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# A Comparative Study of the Concept of Jāhiliyyah in the Thought of Twentieth-Century Thinkers (A Case Study of Ayatollah Kharqānī, Sayyid Qutb, and Abul A'la Mawdudi)

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## ABSTRACT

The colonization of Islamic societies by the West during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries generated numerous reactions throughout the Muslim world. Muslim intellectuals attempted to identify the causes behind the decline of Islamic societies that had placed them in a position of defeat vis-à-vis the West. Various responses were proposed, foremost among them the attempt to locate the causes of this decline within Muslim societies themselves. Consequently, thinkers such as Ayatollah Kharqānī in Iran, Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, and Abul A'la Mawdudi in India sought, through categorizing Islamic society into periods analogous to the era of the Prophetic mission, to formulate a path for overcoming the defeat of Islamic societies in the face of extensive cultural, political, social, and other forms of Western assault. In their view, contemporary Muslim societies resemble the pre-Prophetic era, and indeed the state of jāhiliyyah afflicting them may be even more severe than that of the Prophet's time. The present study seeks, through a comparative approach, to examine the concept of jāhiliyyah in the thought of these three thinkers.

**Keywords:** *Islam, Jāhiliyyah, Kharqānī, Sayyid Qutb, Abul A'la Mawdudi, modern Western political thought.*

## Introduction

One of the most fundamental religious-historical terms in Islam, introduced as a boundary marker between the pre-Prophetic and post-Prophetic periods and playing a significant role in the twentieth-century thought of Muslim intellectuals, is the concept of jāhiliyyah. This religious-social, historical-political, and even economic term refers to the period before the emergence of Islam in Arabia and, after Islam, was primarily used to distinguish the Islamic period from that era. In the modern period, this term became one of the key concepts in the thought of Muslim intellectuals who sought a solution for what they described as the decline of Muslim power and the weakness of Islamic societies. Accordingly, the present study addresses the question of what view twentieth-century thinkers held regarding jāhiliyyah. To this end, using a comparative method, it examines the views of three thinkers—Ayatollah Kharqānī, Mawdudi, and Sayyid Qutb—in three geographical contexts: Iran, Pakistan, and Egypt.



## Jāhiliyyah in Islam

In the Qur'an, the two words *jahl* and *jāhiliyyah* appear, and their meanings are expressed in the following cases:

1. Verse 33 of al-Ahzab, where *jāhiliyyah* means the conduct and customs of the pre-Prophetic period.
2. Verse 26 of al-Fath, where *jāhiliyyah* means the fanaticism and morality of the pre-Prophetic period.
3. Verse 50 of al-Ma'idah, where *jāhiliyyah* means ruling and judging.
4. Verse 154 of Al Imran, where *jāhiliyyah* conveys the conduct and collective behavior of a group that held a non-divine view of metaphysical matters.

In the biography of the Prophet and the Imams as well, *jāhiliyyah* has a meaning within the same framework. For example, the Prophet states: "Whoever has in his heart even a mustard seed of partisanship will be resurrected by God on the Day of Resurrection with the Bedouins of *jāhiliyyah*" (1). In one of the most important hadiths in which the term *jāhiliyyah* is used, the issue concerns imamate, succession to the Prophet, and political-religious leadership: "Whoever dies without having an imam over him dies the death of *jāhiliyyah*" (1). Among jurists and hadith scholars, this term was also used in reference to a historical period before the Prophetic mission. Thus, in describing the change of the name of the city of Yathrib to Madinat al-Nabi, Kulayni Razi states: "The city of Muhammad, which is called Tayyibah, had been named Yathrib in *jāhiliyyah*" (1). Among other Islamic jurists and scholars before the modern period, *jāhiliyyah* generally referred to a historical period before the Prophet's mission. In some cases, figures such as Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) maintained that there were two types of *jāhiliyyah*: general *jāhiliyyah* and absolute *jāhiliyyah*. By general *jāhiliyyah*, Ibn Taymiyyah meant a form of ignorance in which actions and statements were based on ignorance and were incompatible with the missions of Judaism and Christianity. The other type of *jāhiliyyah* occurred after the Prophet's mission, and since prophethood was sealed with him, the *jāhiliyyah* that exists is called absolute *jāhiliyyah*.

