

Explaining the Concept of Justice from the Perspective of Ali Shariati

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Abstract

Ali Shariati (Ph.D.) is a thinker who has tried to describe and introduce Islam in the context of socialism with sociological approaches and utilizing historical data and minimal philosophical views. In this endeavor, justice was a central concept shaping the ideal society of Shariati, called the Middle Ummah (Middle Community). By manipulating conventional socialism, using its various modes, and also incorporating Islamic beliefs into its structure, he tried to use socialism as a context for introducing Islamic vision to build an ideal religious society. In this religious ideal society characterized to be a dual-rooted one named “Classless Monotheistic Society”, justice was the spirit governing it, which tuned it with the system of creation. On the path to build a theory of justice shaping a classless monotheistic society, Shariati passes through the four stages of theorizing; however, contradictions appear in the stages more elaborated by him and a great deal of ambiguity is also seen where he has chosen to give brief explanations. Thus, Shariati’s theory of justice is an incomplete theory containing many innate contradictions and ambiguities. The flaw in Shariati’s justice theory is so serious that the authors claim that what is inherited from Shariati is not a coherent theory of justice; rather, it is an initial design of a theory of justice in the context of Islamic socialism.

Keywords:

Ali Shariati, Justice, Qest (Fair Dispensation), Socialism, Islam, Alawi Shiism, Classless Monotheistic Society

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Introduction

Since the early days of Islam, justice has been a central issue and the subject of several debates and discussions (Motahari, 2015: 35). Similarly, in socialism, justice and illustrating its relations with the concept of freedom had created heated debates from the beginning (Haghighat, 1997: 374). As a thinker rooted in both Islam and socialism who was trying to combine these two contexts, Ali Shariati chose justice as a central concept from the very beginning of expressing his ideas following the importance of justice in these two roots. Apart from this, Shariati believed that the crisis of the current present human society has also originated from injustice and described it as expanded in the process of history. Hence, he attempted to incorporate the Islamic concepts in the context of socialism to find a religious solution, as the only possible solution, to resolve the crisis of injustice in human society. After understanding Shariati's methodical approach to the concept of justice, the authors have sought to extract his theory of justice and reflect on its formulation. The central question of this study is as follows: Do we deal with a coherent theory of Shariati about justice? The authors used a descriptive-documentary analysis method in this study.

1. Assessing the Relationship between Socialism and Islam

Shariati had stood in the midst of socialism and Islamism and was trying to create a mutual relationship between the two. He was pondering on Islam with a perspective of socialist sociology, and on the other hand, he used Shiite beliefs in the correction of socialism. Shariati has had a sociological approach to all matters and has not imagined them apart from society and their place in it. This view has even encompassed concepts like monotheism, self-improvement, human beings, religion, freedom, mysticism, and even justice (Esmaili, 2010: 226). Shariati's socialism had some differences with the conventional socialism. He viewed socialism not as an economic-

social school to form a kind of public distribution system, but a philosophy of life (Enayat, 2001: 268). Similarly, he believed that the difference between socialism and capitalism is not in the form of two types of society but in the content of the two societies (Shariati, 2011: 95). His socialism carried with it the revolutionary character and fighting in all aspects of life and social spheres (Esmaili, 2010: 226) and was a context within which the true Islam could be practiced. Marxism, meanwhile, was the science of accessing that context, which could be taken advantage of, especially the revolutionary character of Marxism. As a result, Islam was not a school in the middle of capitalism and Marxism. Rather, capitalism was like a disease that Islam and Marxism had different prescriptions for its treatment as two different physicians. However, Marxism spoke more clearly and precisely in fighting against capitalism since the purpose of its emergence was to fight capitalism. But Islam has been formed to fight against disempowerment, and capitalism is a kind of disempowerment. Therefore, with the destruction of capitalism and the rise of socialism, Marxism will lose its existential philosophy; but Islam will seek to fight another disempowerment (Shariati, 2010: 114). The triad of the science of fighting, ideal, and context establishing on the notions of Marxism, Islam, and Socialism indicate the meaning of these concepts to Shariati.

