Ali>Naqvi> used for his project of religious revival. It is timely now to reflect on how the two modes relate to one another. Briefly stated, there are two ways in which the two strands of his writings relate to one another: First, the *Husayni>* paradigm was a way to bolster and augment the proofs arrived at through ‘*aq*’-based arguments, and second, it stretched the gamut and perimeters of ‘Religion’ (*mazhab*) established through the reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis (as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3). Let us examine each in turn.

Since for ‘Ali>Naqvi> the religious truths need to be demonstrated with ‘*aq*’, Karbala-related reflections cannot be used as arguments for the principle of faith of the religious tradition. Yet, once the veracity of religious beliefs is established and illustrated through ‘*aq*’, the *Husayni>* paradigm can help reinforce this intellectual assent at the levels of human emotion and psychology. In other words, through reinforcement from the exemplary lives of the Imams, especially Husayn, one may be led to deepen one’s convictions in religious beliefs and practice. This way of relating the two strands

is best illustrated in his essay, “Belief in the Unseen” (*Imān bi al-ghayb*), the full text of which is discussed in Appendix II.⁷¹

Seen this way, the *Husayni*-paradigm illustrates and brings home the full implications of the beliefs assented to by the ‘*aqī*’. In this, the *Husayni*-paradigm exemplifies how religious convictions are lived and embodied in their most perfect mode. Due to their immense love and devotion for the family of the Prophet and the Karbala-narrative, the audience is cajoled and exhorted to replicate this exemplary behavior in their own lives.

Second, the Karbala-paradigm also allowed ‘Ali Naqvi to expand the definition of ‘religion’, which is demonstrated in his writings on the reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis. Whereas the reconfiguration project presents the Islamic faith in its bare-bone skeleton through the broader contours of its essential creed and praxis, his reflections on the Karbala-paradigm fills in the missing pieces through a discussion of the inner comportment and commitments that are needed to fulfill these responsibilities in the most consummate manner. The essential definition and sketch of the religion of Islam ‘Ali Naqvi>outlined in his writings is limited in scope and barely encompass all the various levels and dimensions that collectively makeup that “life-orientational”⁷² phenomenon we term “religion”. It is in view of the limitedness of this ‘*aqī*’-based religious theology and praxis that in ‘Ali Naqvi>’s writings on the subject of reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis, there are ample allusions to the Karbala

⁷¹ See *Nigarshat-i Sayyidul ‘ulama’* (Lahore: Imamia Mission, 1997).

⁷² I am drawing on Hodgson (1974) for this definition of religion: “In a person's life, we can call “religious” in the most restricted sense (in the sense of ‘spiritual’), his ultimate cosmic orientation and commitments and the ways in which he pays attention to them, privately or with others. Properly, we use the term “religious” for an ultimate orientation (rather than “philosophical” or “ideological”), so far as the orientation is personally committing and is meaningful in terms of cosmos, without further precision of what this may come to.” Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, 88.

narrative. Perhaps that is the reason why in his presentation of any topic ‘Ali>Naqvi> would take advantage of every opportunity to incorporate the *Husayni*-paradigm so that the meaning of the life-orientational religious convictions are not understood in their limited outward dimensions alone.

If I have been able to make a convincing case for “reviving Islam through Karbala”, it is hoped that this discussion has also been able to illustrate ways in which ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s reflections on the *Husayni*-paradigm contributed toward a broader conception of ‘Islam’. In other words, one must not take ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s definition of religion as *ushūl* (principles/creed) and *furuʿ* (branches/praxis) as rigid or final: The lengthy list of lessons learned from the life of Husayn provided by him in *Shahid-i insaniyat* and numerous other texts clearly forestalls this conception.

The relationship between ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s writings on the reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis and his reflections on Karbala can be summed up as follows: From one point of view, what happened at Karbala is a concrete proof of the religious commitments established by intellectual reflection. From another, the Karbala-paradigm conveys what these commitments entail in the first place. With mutual support, both modes help accomplish the vital task of preserving and reviving religion.

‘Ali>Naqvi>’s careful *islah* of the Karbala mourning practices in the Indian Shi’i milieu did not always go uncontested or without controversy. Publication of *Shahid-i insaniyat* is one example in this regard. On the 1300th anniversary of Husayn’s martyrdom in 1942, attempts were made by the Shi’ites of India to commemorate the occasion in a fitting manner. For that an editorial board of prominent intellectuals, scholars, and community leaders was setup in Lucknow to oversee the publication of a

major work summarizing the complete life of H̄usayn and his martyrdom. ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> took upon himself to write that book. The first draft of the book was submitted for the editorial review with a clear note on the first page stating that it was only a draft to be corrected in light of the comments and corrections suggested by the board. For reasons not entirely clear, the manuscript—including the note that this is simply a draft, not the edited proof—was published and widely distributed, without ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s prior consent or permission. Huge criticisms were leveled against ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> in regards to his analysis and account of early Islamic history. Grounding his analysis in textual sources, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> had brought to fore certain historical evidence that did not sit well with the popular Shi’i imaginations about the doctrine of Imamate and the events of Karbala. For example, Naq̄vi> noted that on the eve of 8th or 9th of Muharram, ‘Abbas (H̄usayn’s step-brother) along with a few companions of H̄usayn were able to secure water for H̄usayn’s army.⁷³ For popular Shi’i piety, availability of water ran counter to the narrative of H̄usayn’s great suffering at Karbala. Furthermore, instead of the popular conception of events of Karbala as predestined fate of H̄usayn that is to be mourned, throughout the text Naq̄vi> emphasized how carefully—almost calculatedly—H̄usayn assessed his options to succeed in his mission. In that the mythical Imam was turned into a historical human figure. In all, to present H̄usayn as *martyr of humanity* necessitated his *humanization* which was not acceptable to the popular Shi’i sensibilities. In other words, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s historicizing of the Shi’i mythology in this case did not impress his audience. Strong resentment followed publication of this unedited manuscript: preachers spoke openly against ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>; subaltern scholars passed *fatvās* condemning him, and

⁷³ See p.418 of the unedited version published in 1942. I am indebted to Dr. Sachedina for highlighting the significance of this incident and providing me his copy of this unedited text.

the book was also publicly torn and burned.⁷⁴ In any case, as a result of this controversy, ‘Ali>Naqvi> decided to take the manuscript back, made extensive revisions, and finally the revised edition was published in 1945.⁷⁵

Notwithstanding this controversy, in conclusion, for ‘Ali>Naqvi>Shi’i Muslims’ utter devotion to the family of the Prophet and their mourning of the event of Karbala presented an enormous opportunity and conduit for accomplishing the task of religious preservation, propagation, and revival. The Karbala episode carries immense symbolic power and needed to be carefully channeled so that it could be used as a springboard for the religious training of his audience. I use the term “training” instead of instruction simply because ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s numerous meditations on the theme of Karbala deal not only with matters related to the principles of religion (*ushūl ad-dīn*) and branches of religion (*furu’ ad-dīn*), that is, basic theology and law; its all-encompassing scope extends to also incorporate socio-political matters and inner moral comportment. In other words, these writings go way beyond simply teaching doctrinal beliefs or basic practices. They are intended to instill a religious consciousness capable of transforming

⁷⁴ According to the biography of ‘Ali>Naqvi> *Sayyidul ‘Ulama’: Life and Accomplishments (Sayyidul ‘ulama’: ḥayāt aur kaṣnāmāy*, 73ff) and a recent essay “Life of Sayyidul ‘ulama’” published in *Khandan-i ijtihaḥ* (Nov, 2010), the defamation of ‘Ali>Naqvi> was a result of sustained propaganda to curb the growing influence of ‘Ali>Naqvi> upon the Shi’ites of North India which had increasingly undermined the authority of the preachers. It must be mentioned that the authors’ view is colored by their extreme reverence for ‘Ali>Naqvi>. I have not been able to verify all the details of the controversy and have mostly relied on the articles listed above. In this regard, one can also mention Hyder (2006) who made the following observations regarding this controversy:

‘Ali>Naqvi> wrote [this book] ...about the need to universalize Husain’s struggle in order to benefit all of humanity, as well as to unite Muslims in reverence and devotion towards Husain. Subsequently, he was severely reprimanded by members of his own community from glossing over the “crimes” of the first three caliphs in order to appease the Sunnis. Naqvi>’s critics asserted that any oversight in such matters amount to endorsing the misdeeds of the enemies of the Prophet’s family. One such critic reminds Naqvi> that “Husain was murdered at the gathering in which Abu Bakr was elected” (80).

⁷⁵ It is worth noting that the later edition kept the incident about availability of water. This time, however, he mentions it as one report among many (p. 300 of the revised edition published in 2006). It is also worth noting that the unedited text did not have footnotes while the revised edition extensively cites the various historical sources.

the outward and inward religious life altogether, bringing meaning and purpose to everything that is performed therein. Seen from this point of view the scope of these writings is much wider and their function much greater than teaching the basics, which was the purpose of his writings on the configuration of religious theology and praxis.

‘Ali>Naqvi’s religio-intellectual project owes immensely to the figure of H̄usayn and the tragic events of Karbala. Our discussion has shown ways in which the *H̄usayni*-paradigm has contributed to ‘Ali>Naqvi’s goal of religious revival in buttressing his reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis and in enriching the definition of religion itself. One of the recurring themes of *Shahid-i insaniyat* is H̄usayn’s utter loyalty to Islamic Shari’a throughout his life; ‘Ali>Naqvi>presents H̄usayn as protector of Shari’a reminding his audience of the significance of the Divine Law.⁷⁶ In view of our discussion it is hardly surprising then why ‘Ali>Naqvi>would claim that in “explaining Islam” he could not find a historical figure more fitting and compelling than H̄usayn.⁷⁷ That is why fully aware of this indebtedness to H̄usayn and his mission, he never tired of praising him:

O H̄usayn b. ‘Ali! My greetings to you. Till the last moment you did not let go of your sense of duty or of calmness and patience. You sacrificed your life, dignity, everything. You did not deem anything more worthy than your grandfather’s Shari’a. You made the world remember the lesson of true *tauhid*. You died temporarily but gave new life to Islam. Every drop of your blood that touched the ground of Karbala breathed new spirit into the Shari’a. Religion

⁷⁶ Calling H̄usayn “protector of Shari’a” deserves some explanation. The text *Muslim Personal Law na q̄ābil-i tabdi* contains a really interesting observation by ‘Ali>Naqvi>Here he remarked that people always ask what difference did the sacrifice of H̄usayn make to the Islamic world? What was different in the aftermath of Karbala? Is it not that corrupt rulers continued to rule and that most cruel and ruthless rulers followed Yazid? ‘Ali>Naqvi>forcefully argues that until Yazid, every Islamic ruler’s *Sunnah* was incorporated into Shari’a. He notes various examples in this regard. What changed with H̄usayn’s martyrdom was that after his sacrifice never again the *Sunna* of a political leader became part of Islamic Shari’a.

⁷⁷ Reference to the quotation cited on page 1 of this chapter.

owes you its life and Islam can never return you your beneficence (*ahsan*)⁷⁸ toward it. On our behalf may God present you with the gift of blessings.⁷⁹

⁷⁸Literally, “raise its head in the face of your favor/beneficence”.

⁷⁹Naqvi, *Bani-Umayyah ki-'adawat-i Islam ki-tarikh* (?), 16.

CHAPTER V: THE LATER WRITINGS AND 'ALI>NAQVI'S *ISLAH* OF THE SOCIETY

Introduction

In the preceding chapters we have seen how in the first two decades of his intellectual career 'Ali>Naqvi>articulated his understanding of the multiple crises faced by his Shi'i and the broader Indian Muslim community. We noted that for him, especially in his capacity as the religious leader of the community, the crisis of religion was paramount among the many pressing contemporary problems. In regards to the religious crisis, he pointed out the underlying intellectual currents, prevalent misunderstandings that had led to the relegation of religion to the private sphere, and concerns among his interlocutors regarding what relevance religion could have in fixing the sociopolitical problems of the day. During these years, he also began to formulate a comprehensive response to this crisis in which he attempted to overcome various prevailing dichotomies such as *din/dunya*>(Religion/the Hereafter), *dunya/akhirah* (life of the world/the Afterlife), *'aql/mazhab* (intellect/revelation) and *'aql/ah'amal* (faith/works). The ultimate aim of these writings and speeches was to restore religion to its pivotal status within Indian Shi'i society, by continually emphasizing and demonstrating to his audience religion's comprehensive scope and nature. The picture that emerged from these writings is that of unity of life and religion: religion is not a sphere of life but embraces its every aspect and dimension. He endeavored to prove to his skeptical audience the underlying wisdom of Islamic teachings in establishing a peaceful and vibrant society. In other words, for 'Ali>Naqvi> religion, in the grandest sense, is the sagacious ordering of human life and communities.

At this juncture it is relevant to explain at length¹ the basis for the early-later distinction we have employed throughout this study. It is with *Masa'il va dala'il* [Problems and Proofs] ((1944) that the first phase of 'Ali>Naqvi's religion-intellectual project formally closes. As has been shown in the preceding chapters, this is the period during which he lays out the various crises facing the Indian Shi'i community, the most critical of which was the crisis of religion, while also responding systematically to this crisis. In a series of writings that begin with *La>tufsidu>fi al-'arz*(1935) and end with *Masa'il va dala'il* (1944), he formulated a comprehensive response to the various challenges posed by the Indian cultural and intellectual context that were undermining religion's status in the Indian society. All the various crises he listed in *La>tufsidu>* a series of lectures, were already addressed by 1944, within less than a decade. In other words, the first phase of 'Ali>Naqvi's intellectual career is geared towards reconfiguring the foundations of Islam along intellectual lines that would be persuasive to his skeptical audience, demonstrating to it that at its core, the religious vision is sagacious and absolutely indispensable for the wellbeing of society. It is only after the basic foundations of religion are clarified and systematized that 'Ali>Naqvi>chose to speak about a more extensive role that religion should play within a society. In view of these challenges, in the early years 'Ali>Naqvi>endeavored to reformulate Islam's fundamental principles, creed, and practices in order to make them intelligible and palatable to contemporary Muslims, especially those who were under the influence of Western thought and culture.

¹ I have also discussed this briefly in chapter 3.

The middle of the 1940s inaugurated the second phase of 'Ali>Naqvi's intellectual career that would last until his death in 1988. During this phase he lectured unabatedly and authored many works. While constantly elaborating and clarifying many of these themes from the earlier phase, during this period, he also broadened the scope of his subjects by branching out to address more directly the sociopolitical issues fiercely debated in the Indian milieu. In incorporating issues as varied as Islamic history, Islamic political philosophy, and Islamic principles, 'Ali>Naqvi's vision of the comprehensive meaning and function of religion (as posited by him during the earlier phase) remained decisive and remains, moreover, crucial to our understanding of his later writings: If nothing is outside the ambit of an all-embracing religious viewpoint, then every human sphere at an individual or communal level is a religious sphere. There is no human space independent of religion where religion does not have something to offer.

A logical corollary of his religious viewpoint is that his later writings, especially those on sociopolitical subjects, must not be portrayed in some secular light, but rather as part of his broader religious project. In other words, 'Ali>Naqvi's writings on topics as wide as history, political philosophy, culture, economics, and everything in between are at best simply an extension of this religious vision onto these spheres. They are, furthermore, his demonstration to his audience regarding how as a comprehensive code of life, Islam does not leave any sphere of life unattended and unaccounted for. Having restituted the "basic foundations" of the Islamic religion, the writings from these later years were intended as an extension of his religious vision of Islam to the realms of economics, social life, culture, and politics to arrive at what he saw as Islam's comprehensive teachings and vision of a human society. More importantly, in these

writings he draws a direct correlation between the foundations of Islam, that is religious faith and practice (*ushūl* and *furuʿ*), and these other teachings. As asserted in the early years by him, this way of presenting these teachings is a necessary consequence of his assumption that Islam is an interconnected unity, a whole. It is also significant that while extending his thought to these new intellectual territories, he does not carve any novel trajectories. In other words, the basic outline of his thought discussed in the previous chapter hardly witnesses any change: His *ushūl-furuʿ* scheme, and other categories worked out in the early years remain definite for the later period as well, with no noticeable shift or modification.

The same period also witnessed clarification and further development of many themes from the formative period. Besides these writings, there are many others which, although seemingly resistant to a neat and simple classification, bring to the fore a host of themes and topics. The range of topics he took up during his later intellectual career displays much more diversity and seemingly belies any claims of unity for his religio-intellectual project. It will be the burden of this chapter to show that, on the contrary, these later writings are very much part of one holistic view of religion and are clearly related to his earlier works.

By way of a review of his later writings and their prominent themes, the present chapter provides an overview of his later intellectual career and how it relates to what we have thus far called the formative years of his religio-intellectual thought. I will highlight the reasons he chose certain topics during this period and his method of argumentation and presentation.

PART I: AN OVERVIEW OF ‘ALI>NAQVI’S LATER WRITINGS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EARLIER WRITINGS

To clarify the underlying unity of the intent and purpose of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s corpus, especially the relationship between the earlier and later phases of his religio-intellectual project, it is best to begin with an overview of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s later intellectual career. To accomplish this most efficiently, I have used a certain classification based at once on ‘Ali>Naqvi’s intent in authoring certain treatises and their respective subject matter. There is, however, an obvious challenge for this scheme: whereas the diversity of seemingly unrelated subjects about which he wrote belies any claims for the underlying unity of these works, his intent in choosing those particular topics and way in which he argues his positions display patent overlaps among these writings. Consequently, one treatise could simultaneously be classified under several categories. While I am attentive to the limitations of this scheme, this classification still provides an effective way of situating his writings in their proper intellectual context, in elaborating how they relate to one another, and especially how they relate to his earlier works. In other words—and this is most crucial after all—the classification elucidates the deeper unity that underlies ‘Ali>Naqvi’s diverse writings.

Continuities

As noted earlier, many of the themes highlighted in the preceding chapters regarding ‘Ali>Naqvi’s response to the crisis of religion continue unabated till his death. These include the elaboration of the crisis faced by the community, the challenges posed

by Western thought, the clarification of the true relationship between religion and reason, the underlying wisdom of religious and Shari'ite teachings, providing an intellectual justification of the Islamic faith (*ushūl*) and practices (*furuʿ*), the all-encompassing ambit of religion and, finally, the theme and symbolism of the Karbala episode which he unceasingly employed in elaborating the Islamic vision of human life and community.

Having sufficiently explicated the crisis of religion, he returned to the unique challenges faced by Muslims during his time, the problem of growing atheism and materialism, for example, in *Khuda>parasti>aur maʿdiyāt ki>jang* [The Battle between Worship of God and Materialism] (1959) and *Khuda>aur mazhab*, [God and Religion] (1970)², and the question of pluralism in essays such as *Islām aur vah̄ḥat-i adyan* [Islam and The Unity of Religions] (1973).

Regarding religious faith and practice, during these later years, if, on the one hand, 'Ali>Naqvi>provides a summary overview of the Islamic religion in treatises such as *Mazhab shi'ah aik naz̄r main* [Shi'i Religion: An Overview] (1970), *Ushūl va arkan-i din* [Principles and Branches of Religion], on the other, he also continued to penetrate into the inherent wisdom of particular religious doctrines and practices in writings such as *Zat va s̄fat* [Divine Essence and Attributes] (1960), Divine Justice 'Adl [Divine Essence and Attributes] (1959), *Ma'ad* ["Return to God/the Final Judgment"] (1954), *Jabr va ikhtiyar* ["Predestination ad Freewill"] (1962), *Namaz* ["Canonical Prayer"]

² In passing, one may also mention that the full title of the latter essay is "God and Religion: Logical Analysis of Lord [Bertrand] Russell's Questions". This essay was written as a response to the list of points made by Russell in his well-known work *Why I am not a Christian and other Essays on religion and Related Subjects* (1959). A former colleague and friend of 'Ali>Naqvi>from Pakistan had summarized from this text Russell's various objections against religion, translated those into Urdu and mailed those in a letter to 'Ali>Naqvi>for his feedback. This essay is 'Ali>Naqvi>'s reply to these objections.

(1959), and *Hājj* [“The Pilgrimage”] (?). For example, in a text we have already cited, *Ibaḍat aur ṭhriq̄ji ‘ibaḍat* [Worship and Manner of Worship]³, which is key to ‘Ali-Naq̄vi’s exposition of the meaning and purpose of religious rituals enjoined upon its followers,⁴ he brought to fore the importance of human intention in religious practice. The key distinction is between the manner of worship and the Object of worship. The Object of worship pertains to human intention and informs the human mindset which is much more effective than simply following a particular manner of worship. There are obvious benefits of performing worship-rites in a proper manner; fasting purifies the physical body, while prayer is an excellent exercise for the human body. These benefits, however, are limited to the act itself, and to the parts that perform them. It is intention that takes the benefits beyond the act itself, transforming other aspects of human life in the process.⁵

Furthermore, in these writings, almost invariably, his analysis tended to underscore the universality of the message of Islam and its teachings and prescriptions. This point is confirmed further in his works such as *Qur’aṅ kay bayan al-aq̄jami-irshad̄at* [Universal Directives of the Qur’an] (1976), *‘Aḷami-mushkilat̄ ka-h̄l* [Solution to the problems of the world] (?), and *Qur’aṅ-i majid̄ kay andaz-i guftagu-main ma‘yar-i tahziḅ va ravadari* [“Criterion of Civility and Tolerance in the Manner of Speech of the Glorious Qur’an”] (1976).