Ibn Taymiyyah was among the first figures to expand the term *jāhiliyyah* beyond its temporal and historical geography and, from within "absolute *jāhiliyyah*," to introduce "restricted *jāhiliyyah*," referring to a type of *jāhili* conduct and disposition in the Islamic period that is carried out by Muslims (2).

In the modern period, this term was more widely raised by Muslim thinkers who sought to define their position in the world. Among the most important figures who, in the three contexts of Iran, Egypt, and India, extended *jāhiliyyah* to the present age were Ayatollah Kharāqani, Sayyid Qutb, and Abul A'la Mawdudi. By presenting this concept in a form applicable to contemporary societies, they attempted to find a remedy for the crisis of Islamic societies.

## Jāhiliyyah from the Perspective of Ayatollah Kharāqani

The concept of *jāhiliyyah* among Shiite jurists and thinkers has not received the attention it deserves. Since the principal concern of Shiite jurists was the question of imamate and related issues in the period of occultation, greater attention was paid to these matters from the Safavid era to the late Qajar period, and efforts were made to define the essential position of the jurist in various spheres of Shiite society. During the Qajar period, when the dispute between the Akhbaris and the Usulis was one of the central issues, this matter ultimately ended with the supremacy of the Usulis. Amid this development, the travel of Iranians to Europe, their acquaintance with Western ideas, and the emergence of conditions for the Constitutional Revolution in Iran led Shiite jurists to offer innovative views on religion and politics in order to redefine their position in society. The most eminent example of this was the views of

Ayatollah Na'ini, who was influenced by the political-religious views of the high-ranking Shiite jurist Akhund Khorasani.

In this same period, that is, from the reign of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar to the late period of Reza Shah Pahlavi—roughly from 1848 to 1941—a scholar in the field of Shiite political thought presented new views that, although they did not receive the attention they deserved in Iran, were distinctive and worthy of reflection within the domain of Shiite Islam. Sayyid Asadullah Kharaqani, or, according to what appears in the treatise *The Spirit of Civilization and the Identity of Islam*, Sayyid Zayn al-Abidin Asadullah al-Musawi al-Sharzandi al-Kharaqani, was born around 1838/1839 in the village of Shirzand Afshariyeh in Qazvin (3). Because of his long and productive life, his mastery of French and Arabic, and his awareness of Western political theories, Kharaqani was among the few traditional clerics who attempted to offer a path for confronting the West within the framework of a new religious theology and to answer its objections in a comparative form. He was one of the well-known members of Akhund Khorasani's office (4), and after returning to Iran, he was highly active during the Constitutional period. Even afterward, until the middle of Reza Shah's rule, he continued his political activities. It has been said that he had an encounter with Reza Shah, although contradictory accounts of that encounter have been narrated (5). Kharaqani died on April 29, 1936, and was buried in Ibn Babawayh Cemetery next to the tomb of his teacher, the late Mirza Jelveh, one of the masters of philosophy (6).

One of Kharaqani's main concerns was the issue of Islam and the West, and Islam and Islamic societies, which is evident in most of his works. This can be seen in treatises such as *A Refutation of the Christians*, *The Spirit of Civilization and the Identity of Islam*, *Erasing the Imaginary and Awakening the Known*, or *the Path to the Return of Islamic Honor, Greatness, and Sovereignty*, and others (6). All of these works revolve around two important issues: confrontation with religions and defining the place of Islam in the present age. One of the fundamental concepts in Kharaqani's thought was the concept of Islam. His definition of Islam clarifies what concept of *jāhiliyyah* he had in mind when he sought to propose a solution for liberating Islamic societies from the backwardness in which they had become trapped. From Kharaqani's perspective, Islam is a comprehensive and transhistorical religion, and the decline that has afflicted Muslims is the result of Muslims' incorrect understanding of this religion (7). The foundation of Kharaqani's theory concerning his definition of Islam rests on the separation of customary habits from the basis of the Sharia, and the criterion for this rests on three foundations: the Qur'an, the Sunnah agreed upon by all Islamic sects, and the practical conduct of the Prophet (7).