2. The Relationship between Society and Thought

Shariati sought to recognize Islamic concepts from a sociological point of view and using historical data. His views were influenced by Gurvitch in this regard. In his book, *The Social Frameworks of Knowledge*, Gurvitch states that the man's understanding of the surrounding is related to the social frameworks within which we live (Jamshidiha and Ajadarzadeh, 2009: 109). The concept of "Geography of Speech" introduced by Shariati indicates that he has been influenced by Gurvitch's thought. In describing the "Geography of Speech", he explains that in social matters, besides the trueness and

untrueness of every word and affair, we need to consider that the issue of interest comes from what human geography since every word and issue is directly related to all aspects of its society (Shariati, 2013: 87). In trying to match the concept of “Geography of Speech” with the metaphor of base and superstructure, meanwhile he considers this metaphor to be true but sees its status and quality different from the base of mere production relations and the superstructure of other social aspects as the human society is a complex structure and one cannot simply say that the base of human society is just an economic foundation and all the different and complex aspects of the human spirit and social manifestations are only the superstructure of that economic foundation. Rather, the sum of these, i.e., the sum of economic foundation and other aspects of the human spirit and social manifestations have intertwined and created a temperament or material, specific to that person and that community (Shariati, 2008: 58); the temperament or material that makes the meaningfulness of phenomena possible as well as apprehending different meanings of a phenomenon by individuals and societies with different temperaments and tastes.

Accordingly, in addition to the economic basis, other individual and social factors are also effective in directing one’s thinking and understanding of the surrounding world or himself. However, class status is more influential than other factors and the class color is distinctive and specific to a person’s behavior, speech, thought, life, religion, art, and social and human emotions. It should be noted that, according to Shariati, class is not determined solely by economic factors; rather, other social and human relations are also influential in the formation of the class (Jamshidiha and Ajadarzadeh, 2009: 121).

3. The Relationship between Society and the Principles of Religion

Shariati saw the principles of religion as a social and historical reality, which cannot be separated from history, society, and economics. Thus, they should be studied with sociological methods and relying on

historical views, including the principle of justice. In his view, the positive functions of the principles of religion in the social sphere and their effectiveness are the criterion of their truthfulness (Mokhtari, 2014: 53). He considered the purely philosophical or theological expression of the principles of religion, the method of the Abbasid caliphs as the heads of the ruling class in the history of Islamic societies to divert the people's minds from the true meanings of justice, imamate, and social leadership (Mokhtari, 2014: 62). It should, however, be noted that he does not completely abandon the philosophical method; rather, he uses that method to describe the Murji'ah's view in some of his criticisms of Murji'ah's attitude to divine justice.

4. Introducing Islamic Justice in a Socialist Context

1.4. Justice Religious Entrance

Shariati regards justice as a moral value and doing a justly action as an ethical practice. Also, relying on the religious approach, he considers a moral action based on the nature of creation. Accordingly, a just social system is a system that is in harmony and consistent with the system of creation: The system of creation, which man is also a part of it, is based on justice. Therefore, the social system that is part of creation, if not based on justice, is a deviation... I, too, living in that system, will grow up wrongly. I will grow abnormally. It is like a poisoned air in which I breathe (Shariati, 2015: 118).

Thus, attempting to establish justice in the society is a kind of attempting to create a natural life system in harmony with the system of creation and nature. The religious entrance of justice promotes this concept from the place of one of the principles of religion of Islam to the status of the spirit ruling over all aspects of Islam and introduces the goal of the mission of the prophets (Shariati, 2013: 29). The harmony of the just social system with the system of creation is also realized from the representation of the "Concept of Level" of justice

in an ideal society. According to Shariati, in the ideal Islamic society, which he refers to as the Middle Ummah (Middle Community), the Ummah refers to a human society in which all people with a common goal come together to move towards their ideals based on a shared leadership (Sadra and Shamsa, 2016: 687). This community will be based on three pillars: The Book, the Scales, and the Iron. These tripods represent four concepts: Faith and Knowledge, Justice, and Material Power (Zakariaei, 1994: 369). The degree of justice somehow indicates its position in determining the extent of the social system's harmony with the creation system. In other words, the existence of justice itself shows the harmony and consistency of the social system with the system of creation. However, the purpose of harmony was the focus of Shariati rather than the harmony of the just social system with the system of creation. He seeks the harmony of the system of creation in the principles of religion and tries to extract social justice from the principle of divine justice from a sociological perspective.