³ See Chapter 3.

⁴ I have only been able to access the second edition of this text (Imamia publication number 704). In view of this, a conclusive claim as to whether the text belongs to the earlier phase of ‘Ali-Naq̄vi’s intellectual career cannot be made. Nevertheless, the consistency of the claims made here with his other writings—whether from the earlier or later phase—permits my observations here and in chapter 3.

⁵ Naq̄vi, *Ibaḍat aur ṭhriq̄ji ‘ibaḍat* [Worship and Manner of Worship], 11-20.

Similarly, he continued to explicate the *H{usayni>islāh}* paradigm by pondering over the various aspects of the events of Karbala, and the lives of the holy Shi'i Imams. In this regard, one may mention the following writings: *H{usayni>iqhlām ka>pahla>qhdam* [The First Step of H{usayn's Endeavors] (1953), *Maqḥḥad-i H{usayn* [H{usayn's Objective] (1956), *Ashk-i maṭam* [Tears of Mourning] (1957), *Karbala ki>yadgar payas* [The Memorable Thirst of Karbala] (1959), *Diḥ panāh ast H{usayn* [H{usayn: The Protector of Religion] (1956/1959), *'Aza>yi H{usayn ki>ahamiyat* [The Significance of H{usayn's Mourning] (1959), *Karbala ka tarikhi>vaḥj'ah mukhtasir hay ya tūkani?* [Whether the Historical Event of Karbala is Short or Long?] (1960), *Yad aur yadgar* [Remembrance and Memorial] (1968), and *Mi'raj-i insāniyat* [The Pinnacle of Humanity] (1969).

Besides the figure of H{usayn and the event of Karbala, 'Ali>Naḡvi>also continued to introduce the lives of the other holy figures of Shi'i Islam, including the Prophet, in works such as, *Rahbar-i kamil: Savānih'i 'Ali>* [The Perfect Guide: Life of 'Ali] (1961) and *Rasul-i Khuda>* [The Prophet of God] (1961).

Among the themes that have remained uninterrupted between the two phases of 'Ali>Naḡvi>'s intellectual career are, on the one hand the defense of Islam against criticisms from non-Muslim interlocutors (i.e., from the Missionary-Orientalist complex⁶) on many issues, including the status of women in Islam⁷, the basis of

⁶ I have borrowed this term from Khalidi. See Tarif Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam across the Centuries*, (New York: Doubleday, 2009), p. 247. Khalidi's discussion of modern *Sira*-writing confirms my discussion of the deep sense of crisis within the Islamic world during the modern period. Later chapters examine how the various sociopolitical and religious challenges have shaped the way the biography of the Prophet was written in the modern period. Note, for example, the following passages from the chapter "The Hero: Muhammad in Modern Biography"

In many ways Shawqi's poem prefigures the specter that haunts modern *Sira*. How do we best defend our beloved prophet from an all out Western assault on both his religion and his personal character? On the other hand, how can we retell his life in a manner that accords with the "spirit of modernity"? (247)

women's veiling⁸, and the defense of Shari'a rulings regarding marriage and family law⁹; on the other, the defense of particular Shi'i doctrines and practices against the recurrent

Or later in the concluding section of the chapter:

When one scans this cluster of Egyptian biographies of the 1930s, one's first impression might be that they are characterized by strident rhetoric, arguments passionate in the polemic, a view of the past that puts into the shade all human history before Mohammed, a style that is overly lyrical and lavish with comparatives and superlatives. It may well be that in the period in which many of the authors could not openly attacked the Imperial power or its native surrogates, attacking the "Orientalists" and the "missionaries" was an indirect form of religious or national protest. In such an age, Mohammed symbolic importance as leader, hero, genius, and unifier gains new urgency. The burning political issues of the day, such as the struggle for independence, the morality of politics, religion, and science, and the status of women lie just below the surface of the biographies, and Muhammad's example is the ever living and manifest guide. (280)

As Khalidi himself shows—and discussed later in this chapter—the Indian milieu was hardly any different. In the South Asian context as well there has been a surge in the *Sira* literature during this period and remains to be studied.

⁷ For example, "Woman and Islam" (*'Aurat aur Islam*) in *Shu'a-i 'amal*, (May 2009), p.6-13. The role and status of women in Muslim societies has been widely debated in the contemporary period. There is a plethora of literature on this subject. See for example, "Women in Contemporary Islamic Thought" in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, Ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2006); John L. Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982); Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, John L. Esposito *Islam, Gender, & Social Change*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Fatima Mernissi and Mary Jo Lakeland, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Ruth Roded, *Women in Islam and the Middle East: A Reader*, (New York: I.B. Tauris & Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Therese Saliba, Carolyn Allen, and Judith A. Howard, *Gender, Politics, and Islam*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Meena Sharify-Funk, *Encountering the Transnational: Women, Islam and the Politics of Interpretation*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008); Ahmed E. Souaiaia, *Contesting Justice: Women, Islam, Law, and Society*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); and Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For the South Asian context Ashraf 'Ali>Thaavi>and Barbara Daly Metcalf. *Perfecting Women: Maulana>Ashraf 'Ali>Thaawi's Bihishti Zewar: A Partial Translation with Commentary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

⁸ *Isbat-i pardah* (Lahore: Imamia Mission, 1961).

⁹ "*Qanun-i shari'at-i islami> main tabdiki> kay muta'alliq hamarak nazhiyah*" in *Zindah savakat* [Contemporary Questions], (Aligarh: Aligarh University Press, 1971). In this regard mention must also be made of his Muharram lectures delivered at Husayniyah in 1973 where he spoke on the subject for the full ten days. These lectures were published later under the title *Muslim personal law na>qabil-i tabdik*, (Lucknow: Imamia Mission, 1996). Combined, these writings and lectures show that in the early 1970s, 'Ali>Naqvi>was quite concerned and had given sustained attention to the question of "change" in the Islamic personal law. I have already mentioned relevant studies regarding debates surrounding Shari'a law in contemporary times and in the Indian milieu. An aspect of that debate revolved around Muslim personal law. In this regard, see Asiya Alam "Polygyny, Family and Sharafat: Discourses amongst North Indian Muslims, circa 1870–1918" in *Modern Asian Studies*, FirstView (2010): 1-38; Eleanor Newbiggin "Personal Law and Citizenship in India's Transition to Independence" in *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 1 (2011): 7–32; M. Reza Pirbhai, "Codification and a 'New' Sober Path" in *Reconsidering Islam in a South*

polemical criticisms from Sunni scholars and intellectuals.¹⁰ These latter works correspond to his earlier writings on similar subjects such as *Mut'ah aur Islām* [Temporary Marriage and Islam] (1933) and *Uṣūl-i dīn aur Qur'aṅ* [Principles of Religion and the Qur'an] (1930).¹¹

In classifying the above-mentioned works as apologetics, a defense of Islam, or its Shi'i interpretation, I do not intend to preclude thematic or methodological overlaps with his other writings; this classification is based on 'Ali>Naqvi's primary motive in choosing to write on a specific subject. Moreover, not only do 'Ali>Naqvi's apologetics address more than one subject or theme in a treatise, they also reveal a shared hermeneutical approach. For example, unless his interlocutor leveled an objection on purely textual grounds, therefore demanding text-based arguments from him, no matter what subject he takes up, he argues, first and foremost, on intellectual (*'aqlī*) grounds. My discussion of 'Ali>Naqvi's hermeneutics and the central role accorded to *'aql*¹² in his religio-intellectual project should make it clear why intellectual arguments were given primacy in his exposition. That is why, even when responding through text-based

Asian Context, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), especially 123ff. It is significant to note that around the same time when 'Ali>Naqvi was thinking and writing a defense of Muslim personal law, i.e., the early 1970s, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board was established by the initiative of the Deobandi 'ulama' whose function was to protect Muslim personal law in the Indian public sphere. The Shi'i counterpart of this came much later, in 2005, under the title All Indian Shi'a Personal Law Board. Furthermore, the famous controversial case of Shah Bano in early 1980s only reinforced the debate surrounding Muslim personal law (See Zaman (2004, p.167 –170). Recent studies suggest that the debate continues into the present century; see Justin Jones, "Signs of Churning: Muslim Personal Law and Public Contestation in Twenty-First Century India." *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. Special Issue 01 (2010): 175-200.

¹⁰In this regard the following works can be cited: *Yaziḍ aur jang-i qisṭantīniyah* ["Yaziḍ and the Battle of Constantinople"] (1965), *Khilāfat-i yaziḍ kay muta'aliq jazā'ih ara'sīn* ["Free Opinions about the Caliphate of Yaziḍ"] (1964); *Taqīyah* ["Pious Dissimulation"] (1952); and two lectures delivered in 1973 on *Mas'alah-yi ḥḥyaḥ an-nabi>aur vaqf'ah-yi vafat-i rusūḥ* ["The Issue of whether the Prophet is Alive" and the "Incident of Prophet's Death"] (1973).

¹¹ The reader may recall from chapter 1 that the latter work was 'Ali>Naqvi's response to an Ahmadi-interlocutor who had objected that the doctrine of Imamate is not grounded in the Qur'an, and is therefore, superfluous and erroneous.

¹² See chapter 2.

arguments, he would turn to support those via logical, historical, and/or intellectual proofs. This overlapping of “the rational” and “the textual” here, like elsewhere, is a hallmark of his method and was applied universally in his writings and lectures, regardless of the nature of the debate or his interlocutor/audience.

Besides these works there is one more theme that has been consistent throughout ‘Ali>Naqvi’s intellectual career, writings that would be classified as those authored for purely religious purposes, to provide guidance on juridical, religious, and spiritual matters. These include a compilation of his religious rulings, *Tuhfatul ‘avam* (1962), an explanation of basic religious practices and obligations such as the already mentioned *‘Ibaadat aur t̤ariq̤-i ‘ibaadat* [Worship and Manner of Worship] (?), and other writings such as *Khums* [Shi’i Religious Tax] (1956), and *Safar namaḥ-yi Hājj* [The Journey of Pilgrimage] (1977), and finally, a discussion of virtues, either independently, or by way of reflection on the lives of the Shi’i holy figures. In this regard one may mention *Hāqīqat-i ṣabr* [Reality of Patience] (1964), *Mujassamah-yi insāniyat* [Embodiment of Humanity] (1961), *Nafs-i mut̤ma’innah* [The Content Soul] (1968), *Va’dah-yi jannat* [Promise of Heaven] (1979), *Mi’raj-i insāniyat: ṣiḥat-i rasuḥ aur aḥ-i rasuḥ ki-roshni>main* [Pinnacle of Humanity in Light of the Exemplary Models of the Prophet and his Household] (1969), *Shuja’at kay miṣali>kaḥḥamāy* [Exemplary Deeds of Bravery] (1954) and *Rahnumāyān-i Islām* [Exemplary Deeds of Bravery] (1962). The latter is in fact, a compilation of shorter essays on the lives and moral examples of each of the fourteen holy figures of Shi’i Islam, those written during the latter half of the 1930s and early 1940s. All these works were later additions to the body of literature that was intended to provide religious and juridical guidance, for example, *Ṣāḥiḥ al-‘amal* [The Book of

Religious Practice], 1939), a compilation of particular prayers and practices associated with the religious occasions within the Islamic calendar. ‘Ali>Naqvi>carefully reviewed this compilation from another scholar and wrote an attestation of its contents (*tausiq*) and an endorsement of its importance.

In sum, many of the themes and concerns that had motivated ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s writings during the early years continued through later years as well. Yet, this is only half the story: the later phase of his intellectual career saw him undertaking new projects and exploring novel intellectual avenues, the domain to which I now turn.

The Qur’anic Commentary¹³

Two works stand out in this regard: ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s seven-volume Qur’anic commentary *Fasḥ al-khatḥb* [The Decisive Discourse]¹⁴ and four-part account of the early Islamic history *Tarikh-i Islām*. While preoccupied with responding to the crisis of religion, ‘Ali>Naqvi>began the commentary project during the early years of his intellectual career. As was noted in chapter 1, the Qur’anic commentary project was part and parcel of the broader defense of Islam, especially what he saw as “the day-to-day objections (*i’tarazāt*) leveled against the Qur’an, [responses to which were] available in books in the Arabic language but remained inaccessible to lay people.”¹⁵ In 1940, he wrote a 270-page long Prolegomena to the Qur’an (*The Decisive Discourse*) which discussed critical and much-debated issues such as the nature of the Divine revelation (*vahy*), the miracle of the Qur’an (*i’jaz al-Qur’ān*, subsidiary to which was an elaboration of the concept of

¹³ My discussion of the significance of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s Qur’anic commentary is mostly to put forth an account regarding how it ties with his other writings. From the points of view of its interesting content and the underlying method, *Fasḥ al-khatḥb* deserves closer examination, one that is beyond the scope of this chapter, or this study.

¹⁴ Or in a more literal translation, The Discourse that Distinguishes [Truth from Falsehood].

¹⁵ From his introduction to the 1940 edition.

miracle itself) the history of the compilation of the Qur'anic text, clarification of the Sunni suspicions regarding the Shi'i view of the Qur'an¹⁶, various recitation-styles of the Qur'an, principles of Qur'anic exegesis and a century-by-century account of the major exegetical works written in the Islamic intellectual history. *Prolegomena* was intended to be followed by a complete commentary on the Qur'an. The project, however, came quickly to a halt after he completed the first volume. For over 30 years then 'Ali>Naqvi>did not return to it. As preceding chapters have shown, some more pressing concerns had kept him occupied during these decades. He needed to remove the intellectual barriers that had made it impossible for his Muslim audience to take its sacred scripture and its teachings seriously. By 1950s, however, the situation had changed: as I have argued thus far, he had responded to most of the "new objections" in his writings. That is why, in 1972, when the project is completed and was published, his preface no longer situated the commentary in terms of the defense of Islam or the Qur'an, but as the "religious need of the time": for the Muslim masses to have any meaningful relationship with the sacred scripture, there was a strong need for a Qur'anic commentary in the Urdu language. In the preface of the 1972 edition 'Ali>Naqvi> explains his intention behind the project: in the past Muslims had a majority that had mastery over Arabic and then everything was in Arabic. That is why in those days, religious scholars wrote everything in Arabic. With Persian becoming a popular language, religious scholars inaugurated writing in Persian and also transferring intellectual heritage from Arabic into Persian. With the decline of Persian and rise and maturation of Urdu as a language, it was only natural that now religious scholars would

¹⁶ In this regard, in 1932 he had already written a detailed defense in his *The Truth about Alteration of the Qur'an (Tahjiḥ-i Qur'an ki-haqiqat)*.

do the same: religious knowledge will now be propagated through Urdu. It is important to point out that unlike the 1940 edition where 'Ali>Naqvi>is much concerned about defending Islam and the Qur'an from attacks, here his foremost concern is transference of religious knowledge and learning. The preface also makes clear that by this time 'Ali>Naqvi>had realized that finishing the Commentary-project along intended ambitious lines was impossible given his age; he was already in his sixties at the time (*Preface*, 4-5). Yet the need had persisted and therefore he completed the rest of the commentary in a summary fashion, highlighting important points. As a result, what was projected to be a 30-volume project in 1940 eventually published in seven volumes.

Notwithstanding the reduction in size and scope of this project, 'Ali>Naqvi>'s Qur'anic commentary is extremely significant for our understanding of his thought. This significance owes much to the very format in which a Qur'anic commentary is traditionally written: a verse-by-verse layout forestalls a preordained topic and systematization so characteristic of 'Ali>Naqvi>'s other writings; and an immensely broad range and variety of issues that the Qur'an speaks of forces the exegete to express his views on almost every subject of human concern, whether of metaphysical, theological, juridical, polemical, or sociopolitical import. In this way then a Qur'anic commentary divulges – albeit in a non-synthesized form – an exegete's entire viewpoint, from which, in principle, nothing could really be left out. This inevitability of comprehensiveness that is part and parcel of a Qur'anic exegetical exercise is also witnessed in 'Ali>Naqvi>'s commentary. In it converge, therefore, almost every theme and topic that he had dealt with (and would afterwards) in his various writings, and could therefore be reckoned as a compendium of his religio-intellectual thought. In other

words, in light of the immense possibilities presented by the vast scope of Qur'anic verses in their thematic focus, *Fasḥ al-khatab* [The Decisive Discourse] encapsulates the full breadth of 'Ali>Naqvi's thought. Besides the familiar themes discussed in this study thus far, his commentary on verses that presented fresh intellectual questions stretched his thought even further, with the result that his opinions on a whole host of intellectual and social issues are scattered throughout this commentary.

A few comments are also called for in regards to 'Ali>Naqvi's method of exegesis. If, as we have noted above, it conforms to the traditional verse-for-verse style, in many ways it also departs from certain traditional methods: for example, in simplifying the language, avoiding lengthy and tortuous discussion of grammatical nuances (nuance is subordinated instead to the transmission of what he saw as the intended message), accuracy in translation (by way of sifting through various contemporary translations, and employing classical sources when inevitable), and finally, a succinct exposition of the essential message contained within the verse.¹⁷

Even a cursory review of this work makes it clear that 'Ali>Naqvi>intended to provide, via reflections upon the Qur'an Holy Book, religious guidance to an audience whose intellectual and religious needs were quite specific, and pertained to a particular socio-intellectual and historical milieu. In other words, *Fasḥ al-khatab* [The Decisive Discourse], like everything else 'Ali>Naqvi>penned, was sensitive to "the needs of its times", and attempted to address them fully. That is why almost every theme listed

¹⁷ This simplicity of style and emphasis on the message is shared by most modern Qur'anic commentaries, especially those that were authored by the Muslims scholars who do not belong to the 'ulama' scholarly tradition. For modern trends in the Qur'anic exegesis, see Erik Ohlander, "Modern Qur'anic Hermeneutics," *Religion Compass* 3, no. 4 (2009): 620-36; and *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, ed. Suha Taji-Farouki (New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies London, 2004).

under the section “Continuities” (see above) finds ample space in this work. Let me illustrate this point with an example: in elaborating on verse 3:14 (“Decked out fair to men is the love of lusts—women, children, heaped-up heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle and tillage. That is the enjoyment of the present life; but God—with Him is the fairest resort”), ‘Ali>Naqvi>writes:

By itself love of worldly goods is not a bad thing. In fact, it is a natural necessity of a human being. But when there is a collision between interests of this world and the hereafter, then the faith demands that God’s servant should prefer gains of the hereafter over the gains of this world. In the case of this verse, there is no harm even in viewing God as the agent (*fa’sil*) of making [these worldly things] captivating (*dil awayz*). It is so because imprinting¹⁸ of desires for these things within human nature is a means for achieving communal and civilizational interests. But if [a human person] is so overwhelmed by these delights that he overlooks the interest of the hereafter, then it will be a satanic act.¹⁹

One is immediately reminded of ‘Ali> Naqvi>’s rebuttal of the *din/dunya*> (this life/hereafter) divide discussed in chapter 3. As evident, his opinion of the correct relationship between the two is quite consistent with his earlier formulation of the solution; he was simply reiterating what he had stated in other texts, for example, *Tijarat aur Islam* [Commerce and Islam] (1933). Many other examples could be cited from the commentary to demonstrate the recurrence of familiar themes from his writings. In sum, in observing ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s choices of issues to underscore in his exposition, one quickly gleans the essential link between this commentary and his other writings. Further, the characteristic features of simplicity, directness, and avoidance of unnecessary technicalities so common in his earlier works are also present in the

¹⁸ The word here is *vadi’at*, which literally means depositing or entrusting.

¹⁹ Naqvi> *Fas/ al-khatib*, vol. 1, 547.

commentary *Fasl al-khatib*, thus proving that in composing it ‘Ali>Naqvi>had largely in mind the Muslim masses, not the specialists.²⁰

Rethinking Islam’s Sacred History²¹

Later years also saw ‘Ali>Naqvi>writing a four-volume *Tarikh-i Islam* (History of Islam), an account of the sacred history of Islam leading up to the death of the Prophet. I call it “sacred history” for specific reasons: first, what is predominantly a work on the life of the Prophet opens with the creation story, under the section *Aghaz-i aḥadith* (Beginning of creation). Throughout the text ‘Ali>Naqvi>assumes (and at times makes a case for it) that the perennial religion has always been Islam. Under the section “Islamic History and its Beginning” he cites the Qur’anic verse, “The religion with God is Islam,”²² noting that although the term ‘Islam’ was first employed by the Qur’an for Abraham,²³ still from the first prophet Adam through Noah and the last Prophet, the religion has always been Islam²⁴. Since for ‘Ali>Naqvi>Islam is a perennial religion, in fact, the only religion according to the Qur’an, therefore, an account of “Islamic history” cannot but begin with creation, not with the Prophet of Islam in the 7th century. That is why early sections of the book trace Islamic history from Adam through Abraham, and then, Abraham through to the Prophet of Islam. Jewish and Christian prophets and revelations are, therefore, an integral part of this “sacred narrative.” In like manner,

²⁰ I will return to the importance of this statement in the conclusion of this study.