Kharaqani adds that throughout the whole of human life, two beliefs have governed humanity: first, belief in God and the Last Day; and second, materialist belief and denial of God (7). In the first centuries, even for as long as eleven hundred years, Muslims were superior in all respects, but Muslims of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries became humiliated and remained in the sleep of negligence because they abandoned the policies and rulings of Islam. This, too, resulted from familiarity with the particularities of sectarian affiliation, abandonment of the foundations of Islam, and religious dispersion and division. This very matter produced weakness and acceptance of subordination to foreigners, and the only remedy for it is a return to the earliest Islam, affirmation of the testimony of faith, emulation of the Prophet, and the faith and adherence of all Islamic sects and schools to his religion.

Kharaqani believes that the present age is not an age of welfare and freedom but an age of *jāhiliyyah*. This is because awaiting the Imam of the Age is sufficient evidence that the period of occultation is a time of *jāhiliyyah*, since the existence of the Imam together with non-benefit from the legislative advantages of his presence is equivalent to the age of *jāhiliyyah*; this is the third *jāhiliyyah*. The first *jāhiliyyah* was before Jesus and between Idris

and Noah, and the second jāhiliyyah was before Islam or between Jesus and Muhammad. The reason for this is the dispersion of Twelver Shiite beliefs among mujtahids, Akhbaris, Kashfis, Shaykhis, mystics, and philosophers. In any case, the present jāhiliyyah is greater and more severe than the two previous forms of jāhiliyyah (7). Kharaqani continues his discussion with the question of which of the following upholds Islam: a Muslim who rules and judges on a basis other than the Sharia of Islam, or a non-Muslim who rules according to the Sharia of Islam? In response, he states: without doubt, the second type is Islamic, and the first type is contrary to Islam, because there is no doubt that law, in terms of importance and sanctity, is superior to persons. Thus, an unbeliever or immoral person who applies and rules according to Islamic Sharia is closer to the truth of Islam than a Muslim who acts according to a law other than Islamic law. This unbeliever is superior because his government is an Islamic government, whereas the other government is merely attributed to Islam while being non-Islamic and hostile to Islam (7).

In interpreting verses 104–105 of Al Imran, Kharaqani interprets “good” as the religion of Islam, “right” as acts commanded by God and the Prophet, and “wrong” as everything prohibited by God and the Messenger. He regards anyone who does not act accordingly as unworthy of divine vicegerency, and he calls the present age, in which commanding right and forbidding wrong are not carried out, the age of jāhiliyyah. This, in his view, is the condition of the people of Iran, especially Tehran (7).

### **Jāhiliyyah from the Perspective of Sayyid Qutb**

Sayyid Qutb Ibrahim was born in 1906 in Asyut. From 1939 to 1945, he worked as an inspector in the Ministry of Education, and in 1948 he traveled to the United States to study the American educational system. While in the United States, he heard the news of the killing of Hasan al-Banna, the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, and after returning in 1950/1951, he joined the Brotherhood. Sayyid Qutb described this membership as follows: “I was born in 1950/1951.” In 1951/1952, he became a member of the Brotherhood’s Guidance Bureau, and in the internal conflict within the Brotherhood, he sided with Hudaybi. In 1953/1954, he spent some time in prison, and in the same year, after his release, he became editor-in-chief of the Muslim Brotherhood newspaper. After the attempted assassination of Nasser in 1954/1955, he was arrested on the charge of conspiring against the regime. In prison, he wrote *In the Shade of the Qur’an and Milestones*, which drew the attention of takfiri currents. After the dissolution of the Brotherhood and the massacres of 1956/1957, Sayyid Qutb was released for a period in 1963. Then, in 1965, he was arrested again on charges of conspiracy and overthrowing the regime, and on August 29, 1966, his execution sentence was carried out (8).