2.4. The Social Roots of the Principle of Divine Justice

According to Shariati, the two principles of Imamate and justice are not the principles of Shiite religion. Rather, they are the two basic principles of Islam that make the difference between Islam and previous religions. He believes that monotheism, prophecy, and Akhirah (afterlife) are common principles of all divine religions. However, justice and Imamate are the principles introduced by Islam and the spread of Islam among the general public and non-Muslim communities has been due to the influence of these two principles (Shariati, 2007: 446). The reason for bringing up the principle of divine justice and the attribution of justice to God by the Shiites is due to the fact that establishing a just social system means fulfilling one of God's attributes in the human world, and basically, the natural claim of human nature in social relations is based on a just social system. As a result, social justice is not only the demand of a condemned group to

change social relations for their own benefit. The justice dispute is not also only a dispute between the two classes of the ruling and the ruled groups; rather, it is a dispute between two systems of government. One of them is the oppressive system contrary to the system of creation and divine will and the other is a system conforming to the order of existence in the domain of human society (Shariati, 2009: 32). However, the tyrannical system does not represent itself against the system of creation and divine will; rather, it provides a description of the principle of divine justice that has nothing to do with the ruling system in the human society or even introduce its ruling due to God's justice. Shariati brings this precision into account in explaining the different approaches of Sunnis and Shiites belief in the divine justice, and by departing from philosophical views and theological and rational justifications, he tries to explain two similar beliefs in divine justice, the reason for adopting them, and their social effects by referring to deep social roots. According to him, both Sunni and Shia groups believe in divine justice. The difference is that the Sunni scholars believe that whatever God does is justice. But according to the Shia, God does nothing that is not justice. In Shariati's view, the reasoning of Sunnis is more faithful with a mere Kalam (science of discourse) attitude since the Shiite reasoning binds God to justice; or, in other words, makes assignment for God and measures the divine action with the human mind. But if we deal with the discussion of divine justice as a social issue and study the historical process of the formation and expansion of these two different kinds of views, we come to another conclusion. With a philosophical description of the Sunni approach to divine justice, Shariati attempts to examine its consequences in the area of the society: What do they say? Everything God does is in accordance with justice! Whatever is done is the work of God; thus, whatever has been done and is done is in accordance with justice! Therefore, we have no right to object to what has been done, is done, and will be done... Thus, we must justify all the

Muslims and the actions of all the companions until God may judge everything on the day of reckoning. Yet, the unable, failing, and ignorant servant should not predict and determine the unseen act, the divine sentence, destiny, the divine memory, and the scales of resurrection in this world with his wisdom and knowledge! (Shariati, 2009: 34).

The Murji'ah, who highly believed in such an attitude to the principle of divine justice, derived socio-political results from their purely rational reasoning and interpreted the issue of confirming the right of Ali (AS) as protesting and insulting God and rejecting the God's justice; as such an attitude was equal to consider Mu'awiyah and other caliphs as usurpers and they saw this as opposing to the divine will over the whole creation system. From Murji'ah's point of view, if the divine had come to the government of Mu'awiyah, thus, the rule of Muawiyah has been righteousness since the God's will belongs only to the just and righteous issues.

Shariati introduces these two types of views belonging to the ruling class and the ruled class. As a result, he paints the people's mental conception of God, divine attributes, and divine will with a color of class. The ruling class, as a defender of the existing hierarchy, sees the status quo as fair and tries to present it in harmony with the system of creation and divine justice. But the Shiite view of justice sees it contrary to divine justice and in opposition to the system of creation: They say if God has done such a thing, it is not fair, and on the other hand, there is no way that the God I know would do such a thing. It is you who have created an oppressive system. Oppression is oppression, and justice is justice, and there is no way that God is not just. Thus, oppression is the action of the oppressor, not the work of God, and because God does not consent to oppression, He helps me overthrow this system and as God is just, He regards submission to oppression ominous as an act of oppression (Shariati, 2009: 34).