²¹ Akin to my discussion of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s Qur’anic commentary, I have restricted my analysis of this work to an explanation of how his study of history relates back to his broader project of rethinking, reconfiguring and teaching Islam to his Muslim audience, and to his earlier writings.

²² Qur’an, 3:19. Arberry translates the verse as “the true religion with God is Islam”. Since the word true is not within the text I have modified the translation here.

²³ Qur’an, 22:78.

²⁴ Naqvi> *Tarikh-i Islam*, 7.

particular events of Islamic history proper²⁵ are situated within this larger “sacred history” that sets the backdrop for the question of the meaning of these events. That is, the discussion of “history” and its “meaning” are not entirely disjointed in his account, but do overlap in profound ways. In tracing the history of Islam from Adam to Abraham, and in greater details when dealing with the period between Abraham and the Prophet of Islam, Islamic history is presented as a unified whole, one in which history and meaning are intimately intertwined. Moreover, this strong sense of the underlying unity of Islam’s historical narrative is a result, not of historical analysis itself, but the theological framework that sets its backdrop.²⁶

Both points lead to the same conclusion: In setting up Islamic history along these lines, the “historical” has been subordinated to the “theological”. In other words, the historical narrative of Islam, in ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s historical thought, is determined by its theological vision. This has not, however, debarred him from being “critical” in his analysis of the particular historical details. In fact, the hermeneutical scheme of “Historicizing Mythology” and “Mythologizing History” witnessed in his other writings, especially on the theme of Karbala, are also strongly at play here.²⁷ In other words, he attempted to ground his account of history in the early sources to eliminate opinions that had no basis in those. In sum, it is through his theological understanding

²⁵ The word “history” as employed in common parlance and in academic discourse today, that is, critical analysis of what happened at a given moment in historical time.

²⁶ In this regard, ‘Ali>Naqvi> provides an interesting case-study for Sachiko Murata and William Chittick’s contrast between Islamic and Western philosophy of history. See Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, “Islam in History” in *The Vision of Islam*, (New York: I. B. Tauris), 1996.

²⁷ Since both strands (*History of Islam* and writings on the theme of Karbala) originate from the same theological vision, hermeneutical semblances aside, *History of Islam* provides important keys to understand ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s writings on the theme of Karbala. Whereas the particular Shi’i theological backdrop was often invoked in his discussion of the various aspects of the theme of Karbala, it largely remained scattered, and hardly ever presented systematically. *History of Islam* fills in this lacuna, expressing his theological viewpoint fully, and in the process clarifying ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s theological assumptions that informed his analysis of the themes of Karbala and martyrdom.

of Islam's sacred history that 'Ali>Naqvi> approached the formal history; and the conclusions drawn from his critical historical analysis were then applied to the "theological" domain.

One more point needs to be made regarding this intertwining of the theological and the historical: the overarching theological vision that provides parameters and criterion for historical analysis exhibits an unmistakable Shi'i coloring. To put it differently, the theological frame of reference by which particular events of history are assessed and commented upon displays a clear Shi'i bent: The history of Islam (including of all previous prophets) is the history of an oppressed and suffering community. This view of history can be contrasted with the usual Sunni version of a triumphant and victorious Islam. Quite early in the text, while discussing the lives of the previous prophets, he laid out this contrast which would then inform his choice of historical events worthy of discussion as well as the explication of their meaning.

Finally, 'Ali>Naqvi's sources for historical analysis bring to light important insights vis-à-vis how this text is an extension of his thought from the earlier years. For example, *Tarikh-i Islam* (History of Islam), is not history for history's sake. It is not intended as a text that would simply lay out a detailed account of "what happened". Akin to his other works, moral and spiritual lessons are intricately weaved into the historical narrative. Moreover, he employs the Qur'an and hadith-reports as proofs for historical analysis, which shows that the text was written for a Muslim audience who were already convinced of the centrality of Islamic sources.

Let me illustrate the above-mentioned points through the work itself. Commenting upon Nimrod's tyranny toward Abraham which led to his emigration, the

Qur'anic verse 21:68, ("They said, "Burn him [Abraham], and help your gods, if you would do aught") 'Ali>Naqvi>remarks that Divine wisdom did not intervene at this stage and waited further to let the oppression and brutality of the oppressor and oppressedness and patience of the oppressed may both reach their final limit. The Divine Wisdom let events take their course to a point where the oppressor could not argue that "We did not intend to burn, we were simply threatening", or the oppressed Abraham's patience shaken by the terror of fire. Human choices were not obstructed but were allowed to be exercised fully so there is neither confusion nor doubt as to the brutality of the oppressor and the trial of the oppressed. It is only after Abraham was thrown into fire that the Divine Will intervened and saved Abraham. Since God had other aims for Abraham he did not become a martyr. A perfect embodiment of the sacrificing ethos of Islam's foremost guides and exemplars, Abraham in this exposition becomes the first person to have made sacrifice for Islam. With Lot and Sara, he also becomes the first emigrant of Islamic history. For 'Ali>Naqvi>the story of Islam begins with trials, suffering sacrifice, and patience.²⁸

Note that the Qur'an is employed again and again to buttress claims about the pre-Islamic history and the word Islam extended to all the previous prophets. Furthermore, although humans do make choices in history that have good or bad consequences, history is not independent of the divine plan. Abraham was needed for execution of the divine plan.

Islamic history of afflictions, sufferings and sacrifice continues with the succeeding prophets. A few moments later, 'Ali>Naqvi>discusses the prophetic career of

²⁸ Naqvi> *Tarikh-i Islam*, 12-3.

Lot, noting how Lot suffered in the hands of his community which had refused to follow the divine injunctions and eventually drove him out of the area. He writes:

These are the earlier traces (*nuqush*) of Islamic history that have turned events of afflictions (*mash'ib*), pains (*takabir*), torments [from others], homelessness and exile into a treasure. That is why the Prophet of Islam said, "The beginning of Islam was with exile". *How then could it be apt for Muslims that they are troubled, or lose hope with the occurrence of afflictions (mash'ib) or extremities (shada'id). They should understand these things as part of their communal character and should always be prepared to bear them* (emphasis added).²⁹

'Ali>Naqvi's reminder to his community that as the prophetic community, suffering is only destined for them, and faced with it they should not lose heart, is clearly to cater to the anxieties and deep angst that turbulences of the colonial era had afflicted upon it. In tying the sacred history with the contemporary situation, 'Ali>Naqvi attempted to make it come alive in the contemporary Muslim consciousness replete with meaning and hope.³⁰ At this juncture, the narrative of Islam as a religion of suffering and the

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

³⁰ The intersection of history and mythology in 'Ali>Naqvi's narration of Islamic history reminds one of Ricouer's famous essay on the phenomenological experience of time in which he posits the organic unity of the episodic (events/sequence/history) with the configurational (pattern/plot/matrix) within the telling of a narrative:

The story is not bound to a merely chronological order of events. All narratives combine in various proportions, two dimensions—one chronological and the other non-chronological. The first maybe called the episodic dimension. This dimension characterizes the story as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events....I understand this act to be the act of the plot, as eliciting a pattern from a succession....To tell and to follow a story is already to reflect upon events in order to encompass them in successive wholes. Such is the dimension which is completely overlooked in the theory of history by the anti-narrative writers. They tend to deprive narrative activity of the complexity and, above all, of its twofold characteristic of confronting and combining in various ways both sequence and pattern. But this antithetical dynamic is no less overlooked in the theory of fictional narratives proposed by structuralists. They take it for granted that the surface grammar of what they call the 'plane of manifestation' is merely episodic, and therefore purely chronological. They conclude that the principle of order has to be found at the higher level of achronological models or codes. Anti-narrativist writers in the theory of history and structuralist writers in the literary criticism share the same prejudice. They do not see that the humblest narrative is always more than a chronological series of events and that, in turn, the configurational dimension cannot overcome the episodic dimension without suppressing the narrative structure itself....The reasons for which we write history and reasons for which we

oppressed is made even clearer when ‘Ali>Naqvi>discusses Abraham’s pleading with God in the context of Lot’s story. Not only that the guides of Islam had always suffered in the hands of their community –community rebelled and disobeyed them – they never cursed them or took revenge from them. Instead they always tried to protect them through prayers and interceded on their behalf. When the Divine wisdom found no room for reforming Lot’s community it sent angels to punish them but Abraham argued with them and with God to protect them.³¹ Yet, Abraham’s act of dissent is his special privilege as the intimate friend of God, and therefore a friendly and frank quarrelling that only friends could do. A little later, while discussing Hagar and Ishmael’s difficulties and loneliness in the desert, ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s account of the deeper currents that define and make sense of the historical unfolding of the perennial religion of Islam through time is stated in clearest terms: “This was the foundation of Islam’s center in whose account helplessness, exile, emigration, hunger, and thirst are clearly perceptible. The same intensity and pain would become the preamble for the happiness and prosperity (*farrakhi>va khush hkh*) that was to come. “So truly with hardship comes ease, so truly with hardship comes ease (Qur’an 94:6).”³² ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s subtle and repeated stress that “Islam is a religion of the oppressed” in these early pages is, in orientation, quite clearly Shi’i. In underscoring the theme of suffering in the history of

tell stories are rooted in the same temporal structure that connects our ‘élan’ toward the future, our attention to the present, and our capacity to emphasize and to reconnect the past. The ‘repetition’ would no longer appear as a dubious procedure divided between fictional repetition and historical repetition. It would be able to encompass history and fiction to the extent that both are rooted in the primordial unity between future, past, and present.

See Paul Ricoeur, and Mario J. Valdés, “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative” in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

³¹ Naqvi> *Tarikh-i Islam*, 14. Here, he is making reference to the Qur’anic verses 11:74, 94:6 and 3:19.

³² Naqvi> *Tarikh-i Islam*, 17.

“pre-Islamic Islam” he projected the Shi’i sensibilities back onto history. If the message of the various prophets is one with the message of the Prophet of Islam, they also share a common fate: that they will be misunderstood, their teachings will be forgotten by most, and the prophets would always suffer in the hands of their communities. It is obvious how this particular lens with which ‘Ali>Naqvi> looked upon history could easily be extended to the life of the Prophet on the one hand, and the household of the Prophet on the other. It is also clear how ‘Ali>Naqvi> would tie this view of history to the sufferings of H̄usayn and his companions on the planes of Karbala.³³ Like the episode of Abraham, the events of Karbala revealed the extent of the Umayyad oppression and H̄usayn’s forbearance in the face thereof.

Finally, let me cite a passage from these early sections that clarify how *Tarikh-i Islam* (History of Islam) was also intended to edify its audience in ethical and religious matters. The context is Abraham’s building of the House of God in Mecca:

This building of the *Ka’bah* was in fact the building of a center for the Islamic religion, which is a source of success and salvation for the whole world. Both father and son got busy in erecting it: the father was constructing it while the son was doing the hard labor. Though the tribe of Jurhum had already settled in Mecca, the Creator desired that the house be built by father and son alone. In this way, *this concept that there is no harm in labor and hard work was established forever for the followers of Islam*. It is so because our great religious and spiritual ancestors were [themselves] employed by the Creator for this task. (emphasis added)³⁴

Concluding Remarks (Part I)

The foregoing discussion showed the interrelatedness of two phases of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s intellectual career. It illustrated that ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s later thought was an extension of his

³³ How this broader history of Islam ties to the sacrifice of H̄usayn and his companions is evident from my discussion in Chapter 4.

³⁴ Naqvi> *Tarikh-i Islam*, 22.

religio-intellectual project as it was worked out by him during his early years. It was also shown that why and in what ways the earlier phase had priority over the later one. Perhaps the best elucidation of all these claims, in conclusion, I turn now to ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s Muharram lectures in Pakistan.

These lectures were delivered towards the end of his life (1980-1984, spread over a period of 5 years), and later compiled as *Majmu‘ah-yi taqḥīrī* (Collection of speeches). As the compiler notes in his prelude, ‘Ali>Naqvi> had returned to Pakistan after a period of almost 25 years (his last visit occurring in 1956). The structure and order in which ‘Ali>Naqvi> chose the topics for his speeches reveal a certain underlying purpose regarding what he deemed most essential for his audience. The order of lectures also exhibit a consistency of vision that corresponds, almost systematically, with the two phases of his intellectual thought.

In 1980, on the occasion of the very first series of lectures, ‘Ali>Naqvi> chose to speak on the Qur’anic verse, “The true religion with God is Islam”³⁵. Notice how he begins his discussion:

Surely, the true religion with God is only Islam. One of the various questions asked about religion [these days] is that religion takes away our freedom. A human being is born free and should stay free. Religion, however, implements rules which is why religion should be abandoned. I plea that although the eminence of freedom cannot be denied, the only question is [whether it is] freedom of every kind and from every bond (*qayd*)? To the extent that I have come to think [about this I have resolved that] so long as a human has a bond to life absolute freedom cannot be one’s destiny.³⁶

The question raised and the response is reminiscent of the earlier days. It is obvious that in choosing to speak about the contemporary doubts vis-à-vis religion, ‘Ali>Naqvi> is

³⁵ 3:19

³⁶ Naqvi> *Majmu‘ah-yi taqḥīrī*, 7.

catering to his audience in Pakistan who had not been exposed to his writings and speeches the same way that his Indian listeners had been so far. He dedicates over five speeches to this problem of human freedom that had led many to abandon religion. Again reminiscent of the earlier years, it is only after clarifying these prevalent objections toward the “concept of religion” that in later speeches ‘Ali>Naqvi> began to explain Islam itself as a religion. The rest of the volumes follow the lead of his religio-intellectual project (as has been described in this study thus far) and the way it was executed throughout his life: clarifying the grounds for religion first, then turning to the religious doctrines (*usūl ad-dīn*), followed by practices (*furu‘ ad-dīn*) and a discussion of the virtues necessitated by religion. This plan is executed in these lectures in the following manner: lectures of 1981 (volume 2) explain the necessity of following the divine will and many doctrinal issues including the Imamate and Prophecy; 1982 (volume 3) extend the discussion from 1982 to enter the domain of religious practices, virtues and human action; 1983 (volume 4), a continuation of the topics from the previous year, such as the need for Shari‘a and other virtues; 1984 (volume 5) where he responds to the challenge of religious pluralism and asserts the truthfulness of Islam vis-à-vis other religions. Although not entirely systematic, the underlying reasoning mirrors the manner in which he had approached the crisis of religion throughout his life.

In concluding our overview of the later phase of ‘Ali>Naqvi> it must be emphasized that during these years several of his earlier writings went through various editions, continued to be published and re-published, and therefore complemented these later writings. Additionally, he traversed unmarked territories and provided intellectual responses to the exigent problems of the day by diagnosing the nature and degree of the

crisis within the Indian Shi'i society. Finally, the contemporary rejoinders to it provided a foundation from which he could extend his religio-intellectual project to incorporate other urgent issues. In this regard, mention must also be made of his treatises that he intended as précis of his writings on the principles and branches of Islam (*ushūl va furu' ad-dīn*), for example, *Ushūl va furu' ad-dīn* (Religious doctrine and practices) and “*Shi'at ka-ta'rruf*” (Introduction to Shi'ism). His further exposition of the various burning theoretical issues surrounding the role of religion in the Indian society (as noted above) and this co-presence of writings from both phases ensured that he could entertain issues that were significant, yet “subordinate” to those he dealt with in the earlier phase of his intellectual career.

In the final analysis, both phases completed the theoretical and the practical aspects of the role of religion in creating a harmonious and vibrant human society: Without drawing the full import of the underlying intent of Islam in transforming a human society through its religious and theological vision, the project of reconfiguration would have been left incomplete. More importantly, it would have failed to convince 'Ali>Naqvi's demurring interlocutors that “religion, especially Islam, is the greatest source of a society's *islah*”. This survey of 'Ali>Naqvi's later writings, therefore, turns to this final aspect of his thought: his exposition of Islam's sociopolitical vision for a human society, subordinate to which is his attempts to reform Muslim culture and social practices, in other words, his social reform (*islah*).

PART II: 'ALI>NAQVI'S SOCIAL REFORM

Why Social Reform?

A prominent theme from 'Ali>Naqvi's earlier writings was the all-encompassing scope of Islam that leaves out no dimension of human life and society. For 'Ali>Naqvi>to assert it fully, he had to apply this vision to all spheres of human life. In reconfiguring the foundations of Islamic religious doctrines and practices, he had to show that the teachings of Islam pave the way for a prosperous and healthy human society. And to persuade his audience of this claim, he had to confront topics of social and political import head-on. Although providing the theoretical basis for why such a claim is legitimate from the Islamic point of view, during the earlier years, he did not demonstrate it by way of discussion of concrete sociopolitical issues. Yet, the intention was always there, and precursors to the trajectory that he took in later years were clearly disclosed in the earlier writings. For example, *Commerce and Islam* (1933) was as much a work of social reform, to help the economic cause of the Muslim community, as it was an exposition of the all-encompassing nature of Islam.

During these later years, therefore, the sagacious order of Islam now needed to be brought to the fore in its fullest breadth and depth. His essay *Islami>culture kia>hay?* (What is Islamic culture?) provides an excellent venue for the discussion of the Islamic vision of a human society, in which 'Ali>Naqvi>lays out his vision of a well-ordered society as well as the general principles to be followed to reform human culture. Reminiscent of his assertion of Islam's comprehensiveness, here again he begins by noting that "Islam is not a kind of religion that remains aloof from communal life." Just

the way it has its own law and constitution (*a'in*), it also possesses its own perspective on political order (*mulki-nizhām*) and culture. Islamic governance and culture are based not on authorities of a person, a tribe, a political party, or people's will in the form of democracy or material progress, but on the principles of simplicity, peace (*shlah*)³⁷, and God-wariness (*taqvā*). Only a government and culture that propagate these values could be called Islamic governance or Islamic culture. It does not matter, 'Ali>Naqvi> emphasizes, whether those ruling are Muslims or not: "If the government is of Muslims, but its constitution and order is not in conformity with this [Islamic] government, then it will be a non-Islamic government; and if its behavior, traits (*adat va khasā'i*) and social life (*mu'asharat*) include elements which are different from this [Islamic] culture then it will be a non-Islamic culture, even when those [responsible for] choosing it are Muslims".³⁸

Furthermore, because they are founded upon local, racial or communal tastes, temperaments, and dispositions, compared to Islamic culture all other cultures have limited scope and application. Since Islamic teachings are comprehensive and prescribe limits (*quyud*) of permissible and forbidden (*halal va haram*) for every domain of human life, it is by way of following these limits that Islamic culture is formed. In 'Ali>Naqvi>'s view, the "Islamic" content of an Islamic culture is offered by the concrete Shari'ite teachings, and Islamic culture formed through adherence to these directives regarding permissibility or non-permissibility of actions. To the extent cultures, nations, and

³⁷ The word *shlah* can also be translated as prosperity.

³⁸ Naqvi> *Islami-culture kia-hay?*, 55. For the moment I will concentrate on 'Ali>Naqvi>'s social reform. His political thought will be taken up in the following section.

countries follow and implement these juridical categories they become Islamic.³⁹ In other words, Islamic culture is formed through Shari'ite law and its adherence. Consequently, it is Shari'a that confers upon Muslims their cultural identity and a basis for reforming their social life.

In the concluding remarks 'Ali>Naqvi> makes a significant point regarding how Islamic culture compares with other cultures: “*Hence, Islamic culture is not a culture that is in competition with the cultures of other nations and countries. It is rather about shaping all those into a proper mold (shāhīh} sāncāh)*” (emphasis added).⁴⁰ Islam in 'Ali>Naqvi>'s exposition has a clear vision of its own for a human society and provides guidelines by which to organize a human community at every level. The Islamic vision is based on its own principles laid out in its theology and Shari'ite law; yet, this vision is not something to be implemented from without, or created anew from scratch, but rather a way to reform an already existing human society along these guidelines.

How to Carryout Social Reform?

If Islam intends to reform an existing culture “from within”, how is this task to be accomplished? How does Islam as a religion guide a culture along its path to welfare and prosperity? Again, in the early years, 'Ali>Naqvi> did lay out—albeit in a summary fashion—his answer to this question. The text *Mazhab aur 'aqī* (Religion and reason) includes a section entitled, *'aqā'id va marasim* (Beliefs and practices) on the relationship between religious doctrines and popular custom. In this short section, 'Ali>Naqvi> noted the following:

³⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 64.