Sayyid Qutb’s view of jāhiliyyah is embedded in his definition of Islam. The definition he offers of Islam in his Islamic writings is oppositional and polemical, and this perspective was the dominant element in the last two decades of Sayyid Qutb’s life. Titles such as “The World at a Crossroads: Islam or Communism!” (9), “American Islam” (10), “true Islam” (8), *Islam and Christianity*, and *Islam and jāhiliyyah* all indicate Qutb’s oppositional thought during a period when the world was divided into Eastern and Western blocs (11). In order to present his own concept and understanding of Islam more clearly, he compared it with existing religions and ideologies, especially Christianity and communism. In his view, Christianity considers only the spiritual aspects of the human being, while communism emphasizes purely material needs. Islam, however, comprehends both and articulates spiritual and bodily aims together; in Islam, spiritual and material needs are not separated from one another, and this is the point of separation among communism, Christianity, and Islam (9). For Sayyid Qutb, Islam realizes a complete social

justice, and it has an aspiration higher than concern for a limited economic justice or reliance on legal pressure alone as the guarantee of its implementation. Rather, it pursues a universal human justice and rests upon two firm pillars: the human heart and conscience from within, and sound legislation within the social environment (9). From his perspective, the communist and capitalist blocs constitute one front, and Islam stands against them. For the salvation of the world, he proposes the formation of a third camp that has its own mode of thought and ideology concerning life and possesses distinctive features in relation to the two imperialist camps of East and West. Thus, the third camp is the only and final solution for realizing and establishing global balance and international equilibrium in a world bewildered between two aggressive camps (9-11).

Sayyid Qutb's oppositional view is dominant in *Milestones* in relation to the definition of Islam. Throughout the book, there are two concepts that constitute the key to the relationship between the human being and God. These two concepts are servitude and divine sovereignty. By assigning each of these concepts to a stage in the revelation of the Qur'an, Sayyid Qutb seeks to describe the path that the Islamic movement must follow. Servitude represents the first stage of the Prophet's movement in the course of his call, while divine sovereignty, like servitude, represents the second stage of the Islamic movement. During the thirteen Meccan years, the Prophet laid the foundations of this second stage by passing through the first. From this perspective, Sayyid Qutb regarded the movement of the Prophet at the head of this movement and the movement of his companions in obedience to such charismatic leadership as a Qur'anic movement. Entering the second stage does not mean abandoning the first; rather, at all times these two must exist together. In fact, from the concepts of servitude and divine sovereignty, he had in mind two stages of Islamic movement, encompassing the beginning of leadership through the establishment of Islamic society. The first stage is spiritual maturation, the stage of Qur'anic inspiration, whose aim is liberation from jāhili alienation, namely servitude; and the second stage is struggle against jāhili society, namely divine sovereignty. In Sayyid Qutb's thought, what encompasses all these currents—from individual effort to reflection on the Qur'an and armed struggle—is jihad. These two terms, as Sayyid Qutb understands them, resemble their use in Mawdudi's writings in *The Four Terms in the Qur'an*. However, Sayyid Qutb uses them as major concepts in his analysis of jāhiliyyah and Islamic societies and gives them a greater semantic weight than Mawdudi. Hedaybi, the General Guide, contrary to the views of Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb, states that the two terms servitude and divine sovereignty are not Qur'anic terms. In an Islamic society as intended by Sayyid Qutb, these two terms have the following meanings: servitude means being subject to the law and Sharia of God, and divine sovereignty means the full sovereignty of the law and Sharia of God in the sense stated above (12).

In Sayyid Qutb's view, humanity today stands on the brink of destruction, and this destruction is due to the outlook of communist, capitalist, and nationalist systems; only Islam can save contemporary humanity from falling into the abyss of destruction (12). He believes that today's world, in terms of the foundations and affairs of life, is in jāhiliyyah. This jāhiliyyah is founded on aggression against God's sovereignty on earth and against divinity, and it acknowledges human sovereignty. Since people have distanced themselves from the Islamic method, they live within a non-Islamic system (12). In order to be freed from this jāhiliyyah, contemporary humanity needs signposts that define its path and protect it from bewilderment, and these signposts must be sought in the Qur'an (12). Sayyid Qutb considers today's jāhiliyyah to be like the jāhiliyyah of the time of the Prophetic mission, and indeed darker than it, encompassing people's conceptions and beliefs, habits, culture, arts and manners, laws and legal systems. He even regards it as so widespread that much of what is called Islamic culture, Islamic references, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic thought is, in his view, the product of this jāhiliyyah. To avoid this jāhiliyyah, Sayyid Qutb

proposes movement along the path of activist Islam and a return to the authentic and pure Islamic source (12). The Islam to which he calls consists first of affirming the belief “there is no deity but God,” referring sovereignty to God in all affairs, and rejecting those who rebel against God’s sovereignty (12). This Islam is not merely a doctrine, but a method for the movement of liberating all human beings. Under the protection of this Islam, an Islamic society is formed that rests on the foundation of belief and encompasses all peoples and nations (12). Opposite this Islamic society stands jāhili society, which includes all societies whose servitude is not purely for God. This ignorance is evident in doctrinal conceptions, acts of worship, and laws; according to this definition, all contemporary societies are currently of this kind (12).

