

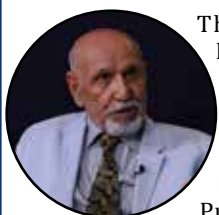
Shift from 'global subjugation' to 'world stewardship'

Farhang Rajaei's account of development in Iran



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ANALYSIS EXCLUSIVE



The book "Farhang Rajaei's Account of Development and Underdevelopment in Iran" is a recent publication by Shargh Newspaper Publishing, authored by Dr. Mokhtar Nouri, a faculty member at the Political Science Department of Razi University of Kermanshah, Western Iran, under the academic supervision of Dr. Mohsen Renani, Professor of Economics at Isfahan University. This work, which was written with the help of the Iranian non-governmental institution "Pooyesh Fekri Tose'e" (meaning: Intellectual Movement of Development), centers on the thought of the renowned Iranian thinker Farhang Rajaei, who dedicated nearly 50 years of his distinguished life to hashing out ideas about humanity, Iran, and, on a broader scale, human civilization. Rajaei was confronted from his youth with a serious — as he himself describes — "lifelong" concern: "How can a desirable state of affairs be set up that benefits the majority of a society?" This persistent question, deeply linked to the field of development, was laid down in his mind by his teacher Mohammadreza Mohtat during the social sciences class at the Pahlavi High School in Arak. Hence, Rajaei's core concern lies in the disorder and lack of striking a balanced chord in production within human societies and civilizations, generally, and, specifically, Iranian society. In his quest to get out of this disorder and imbalance, Rajaei later became acquainted with what he calls "world stewardship" and the "law of the world stewardship's logic" through his professor Hamid Enayat at the University of Tehran. This led him to dive into the profound and significant "Letter of Tansar" — who was a wise mobad of the Ancient Sassanid era, described as "one who has a head on his shoulders and is above worldly rules" — seeking a way to break through today's problems. This concern dragged Rajaei into various fields such as history, identity, culture, ethics, tradition, modernity, development, and Iranians' encounter with modernity. It can be said that Rajaei's main issue is development and progress, but he approaches it with his own perspective under the theory or vision of the "law of the world stewardship's logic". For Rajaei, development means the rolling out of this law — in other words, the transition from global subjugation to world stewardship. Therefore, Rajaei seeks to figure out why world stewardship and its laws have not become the dominant framework for governance for Iranians. In his search for this law and to achieve his desired imagined state, Rajaei, like many contemporary Iranian intellectuals, sets foot on the battleground of the clash between modernity and tradition — a longstanding dilemma. According to him, this arena calls for serious dedication and effort because development must be played out like a well-orchestrated symphony.



Rajaei truly represents the intellectual who neither wants to fall into the pit of modernism and completely melt into Western culture nor get caught up in the trap of nativism and hostile conflict with the West. Instead, he believes in intelligent maneuvering in politics and governance, asking, "How can we play the game wisely?" His answer is that a person must bring forth willpower and, using Iranian literary and mystical terms, "hemmat" (determined effort) to play the global stage. These premises show Rajaei as a development-minded thinker, advocating a balanced and comprehensive development that puts "public good" front and center. Rajaei's approach to concepts like development and progress makes his thought system highly thought-provoking. Ultimately, Rajaei's concern is to bring about a desirable condition that benefits the majority of society. However, he explicitly states that the path to this ideal state is not found in economic growth or common quantitative and statistical measures used in development literature. Instead, without entirely sidelining economics, Rajaei downplays its key role and zeroes in on the issue of "identity." Thus, the Iranian identity holds significant meaning and status in Rajaei's

intellectual project. He believes that without defining who we are, we cannot effectively step up as actors or develop. His perennial questions include: Who are Iranians, and who can they become? Why has the Iranian civilizational domain fallen into a state of non-production? Why, after the Safavid era, have we not been active players, suffering what Dariush Shayegan calls a "historical vacation"? Why, in other words, has Iran failed to make the leap from the global subjugation cycle to the world stewardship cycle after the Safavid era? For Rajaei, a key concern is discovering who the Iranian is and where he stands today. His intellectual project aims to pin down "the identity of Iranians" and figure out "how to recover their capability to act" on the world stage. This entire framework boils down to Rajaei's central question: "What kind of thought had truly been able — and can still — harmonize the four elements of Iranian identity, religion, tradition, and modernity into a coherent symphony that has moved all Iranians in their civilization-building eras, such as the Achaemenid period before Islam and the Safavid period after Islam, to step forward and leave a grand, global impact?" A preliminary answer within Rajaei's thinking is that only a worldview that brings together the three main pillars

of the law of the world stewardship's logic — "expediency," "government/territory," and "governance and reflection" — in a balanced harmony can establish development, stewardship, civility, and civilization. Then, the garden cultivated by the tradition of advice-writing — the final product of the law of the world stewardship's logic — will flourish.

Development is the 'law of world stewardship's logic'

The core concern of Mr. Farhang Rajaei is the expansion of the law of the world stewardship's logic. Intellectually, he takes issue with the commonly accepted concept and term of development, preferring instead to use "world stewardship" or, where he can, "sustainable development". Therefore, the desirable state of affairs for Rajaei is world stewardship, and he believes sustainable development and the indigenous concept of "world stewardship" are one and the same. On this, he writes: "At least for two reasons, I consider the term world stewardship more precise than development. First, development is somewhat derivative and biased because it is a translation of a term that was invented in the Western cultural, social, and political context — often, as many believe, deliberately and with specific intent — making its



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The tomb of Hafez, also known as Hafezieh, located north of Shiraz
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