To act solely according to those things that continue for a long time is called custom (*ravaʿ*). Belief (*ʿaqīdah*) should not be based on customs, but instead on *ʿaql* and reasoning. Without doubt, practices (*marasim*) are related to customs. If they are beneficial for God’s creation and have an intellectual basis, then they should remain, otherwise, they should be abolished.

Practices have often gone beyond [their status] to become inherited mental prejudices (*damaghi-khalaʿ*)⁴¹. Surely, they require reform (*islah*). Nature has endowed us with unlimited *ʿaql* and speech as human beings, so that by the mind things are understood through thinking, by speech they are understood by way of asking, and by the eyes, so that old propositions, previous human beings, and ancient sayings are comprehended in light of the contemporary milieu; *ʿaql* has been given for *islah* of understanding and for correct estimation (*sahih andazah*).⁴²

The idea that social practices and customs should not be taken at their face value, but rather, in light of the religious doctrines, requires a continuous reevaluation of the social benefits of these practices, or lack thereof. This process of continual reflection and reevaluation provides ‘Ali>Naqvi> with a clear principle for social reform (*islah*). It is with this principle that he would address and navigate every social problem during his later years.

A few words need to be mentioned regarding ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s approach towards social reform (*islah*): First, for him the ‘ulama’ have a huge role to play in carrying out social reform. In fact, he sees it as an essential concern and responsibility of the ‘ulama’. In other words, in his capacity of being the religious guide of his community, it was his function to point-out those aspects of culture that were in conflict with the teachings of Islam or common sense. It is, however, a different matter that sometimes the ‘ulama’ (like he himself) find themselves in a milieu where they are confronted by matters much more significant and fundamental, that social reform becomes of secondary import.

⁴¹ The word “*khalaʿ*” has a wide-ranging meaning including prejudice, craziness, defect, and confusion, and is replete with derogatory connotations.

⁴² Naqvi> *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, 57-8.

Second, *islah* for ‘Ali>Naqvi is an ongoing affair, a never-ending exercise inherent to the way human societies develop and degenerate. Finally, although incessant, *islah* of a human society for ‘Ali>Naqvi is always gradual, with measured and well thought-out steps. In positing this gradual and sustained approach to *islah* of a human society, ‘Ali>Naqvi preempts sudden, impatient, and revolutionary approaches toward this cause. He expresses these points quite clearly in one of his essays on the institution of marriage. He notes how the ‘ulama’ had always attempted to reform unnecessary social customs, or those opposed to the spirit and teachings of Islam and cites the example of his forefather Ghufran Ma’ab⁴³ who was confronted by a community thoroughly immersed in Hindu practices. But Ghufran Ma’ab’s approach toward reform was well thought-out, measured and gradual, in which according to their respective significance, issues were prioritized. He first countered things that were causing unbelief (*kufi*) and associating things with God (*shirk*). The example of the guides of Islam and true ‘ulama’ such as Ghufran Ma’ab taught Muslims this proper method of reform:

The [proper] way of *islah* is that one should always choose [to change things in] gradual progression (*tadriji*). You know that in Islamic Shari’a this wisdom and good sense has always been kept in view. From the time the Prophet’s mission began, the benefits of prayer and fasting had the same sagacious facets, yet, you know that they were not made obligatory until the first and second Hijra [year of the Islamic calendar]... It is needed that these days we keep in view the customs and manners (*adab*) of the Shari’a of the Household of the Prophet, for example marriage as a religious custom and refrain from absurd social customs.⁴⁴

⁴³ Title of Dildar ‘Ali> the head of the Household of *Ijtihad*.

⁴⁴ Naqvi> *Mazhab aur ‘aql*, 31. “*Shadi-khana abad*” are the words used. These comments provide strong support for my analysis and presentation of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s religio-intellectual project. The path of comprehensive *islah* of a human society that he lays out here (and commended in the example of Dildar ‘Ali) is precisely what I have argued for ‘Ali>Naqvi himself: By way of prioritizing the various challenges that his community faced, he sought to first establish the intellectual basis for religious beliefs and practices, making possible the intellectual acceptance of the foundations of Islam (the task he carried out in the early years). Only when the essentials of the religion became amenable to his audience did he turn his attention to the reform of social practices and customs (that is, his writings from the later years). These comments leave little doubt that in addressing the intellectual, religious, and social problems of his times, ‘Ali>Naqvi consciously followed the model of Dildar ‘Ali> or his understanding of it.

This understanding of “steady gradual Islamic social reform from within” was then applied to the concrete social practices. It often lead ‘Ali>Naqvi>to level devastating critiques against aspects of culture that had neither a basis in religion nor a justification on intellectual grounds, and therefore, were of no benefit to society.

Illustrating ‘Ali>Naqvi>s Reform of Shi’i Culture:

In justifying why certain practices demanded reevaluation, ‘Ali>Naqvi> also provided a sociological and historical analysis of how customs are usually instituted in cultures, and especially how certain practices came into existence in the Indian milieu. His essay *Hamaray rusum va quyud* (Our social customs and [cultural] bonds) is crucial in this regard, where ‘Ali>Naqvi> refers to these cultural practices and customs as intoxicating. Islam had come with simple and serious principles and teachings but these teachings—although kept intact within certain households—were ignored by most after the Prophet. What spread instead was the culture of power and the powerful, of the courts of kings and rulers. For ‘Ali>Naqvi> spread of Islam into India occurred under the shadow of the sword. That is why the customs that dominated royal courts were based, not on Islamic principles, but on Turkic, Persian, and other cultures. Furthermore, this experience of Qur’an and the Prophet on the one hand, and obedience to the ruler under the pretext of misinterpretation of the Qur’anic verse “O believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority (*ulu>al-‘amr*) among you,”⁴⁵ on the other left a

⁴⁵ Reference to the Qur’anic verse 4:59. The complete verse reads as follows: “O believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. If you should quarrel on anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day; that is better, and fairer in the issue.”

deep mark on Muslim consciousness. Consequently, faithful obedience to the ruler engendered imitation of their ways of life that spread then to the Muslim masses:

The conclusion is obvious: an event and practice that occurred around kings, were imitated by the elites and they took part in spreading it. Through their influence, those who were close to them also chose similar ways. The result, therefore, was that those things are usually considered to be [important] parts of life. [How absurd that] pure religious obligations may be neglected, but these customs cannot be neglected. Over time, these customs were strengthened by superstitions (*tauham parasti*).

In sum, popular customs and rituals usually result from a “trickledown effect”, in which those in positions of political and economic power play a key role. It is their embrace of certain customs that make possible mindless imitation of these practices by the laity. ‘Ali>Naqvi’s Shi’i sensibilities are also on display in this analysis: the seriousness, purposefulness, and simplicity of the Islam of the Shi’i holy figures has been contrasted with the pompous, ostentatious, and opportunistic Islam of the power-hungry. Tracing this contrast back to the early days of the Islamic history⁴⁶ is clearly a juxtaposition of the Shi’i Islam of martyrdom and suffering, and Umayyad Islam of empire-building and lax attitudes toward the teachings of Islam.

But that is not the only factor. Faith in superstitious, widespread in India, complicated the matter even further. Since everything was seen in the light of these superstitions, performance of rituals and adherence to certain customs gained far too much significance than following the principles of Islam and simplicity in religious and worldly life that it had prescribed for its adherents. As a result, Muslims also became much more ritual- and custom-oriented; certain customs that had status only of preferential came to be seen as mandatory and vice versa. In sum, both these factors—

⁴⁶ For example, his comment: “The story of our afflictions (*sargashtagi*) is quite long. Islam had come with simple and serious principles and teachings. But how long did those days of simplicity last?”

imitation of the ways of the rulers and belief in superstitions reinforced by the Indian ambience—lead to further distancing of Muslims from the simple and vital teachings of their faith. “Eventually, those simple ways that were prescribed by Islam for its adherents were besieged by [these] superfluities and additions, to the extent that their real form was concealed. [In fact,] what was the real thing that was prescribed for us became even harder to know.” For ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>this phenomenon of unyielding adherence to social customs was not unique to Muslim communities alone, but rather ubiquitous: A human being finds himself always caught up in a cultural ambience, aspects of which are based on degenerated practices or the result of political maneuverings, akin to what was found in the way Muslim communities took up much of Hindu customs, despite the fact that they oppose the Islamic emphasis on simplicity in lifestyle. Human societies become such that no matter what, these social customs continue to chain, such that no human being can dare to break-free from; not even with death, since these social customs even surround rituals of death and burial.

Having laid out a sociological account of how these practices were embraced by Muslim laity, ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>began to clarify why such practices needed to be opposed and reformed. The motive for that was not simply that they lacked a religious basis (that is, when they are unwarranted in Shari’a), but also because they were causing harm to the economic wellbeing of those involved. If these customs were simply dry and without any harmful consequences, one would not have objected to those. But since they are quite ostentatious and require extensive spending, one should feel compelled to evaluate their necessity, purpose, and lawfulness in the eyes of God and Shari’a. One needs to ask oneself why so much money is spent on rituals and customs that are either without

purpose and/or based on superstitions, or outright prohibited by the Shari'a. Economic considerations alone should be enough to discourage Muslims from carrying out these pompous and unnecessary rituals that cause great damage to the economic wellbeing of the community. 'Ali>Naqvi> cites various examples of the kinds of rituals and practices that are prohibited by Shari'a or are based only on superstitions: "In adhering to these minute things, the kind of life that is formed precludes our destruction (*fana*)." ⁴⁷

In criticizing these ill-instituted customs, 'Ali>Naqvi> also takes to task those who claimed the "new light" (*na'i>roshni*), that is, the enlightened Western-style educated Muslim elite. For 'Ali>Naqvi> they are content with simply pointing out the unreasonableness of these practices without ever trying wholeheartedly to eliminate them from society. Like everyone else, they are also chained by these customs and despite all their rhetoric, they hardly ever breakaway from them. In that, their criticisms were simply lip-service and an expression of a fashionable "enlightened thought" that lacked sincerity in eliminating these harmful customs. ⁴⁸

In numerous essays, then, 'Ali>Naqvi> would address various prevalent practices that had become deeply ingrained in the culture, but had no justification. In this regard, he paid special attention to marriage, especially the ornate ceremonialism that accompanied it and had become quite widespread within the community. He spoke on the subject on at least three occasions, in the essays *Hama'ay rusum va quyud* (Our social customs and [cultural] bonds), *Shadi> kha'nah aba'di* (Marriage: building a household) and *Niz'm-i izdava'* (Marital order). Although the latter two essays address the subject directly, even the former that was intended as a broader outline of how to

⁴⁷ Naqvi> *Hama'ay rusum va quyud*, 32-42.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 46-9.

reform cultural practices spoke extensively on the subject of marriage and marriage ceremonies. For ‘Ali>Naqvi>, the rituals and ceremonies of marriage best exemplify the Muslim community’s blind imitation of Hindu cultural norms. This led to a conscious or unconscious neglect of the teachings of Islam which are based on a purposeful and serious vision for a human society. Consequently, for ‘Ali>Naqvi> this lack of adherence to Islamic teachings and thought on the part of Muslim’s was wreaking havoc in both Muslim Indian culture and it’s religious practice: “Those ceremonies that continue from the time of our forefathers are considered obligatory, as if marriage is not valid without them. There is no way of determining [good or bad] ceremonies. They change not just with countries, but with cities; not just cities but with [particular] houses. Every house has its own specific ceremonies. Some of these ceremonial rituals are against Shari’a (19)”.

For ‘Ali>Naqvi> even when these practices are not forbidden from a specific Shari’ite point of view, they still need to be evaluated for their effectiveness and benefits. He pointed out how marriage-ceremonies best illustrated blind imitation of the Hindu ways, pointless wastefulness of economic resources at the expense of enjoying basic necessities of life by all members of the community, and by many avoidance of marriage altogether: “Marriages do not happen simply because there is not enough money to carry out these ceremonies....These absurd ceremonies and this imitation of Hindus, are things that are taking us toward the path of annihilation.”⁴⁹

Reflective of his general approach toward all intellectual topics, whether pertaining to doctrine or practice, in reforming ceremonies related to marriage, ‘Ali>

⁴⁹ Naqvi> *Shaadi>khannah abadi>*20.

Naqvi>clarified first the religious meaning and purpose of marriage, and the divine intention associated with it. The synthesis of the various themes, the comprehensiveness of religion, the opposition to the *din/dunya*>divide, the sound basis of the concrete Shari'a prescriptions, and finally, the transformation of a mundane act like marriage into a spiritual act of worship, are all displayed here regarding what marriage is and how it needs to be simplified to conform to the religious teachings. His essay *Shadi>khanah abadi*>(Marriage: building a household) begins with the the Qur'anic injunction for establishing marital order (*nizām-i izdavaʿ*) recited at the marriage ceremony. He notes that the Qur'anic prescription ensures survival of the human race. No marriage, no human population, he argued. Since Islam is interested in preservation of the human race it encourages human beings to marry and form communities. Therefore marriage, solely responsible for promoting human life, becomes a religious responsibility. Akin to everything else, Divine prescription for marriage creates a religious duty that is not only in human interest itself and vital for human survival, it is emblematic of Islam's general approach of incorporating mundane and otherwise worldly necessities into religious life: "It is Islam's sagacious disposition (*ḥakimānah ravāyah*) that endowed a spiritual facet even in actions that are purely material, and has provided a fundamental sense of responsibility."⁵⁰ Discharging responsibility in Islam then is not only fulfillment of one's responsibility, but simultaneously fulfillment of one's personal desire. The act of submission to the Divine Will and prophetic *Sunnah*⁵¹ in marriage not only makes the human being a servant of God; it also helps fulfill one's personal desire and pleasure.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁵¹ 'Ali>Naqvi>refers to the hadith, "Marriage is my *Sunnah*, one who loathes my *Sunnah* is not related to me". See the hadith collection, *Jami' al-akhbar*, 101.

Akin to the general way Islam turns every mundane action into a religious performance, “if a human being performs a marriage or some other event in a manner that becomes means for forgetting God, then the objective of Islam will not have been achieved” (16). Once the remembrance of God accompanies it, a worldly action turns immediately into an act of worship.

The argument is simple and reminiscent of ‘Ali>Naq̣vi>’s general approach toward questions of practical life: Marriage, like everything else in life, if performed according to the Will of God as laid out in the Shari’a, is an act of worship. Having clearly explained the significance of marriage and the Islamic intention behind the prescription to marry and multiply, ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> critically evaluated each and every marriage ceremonial ritual for its conformity to Islamic teachings on the one hand, and purposefulness on the other. In all, ‘Ali>Naq̣vi> reminded his audience that Islam approaches life with a serious attitude in which simplicity in the lifestyle and meaningfulness in everything one does are critical principles. Lack of basis in Islamic teachings and economic harm were the criteria he used to reject most of these practices.

Often an intellectual case for reforming these practices is buttressed with an invocation of the lifestyle of the holy figures of Shi’i tradition: As is the case in his other writings, he persistently reminded his Shi’i followers to pay heed to the model set by the Shi’i holy figures, a move we have already witnessed in other contexts: no one is more honored and dignified than the Prophet of Islam. He could have spent millions on the wedding of his daughter but he chose simplicity and economic prudence (*kafayat sha’a*). If the prophet was not ashamed for not spending too much, why should his followers be? He asked: “You should also be content with [arranging for] the [basic]

needs of your era. It is according to the simple lifestyle of the Commander of the Faithful [i.e., ‘Ali] and Fatima that the Prophet gave useful things to his daughter and son-in-law. You should as well make a list of useful things according to your lifestyle, in which you should not be thinking about showing off (*numa’ish*)”.⁵²

Often ‘Ali>Naqvi>contrasted the Shari’ite understanding of what marriage is with its changing conception that had gained currency under the influence of western thought and lifestyle. For ‘Ali>Naqvi>in the modern age, reform-minded, Westernized, educated, Muslim elite had begun to base marriage on love: Unless one falls in love one should not marry, and one should only marry the one whom one loves. He strongly criticized this view for its non-realistic and impractical implications: “Love is an anxiety generating (*izfharab afarin*) [unstable emotional] oscillation (*tamavvuj*) and marriage is a stable building. A firm building cannot be established on a moving wave [of ocean]. That is why the basis of marriage should only be upon prudent foresight [of the future] (*hikimānah durādayshī*)”. That is why in view of the considerations of a stable future, for ‘Ali>Naqvi> the opinions of girl’s parents are much more reliable. That is not to say that parents should not sincerely seek the girl’s consent and willingness (54).

The Issue of Governance

If in ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s exposition Islam is a complete religion that addresses every facet of human existence, it could not be indifferent to the question of governance. In concluding the discussion of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s vision of the human society, I turn to his political thought. ‘Ali>Naqvi>did not write much on politics beyond the two essays, *Qur’añ aur*

⁵² Naqvi> *Rusun va quyyud*, 51-2.

nizām-i ḥukūmat (The Qur'an and political order) (1972), and *Islāmī nazḥiyah-yi ḥukūmat* (The Islamic concept of government). If there is any further discussion, it is too scattered to allow a clear picture to emerge. These two essays, however, succinctly summarize 'Ali>Naqvi's political thought and his views on how societies need to be governed. The former essay was a response to the political writings of a well-known Pakistani religious scholar and political figure, Maulāna>Kaṣar Niazi> The first part of the essay is a rebuttal of Maulāna>Niazi's standard Sunni understanding of the political ramifications of the concept of consultation (*shūrā*)⁵³, according to which the Qur'an does not provide any explicit guideline for governance beyond the principle of mutual consultation.⁵⁴ Consistent with his argument about the all-encompassing scope of Islam, and in a characteristically Shi'i manner, he argued that this comprehensiveness forestalls any claim that Islam or the Qur'an, having provided guidance in the minutest details of life, could be silent on the issue of governance. All the more so, because as history and experience has shown, governance has always had huge and wide-ranging consequences for a society. Islamic silence on the issue will be equivalent to "subordinating it to the unconscious errors of a fallible human's wants and ignorance." (6) The intellect cannot accept that such could be the case. Instead, if the Qur'an is indeed silent on the matter then one has to accept that in the Islamic perspective, there is no conception of governance without a religious guide that would watch over it. (6) Consequently, even

⁵³ As noted by Crone, in some way the principle of consultation was operative in the political milieu of pre-Islamic Arabia and was invoked on various occasions in early Islamic history as well, for example, for the election of 'Uthmān. See Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), especially 36-38 and 52. In the context of nation-state in the modern period, the word *shūrā* has been employed to argue for representative democracy. See *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. "Democracy".

⁵⁴ Derived from the Qur'anic verse 42:38, "And those who answer their Lord, and perform the prayer, their affair being counsel between them, and they expend of that We have provided them."

with division of labor (*taqḥīm-i 'amal*) in administering societies, political appointment and guidance as to how to run affairs have to come from the religious guide. That is why neither the ruler nor the community has any right to their opinions or consultation. This, however, does not preclude the religious guide to consult some people in worldly matters when he deems it fit. For 'Ali>Naqvi> his form of consultation may well be to make people responsible or for uniting them.⁵⁵

If in this essay, 'Ali>Naqvi>rejects consultation as the basis for governance, in *Islāmī>nazḥiyah-yi ḥḥkumat* (The Islamic concept of government),⁵⁶ he outlines a succinct yet comprehensive account of his political thought. The essay begins with the question of why government is necessary in the first place. In 'Ali>Naqvi>'s view the necessity of government emerges from the impossibility of absolute freedom for human beings. Lack of absolute freedom means that communal restrictions (*qḥyud*) are inevitable: "These communal restrictions (*ijṭama'>i>qḥyud*) are called 'ways of action and legislation' (*dastur-i 'amal aur qḥnun*), and the power that implements them is called a government (*ḥḥkumat*)."⁵⁷ Furthermore, necessity for government could also be annulled by the existence of individuals who carry a deep sense of responsibility towards fellow human beings and the community. Yet, the possibility that such sense of responsibility exists for all members is quite impossible; it can only occur when these individuals are devoid of errors in their thought or action, in other words, when they are infallible (*ma 'shūn*). When this utopian view is impossible, pursuing it will only be in vain. For

⁵⁵ Naqvi> *Qur'an aur nizḥm-i ḥḥkumat*, 6-7.

⁵⁶ 'Ali>Naqvi> *Nigāshat-i Sayyidul 'ulama'*, (Lahore: Imamia Publications, 1997). Shi'i commitment to the doctrine of Imamate through divine decree (*nasḥ*) meant rejection of the legitimacy of the *shu'ra* and explains why 'Ali>Naqvi>-criticized it. See Muhammad Husayn al-Tabatabai, *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 10.