### **Jāhiliyyah from the Perspective of Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi**

Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi was born on September 25, 1903, in Hyderabad Deccan. Upon entering Dar al-Ulum, he became acquainted with Mawlana Hamiduddin Farahi. In 1918/1919, he entered the profession of journalism, coinciding with the beginning of the Indian national movement. In the same year, he played an active role in the Association for the Assistance of Muslim Prisoners. The following year, he joined the Khilafat Movement. At this stage, he wrote his first work on Gandhi’s personality, which was confiscated before publication. After that, for several months, he worked with Mawlana Taj al-Din, editor of the weekly Taj. After the weekly Taj was suspended, he went to Delhi and met with the leaders of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind. Mawlana Kifayatullah and Mawlana Ahmad Sa’id invited him to edit the journal Muslim, a position that continued until 1922/1923. Afterward, he became acquainted with Mawlana Muhammad Ali Jauhar. Mawlana asked Mawdudi to work with his newspaper, Hamdard. The following year, he collaborated with the newspaper al-Jam’iyat under the supervision of Mawlana Ahmad Sa’id, which continued until 1928/1929. One year earlier, however, in 1927/1928, events occurred that affected Mawdudi’s future. The event was that the leader of the Shuddhi movement, Shardhanand, who belonged to the radical Hindu religious revivalist movements, was killed by a Muslim, and a flood of accusations against Islam followed. This went so far that Gandhi stated that “Islam has shown itself in the form of a movement whose decisive force is the sword and the sword.” In response to these accusations, Mawdudi wrote articles entitled “Jihad in Islam,” which were published in book form. In 1931/1932, he wrote the Treatise on Religion. These two works played a major role in Mawdudi’s fame before Tarjuman al-Qur’an. In 1933/1934, he assumed the editorship and management of the journal Tarjuman al-Qur’an. In 1938/1939, Allama Iqbal invited Mawdudi to assist him in codifying Islamic jurisprudence. In the same year, in order to train a young generation of jurists, he founded the Dar al-Salam Academy. He founded Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941/1942. Jamaat-e-Islami was created under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and in conformity with Abul Kalam Azad’s idea of the Party of God (13). In 1943, he began writing the exegesis Tafhim al-Qur’an. He eventually died in 1979 (14, 15).

The definition that Mawdudi has in mind regarding jāhiliyyah is the opposite of Islam. Therefore, in order to clarify jāhiliyyah, his definition of Islam must be clarified. In a lecture delivered before the independence of Pakistan under the title Islam and Jāhiliyyah, Mawdudi does not offer a specific definition of jāhiliyyah; rather, he describes manifestations in which jāhiliyyah can be seen in order to explain his view. Regarding the “solution of various problems of life” and the method that must be adopted, he proposes three types of solutions: first, the human being’s reliance on the senses and judgment on that basis; second, combining sensory observation, conjecture, and analogy and deriving a conclusion from them; and third, prophets commissioned by God to call people to the straight path and truth, who have presented a solution to these problems.

From Mawdudi's perspective, the first and second solutions are equivalent to pure jāhiliyyah. He does not provide a definition of pure jāhiliyyah, but from the explanatory content he offers regarding the first solution, it can be understood that by pure jāhiliyyah he means a human-centered view of the program of life in which, beyond the human realm, there is no authority before whom the human being is accountable, and there is no source of knowledge or fountainhead of guidance from which the human being can derive the law of life. Therefore, the human being is an autonomous and unaccountable being. Establishing laws and regulations, determining how to expend one's powers, and determining one's method of dealing with beings are among the human being's own duties and responsibilities. Life is whatever exists in this worldly life, and all the results of actions are determined within the bounds of this life. Thus, rightness and wrongness, usefulness and harmfulness, acceptability and rejection are determined only according to the results that appear in this world (16).