If justice is one of the defining attributes of the world of creation, thus, the existence of oppression in human society is not a natural state, but it is a temporary and destroyable state. The natural state of society is a state of justice since the world is a place for manifestation of divine attributes. As a result, the sentence of “God is just and is not an oppressor” is a meaningless sentence in explaining the meaning of the principle of justice. Obviously, the creature cannot determine the task for the Creator. Whatever God does is based on justice; however, the creature may or may not understand his justice. In describing the meaning of the principle of justice, one must say that the place of manifestation of the divine attributes should also correspond to justice (Shariati, 2005: 232). A result-oriented approach based on sociological context to the analysis of the concept of justice principle and the roots of the two different types of views are quite clear in this description.

3.4. The Separation of Qest (equity) and Justice based on the Metaphor of Base and Superstructure

The base and superstructure of Shariati is a metaphor to illustrate the importance of issues under the title of justice. It is a metaphor, which both sides mutually affect each other. He tried to explain the difference between the concepts of equity (installment) and justice by the base and superstructure metaphor. According to Shariati, equity (installment) and justice have not been used in the same sense in the Qur’an and hadiths, just as oppression and tyranny carry two different meanings. Justice refers to the legal form of social relations between individuals and social groups based on recognized individual and group legal rights. Equity (installment) also refers to the actual share of anyone or any group of the set of material and spiritual benefits and social facilities due to the role played by them in the society. Accordingly, the term justice refers to the implementation of contracts and agreements in a society and equity refers to the fairness of the content of the agreements. Equity (installment) considers the value of

the works and focuses on the fairness of the context in which agreements are formed. On the other hand, and based on this division, equity (installment) is opposed to oppression and justice is against tyranny (Zakariaei, 1994: 218). In this sense, equity (installment) is literally the base of a society due to attitude to the context of formation of a society and justice is the superstructure of that society in the specific sense of judicial justice. Justice can exist in a society with no equity (installment) found in that society; such justice is dependent on individuals and disappears with the change of individuals; however, the existence of equity (installment) also brings justice with itself. Shariati's social perceptions of the principle of divine justice are consistent with the meaning of equity (installment) and not with the specific meaning of justice. As a result, the uprising for equity (installment) is the fundamental mission of the Imam and the Islamic Ummah as the principle of divine justice is the spirit of Islam. He relies on socialist ideas in explaining the meaning of equity (installment) and considers ownership, economic system, and class as the central axis of equity (installment) - which he regards it the Islamic equivalent of social justice. He also demonstrates his mastery of socialist ideas in finding the equivalence of terms of justice and in equity (installment) in French, where Shariati considers justice equal to "justesse" and equity (installment) as equivalent of "egalite" (Shariati, 2009: 36).

"Justesse" is equivalent to the word "Rightness" in English and refers to the "justness" of an action. But the English equivalent of "Egalite" is "Equality" and refers to the concept of "equation". The socialist ideas show themselves somewhere else as well. He believed that equity can be established with a social revolution in the area of ownership associated with the change of the economic system. However, he thought that justice can be achieved by reforming the judicial system (Shariati, 2014: 62). This social revolution is the same original Islam or Alawi Shiite. With the establishment of Alawi Shiite

relations in the human society, we will witness a classless and free society founded on justice and equity (Shariati, 2007: 630).