⁵⁷ 'Ali>Naqvi> *Islāmī>nazḥiyah-yi ḥḥkumat*, 84.

ordinary fallible human beings in a communal setting—be it a household, a city or a nation—it is therefore inevitable to define and implement certain limits (*hhdudā*) and rights (*hhqhq*). The power that implements it and ensures that these limits and rights are adhered to is the government.⁵⁸

After positing the absolute necessity of government, ‘Ali>Naqvi> employs Aristotle’s threefold division of governance, monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy, evaluating each for its propriety. He points out that for over 2000 years and despite all the cultural and ideological revolutions, the forms of government found within human societies had always been from among these three. Yet, for ‘Ali>Naqvi> none of these forms of government are correct.⁵⁹

Based on the Islamic theological assumption that all human beings are created equal by God, ‘Ali>Naqvi> argued that for some one person to rule others, he needs to have some particular excellence over those ruled by him. Otherwise, this claim to power would be unacceptable. Turning to the particular manifestation of one-person’s rule (i.e., monarchy) he contended that history barely provides evidence for the excellence of kings over their subjects. Rather, monarchs most often employed power and coercion to rule, which could not be construed marks of their excellence: “If a person has established rule through coercion and then the subjects oppose his acquisition of power, how could this be a crime,” he asked.

Extending his analysis to the second and third form of governance, ‘Ali>Naqvi> observed that if no one person has any particular excellence that would qualify him to

⁵⁸ Ibid., 84-5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 85-6.

rule others, the same would be the case with the rule of a few. With the third case, he argues that the objective of governance itself gets compromised:

It means that the nation itself is the ruler, and itself ruled. It implies that the purpose of government itself is dissolved: Government was needed so that there is a power among those who are selfish, self-centered, and parochial (*kuṭāḥ nazḥr*) that would make them adhere to the true law. But when law-making is itself given to this group, they would legislate according to their desires. As a result, there would be a continuing push and pull among the various groups: one group would desire to impose their wants upon everyone else and change those [laws] when they begin to threaten their interests.⁶⁰

‘Ali>Naqvi>continues to identify limitations of the third form of governance. That most of his discussion relates to this third case must be clear from the historical milieu in which he lived. Due to the political transformations in India, the issue of what form of governance is endorsed by Islam and whether democracy has any justification within Islam was—and still is—a pressing question with huge sociopolitical import. In addressing *shura*>(consultation) in the previous essay and democratic governance here, ‘Ali>Naqvi>was responding to the burning questions of his cultural milieu.⁶¹

If the first part of the essay, he deals with the necessity and various forms of governance. In the second part he deals with the question of the proper form of “Islamic government”, especially elaborating on the adjective “Islamic” and the circumstances

⁶⁰ Ibid., 88.

⁶¹ The compatibility of Islam with democracy has been widely debated among Muslim intellectuals and there is a plethora of literature on this subject. I mention here only some of these sources: Khaled Abou El Fadl, Joshua Cohen, and Deborah Chasman, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy: A Boston Review Book*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2004; Roxanne Leslie Euben, and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Hamid Inayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought: The Response of the Shi'i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005); Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); ———, “Muslim Intellectuals and the Struggle for Democracy” in *Global Dialogue* vol. 6, no. 1–2 (Winter/Spring 2004). For the South Asian context see Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, “Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the Making of State Power,” in *Religion and Global Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); ———, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-I Islami of Pakistan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

under which it can be associated with the term “government”. ‘Ali>Naqvi>begins the analysis with a clear statement that Islamic governance can never be identified straightforwardly with Muslim governments, or with governments run by Muslims. For him, intellectually speaking, and as the later section of the essay would show that even on historical terms, they are separate. Looking back at how the question of governance was resolved in the early part of Islamic history, ‘Ali>Naqvi>identifies certain principles:

Popular opinion about the governments formed by Muslims—that they were based on democratic principle—is entirely wrong. In all these governments, there was always an individual sway (*shakhsi-farman rava-i*), which also did not have a single [underlying] principle: sometimes a ruler was elected in a gathering, sometimes the previous ruler nominated the one after him, sometimes a committee was formed for consultation, sometimes it only took becoming prominent to gain power. As it happened [i.e., just the way question of rule was resolved in history] accordingly were laid out the principles [of governance]: consensus (*ijma*), appointment (*istakhlaf*), consultation (*shura*), and force and domination (*qahr va ghalabah*).

Without explicitly stating the names, it is obvious that the first three principles of forming a government in ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s exposition relate respectively to the way the first three caliphs of Islam came into power; and the fourth refers to the Umayyad caliphate.⁶² ‘Ali>Naqvi>then sifts through each one of these principles and show how they are not unacceptable from both the intellectual (‘*aqli*’) and the transmitted (*naqli*) points of view. In regards to the principle of consultation (that resulted in Abu>Bakr’s caliphate), for example, ‘Ali>Naqvi>writes:

Does [consultation] mean agreement among all the individuals of the state, or all the people of the capital, or a group among those from the capital, or even further, some among this group who have come to agree? If it is all, then even in this age of electricity and communication and cars and airplanes, it would take

⁶² For historical details on the controversial subject of succession to the Prophet see Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003); Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

months. What about the times when these means for communication did not exist. In those days, this [consensus] was difficult to achieve in months; what to say about a small part of a day. Then on intellectual terms, no matter how big a group it may be, accepting the correctness of their decision rests on the presence of someone who is infallible within the group. If such is not the case, then how could a totality, each part of which is made up of error, be deemed devoid of it? If it is only some people from the capital, then what right do they have of taking away the freedom of the people from all other parts [of the state], and impose their government upon them?⁶³

Since the consensus that gave power to the first caliph could not be justified, ‘Ali>Naqvi> contends, how could it then justify transference of this power to the next (i.e., ‘Umar) by way of appointment (*istakhlaḥ*)?

Having argued for the shortcomings of all four principles, ‘Ali>Naqvi> then turns to putting forward his own prescription. He starts off by reasserting the ubiquitous claim about the comprehensiveness of Islamic teachings⁶⁴ and then states how the power to legislate from the Islamic viewpoint rests with God and God alone. It is only God who can ensure that laws are made that would transcend the capriciousness of human egocentrism. According to ‘Ali>Naqvi> the government has two functions: first, promulgating the constitution and law, and second, implementing these laws through the use of power and governance. Turning to the legislative function first, ‘Ali>Naqvi> argued that if Islam was simply a creedal system one could have presumed that Muslims are required to make their own legislation, or could have followed that of another country. But this view is incorrect. Since Islam presents a constitution of life (*dastur-i ḥayaḥ*), its teachings legislate for everything that concerns a human being at an individual or a collective level. By accepting Islam as one’s religion, every Muslim has pledged (*mu’ahaydah kiya*) to remain, in his individual and collective life, bound by this

⁶³ ‘Ali>Naqvi> *Islami-nazḥiyah-yi ḥikumat*, 90.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

law. Therefore, one could not claim to be a Muslim while also attempting to make laws that bypass or ignore the Islamic laws.⁶⁵ He further argued that there are many contemporary thinkers in whose opinion impartiality in the legislative process is only accomplished when the law is made not from within the group or nation of people for whom the law is made, but by those who are impartial towards all members of the group or nation. Such impartiality is impossible within human experience of communities and that is why it is perfectly logical to look beyond human legislation and seek the One whose Knowledge and Power encompasses everything and as the Creator of all does not favor one over another. This according to ‘Ali>Naqvi> is the Islamic viewpoint on governance. In conclusion therefore, “God is both the legislator and the ruler. With [acceptance of] Islam, a Muslim consents to His kingdom alone, after which a monarchy, an oligarchy or a democracy will be identical with taking away God’s right. After this the three forms of Aristotelian governments have no place. When there is one true ruler, that is God, then monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy are all equally wrong”.⁶⁶

After clarifying the nature of governance and the legislating authority of God in the Islamic perspective, ‘Ali>Naqvi> turns to the question of the ruling authority, the enforcer of the law: “Now, if the government is God’s, then it is God’s responsibility to appoint his representative in every era. To take this authority in your hands will be putting up resistance to the divine right to rule and against the honor of a Muslim.”⁶⁷ He continues to argue that the Prophet of Islam was chosen by God and ruled by divine

⁶⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 95.

right, without recourse to human consultation or appointment. Extending this argument later to early Islamic history ‘Ali>Naqvi>argues that it is precisely because Muslims chose their own rulers without paying attention to the Divine Will and appointment of the Prophet that differences of opinion began to originate.⁶⁸ Consequently, in denying God’s right of appointment, Muslims made arbitrary choices in political matters and in retrospect employed tenuous principles to unsuccessfully window-dress what was otherwise just the way political events unfolded in history.

It is obvious how the Shi’i view of the Imamate informs every step of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s analysis. God appointed the Prophet and the Prophet appointed ‘Ali>and so on down through the Imams that came afterward, until the last Imam, who went into occultation. Whether these Imams *de facto* ruled or not, *de jure* the right belongs to them permanently. Whereas the political thought of the Sunni Muslims posits material realization as a condition for legitimacy of the political power and seeks consensus or acquisition of power regardless of whether one has a right to it or not, the true Islamic viewpoint is principled and uninterested as to whether it is applied or not: “Even if the whole world rejects him, resolves to oppose him, tries to murder him, or even if he is in isolation, imprisoned or quite poor, if he is the most knowledgeable in Islamic law, a diligent practitioner of it, worthy of being its protector, and appointed by God on this position, then it is “Divine command” and it is obligatory on the world to follow it”.⁶⁹

He further argued that even when deprived of his right to rule, as a follower of the Divine command, it is then up to the divinely appointed ruler to decide when it is time to stay silent on the matter or when to rise up. At times he might come across

⁶⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 97.

obedient to the unjust ruler and accepting of his decrees, but it need not be construed as his acceptance of the ruler, rather perhaps his way of preserving higher aims set by God. In no way does he seek an objective other than the fulfillment of the Will of God, the real Ruler of everything.⁷⁰ It is evident that here ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> is defending the *modus operandi* of the Shi’i Imams who had often remained silent on political matters and did not challenge the ruling authority.

‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s whole discussion of Islamic political philosophy turns, in the final section of the essay, to address the implications of this viewpoint for the contemporary period. If a divinely appointed ruler is no longer present (referring to the occultation of the twelfth Shi’i Imam), how should Shi’i Muslims respond to this situation? For ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> the outward establishment of the rule of the hidden Imam depends on the existence of a significant number of righteous (*shālih*) followers. Absence of such successors of the Prophet is the main impediment for the establishment of the outward rule of the divinely-appointed ruler. The experience of 260 years during which eleven such divinely-appointed rulers lived proves the indispensability of such righteous followers. Until this situation would persist, one could not expect establishment of the divine governance within human societies.⁷¹

Considering finally the government of the religious scholars who represent the Imam in the realm of religious teachings, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> concludes that in view of the points already made, even they would be unable to create a divine government.⁷² Therefore, “In

⁷⁰ Ibid., 98.

⁷¹ Ibid., 98-9.

⁷² I have not been able to find anything in ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s writings that would be a direct comment upon the political developments in Shi’i Iran in the late 1970s. This is however one place where ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s argument seems to clearly forestall the doctrine of comprehensive authority of the jurist (*valayat al-faqih*) as argued by Ayatullah Khomeini. For the development of this doctrine in its modern Shi’i’ formulation

this situation one should have certainty that no matter what government there is, it will not be divinely sanctioned, whether it is of those from among us [i.e., the Shi'ites] or those who are outsiders."⁷³.

The closing remarks draw the full import of what all this discussion entails for the Shi'i Muslims who find themselves under governments that are not "Islamic" and ruled by the divinely appointed ruler. 'Ali>Naqvi's reply could be summed up under two principles: absolute commitment to the divine government which hampers unconditional cooperation with the existing governments, and in the peacemaking spirit of Islam and the example of the Imams, striving for peace in the society:

[For the Shi'ites] beside this divine government, the organization of any form of rule or an unconditional pact of cooperation with an institution are absolutely forbidden; especially when they have a pact with God (that we have to follow Him), then how could we unconditionally accept another group's [political] order of things (*nizām-i 'amal*)⁷⁴? [All the more because] it is possible that in this political order of things there will be situations when in fulfilling the commands of the divine governance, we might have to oppose it.

[All] this means is that for the sake of general peace [in the society], we must support every government, while remaining free in the awareness of our own sense of duty and by figuring out the right plan of action. Performing actions through adherence to the way of another group, however, is in conflict with adherence to the divine governance, and against the model of the infallible Imams.⁷⁵

The political ideas of 'Ali>Naqvi>are quite significant, especially when situated within their historical and sociopolitical milieu. First of all, in addressing the political question, 'Ali>Naqvi>was hardly dealing with a mere theoretical problem: as the last section reveals, the matter had serious implications for his Shi'i followers in the way they

see Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Just Ruler (al-Sultan al-adil) in Shi'ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷³ Ibid., 99.

⁷⁴ Literally "system of action".

⁷⁵ Ibid., 99-100.

would orient themselves vis-à-vis the Indian government. Not only did ‘Ali>Naqvi> attempt to uphold the traditional Shi’i view of the divine governance of the hidden Imam—and the situation with his occultation—but he also addressed the particular challenge of how one who adheres to this vision of political governance could relate to a political order that is not founded on it.

It must also be emphasized that from ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s point of view, there was absolutely no difference between the governance of Muslims and that of non-Muslims: all governments in the final analysis from the Shi’i vantage point are equally non-Islamic. In clarifying the matter in this manner, he articulated and defended the traditional viewpoint on the one hand, and made possible for his followers to fully embrace their political reality.⁷⁶ Finally, ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s prescription of “detached-cooperation” (one that would hardly put the religious and political convictions aside) provided Shi’i Muslims with a positive role that would allow constructive criticism of the state and its laws. Shi’i Muslims in this perspective were no passive spectators of the political process; they were rather its overseers, who had at their disposal a critical lens that was fully grounded in a dependable divine framework.

⁷⁶ Though not within the scope of this chapter, ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s position is worth comparing with his counterpart Shi’i ‘ulama> of Iran who had been heatedly debating the “political question” since the days of the Constitutional Revolution. See Vanessa Martin, “Trends in the Shi’i>Response to Constitutionalist Ideology in Iran” in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2, no. 3 (1992): 347-61; Abdol Karim Lahidji, “Constitutionalism and Clerical Authority” in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi’ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Dabashi, and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr. “The Debates over the Constitutional Revolution” in *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi’ism in History*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); and Linda S. Walbridge, “Analysis of Khomeini’s Proofs for *al-Wilaya al-Mutlaqa*” in *The Most Learned of the Shi’a: The Institution of the Marja’ Taqlid*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Concluding Remarks

In concluding this discussion that has been spread out over five chapters, let me suggest for one last time ‘Ali>Naqvi>particular method of *islah* of his community. Though the exact date of the publication of his essay ‘*‘Alami>mushkilat ka>hāl* (Solution to the problems of the world)⁷⁷ is unknown, it captures in a nutshell his approach:

A person who opened his eyes in an environment as narrow as that in which a religious scholar (*maulavi*) is trained, and whose information is [therefore] restricted to that limited circle, [such a person] would never have an opportunity to breathe the air outside of his country and would never have exchanged views with a political commentator, to the extent that he would never have had a basic membership of a political party. Why should there be expectations from him that he could present a “solution to the problems of the world”, especially when I neither have knowledge of the opinions of the thinkers and intellectuals of the world, nor have I studied the books of politicians about politics. In this situation, then, I cannot even understand what the problems of the world are in the first place; to prescribe their solution is a matter that would come only after that.

In reality, whatever I will say, it will not be a new thing; instead it will be my repetition to you of the lesson learned from 1400 years ago. Whether the world sees it as my narrow-mindedness, blind imitation, traditionalism (*qādamat pasandi*), or blame me for backwardness (*rij‘at pasandi*).

But in my view this world (‘*alam*) is nothing but in reality the name of a collection of different souls (*nufus*). That is why to discover the problems of the world does not require exertion from without (*bayruai>justaju*); instead, if there is nothing else, then we can study the psychology of our own self to estimate about the whole world. It is possible that someone would again consider it narrow-mindedness and say that ‘This is [again] like an insect within a wild fig that sees the whole world limited to that wild fig.’ I accept this, but there is a difference between me and this [insect]: the insect sees the world limited to a wild fig while I see my-self (*nafs*) encompassing (*muhit*) the [whole] world; that is, I see the macrocosm (‘*alam-i akbar*) in the microcosm (‘*alam-i asghar*).

In reality, a collection (*majmu‘ah*) of individuals is a community (*qaum*)⁷⁸, a collection of communities a country, and a collection of countries the world. Now, whatever faults (*kharabiyan*) are [found] within individuals, these will become the cause of the world’s problems: The same minor faults that are among individuals and are ignored [precisely on the grounds] that they are individual, will be born among communities and will be the cause of the enhancement of the world’s problems. Therefore, if the world’s problems are to

⁷⁷ Published in *Shu‘a-i ‘amal* (July 2009), 30 ff.

⁷⁸ The following comment makes it clear why *qāum* cannot be translated as the usual nation.

be eradicated then there is only one solution: that individual human character is reformed.

In my mind are two verses of the physician of the spirit, Hazrat ‘Ali>b. ‘Abu>Tālib:

Your cure is within you but you do not understand it (*dua’uka fika wa la>tubstir*)

And your illness is within you but you do not realize it (*da’uka fika wa la>tash’ur*)

You presume that you are a small body? (*ataz’amu annaka jirmun saghiḥ*)

While within you is hiding a great world (*wa fika intḥwa>al-‘alamu al-akbar*)⁷⁹

...The Qur’an has made the Prophet a Mercy for the worlds, that is, it gave him an international status (*bayn al-aqḡami>darjah*). The Prophet himself stated his prophetic mission (*maqḡḡd-i ba’sat*) in the following words: “I have been sent only to teach the human race the beauty of the morals” (*ḡḡsn-i ikḡlaḡ*).⁸⁰ God parenthetically (*ḡḡst kay saḡ*) called the Prophet “mercy for the worlds” and the Prophet explained parenthetically⁸¹ that his Prophetic mission was to teach humanity morals. Combining both, there is only one conclusion: that the solution to the world’s problems is simply that humanity be adorned with the ornaments of morals (30-31).

For ‘Ali>Naḡvi> in any endeavor of carrying out *islah* of a human society (or for that matter the whole world), one has to commence, not with institutions or socioeconomic or political structures, but with an individual human person. The more righteous the people are in a society, the better its chances of flourishing, maintaining order and equilibrium. In other words, reforming human beings is reforming the world, and vice versa. Reflecting back on the examination of his writings, it becomes clear that ‘Ali>Naḡvi>’s *islah* methodically followed this principle.

⁷⁹ ‘Ali>Naḡvi> does not cite the reference. According to a contemporary commentator of *Nahj al-Balaghah* (a collection of speeches and letters of the first Shi’i Imam ‘Ali>) although this couplet is not within this collection, it is attributed to him. See Muhammad TaḡḡJaḡfari> *A Translation and Commentary of Nahj al-Balaghah (Tarjumah wa tafsir Nahj al-balaghah)*, (Tehran, 1981), p. 267.

⁸⁰ Majlisi> Muḡḡammad Baḡḡr b. Muhammad *Bihḡḡ al-anwaḡ al-jamii’ a li-durar akḡbaḡ al-a’imma al-athḡaḡ*. Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Wafa’, 1403, vol. 7 p. 372.

⁸¹ ‘Ali>Naḡvi> is commenting on the particle *innama*> which precedes both the Qur’anic verse that refers to the Prophet as “Mercy for the Worlds” and the hadith-report where the Prophet describes his Prophetic function of “beautifying human morals”. The occurrence in both reports of this particle for ‘Ali>Naḡvi> clarifies that the Prophetic mission was restricted, or confined (*ḡḡst*) to this function of “beautifying morals” *alone*.

It is not surprising then that the path of *islah* he laid out for himself accorded centrality to a human person. During the earlier years, it is this centrality of an individual that led to the project of rethinking and reconfiguring of Islamic theology and praxis. To reform a human person for him was to alter the way a human looks at the world, and understands his place in it. That is why the earlier writings discussed meaning of human life and death, the role of religious beliefs in breathing new life into human existence, and of concrete religious practices in deepening the affects of this renewed life. For 'Ali>Naqvi> the wisdom of a religion like Islam is precisely its ability to anticipate all these inherent needs of a human person. By prescribing an unambiguous view of the world and tapping deep into the mysteries of human reality, it simplifies for its adherents the much-needed perspective (i.e., religious beliefs) and ways of conforming to it (i.e., religious practice), which would otherwise remain veiled from his discernment.