The method based on sensory observation, whose necessary result in individual life is that the human being adopts an autonomous and irresponsible method from the beginning of life to its end, then produces a society composed of individuals with this mode of thought. Such a society will have the following characteristics: its foundation and basis will rest on human sovereignty, whether that sovereignty is personal, dynastic, class-based, or republican. In any case, the highest social idea that will be established is only the notion of a commonwealth. In economic life, feudalism will sometimes rise, capitalism will sometimes take its place, and at other times workers will strike and rebel in order to establish their own ideas and views. This method is one based on pure jāhiliyyah, because from a method combining observation with analogy and conjecture, three different kinds of judgment are derived: first, polytheism; second, monasticism; and third, the doctrine that "all is He," meaning that the human being and all things in the universe are, in themselves, unreal and do not possess independent existence. In reality, a single being is the means through which all these things appear, and that being acts within all of them. There are numerous forms of this theory in its details, but the common element in all of these details is that all existents derive from one external being that is in fact the origin of existence, and beyond it nothing else exists (16).

The solution that Mawdudi proposes for departure from pure jāhiliyyah is guidance through the prophets, the most important of which is Islam. After the independence of Pakistan, Mawdudi's view of jāhiliyyah became more directed toward the political order, and the same generally applies to Islam. In his view, Islam is a democratic, popular, and comprehensive system (17), in which there is a logical connection between its major and important pillars and its small and precise details (17). Politically, Islam is founded on the verse, "Whoever does not judge by what God has revealed, they are the unbelievers," according to which Islam means that the human being should obey and submit only to God and refuse to accept any method or law that contradicts divine guidance (18). He speaks of two forms of Islam: legal Islam and true Islam. In legal Islam, verbal acknowledgment alone is sufficient, and it pertains only to worldly affairs; individuals who enter Islam through this verbal acknowledgment are considered Muslims. True Islam, however, is based on heartfelt acknowledgment, and human salvation in the afterlife and being counted as Muslim and believer depend on this basis (18).

In his view, contemporary world civilization rests on three strands: secularism, nationalism, and democracy, all three of which are symbols of jāhiliyyah. The political system that emerges from them will be a jāhili government, the opposite of the divine government intended by Mawdudi. The political legitimacy of a jāhili government is based on the sovereignty of human beings over human beings (19). Opposed to these three jāhili principles are three other principles: first, servitude and obedience to God in opposition to irreligion and atheism; second, humanity in opposition to tribalism; and third, the sovereignty of God and republican vicegerency in opposition to the sovereignty

of the people (20). The political system founded on these three principles will be theo-democracy, or, in abbreviated form, theodemocracy (17). The foundations of its legitimacy also rest on the sovereignty of God and the vicegerency of the human being. This sovereignty of God lies in the irrevocability of His laws, which have come to humanity through the prophets (13).

Mawdudi regards the three principles of secularism, nationalism, and democracy as jāhili principles, and consequently nationalism is one of the most important manifestations of jāhiliyyah. In his view, there have been two periods of jāhiliyyah: ancient jāhiliyyah and modern jāhiliyyah. Ancient jāhiliyyah disappeared with the coming of Islam. This period lasted until the transformation of the caliphate into monarchy; after that, modern jāhiliyyah began. Now, as it has become increasingly mixed with elements of European civilization such as secularism, socialism, and nationalism, jāhiliyyah has become ever more pervasive. The most important symbol of this jāhiliyyah is nationalism, which classifies nations on the basis of blood, race, color, and similar factors and imagines a separate nation for each. In contrast, Islam avoids using the term nation and has chosen the term party for Muslims. Nations arise on the basis of lineage and descent, while parties arise on the basis of principles and doctrine. Therefore, Muslims are not a nation but a party. For this reason, they are separate from the entire world and are connected to one another only in the sense that they believe in a single principle and doctrine (21). Through the understanding he offers of the Qur'an, Mawdudi believes that the Qur'an recognizes two parties throughout the earth: one is the Party of God, and the other is the party of falsehood, or the Party of Satan. If differences arise within the party of falsehood in terms of principles and doctrine, the Qur'an views all of them in the same way, because their thought and action, in every form, are contrary to Islam; despite minor differences, all of them agree on obedience and submission to falsehood (21).