4.4. Equity (installment) in the Sense of General Equality

From the concept of public equality, Shariati perceived “the equality of rights paid by the society to the individual with the value of his social practice”, which is, in other words, the equality of the legal right with the real right (share) of everyone (Shariati, 2009: 37). He analyzes the religious history to study the place of ownership in the issue of equality, and based on the story of Abel and Cain, introduces Abel as the symbol of the oppressed and Cain as the symbol of the arrogant. According to Shariati, the era of equality and brotherhood ends with the death of Abel at the hands of Cain and the era of private ownership begins. Private ownership also leads to the formation of a society with class distinctions and a system of discrimination and slavery. History is the story of the fights between these two factions and both sides resort to religion weapon. The Safavid Shiite symbolizes the faction of the arrogant under the Shiite world and the Alawi Shiite symbolizes the faction of the oppressed under the Shiite world. The change of base means the end of the rule of the arrogant faction and the assertion of the weak faction or class to rule of the land, inherited to them by God. Thus, it is only once and at the end of history that the base will change, and in the rest of the events, people only change their place of dominance or non-dominance of the private ownership. Changing the base at the end of history is the creation of a classless monotheistic society (as the Middle Ummah) by Islam. It is a society in which the private ownership would not deprive the public equality like the capitalism and it will not promote absolute communion like the communism; but, it will be something between the two. Also, the Middle Ummah will be classless in all three economic, political and cultural aspects and will reject the reasons for the formation of the classes in these aspects, namely despotism, exploitation, and colonialism (Roshan and Shafiei Seif Abadi, 2016:

13-18). As a result, summarizing the classless monotheistic society to the economic and material dimension is some kind of reducing it. However, the issue of ownership is so important that if it does not change, it is as if the base has not changed (Shariati, 2002: 147) and the monotheistic classless society has not been materialized.

Shariati believes that general equality, although is a political and social issue, but is founded based on philosophical and scientific principles in Islam to introduce a certain natural principle. On the other hand, he links equality to the concept of brotherhood and promotes it from legal equality to the status of true equality, that is, the equality with natural, objective, scientific, and creative origin. Consequently, general equality in Islam is linked to the concept of brotherhood. Brotherhood is a deeply interconnection human feeling, and basically, general (public) equality in a society is not possible without a fraternal life (Shariati, 2013: 481). Based on the concepts of equality and brotherhood, Shariati describes areas in which Islam focuses on the general equality. The first is equality in creation, and thereby, equality in having human personality and independence of action. All humans are equal and all belong to the same family. In the next area, men and women are equal in human origin and gender and in being human, nor man neither woman have superiority over each other. Equality in creation and equality in human nature (this equality refers to means equalization) will include legal equality and this equality is universal to all human beings and not just the Muslims. The next area is economic equality. In the area of economic equality, Shariati believes that public property belongs to all of the nation's people. Included in this area, he also mentions equity in consumptions and non-rating of the consumption as well. Shariati then discusses the area of politics and political freedom and attributes the right to political freedom to the general public. He also does not consider the establishment of justice subject to the ruler's will (and therefore, the ruler's kindness to the people), but sees it as the natural right of the

people and the duty of ruler to the people. Another area is the need for religion and the freedom to choosing a religion (Zakariaei, 1994: 29-31).

Conclusion

Shariati's main concern was the issue of justice. He analyzed history and society with the notions of justice and oppression and believed that fighting is the struggle between these two concepts. However, Shariati cannot be considered a theoretician of justice. If we consider the four stages of any social theory as observing the crisis and disorder, detecting the pain, abstractive drawing and reconstruction of the ideal situation, providing treatment solutions (Akhavan Kazami, 2014: 116), the Ambiguity in Shariati's words in the process of abstractive drawing and reconstruction of the ideal situation and providing treatment approaches lead us to consider his view of justice flawed at least in these two stages.

By understanding of religious concepts and history in his own manipulated socialism context (to enable socialism to adopt Islamic concepts), analyzing them from a sociological perspective and the minimum use of philosophical methodological approaches, Shariati identified the current crisis in the human society a deviation of justice. Such deviation was such that the status quo and maintaining the existing hierarchy were introduced equal to justice, whereas the status quo actually indicated injustice and the lack of justice. In the next stage, he diagnosed that the pain was excessive based on the private ownership. Injustice and oppression are prevalent in human society since the society is built on an economic system, which regards excessive private ownership as a natural principle. There are other minor pains alongside this pain such as coercion to accept religion, monopoly on political activity, replacing social justice with judicial justice or the same distortion of social justice meaning, accepting differences in the humanity of humans, and the prevalence of racism, ethno-nationalism, gender supremacy, etc. In the third stage, he

introduces the monotheistic classless society as the ideal situation, which instance was made in Medina of in the Prophet (PBUH) times (Zakariaei, 1994: 369). In the fourth stage, he concludes that the solution is to return to true Islam, i.e., the Alawi Shiite that such a return implies a social revolution (Shariati, 2007: 630).