Nevertheless, in 'Ali>Naqvi>'s view, the twentieth century had posed a special challenge to a religious universe like Islam: it had deprived Islam of this essential role. Rarely had the role of religion in orienting human life and the ordering of a peaceful and prosperous society come under such severe attack. "New objections" had instated major intellectual and psychological barriers which were preventing his followers from embracing their religious convictions in a meaningful way. Consequently, religion was no longer a source of *islah* of the human society. Religion's vital role in reforming an individual, which is the basis for the reform of the society, was seriously threatened. That is why for 'Ali>Naqvi> convinced of religion's supreme role in ordering human society, religion itself needed to be preserved and revived. Reform of human society, in

other words, depended on the preservation of religion. Since the changing of the social milieu was replete with calls for reform (*islah*), using this extensive interest as the common ground, ‘Ali>Naqvi> began to rework and re-present anew the traditional Islamic viewpoint.

Foregoing chapters make it clear that together the writings and speeches from the two phases of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s career were geared toward a comprehensive *islah* of his Shi’i community. While also asserting its comprehensive scope, the earlier phase was dedicated to making a strong case for Islam’s sagacious teachings in reforming an individual’s life. In the later phase, he then turns to the social and political teachings of Islam. In other words, commencing with an individual’s *islah* gradually he branched out to a comprehensive *islah* of the Indian Shi’i community. Observing the multitude of challenges that had besieged his followers, between the two phases, ‘Ali>Naqvi> evaluated and prioritized them, responding first to those that seemed more critical, then branching out to address others. In completing this comprehensive *islah* however, Islamic teachings were almost always articulated in universal terms. It is clear from the discussion of chapter 1 why nothing less could have satisfied his audience. It is in view of this wide-ranging scope of his religio-intellectual project that ‘Ali>Naqvi> lectured and wrote relentlessly throughout his life. His dedication to this project meant that by the time of his death, there was hardly any subject that had not received some attention from him.

In following this trajectory of reforming Islamic society, ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s *islah* of his Shi’i community mirrors that of his Indian Sunni counterparts. In other words, it is

reminiscent of the revivalism of the “Inward Turn”⁸² championed by various religious movements in the contemporary South Asian milieu. Yet what sets ‘Ali>Naqvi> apart from these movements (and their ideologues) is his refusal to accept privatization of Islam from the Indian public sphere. The contrast is crucial and deserves some discussion and clear emphasis.

Recent scholarship has posited increasingly privatization of religion in Muslims societies a major phenomenon and has also delineated its genealogy. Note, for example, Zaman (2002)’s comments in his well-known study of the ‘ulama’ of South Asia:

The most important of the categories that have shaped all discussion of the madrasa, as indeed of many other institutions of Indian society, is the notion of "religion". As Talal Asad has argued, developments in modern Europe and especially the impact of the Enlightenment led not merely to the subordination of religion to the state, or the confinement of the former to the spirit of "private" life, but also to "the construction of religion as the new historical object: anchored in person experience, expressible as belief – statements, dependent on private institutions, and practiced in one's spare time. This construction of religion is sure that it is part of what is *inessential* to our common politics, economy, science, and morality” (62).

Zaman’s insightful analysis conclusively demonstrates how without really intending to be secular in any way – quite to the contrary it was in fact to resist secularization of Muslim society –that the ‘ulama’ in a roundabout way ended-up *internalizing* the category of religion, and thus its privatization. In reasserting their religious authority on

⁸² I have borrowed this term from Qasim Zaman:

A major stimulus to the emergence of revivalist trends, from the second half of the nineteenth century, lay in the recognition by the Muslim cultural and religious elite that British colonial rule could not be effectively combated by force of arms or political resistance. Following the work of Barbara Metcalf [1982], Robinson [2000] sees Deoband and several other movements as representing an “inward turn” (cf. *Islam in Muslim History*, 115ff.) – an effort to preserve and deepen individual piety and personal responsibility and *thereby* to secure the survival of the community – at a time when Muslims had lost political power to the British and when they had begun to see the threat of India’s Hindu majority to their own community and culture in a new and alarming dimension (254).

See his “Review Essay: Modernity and Religious Change in South Asian Islam” in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* (2004), 14: 253-263

the one hand, and communal Muslim identity on the other, this internalization of distinctions within the ambit of life not only helped carve a distinct sphere of “religion”, but also shaped their seminary curricula within which became operative categories of religious (*dini*) and worldly (*dunyawi*) sciences (*‘ulum*). Ironically then, it is precisely the fear of relegation of Islam to the private sphere and its outright rejection that led to carving of a religious space independent of other domains of life, and freeing of the latter from the former’s influence.

...[T]he ‘ulama’ who have written on the question of madrasa reform have... insisted that the debate on the madrasa is a debate on the status and future of Islam itself, for the madrasa is both the bastion of Islam and its guardian. This equation between Islam and the madrasa is not just a polemical and, doubtlessly to some, persuasive argument against reform; it is also an argument for differentiating religion from other areas of life and thereby for asserting its autonomy in society. The issue here is not the separation of religion and state, or of society and state – which, some have argued, had come about in Muslim societies from the first centuries of Islam – but rather a recognition by the ‘ulama themselves of greater differentiation *within* society, with religion occupying the distinct, inviolable, autonomous sphere. Inasmuch as the functional differentiation of the religious from others appears is at the heart of secularization in modern societies, the ‘ulama’ might be said to have accepted this facet of secularization. Yet the recognition of this functional differentiation does not derive from any commitment to the idea of secularization itself, but is intended rather to serve as a means of resisting or limiting the encroachments of the modern state (84).⁸³

⁸³ For his analysis see chapter 3 “Reform and the Religious Sphere” of the book. Bellah’s analysis echoes the same scenario at a more general level for modern Islamic societies:

Where Islam has simply been identified with the specificities of an existing traditional society it has been little more than an obstruction to modernization at the personal, familial, political, and religious level. Every institutional or ideological change in education, family, or law has simply been blindly opposed. Such blind reaction is almost everywhere precipitated its dialectical opposite: the importation of Western secular ideologies as the real guiding forces of life. This need not necessitate the outright rejection of Islam in some form of atheism or agnosticism, though this too has occurred. It may involve simply the relegation of Islam to the realm of purely private concerns so that it is without relevance to most of life (159).

See his essay “Islamic Tradition and the Problem of Modernization” in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

Furthermore, observers of contemporary intellectual trends within the Islamic world have time and again called attention to the inevitability of confronting the challenges posed by modernity on the one hand, and on the other inadequacy of the Muslim intelligentsia in satisfying the religio-intellectual needs of their Muslim audience. The late Hamilton Gibb had pointed that out in his well known essay:

Every religion has necessarily built up its own frames of reference, general structures of thought abstracting from the material world of senses in terms of which it presents its spiritual or ethical message to mankind and defends its basic positions. Insofar as a religious system affirms certain positives, it excludes or denies concepts opposed to or inconsistent with these positions. Every religion today, including Islam, is confronted with searching questions as to the validity of its metaphysics, its ideal constructions abstracted from the material world, and of the resulting frames of reference within which its doctrines are formulated and expounded. The problem which Islam must face is that its traditional formulations necessarily include certain elements of reasoning which are based on intellectual concepts no longer accepted, and that it must be continually adapting its apologetic to more acceptable concepts –some of which it may even have denied in the past –with the penalty of creating a condition of 'double-mindedness' among its adherents... Since this challenge comes almost wholly from the outside world, for the great majority of Muslims the old frames of reference have remained completely adequate. If at any time any hint of doubt or questioning seeps through from current philosophies developed in the West, it is immediately and decisively countered in the Muslim mind by the dogma of the 'materialist West', having no grasp of spiritual realities, and therefore deserving no serious attention (3-4).⁸⁴

I hope the discussion thus far of 'Ali-Naqvi's thought makes it clear how his intellectual life was geared towards avoiding privatization of religion on the one hand, and meeting

⁸⁴ See Hamilton, A. R. Gibb. "The Heritage of Islam in the Modern World (I)." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1, no. 1 (1970): 3-17. Similar observations are made by Bellah in the essay already cited:

If Islam out of its own resources cannot provide an encompassing myth for the Muslim peoples – and of course it must be a new kind of myth – more self-conscious, flexible, and expressive than the traditional ones – than other kinds of thought will...Perhaps the greatest problems of modernization of all for Islam is not whether it can contribute to political, familial, or personal modernization, but whether it can effectively meet the specifically religious needs of the modern Muslim peoples (166).

the particular needs of the modern Muslim mindset. His fame and communal popularity provides ample evidence as to his success in this project.

Until this point the study has largely been preoccupied with the content of his message, barely mentioning the form that it took. Yet, the success of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s religio-intellectual project owes as much to the medium, as it did to the message itself. In fact, his innovations in this realm remained a conscious and critical part of his project. In concluding this study, in recapitulating ‘Ali>Naqvi’s religio-intellectual project constituted by the strands of “rethinking” and “reconfiguring” of Islamic tradition, it will be appropriate as well then to examine this remaining dimension: ‘Ali>Naqvi’s approach toward the popularization of his message.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ I have briefly touched upon this aspect of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s religio-intellectual project in Chapter 4.

CONCLUSION: A COMPREHENSIVE *ISLAH* REFLECTIONS ON ‘ALI>NAQVI’S THOUGHT AND LEGACY

‘Ali>Naqvi’s intellectual career comprised of three distinct and vital strands: rethinking, reconfiguring, and popularizing. For ‘Ali>Naqvi> given the magnitude of the crises faced by his community, any earnest response had to be grounded in sensitivity to the nature and extent of these problems, a careful assessment of the intellectual, symbolic, and communal resources upon which such a response could be structured, and finally, a fresh appraisal of how to publicize this well-thought out response. This study illustrates that in all stages of his intellectual career, he intended that these three facets were always in concert. It also shows how ‘Ali>Naqvi> strove to be exhaustive in his comprehensive enterprise.

Popularizing the Reconfigured Message

Before making some observations on ‘Ali>Naqvi’s religio-intellectual project and his legacy, let me recapitulate the findings of this study. Chapter 1 abridged ‘Ali>Naqvi’s examination and reception of the various crises faced by his Shi’ite community in the modern age (within which the religious crisis was given a pivotal status). Chapters 2 and 3 then examined ‘Ali>Naqvi’s rethinking and reconfiguring of the foundations of Islamic theology and praxis along rational lines. In chapter 4, I turned to ‘Ali>Naqvi’s appropriation of the symbolic sources of Islam and their employment in the task of religious revival. I also showed how his careful channeling of the symbolic

sources both complemented and supplemented his rethinking and reconfiguring of Islamic theology and its praxis discussed earlier. Finally, chapter 5 was an account of how firmly situating himself within this reconfigured understanding of the Islamic tradition, ‘Ali>Naqvi>cautiously branched out to enunciate the Islamic vision of human society in all its breadth and depth. Jointly, chapters 1 through 5 then encapsulate the full breadth of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s religio-intellectual project.¹

Having closely examined the content of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s message, it is timely now to turn to the medium or form in which it was communicated. If rethinking and reconfiguring was critical to ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s religio-intellectual project, so was its popularization, the significance of which I have continued to stress. Chapter 4 had an elaborate discussion of why he chose to lecture from the pulpit, something quite unusual for a scholar of his stature. In his own words, through the force of circumstance, he reluctantly made this choice: “Stubborn opponents (*mu’āhidīn*) have needlessly turned me into a controversial (*nazaʿī*) personality² and have forced me to do preaching (*zakari*). Had I stayed in seclusion, I could have provided resources (*mavaʿ*) for those giving sermons (*khatḥub*), preachers (*zakirun*) and polemicists (*munazārah baz*). With those [resources] they could have served the true religion (*dīn-i ḥaqīq*) and given compelling answers to their opponents. This would have been a great service to religion (*dīn*)”.³

¹ It must be stated again that this study has consciously avoided abstractions and a use of popular categories such as ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’. This was in service of a careful consideration of the text and the context. The focus has instead been on the ‘concrete language’ in which the problem of modernity was understood and articulated by ‘Ali>Naqvi>in his writings and speeches. That is why, inasmuch as the sources have permitted, I have kept my commentary to a minimum.

² Perhaps allusion to the controversy generated by his book *Shahid-i insāniyat*.

³ ‘Ali>Naqvi> *Sayyidul ‘ulamaʿ: ḥāya aur kaḥmāy*, 83.

These were not just words: In the early years under the titles *The First Book of Preaching* (*zakri-ki-pehli-kitab*) and *The Second Book of Preaching* (*zakri-ki-dusri-kitab*), ‘Ali>Naqvi>wrote manuals to help improve the quality of preaching in India.⁴ ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s preface of the latter reads: “In accordance with the ten days of Muharram, in this book there are ten rough [lecture] drafts (*musavvaday*) for those preachers (*zakiriya*) who are used to speaking for a [relatively] longer time [during their preaching], and, in terms of knowledge, possess an average level of ability (*isti’dad*). In these drafts, the quality [of the exposition] has been raised to a level higher than [found in] *The First Book of Preaching* (*zakri-ki-pehli-kitab*)”. In other words, organically tied to his decision to sit on the pulpit, these texts were authored to raise the quality of Shi‘ite preaching. These writings were also part of his endeavors to bridge the widening gap between the findings of the Shi‘ite scholarly tradition—one grounded in authoritative texts—and exaggerated mythologies rehashed from the pulpit. If to revive Islam the culture of preaching were to be successfully reconfigured, his own relentless lecturing would not suffice, but rather the entire discipline of preaching would need to be improved.

In regards to his popularization of the reconfigured message, mention must also be made of the Imamia Mission. I have already noted⁵ how almost exclusively all the earlier works published by the Imamia Mission were authored by ‘Ali>Naqvi>. Its first publication, *Qatila-i Husayn ka-mazhab* (1932) happened also to be the first book authored by ‘Ali>Naqvi> upon his return from Iraq. As the biographer of ‘Ali>Naqvi> noted, it is the publication of this work that provided the foundation for the establishment of the Imamia Mission. *Qatila-i Husayn ka-mazhab* (1932) was written

⁴ Information regarding the date and place of publication of this text is not given.

⁵ See chapter 1.

to respond to the polemical attacks from the editor of the magazine *an-Najm*, Maulana 'Abd al-Shakur, who had accused Shi'ites of killing Imam H{usayn. The Shi'ites of India had anxiously awaited a rebuttal of this charge, which eventually came from the pen of 'Ali>Naqvi> and was published as a series of newspaper articles in the newspaper *Sarfaraz* (Lucknow). A young Shi'ite man, Ibn H{usayn Naqvi> working as an accountant in the newspaper resolved that these articles needed to be compiled and published as a book. With the help of some friends he was finally able to accomplish that. When it came to choosing the publisher's name, he chose the name Imamia Mission, thus establishing the publication house. Although not directly his own doing, it was 'Ali>Naqvi>'s writings that resulted in the creation of this institution which would then publish over a thousand books. Within months, he also came to head the institution and oversee its various activities.⁶ These included the translation of Shi'ite literature (mainly 'Ali>Naqvi>'s works but not restricted to those) into other regional languages of India, including English. Later in 1955, during his first trip to Pakistan, 'Ali>Naqvi> founded the counterpart to the Imamia Mission in Lahore. The Imamia Mission Pakistan also initiated a series of publications of Shi'ite literature in Urdu to meet the religious needs of the community. Although temporarily cut short in its activities in 1986, the institution was revived in Pakistan in 1996 again and has continued to publish 'Ali>Naqvi>'s writings.⁷

The Imamia Mission has played a vital role in shaping the intellectual life of the Shi'ites of South Asia. In this regard his biographer observes the following:

⁶ See Naqvi> *Sayyidul 'ulama': h{ayāt aur kaḥnāmay*, 65ff.

⁷ From the preface of *Nigāshat-i sayyidul 'ulama'*, 6.

If the person of Sayyidul ‘Ulama’ and the efforts of the Imamia Mission were not there, then in the previous 50 years there would have been a deep silence on the front of writings and publication. Yes, there would have been writings and books which, instead of contemporary problems, would have addressed one or two doctrinal or historical discussions. Their whole focus would have been to copy the miracles [of the holy Shi‘ite figures] and, without arguments, to attack [sectarian opponents] in a sentimental manner. Have we ever considered that if there were not the pen of Sayyidul ‘Ulama’ then what would we have to present in front of the powerful pens of Maulana>Shibli> Maulana>Sulayman Nadvi> Maulana>Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana>Maududi?⁸

Perhaps an exaggeration on the part of the biographer, nevertheless, the comment does capture accurately ‘Ali>Naqvi’s contributions to Shi‘ite Islam in South Asia. In the absence of this institution and ‘Ali>Naqvi’s writings, which constituted its mainstay, perhaps there would have been a dearth of literature that would have addressed the contemporary needs of the Shi‘ite community or represented the Shi‘ite point of view.

Although making free and extensive use of the print-medium, ‘Ali>Naqvi>was quite selective and innovative in how this medium was channeled toward the task of popularization. Since his writings were intended for the Shi‘ite general public, ‘Ali>Naqvi>kept his treatises concise and to the point, some of his essays no more than only 10-15 pages. That did not mean compromise on the quality or content of the message. If, on the one hand, conciseness and simplicity meant accessibility for his lay audience, on the other hand it also made it possible for ‘Ali>Naqvi>to address a wide range of subjects. As was noted earlier⁹, it is due to this dimension that ‘Ali>Naqvi>could not finish the ambitious project of his Qur’anic commentary along the intended lines.

⁸ Naqvi> *Sayyidul ‘ulama’: h̄yaʿ awr kaḥmāy*, 67. These are names of some of the most prominent Sunni scholars of the late 19th and the 20th century.

⁹ See chapter 5.

Furthermore, not only did ‘Ali>Naqvi’s style make the arguments accessible to the lay audience in general, but it also allowed him to tailor his message to particular members of the community at large, another major feature of his writings and thought. *What* ‘Ali>Naqvi>chose to write or speak about was predominantly a function of the audience to *whom* he was speaking and *how* he argued was also colored strongly by his intended audience. His project of religious preservation and revival demanded convincing a range of audiences, with varying levels of admiration, affiliation, sympathy, criticisms, and/or doubts regarding religion. It also included a huge majority that identified strongly with religion but needed tools to feel empowered intellectually in the face of objections against religion. To be able to reach out to all and satisfy this multi-layered audience was no easy task. Yet, as many examples cited in this study, ‘Ali>Naqvi>approached the question of audience in almost a calculated manner, choosing judiciously what sorts of arguments would best persuade the intended audience. This “audience-specificity” of his writings and speeches was critical to the success of his project.

Finally, beside his scholarly accomplishments, his admirers¹⁰ have time and again pointed to ‘Ali>Naqvi’s piety, charisma, and immense ability as a speaker as reasons why he left upon them such a strong impression. An interviewer mentioned how he stopped attending Muharram gatherings (*majalis*) after ‘Ali>Naqvi’s death since “there was no one worth listening to anymore”. One interviewee noted that ‘Ali>Naqvi> was “truly what a religious scholar should be like, most knowledgeable, most articulate,

¹⁰ During my fieldwork in Pakistan I have personally interviewed many who had known or read the works of ‘Ali>Naqvi> or heard him live. In the case of India I had to rely on phone interviews and Skype conversations. A detailed discussion of this aspect of his life and influence is outside the scope of this study.

and most pious”. Another claimed that “there will hardly be anyone more eloquent than him.” His eloquence, religious authority as an *‘alim*, piety, and charisma remained crucial to the popularization of his message.¹¹

Reflections on ‘Ali>Naqvi’s Religio-Intellectual Project

In 1971, ‘Ali>Naqvi>penned an essay “Islam in the Contemporary Age” (*Islām ‘ahd-i ḥāzīr main*)¹². In many ways this essay summarizes ‘Ali>Naqvi’s religio-intellectual project and its various strands I have laid out in the preceding chapters. Written towards the latter part of his career, more significantly, it is ‘Ali>Naqvi’s clearest statement regarding how he himself looked at the multitude of intellectual activities he carried out in the preceding forty years, i.e., from 1930-1970. It conclusively corroborates the overarching assertion of this study, namely that ‘Ali>Naqvi’s diverse activities (whether intellectual or otherwise) constitute essentially an organic unity. In other words, his writings, speeches, the manifold topics he chose to write or speak about, the establishment of the Imamia Mission and its publication house, relentless public lecturing, efforts to unite the Muslim community, the reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis, and his exposition of Islam’s sociopolitical vision are all dimensions of a single project: the project of the rehabilitation and revival of Islam against its progressively declining fate within Indian society. A reflection on the various aspects of his own intellectual life and efforts and a reminder to his Muslim audience of what needed to be accomplished in the face of the numerous crises of the contemporary

¹¹ ‘Ali>Naqvi’s careful assertion of his religious authority (and with that of ‘ulama> in general) is a topic worthy of discussion, but remains outside the scope of this study. For a discussion of charisma and religious authority within the Islamic milieu, especially during the early Islamic history, see Liyakatali Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shi’ite Islam*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

¹² This essay is taken from his collection *Contemporary Questions (Zinda savakā)*, (Aligarh: Aligarh University Press, 1971).

era, for the task of reviewing his religio-intellectual project in these concluding remarks, the following essay provides an excellent synthesis of the findings of this study regarding 'Ali>Naqvi>intellectual career. Given its significance, I have translated the complete essay:

Islam is from the beginning (*aza*) and will be unto eternity (*abad*): ([As the Qur'an mentions] the religion with God is Islam¹³). It is impossible for anything in existence (*ka'sinat*) to escape from its all-encompassing circle: if someone is unable to accept it by choice (*ikhtiyar*), he has to accept it by compulsion (*izharar*), ([as the Qur'an says] do they desire another religion than God's, and to Him has surrendered whoso is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly)¹⁴. In different ages, causes (*muharrakat*) responsible for willful acceptance of Islam are a few or many. Therefore, with respect to each age one can ascertain how much the atmosphere (*fazl*) was conducive for Islam's acceptance in it. Seen from this point of view one feels that no age other than the present one had a more appropriate atmosphere [for the acceptance of Islam]. The more the contemporary age progresses in its particular traits (*khasusiat*), the more the atmosphere will be conducive for Islam and the world will consciously or unconsciously come closer and closer to it. In this regard, I present a few dimensions.