### **A Comparative Application of the Views of Kharaqani, Sayyid Qutb, and Mawdudi on Jāhiliyyah**

From the perspective of political thought, the influential elements in the thought of contemporary Muslim thinkers from the beginning to the present can be divided into four main stages: first, the period of reform; second, the period of transition; third, the period of confrontation; and fourth, the period of interaction with the democratic process (22).

The period of reform refers to a historical stage in the thought of Muslim thinkers during which they attempted to achieve reform from above and through rulers. Examples of such thinkers were Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. After the defeat of the Urabi Pasha uprising, Abduh revised his method of reformism and turned toward reform from the masses.

The period of transition covers the interval from the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate to the late years of the Second World War, during which Muslim thinkers usually sought to remedy the existing vacuum. Iqbal, Rashid Rida, and Kharaqani were among the thinkers who theorized during this sensitive stage.

The rise and expansion of the Soviet system, its confrontation with the capitalist world, and the formation of a bipolar world created new conditions for Muslim thinkers to present their theories within a new framework. In this period, thinkers sought to take a reactive position regarding the confrontation between East and West and to redefine their own place. Sayyid Qutb, Mawdudi, and Imam Khomeini were among the influential thinkers of this period.

With the end of the Cold War and the vacuum caused by the absence of communism, the West turned its attention toward Islam. For the West, Islam was considered a suitable replacement for communism. In this period, Muslim thinkers sought to accommodate themselves to the West through interaction rather than confrontation;

therefore, the interpretation offered of Islam was democratic and, in some cases, secularist. Criteria such as religion, women, parties, freedom, the press, and similar matters, which the West defines and promotes, hold a fundamental place in the thought of the thinkers of this period.

However, the thinkers discussed in this study in relation to the term jāhiliyyah theorized in the periods of transition and confrontation. Kharaqani was a thinker who, during a transitional period in Islamic thought, attempted to reflect on the afflictions, defeats, and decline of Islamic societies, especially Iran. His view of the jāhiliyyah of Islamic societies can be traced in three respects.

1. His definition of jāhiliyyah and the determination of its limits and scope. He calls the present jāhiliyyah into which Islamic societies have fallen the third jāhiliyyah. He refers the other two forms of jāhiliyyah to the period before the Prophet's mission. He calls the present age, in which commanding right and forbidding wrong are not carried out, the age of jāhiliyyah, and this, in his view, is the condition of the people of Iran, especially Tehran.
2. The specific attribution of this third jāhiliyyah to the geographical domain of Iran. In his view, because the society of his time had no access to the Imam of the Age and did not benefit from the legislative advantages of his presence, it was equivalent to a time of jāhiliyyah, and the society in question resembled the jāhili society of the Prophet's era and perhaps was even more ignorant than it. The reason the present jāhiliyyah is greater than the two previous forms is the dispersion of Twelver Shiite beliefs. The solution he proposes for escaping this jāhiliyyah is adherence to the primary Islamic sources and the principles agreed upon by all Islamic schools.
3. From Kharaqani's perspective, the jāhiliyyah of Islamic societies, on the one hand, and the incomplete understanding of Islam and lack of real commitment to it, on the other, have caused Muslims to move away from true Islam. Indeed, many Islamic principles may now be implemented better by unbelievers than by Muslims. Consequently, who is more deserving of being called Muslim: the unbeliever who rules on the basis of Islamic Sharia, or the Muslim who acts according to a law other than Islamic law and is, in practice, an enemy of Islam?

In terms of political-social conditions, Kharaqani thought within a Shiite environment and under the influence of Shiite Qur'anic teachings, and historically, during the transitional period of Islamic thought. With the end of the Second World War, the emergence of rivalry between the Eastern and Western blocs, and the presence of this global confrontation in the world of thought and philosophy, Muslim thinkers also attempted to define their position in this sensitive historical stage. This position was accompanied by a confrontational view of the Cold War. For the Muslim thinkers of this period, which largely continued until the fall of the Soviet Union, the question was that Islam did not need to be situated in either of the two blocs, but rather stood against both of them; from this perspective, East and West were, to some extent, the same for these thinkers. Sayyid Qutb was among the thinkers who, under these political-social conditions, offered a comprehensive definition of Islam and at the same time called contemporary societies jāhili because of the presence of communist, capitalist, and nationalist systems.