This Islamic social revolution targets the main pain, i.e., the excessive private ownership and will cure other pains besides it. Otherwise, it will lead to defeat like other religious experiences such as the Safavid movement, in which, they focused on minor pains and forgot the problem of private ownership (Shariati, 2002: 147). General equality is Islam's prescription for the treatment of the pain of excessive private ownership. Public equality is a general term that provides various prescriptions in different areas for major and minor dilemmas, and the problem actually begins with this way of provision. The prescription of Islam for the problem of excessive private ownership, according to Shariati, is equality in public property and equality in consumption. He does not specify the conceptual boundaries of these two phrases for his audience. Does the concept of excessive private ownership refer to the infiltration of private property into the public domain? In this case, what is the scope and extent of the public property? Also, what does he mean by equality in consumption?

Shariati's works suggest that equality in consumption is not just equality of consumption for essential needs and, in other words, equality of the public to meet their basic needs; rather, the equality in welfare comes to mind as well. However, equality in prosperity is not consistent in the sense that Shariati provides for the equity (installment) as the Islamic resurrection of social justice, that is to say, everyone's enjoyment of their true share in the society. This ambiguity and its contradiction can be compared with Shariati's attempt at offering a solution for the sub-problem of monopoly in political action; a problem that makes the political arena only

available to the ruling class. He introduces political freedom to cure this pain, and thereby, considers the understanding of the demand for justice as a public right an exemplary instance of this political freedom. However, Shariati also extracts the structure needed for this explanation from Islamic concepts. By discussing the Imamate principle and the resulting leadership, a middle structure is provided that neither ends up with democracy nor with the righteous dictatorship, which greatly reduces the ambiguity of prescribing for the political arena. Accordingly, if we consider Shariati's particular view as the basis, he himself has mostly focused on the minor pain rather than the main pain. However, one may say that the design of political structure is the solution to the main pain. That is, the excessive private ownership will not be cured unless through the principle of Imamate and the resulting leadership. In this justification, the authors understand the superiority and importance of the political system over the economic system since the result would be as such that the economic system will not be reformed unless the political system is reformed. Thus, the main problem is the wrong structure and distortion in the area of politics and not the economic structure and the invasion of private ownership to the public ownership boundaries. Accepting this justification implies that Shariati has made a mistake in the stages of crisis observation and diagnosing the pain.

The ambiguity increases in the stage of the abstractive drawing of the ideal situation as well, since describing a monotheistic classless society is the refusal of the classes, and nothing more. In describing his ideal society, Shariati first uses the negation methodology and mentions the absence of classes as a feature of his ideal society, which are largely based on the economics formed. The absence of classes is only possible by a social description of the principle of monotheism and its expansion into the human society. Then, referring to the past, he mentions the Medina of the Prophet tomes as his exemplary society. Instead of answering the question that "If the Prophet (PBUH)

were present at the current time, what society and with what characteristics and features would he draw?”, Shariati draws the abstract state of his ideal society in the minds of the audience. By describing the characteristics and peculiarities of the society at the times Prophet, in the time and spatial conditions completely different from the present era, he makes the mind more confused. For example, the rule of reciprocal responsibility was widely used in the social structures in a community based on the tribal system of the Medina of the Prophet (PBUH) times; now, if the sacred Prophet (PBUH) wishes to build his own Middle Ummah in a society not based on the tribal system (like the Iranian society of the present day), what will happen to this rule? How would be Shariati’s monotheistic classless society like; it is actually unclear. If we ignore the negation and denial issues of this society, what would be its positive and obligatory issues?

Failure to draw the inner state of the four stages of theorizing and the contradictions between these stages will make us to find Shariati’s theorizing flawed and contradictory, at least justice in the stages of general drawing of a theory, and thus, we cannot prove its coherence. Shariati’s efforts led to early designs of a theory of justice from the perspective of Islamic socialist sociology; but it did not end with the provision of a comprehensive theory.

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