(1)

Religions that felt threatened by thinking and reflection and closed the doors of reason are other [than Islam]. Islam has always addressed the people of the intellect and has invited them to reflect and ponder. That is why the inclination of people toward thinking and reflection—which is a characteristic of this age—is a good omen for proving Islam's truthfulness. Insofar as the people will consent to thinking and reflection, they will come closer to the truths of Islam.

(2)

Islamic teachings are extremely congruent (*ham ahang*) with the general [principles of] reasoning, communal feeling (*hasa'i-jtima'i*), and the demands of nature (35). Things which are a hurdle in Islam's path are fetters of ancient traditions, blind imitation of forefathers, and the shackles of the rituals of the existing religions. To the degree that the fervor of the atheistic trend (*la mazhabi-ka rujhan*) and rebellion against the older customs of the contemporary world progress, to that degree, the world will be prepared to accept the true verdict of

¹³ Qur'an 3:19. I have modified Arberry's translation here.

¹⁴ Qur'an 3:83

intellect and nature. In other words, atheism prepares grounds for that kind of religion which is able to truly quench the thirst of reason and conscience. We should reckon that in this destruction is hidden a form of renovation (*ta'miṣ*)¹⁵ and this lightning, while demolishing falsehood (*baṣṭ*), will also build home for the true religion.

(3)

Ghalib¹⁶ describes a psychological and natural reality: “the extremity of grief becomes medicine.” From this point of view the havoc wreaked by the alliance between scientific progress (*sa'insi-taraqḡ*) and heresy (*ilhāḡ*) is such that it has caused much distress in the human heart and conscience. By reaching its limits this distress is forcing the ship of the human mind to seek a peaceful shore. And this peace could truly be found in knowing God, about which the Qur'an says: “In God's remembrance are at rest in the hearts.”¹⁷

(4)

The greatest opposition to Islam that had come to this End times was from Communism. After Stalin, the dispersion and disagreement that has risen [among its camps]—whether it weakened it materially or not—have defeated communism in the domain of its belief system and practice (36). Those same things which religion is blamed for to [make people] turn away from religion are now divulged about communism itself, to the extent that now there are sects within it whose differences, moreover, have now leaked out (*tḡsht azbaḡ*). Just the way people of religion used to fight in the name of religion, communist sects are fighting one another. Now that the decline of the greatest competitor of Islam in this epoch has begun, obviously then the atmosphere is becoming conducive for Islam's progress (*irtaqḡ*). There is no reason why after fully defeating its last competitor (*ḡḡriṣ*), it will not attain complete power. After that it is quite possible that Islam would dominate the whole world whose prophecy was made by the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him and his family) in his reliable hadith-reports.

(5)

The proximity of Islamic teachings to the nature of things (*fiṭḡat*)¹⁸ has a consequence that by making use of conscious or unconscious independent reflection, the world in the name of “reforms” and “progress”, has begun to

¹⁵ Literally *ta'miṣ* means to build.

¹⁶ Famous Urdu poet of the 19th century.

¹⁷ Qur'an, 13:28.

¹⁸ Literally nature but here meant in the sense of “the way things are.”

accept the injunctions of Islamic Shari‘a. For example, places where there was no remarriage for widows, there have been attempts to initiate it; where women did not have inheritance, laws have been promulgated there to give them the right to inherit; where there was no divorce after marriage are now implemented laws to allow divorce. The name of war has been changed to defense which is the way the Qur’an speaks about it. Everyone is aware [now] of the wrongs of racial and ethnic divides. All the civilized world has come to agree on the falsehood of the black-white opposition and the rights that were based on this [distinction]. It is a different matter that in practical implementation of these things there have been difficulties. In theoretical terms, however, the world has submitted to the Islamic ideas. Soon the day will come when all hurdles will be removed and all these things will be practically implemented.

(6)

The thing the world most craves for is unity [of humanity] (37). Nowhere in the systems or laws of the world is to be found a more complete message about human unity and egalitarianism than in the Qur’an. This is another reason why the world has no option but to accept the Islamic order at some stage.

(7)

Regarding distribution of wealth, the reaction to the poor results of capitalism (*sarmayah dārī*) had pushed the world towards communism (*ishtarakīyat*) which in this regard is another point of extremity. By witnessing the adverse extremities [of communism], now the world has begun to retreat from it. [Consequently], in Russia, limited private ownership (*infaradi>malkiyat*) and personal property (*shakhsi>ja’idaat*) have been accepted. Therefore, after experimenting with the two points of extreme, there is left but only one position of equilibrium, the one that Islam stands for.

(8)

In the confrontation between capitalism and communism on the one side is the United States, and on the other Russia and China. On both sides are angry powers which are competing with each other in progress. Due to this competition there is a cold war between them and each side is trying—and will continue to try—to prove itself to be more balanced compared to the other, to gain popularity among the neutral parts of the world. In this case, it is necessary that the capitalist side will try to remove those faults that are associated with its system, and those upholders of communism, the excesses of communism. The retreating feet of both sides will help intersect in an embrace that will be closest to Islam’s [position]. (38)

(9)

The materialist point of view tells us that the origin of the human journey is in the era of savagery (*daur-i vahshat*) where every human lives in a different world. Then came the feeling for communal life (*ijtima-i-zindagi*) and houses were built. Other houses were joined to making bigger houses, and houses were joined to build clans. Clans united to form countries and many countries came together to form empires. Thus, the pace of human progress points to the direction that multiplicities are transformed into unities. These days the pace of progress has reached a moment when the whole world is divided between two points, East and West. Now the discussion is convened about what is good for Asia, what for Europe. Now the next step could only be that these two are joined. For this day the Qur'an had spoken, "To God belong the East and the West"¹⁹. What is this division between East and West, both are God's. Thus, the pinnacle of human progress to which humanity can reach without delay is that through God's unity the whole world feels brotherhood. That day will be one when the Qur'anic promise will be fulfilled and the whole world will be united under Islam's banner.

(10)

Finally, the purity and greatness of the lives of the guides of Islam: the moral teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him); the life of the commander of the faithful 'Ali>ibn Abi>Tālib, especially the simple life led during his caliphate and his egalitarianism and care for humans; the great sacrifice of Imam H{usayn and other Imams; and the examples of the lives of people's true [spiritual] teachers (*sachay pi*). Without employing the burden of religious terminology that causes unfamiliarity (and by separating these lives from miracles etc. which distract today's mind from reflection and thinking (39)) [all these resources must be] presented from the ethical (*akhlaq*) and anthropological (*insan*) point of view. Thank God this task (*kam*) has been started by some servants of God (*khudakay banday*). No matter how much those fettered by the curling locks of custom and rituals oppose [these things], due to the best result (*aslah>natijah*) [exhibited by this task] in view of the demands of the contemporary world, it will only move forward. On this path there is no retreat!

[Concluding Remarks]:

Through a full utilization of the existing developed media for communication and printing this project²⁰ is pushed forward, the attractiveness of these ethical teachings and unrivaled lives [of the Imams] will cause the slow dragging

¹⁹ Qur'an, 2:142.

²⁰ Although literally the word "*kam*" means task or job, in the context of the enormity of the task in 'Ali>Naqvi's exposition—and as demonstrated throughout this study—it is more proper to present it as a project.

(kashan kashan) of the world towards this center [i.e., Islam]. In the end the world has to gather around this center of true Islam, of whose [teachings] these personalities were concrete embodiments ('amali-mujassimah)²¹.

At present, these ten dimensions have been presented in a summary fashion (*mujmalan*). If they were written about in detail, it would result in a huge book (emphasis added).

'Ali>Naqvi>never wrote in detail about these matters; yet his career—his other writings, preaching, and his message—is by itself a commentary on the various dimensions he lists here. First, evident from the title of this essay 'Ali>Naqvi>'s concern, first and foremost, was religion and its fate in the modern age. The ten dimensions he cited were prefaced by the burning questions of his time: “What will be the fate of Islam in the contemporary era?”; “Can Islam play any important role in today’s world?”; “How in the face of the criticisms of Islam from all sides could religion be ‘preserved’²²?” It has been my contention that 'Ali>Naqvi>'s entire corpus is a response to these questions and geared toward the preservation of Islam in the Indian milieu. If the category of “religion” was assumed by his interlocutors to be redundant in the modern age, 'Ali>Naqvi>had to convince his audience that this conclusion was fundamentally flawed. Since his interlocutors had rejected religion precisely in the name of social and cultural reform, 'Ali>Naqvi>went at length to demonstrate to them that the task of reform is best accomplished through religion, thus necessitating its preservation. In his argument, Islam was the single most important resource for the *islah* of the society. In a nutshell, his is a project of preserving and cultivating religion in times of crisis. This task of

²¹ Literally “practical embodiment”.

²² “If there is a religion [i.e., Islam], which, with respect to its teachings, is a supporter of peace and harmony and of generating a milieu of tranquility and concord, then *such a religion deserves to be preserved* for the reformation of the world....The real struggle for reform (*islah*) [therefore] will be the spreading (*tarvij*) of the teachings of religion and the attempt to turn people into its adherents (emphasis added).” See Chapter 1, p.46.

safeguarding and nurturing Islam, however, could not be accomplished in the old-fashioned way, by stridently sounding the religious creed and its obligations and prohibitions into Muslim ears. Religious discourse, while remaining grounded in its broader vision and deeper commitments, needed to depart from its formal expressions. In other words, it is only by way of reconfiguring religion that religion could be preserved and returned to its prestige.

Interestingly, to his audience, ‘Ali>Naq̣vi’s tone is reassuring, and his message, “Islam has every reason to prevail!”, I believe successfully continues to mitigate the fears and anxieties of his Muslim audience. In other words, for ‘Ali>Naq̣vi inasmuch as the Shi‘ite Muslims of South Asia would be attentive to the concrete peculiarities of the crisis in the contemporary period, the immense resources of the Islamic tradition (both intellectual and symbolic), the new opportunities to spread the teachings of Islam, and the widespread deep feeling of crisis and dismay caused by these contemporary challenges would be transformed into a colossal prospect of a fresh appreciation and esteem for the teachings of the Islamic faith.

Second, his conception of Islam is not that of a privatized religion which is to be practiced in one’s private space and spare time; it is that of a religion which simultaneously covers human personal and communal needs, i.e., the private and the public dimensions of human life. That is why ‘Ali>Naq̣vi’s exposition transitions so easily from Islam’s emphasis on the remembrance of God (personal peace of mind) to its sociopolitical vision (social peace and harmony). In chapter 3 and chapter 5 the relationship between the private and the public, between core religious beliefs and practices were extensively discussed. What deserves emphasis is how this reconfigured

understanding of Islam was brought to bear upon the concrete intellectual and sociopolitical realities of 'Ali>Naqvi's time: from communism to capitalism, atheism to materialism, and fetters of cultural customs and practices. In a summary fashion the essay also captures the full breadth of the crises faced by Islam in the contemporary period.

Third, what was initially envisaged by 'Ali>Naqvi>as an endeavor of preserving Islam in the modern age turned eventually into a project of systematic and comprehensive *islah* of the Indian Shi'ite society, thus becoming his life-time occupation. From core religious beliefs and practices to culture and politics everything was brought within the ambit of Islam. By the mid-1970s he had written or spoken about almost every facet of human life. Yet the comprehensive *islah* of the human society he proposed was built on a reconfigured religious and intellectual foundation. In this reconfigured understanding, there was no space for beliefs and actions that did not have a strong basis in either reason or religion. That is why 'Ali>Naqvi's social reform (chapter 5) mirrors his religious reform of the Karbala commemorations (chapter 4). In both domains he made the same point: religious and social customs/practices demanded reevaluation. In light of the religious and intellectual foundations, the society needed to ascertain the purposes and wisdom behind these practices. Undue emphasis given to habit or custom (for example, emphasis on the act of mourning instead of its objective and meaning) could only damage the religious and social interests of the community.

Finally, this essay is 'Ali>Naqvi's most lucid statement regarding how he himself envisaged his religio-intellectual project. It validates the claim of this study that 'Ali>Naqvi's various intellectual activities were part of a unified mission. It also confirms

that in this mission ‘Ali>Naqvi>consciously thought of each of the three strands within his project, that is, ‘rethinking’, ‘reconfiguring’, and ‘popularizing’: *rethinking* of the intellectual and symbolic sources of Islam to address the religious and sociopolitical needs of the day; *reconfiguring* the intellect’s partnership with religion and the latter’s endorsement of the former; *re-presenting* the lives of the holy Shi’i figures as universal heroes of humanity and not just for Shi’ites; and finally, *popularizing* his enterprise by making use of the new opportunities presented by the emerging innovations in communication in the modern period, especially the printing press. This essay confirms that none of these dimensions was purely accidental or arbitrary, but carefully situated within a well thought-out intellectual enterprise.

‘Ali>Naqvi’s Legacy

As revealed by the continuous publication of his works in both India and Pakistan in the recent years, it is clear that ‘Ali>Naqvi’s influence has hardly waned in Shi’i South Asia. In Pakistan, for example, in 2006 the Imamia Mission Pakistan Trust published the revised edition of *Shahid-i insaniyat*, and as late as 2009 ‘Ali>Naqvi’s Qur’anic translation and commentary was published from Karachi as a single volume. For the purpose of condensing the seven-volume work into one, the commentary was abridged and included as side-margins to the text, a style quite common in South Asian Qur’anic commentaries. Texts such as *Tahfiḥ-i qur’an ki-haqiqat* and *Mut’ah aur Islām* have gone through several editions. Furthermore, further compilations of his essays have also come out. A foremost example in this regard is *Nigāshat-i sayyidul ‘ulama’*, a compilation I have cited on various occasions.

For various reasons, in India ‘Ali>Naqvi’s influence has been even greater. First, it is due to the ongoing publication and republication of his texts, much more than in Pakistan. These publications include several editions of his original works—many still available after over 20 years of ‘Ali>Naqvi’s death—and compilations of his essays such as *Maqālat-i sayyidul ‘ulama’*. Second, this influence owes to the impact of well-known preachers-‘ulama’ who were his disciples, such as, Maulana>Kalb-i Sādiq²³ and Allamah ‘Aqīl al-Gharvi²⁴ both of whom have sought to raise the quality of religious discourse in sermons delivered at Muharram commemorations. Third, ten days after ‘Ali>Naqvi’s demise, scholars of North India (including his son Sayyid ‘Ali>Muhammad Naqvi>who now holds the position of the Dean of Shi‘ite Theology at Aligarh Muslim University) established Sayyidul ‘Ulama’ Academy, whose task it has been to collect, preserve, publish, and disseminate the works of ‘Ali>Naqvi>

Mention must also be made of the Noor-e-Hidayat Foundation founded by Aseef Jaisi, a Shi‘ite scholar from Lucknow. The Foundation has initiated a renewed effort to gather and conserve the corpus of the Household of *Ijtihad* (including the writings of ‘Ali>Naqvi). Since the early 2000s, The Foundation has been publishing a yearly volume *Khandaan-i ijtihad* that documents the lives and achievements of the scholars of the Household of *Ijtihad*, and a monthly religious magazine *Shu‘a’-i ‘amal*. After operating for a number of years, the Foundation has recently opted to make its publications available online. The Foundation’s initiative to digitize (and where necessary, translate)

²³ See Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, “An Islamic Critique of Patriarchy: Maulana Sayyed Kalb-i Sadiq’s Approach to Gender Relations” in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2006).

²⁴ A preacher of burgeoning fame, ‘Aqīl al-Gharvi>wrote a eulogy for ‘Ali>Naqvi>which was published in ‘Ali>Naqvi’s biography, p.85. He was also among the founders of the Sayyidul ‘Ulama’ Academy (mentioned a few sentences later in the main body of the text).

the scholarly writings of the Household of *Ijtihad*, to provide free online access to these publications, to publish *Shu‘a‘-i ‘amal* in both Urdu and Hindi, and to elicit writings pertinent to the challenges of the times are clear examples of ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s living legacy within Shi‘ite intellectual circles. Regarding the preservation of the corpus of the Household of *Ijtihad*, ‘Ali>Naqvi> has been given the most attention. Far exceeding any other member of his family, his essays have been a permanent feature of *Shu‘a‘-i ‘amal*, every issue containing at least one. But more than that, thematic presentation of issues—a 2007 issue was dedicated to the question of Sunni-Shi‘ite unity—and choice of topics reveals that the Foundation sees itself carrying the mission of ‘Ali>Naqvi> forward. Aseef Jaisi confirmed this intent in an interview with him. When asked what is so special about ‘Ali>Naqvi> why so much effort has been devoted to preserving ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s writings and his contribution to Indian Shi‘ite Islam, in his response, he credited ‘Ali Naqvi for the following:

- People started taking interest in religious literature. It was because ‘Ali>Naqvi> provided religious literature that did not cause estrangement/repulsion (*vahshat*)
- He transformed the pulpit into a center of research and scholarly discussion (*minbar tahqiqi markaz main tabdi huva*)
- He eliminated atheism (*La-diniyat dur ki*)

He also noted that given additional funding, the Foundation would expand its activities and eventually would like to digitize and publish all the writings of ‘Ali>Naqvi>

Finally, to comprehend the wide-ranging influence of ‘Ali>Naqvi> it is perhaps best to point to the compilation of eulogies published at the anniversary of his death, which includes selections from a range of prominent Muslim thinkers, religious scholars,

and literary figures.²⁵ Over seventy contributors wrote eulogies for this compilation and the list includes well-known figures such as Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, Dr. Waheed Akhtar, ‘Aqīl al-Gharvi, Mahmud Saroush, Sahir Fakhry, Mohsin Naqvi, Shamsi Tehrani and Farogh Kazemi. These eulogies paid the highest conceivable tribute to the personality and accomplishments of ‘Ali>Naqvi> remembering him with titles such as “the holy figure” (*zāt-i muq̄ddas*), “protector of religion (*naṣīr-i dīn*)”, “Taj Mahal of majesties” (*azḥmaton ka taj mahāl*), “Mount of knowledge and action” (*koh-i ‘ilm wa ‘amal*), “A successful life” (*ḥayāt-i kamīyab*), “Lord’s Mercy” (*Rah̄mat-i parvardigaṣ*), “The world has not seen his simile” (*diāla-yi ‘akam na diālah misl-i u*), “A Perfect speaker” (*zakīr-i lajavāb*), “Pillar of the True Religion” (*sutun-i dīn-i ḥaqīq*), “A beautiful character” (*Kirdar-i jamiā*), “The Brightest star of knowledge and wisdom” (*aftāb-i ‘ilm va danīsh*), “Ghufran Ma‘āb of the Era” (*Ghufran Ma‘āb-i vaqf*), “Pride of the Nation” (*fakhr-i millat*), “Deputy of the Imam” (*na‘ib-i iimān*). Many more of these titles could be provided from these eulogies. It is hoped that these titles provide sufficient evidence that ‘Ali>Naqvi>’s immense popularity was not limited to his Shi‘ite audience, but extended to the broader Muslim intelligentsia of the time.

For quite some time, western scholarship on the contemporary Islamic intellectual history had bypassed the role of the ‘ulama> in the modern period. With the rise of the “new intellectual elite”²⁶ in the Islamic world, the days of the ‘ulama> were thought to have been numbered. The question “who speaks for Islam?” has been at the forefront of this discourse. Despite Gibb’s (1947) assertion that “the future of Islam

²⁵ *Bu‘ay gul*. ed. Sayyid Mahmud Naqvi> (Delhi: Nishaṭ Publications, 1989).