The characteristics of jāhiliyyah from Sayyid Qutb's perspective are as follows:

1. The present jāhiliyyah is founded on aggression against God's sovereignty on earth and against divinity, and it acknowledges human sovereignty. This aggression has caused distance from the Islamic method. The result of this distance, from Sayyid Qutb's perspective, is that people live within a non-Islamic and jāhili system.

2. From Sayyid Qutb's perspective, as in Kharaqani's view, the present jāhiliyyah into which Islamic societies have fallen is like the jāhiliyyah of the time of the Prophetic mission, and indeed darker than it, because it encompasses all the various dimensions of human material and spiritual life. It has even spread so widely that much of what is called Islamic culture, Islamic references, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic thought is produced by this jāhiliyyah. To avoid this jāhiliyyah, Sayyid Qutb proposes movement along the path of activist Islam and a return to the authentic and pure Islamic source.

During the same period, amid the confrontation between East and West and simultaneously with the process of Pakistan's independence, Abul A'la Mawdudi expressed his views on jāhiliyyah. Like Kharaqani and Sayyid Qutb, he defined Islam politically and placed jāhiliyyah opposite it. Although Mawdudi's view of jāhiliyyah during and after the period of independence did not change in essence, it changed slightly in its degree of inclusiveness. He was among those who influenced Sayyid Qutb, while at the same time he himself was influenced by many of Qutb's views.

Jāhiliyyah from Mawdudi's perspective, in conformity with the views of Sayyid Qutb and Kharaqani, had the following characteristics:

1. The various solutions offered for the problems of human life, because they have a program other than that of the prophets, are considered pure jāhiliyyah. In this interpretation, pure jāhiliyyah places the human being at the center of decision-making and planning and grants no validity to anything beyond the human realm.
2. The second characteristic of Mawdudi's jāhiliyyah is its extension to the political sphere and the political system. Secularism, nationalism, and democracy are the three principles of contemporary human civilization that provide the foundation for his concept of jāhiliyyah. Consequently, the government that emerges from them will be a jāhili government.

## Conclusion

The colonial presence of the West in the Islamic world, which marked the beginning of the decline of Islamic societies, led Muslim thinkers to define their own position and, in this redefinition, perhaps to liken Islamic societies to the pre-Prophetic period. The aim of this comparison was to resolve the problem of decline at its root, as the Prophet had done. Kharaqani, Sayyid Qutb, and Mawdudi considered contemporary Muslim societies comparable to the age of jāhiliyyah, and in some cases worse than it, and they regarded the attempt to exit from it as their own task.

Kharaqani, in a Shiite society and under the influence of teachings from intra-religious reformist currents, described contemporary Iranian society as equivalent to the jāhili society of the Prophetic mission and perhaps even worse than it, and he attempted to find a path out of this jāhiliyyah. He regarded lack of commitment to Islam and negligence in performing religious obligations as the reason for the jāhiliyyah of contemporary society, and the solution for escaping it was action according to the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the principles agreed upon by Islamic schools. After him, Mawdudi raised the theory of jāhiliyyah in the Sunni world, and the influence of this idea can be seen in the works of Sayyid Qutb. The importance of Sayyid Qutb's view of the twentieth-century theory of jāhiliyyah lies in its inclusiveness. In his view, all contemporary humanity is trapped in jāhiliyyah, and he makes no exception, because everything that is practiced and thought is entirely drawn from jāhili contents. To escape Eastern jāhiliyyah, namely communism, and Western jāhiliyyah, namely capitalism, Sayyid Qutb proposes the theory of the third camp, which is Islam. In the Indian subcontinent as well, Mawdudi attempted to redefine jāhiliyyah. In his view, the solution

to contemporary human problems can be pursued through three paths. The first and second paths, namely analogy and sensory observation, are manifestations of pure jāhiliyyah, and the only path for escaping this pure jāhiliyyah is Islam and its program of life. Accordingly, the conclusion reached by these three thinkers in three separate geographical contexts with three different social-religious structures from the proposition of the jāhiliyyah of societies ultimately leads to Islam.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

### Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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