²⁶ The term has been borrowed from Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, (1996; repr. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 68–9.

rests where it has rested in the past—on the insight of the orthodox leaders and their capacity to resolve the new tensions as they arise by positive doctrine which will face and master the forces making for disintegration (122)”—the ‘ulama’s authority has continued its demise, all the more so with the rise of televangelists and cyberspace.²⁷ As recent studies have shown, although these new challenges may have limited the ‘ulama’s influence, they have not been able to marginalize them completely. In innovative ways, the ‘ulama have adjusted their discourse to the changing circumstances and have reasserted their authority in novel ways. ‘Ali-Naqvi’s popularity in the South Asian Shi‘ite context, when juxtaposed with his rethinking, reconfiguration, and popularization, buttresses many of these claims. His example demonstrates that preservation of religion was crucial to the endurance of his authority and that, during the modern period, within the ‘ulama class there were isolated figures who were successful in resisting challenges to their authority.²⁸ One may recall, in this regard, ‘Ali-Naqvi’s own assertion that the fate of the ‘ulama is intertwined with religion itself: Insofar as the Islamic faith would remain central within Muslim societies, so would the ‘ulama; with its demise, authority associated with religion—whether of the ‘ulama or that of other claimant of “religious” authority—would consequently subside. Scholarly discourse about the crisis of authority in Islam²⁹ during the modern period has often overlooked this crucial point. In other words, the ‘ulama’s measures to

²⁷ See, for example, Mohammed el-Nawawy and Sahar Khamis, *Islam Dot Com: Contemporary Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

²⁸ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia*, Makers of the Muslim World (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008). See also Zaman (2002).

²⁹ Francis Robinson “Crisis of Authority: Crisis of Islam?” in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* 19:3 (2009), 339-354; and Krämer, Gudrun, and Sabine Schmidtke. *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

reestablish their religious authority could not be studied in isolation from their attempts to rehabilitate religion in the modern world. Yes, the ‘ulama’ may have been socio-politically active, must have incorporated novel methods to reassert and expand their influence, and the number of madrasas may have grown exponentially, yet the basis for their authority in the contemporary period—as it has always been—resides first and foremost in their ability to authoritatively interpret religion for the broader community. It is hoped that this study has been successful in demonstrating why that is the case, and how the ‘ulama’ continue to be both the “guardians of faith” and the “custodians of change”.³⁰

Even if the scholarly debates about the ‘ulama’ would continue to revolve around the question of their religious authority alone—without making any reference to their scholarly works or writings—one could hardly afford to ignore the ‘ulama’s’ endeavors to rehabilitate and revive religion in the wake of modernity. This would imply attentiveness to the theological dimension of the crisis of modernity for the Islamic tradition, a topic which stands apart from modernity’s usually discussed socio-political dimensions. In the Indian context alone, one observes rigorous debates, not only over the issues of nationalism, human rights, veiling, or western education, all contesting the domain of Islam’s sociopolitical teachings, but more crucially, over the ‘fundamentals’ of religion. Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Chiragh Ali are two figures who attempted a serious updating of Islamic creedal faith by means of developing a natural theology. Their thought was not simply a reassessment of Islam’s social teachings but, in Troll’s³¹

³⁰ Terms borrowed from Hatina (2008) and Zaman (2002) respectively.

³¹ Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology*, (New Delhi: Vikas Publ. House, 1978).

terms, a comprehensive “Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology” in the light of Newtonian science. Illustrative of the recognition of modernity as “*the challenge*” to the fundamentals of the Muslim faith is witnessed in the writings of Iqbal a few decades later. In the midst of the most fervent political activism among the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent—to which he hardly remained indifferent—he attempted instead to take up the theological and philosophical challenge that modernity posed to religion: Could the most essential convictions, such as God, religious experience, the meaning of prayer, and human immortality be rehabilitated? What possibilities of transcendence remain for human beings in the wake of modernism? The structure of *Reconstruction*³² reveals clearly that Iqbal was dealing with modernity, first and foremost, as a philosophical and theological challenge. Notice that before prescribing *ijtihad* as the panacea of Muslim societies’ sociopolitical problems (in his sixth chapter “The Principle of Movement in Islam”), he had attempted to work out a comprehensive intellectual defense of the validity of religious experience, intuitive knowledge, God’s existence, the human ego, and the function of prayer in religious life. The first four chapters of *Reconstruction*, in this reading, are a philosophical response to the big question “Is Religion Possible?”³³ (to be read as “Is Religion Possible *Any more?*”). This was the ultimate question that the alliance of rationalism and Newtonian scientism posed for all religious communities.

Iqbal and ‘Ali>Naqvi>are examples of Muslim intellectuals in the modern age—like intellectuals of any other religious tradition—who, in addition to being confronted

³² Muhammad Iqbal and M. Saeed Sheikh, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986).

³³ This is title of a lecture given by him at Oxford which was later added as the final chapter of the *Reconstruction*.

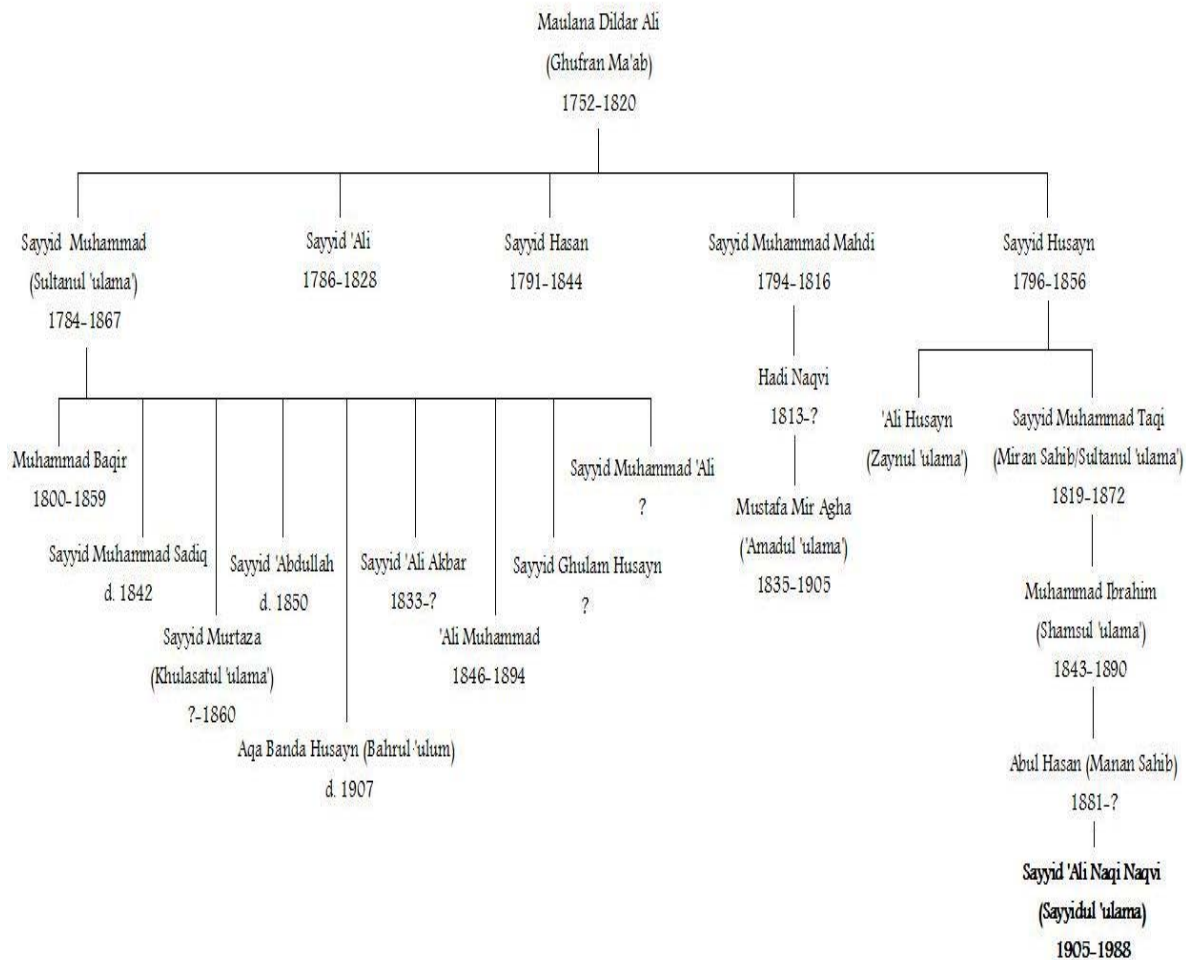
with numerous sociopolitical challenges, were constantly faced with the challenge of defending their fundamental religious beliefs against ideologies such as Enlightenment rationalism, Marxism, and modern scientism. Modernism and other competing ideologies as alternative worldviews had put the core truth claims of Islam to the test, not simply this or that teaching. More than ever, Muslim leaders and intellectuals were faced with the daunting task of revisiting their belief-system that had been taken for granted for centuries, now being required to understand their intellectual and scriptural bases afresh and find novel ways to express these fundamentals in a way that would be convincing, not simply to the outsiders, but to their community as well, which had come to adopt modern thought and its concomitant lifestyle. The danger of the community forgetting what constitutes the core of religious commitment meant, first and foremost, finding ways to reinvigorate and then sustain the life-orientational commitment on which Islam is based. This dimension of teaching the faith and defending it rationally against alternative worldviews, religious or secular, and forced by modern circumstances that had motivated much intellectual activity among Muslims. Much of this has generally been overlooked.³⁴ ‘Ali>Naqvi’s religio-intellectual project originated out of this concern for the fate of religion and was envisaged precisely along these lines. Such writings constitute a separate strand of Islamic religious thought in the contemporary period, and need to be considered independently from other debates like “religion in the public sphere” or “religious activism”. It is hoped that future scholarship on the ‘ulama>

³⁴ There have of course been exceptions. Gibb (1947), for one, pointed quite clearly in this direction:

For the majority the issues in dispute are mainly those relating to the practical duties and social institutions. It is only one or two exceptional men who raised the argument to a more philosophical level, where the old metaphors in which the doctrines of Islam are expressed...no longer seem adequate to experience and who therefore reach out to new metaphors in closer accord with their widened vision of the universe (53).

would also incorporate this theological dimension of modernity and the intellectual developments that have emerged from it.

Appendix I: Household of *Ijtihad* (Source: S.A.A. Rizvi [1986])



APPENDIX II

Chapter 4 of this study noted how ‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s reflections on the subject of Karbala and martyrdom of H̄usayn was organically related to his project of reconfiguration of Islamic theology and praxis.¹ Here I provide an illustration of how in his lectures and writings usually the two themes were juxtaposed, and how he employed the powerful symbol of Karbala to the task of religious revival and preservation. In this regard, let me present a representative text “Belief in the Unseen” (*Imān bi>al-ghayb*).²

‘Ali>Naq̄vi>’s opening remarks point out the need for addressing this subject. One may recall from the chapter on the “Crisis of Religion” the context from which this need emerged: “Today’s civilized world (*mutamaddin dunya*) takes pride in that people believe in only what they see. They say that our knowledge is dependent on the empirical (*mushahada*). They are not willing to consider the things unseen (*an daykhi*), although if one is vigilant then it will be known that to limit knowledge to the empirical is not something proper to the distinct qualities of humanity”. It is clear that non-belief in the unseen makes it impossible for people to assent to a belief in God, angels and in the case of Shi‘i theology, in the unseen Imam. After setting up the problem, ‘Ali>Naq̄vi> presents his ‘*aq̄l*’-based intellectual response in the following words (quoted at length):

Everyone agrees that the human is comparatively superior to everything else. But from what point of view is this superiority? If seen from the point of view of corporeality (*jismiyyat*) then mountains are many degrees superior. If viewed from the standpoint of bodily growth (*nasho numa*) trees grow much faster than humans. If observed from the viewpoint of sense-experience (*ahsasa*) then many animals are ahead of the human: their sight is much sharper than the human’s. If

¹ See p. 47

² From *Nigāshat-i sayyidul ‘ulama*; Lahore: Imamia Mission, 1997

the essential preeminence (*jauhar-i imtiyaz*) rests on these things then he seems to be lagging behind from other things. Then why is he considered superior?

Now then, if the human being is deemed the crown of creation (*ashraf al-makhlūqāt*) then it will have to be accepted that beyond all this there is in him some merit (*jauhar*)³ which others do not possess. So let us find that special merit. If it is said that it is knowledge (*'ilm*) and action (*'amal*) – the translation of *'ilm* (knowledge) in Persian is “*danistan*” (to know) and in Urdu “*jañana*” (to know) – then who says that an animal does not know anything. It knows the place where it resides: If [sent to another location] and made to stand there it will be restless and would not be at peace until it returns to its own place. It recognizes the hand that feeds it and recognizes it well: it will not ask a stranger standing in front for food except the one [it is familiar with]. It knows the food it eats and that is why we do not find sick animals in a jungle. It is only when a human being breeds them that sometimes they get sick. A honey bee makes even boxes without a compass and a fish knows how to swim. In fact, humans have learned these things from animals. Therefore, knowing is not characteristic of humans [alone]. Animals also know much. Then what is that knowledge which is characteristically human?

Pondering over this one understands that animals’ knowledge is restricted to the empirical and sense-experience (*mushahadaṭ va mahṣusaṭ*). I have mentioned that an animal recognizes the hand that feeds it. But it knows only that. If it receives food from a servant it will only know him, not recognizing the master.

Now if a human behaves the same way, taking the very door from which he is fed as his god, assenting to prostrate to the person from whose hands he receive things then there is no difference between him and an animal. The station of human knowledge is elevated and he should find a way to jump across and beyond the four-walled chamber of the empirical and the sense experience. This is why it is stated in the Qur’aan that “That is the Book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the godfearing who believe in the Unseen.”

Now today it is proudly said that we only believe what we see with our eyes. But to what extent is this claim true? Take the example of the material sciences (*maḍi’ulūm*). Do we see matter with our eyes? Have these particles of matter (*zarrat-i maḍah*), upon whose existence this science is built, ever been seen?

It is only its effects (*asāṭ*) and necessities (*lavazim*) that are observable by the eye through which they [the scientists] have admitted the existence of matter. And when have we said that they believe in the Creator without seeing Him? We also say the same thing: they should see the effects and accept the existence of the Effector (*mu’asir*).

The same principle was prevalent in the old days and is prevalent in the contemporary period (*daur-i jadiaṭ*): Our Greek physicians used to observe the

³ The technical translation of “*jawhar*” is substance in Islamic theology and philosophy but here it is employed as the distinctive mark of human beings, as essence (*mahiyah*), differentia (*fashḥ*) or in a more general sense as the distinctive mark of the human being.

pulse to ascertain temperature and doctors [these days] detect temperature in a thermometer. But is the temperature of the patient's body itself contained in the thermometer? The thermometer is there which can be seen, but they [the doctors] figure out habitually the correspondence (*talazum*) between the movement of the mercury and the quantity of the temperature. Therefore, through the rational necessity of correspondence, the quantity of the temperature of that body is known through the magnitude of the movement of mercury. What is it? It is the same: to see the effects and discover the effector.

This search for causality in a child is [present] from its natural beginning. From the moment the capacity to think (*qiyvat-i sha'ua*) begins to function within a child, from that very moment he first begins to understand and ask, and immediately thereafter begins to discover. What is this? What is that? There is a profusion of concepts (*tashvvura*) that are supplied by its brain (*damagh*). And then begins the sequence of whys. Why this? Why that? This string of whys is sometimes so long that even philosopher-parents find themselves unable to answer. But this is a thirst which the child's nature feels [the need] to discover the cause of everything. Now from this childhood his nature is resolute that everything has a cause and each effect has an effector. After growing up, when he asks who is the author (*muujid*)⁴ of the whole world (*dunya*), if you say that it has come into existence on its own and that what he [the grown up child] sees has no inventor beyond it, no cause that has brought it from nothingness (*nisti*) to existence (*hasti*), if this response is not against his natural disposition then what is it? That is why the Qur'an says that the divine religion (*din-i ilah*) is [human primordial] nature (*fitrat*), which means that its [the divine religion's] source (*sar cashmah*) is the demands of human nature itself, any efforts against which could never yield positive results.

You behold Taj Mahal and praise its builder although you have never seen him. The inventors of the train, airplane, telephone, radio, and all customary machines are praised even when they are absent from our eyes. Then after seeing the whole world if its Creator is conceded, what is [so] novel [or strange] in it, and why is He rejected?

The greatest sign of the Creator which is closest to oneself is one's soul (*nafs*). The sun and the moon and everything else in the created order (*'alam-i hasti*) is discerned through corporeal eyes and therefore if someone is deprived of eyes then perhaps he would also be considered deficient in his understanding of the Creator (*Khaliq*). But a human does not know himself by seeing himself, by listening to his voice, by tasting himself, by touching himself, or by smelling himself. Rather it is our existence itself that reveals ourselves to us. And this is itself a sign of the Creator's sign. In the same way the knowledge of the Creator does not depend upon the eye, ear or hand etc., but requires only the heart and mind. If all the capacities of the senses have halted and it were impossible to see the earth or the sky, the sun or the moon, to the extent that nothing of the universe could be seen, even then he would sense his own existence. And this suffices to accept the existence of the Creator.

⁴ Literally the inventor.

Yes, it is often said that without seeing there can only be conjecture (*wahm*) and opinion (*guman*), not certainty. But certainty itself is an unseen thing which can only be known through its effects (*asā*).⁵ In fact, to the extent that I have discerned, the reality of things (*haqqiqi ashya*) do not affect a human being with their real existence (*vujud-i asli*); rather their effects are proportionate to stations of understanding. Imagine if there is a lion along your path and you do not have a conception (*tashvur*) of a lion. [In this case] you will continue walking without fear or terror. [Imagine now that you do have a conception of a lion and then] somebody says “there is a lion,”: [in this case] even if there is no lion you will be terrorized.

A child is usually afraid of his father. Whenever the father is home he commits no mischief. As soon as the father leaves the house he will create havoc in the house. If somebody says to him, “See your father is here” he will be scared. What is it that has scared him? [It is] the conception of his father’s arrival. Now, the stronger the conception, the greater the impact will be. If it is his peer who breaks the news he will look back [to confirm] and if it is his mother or some other elder from whom he cannot expect jokes, then he would attempt to run as fast as he can [from the place]. It shows that one’s character is in accordance with the degrees of one’s knowledge (*madarij-i idrak*) (12).

It is evident that ‘Ali>Naqvi>attempts to prove the reasonability of the “belief in the Unseen” through a number of intellectual arguments. It is important to observe that until this point he uses nothing but intellectual arguments to convince his interlocutors of the reasonability of the Qur’anic and religious demand for the belief in the unseen.⁶ Having made his intellectual case, ‘Ali>Naqvi>turns now to the symbolic resources of Islam to reinforce his argument:

Now let us witness the character of those who believe in God. Let us see if they display certainty or not. To us it seems that empirical observation (*mushahadah*) is without an effect. Instead it is the belief in the Unseen (*ghayb ka ay‘taqad*) that has the effect. On the night of emigration (*hijrah*) Hadjat ‘Ali> peacefully slept in the bed of the Prophet while the walls of the house were surrounded by drawn out swords. This siege by the enemies, their flashing swords and terrible words, these were all things of the observable world (*‘alam-i shuhud*). And what were their goals? To insinuate terror and fear. On the

⁵ Or signs, impressions, manifestation, or marks etc.

⁶ For example, opening verses of Chapter 2 of the Qur’an read: “That is the Book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the godfearing, who believe in the Unseen, and perform the prayer, and expend of that We have provided them”.

contrary Hadīth ‘Ali> was at peace (*mutma’in*). If there was no sign of any perturbation (*izḥyāb*) then it has to be admitted that it was the effect of belief in the Unseen which dominated the observed reality (*mushahaydat*) (13).

Along similar lines and to bolster his argument further, he finally brings in examples from Karbala where the belief in the Unseen can be witnessed quite vividly (and is prefigured in the Shi‘i devotional consciousness):

On the soil of Karbala the knowledge of the seen [tells us] that there is an army of at least thirty thousand in front. The thirst of small children and their cries of “I am thirsty” were of the world of the observed reality (*mushahaydah*). The presence of women and their poor state was obvious. Even more obvious was the youth of ‘Abbas and ‘Ali>Akbar, the youth of Qasim, and the beautiful faces of children that were in front of the eyes, all of which demanded that to save one’s life and that of the companions [including the children] one should give allegiance to Yazid. But there was [also] belief in the Unseen Power that was preventing this allegiance. Those were the demands of the observed reality that were subdued, and this was the belief in the Unseen which had made the hardest of sufferings pleasing (14).

He concludes his discussion on the subject with the words that carry strong emotional force for his Shi‘i audience.

In the last moments the fire within chest, dry lips and tongue due to the intensity of thirst, enormity of wounds, boiling fountains of blood and after all this the workings of the blade of a knife on a parched throat, all of this was on the one side and belief in an unseen Being (*zāt*)⁷ on the other. Even now does anyone has a right to imagine that there cannot be certainty without seeing (15)?

⁷ *Dhāt* in Islamic theology, when referring to God, is usually translated as Essence. In Urdu its meaning ranges from the Divine Self, Divine Being and Essence in the technical sense.

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