

Reciprocal Services of Religion and Democracy in Iran

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Abstract

Religion has always been an inseparable component of political, social, and cultural life of Iranian people. Democracy as a western phenomenon has also been theoretically and in spoken as well as written form publicized in Iran for 100 years. The present article is an attempt to show to what extent religion has served democracy in Iran and vice versa. Elaborating on the type of interaction between religion and democracy in Iran, this article concludes that religion has believed democracy more than the latter having served the former. As a result, if religion had not entered the field of politics in Iran, it was quite likely that there would not have been any manifestations of democracy here.

Keywords

religion, democracy, reciprocal services, suffrage, answerable government, pluralism

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Introduction

If we overlook the era of ancient Iran especially the period of the reign of the Sassanid dynasty -that was founded with the support of the Zoroastrian scholars- (Cf. Minui & Rezvani, 1975) during which Zoroastrianism was the official religion and the vast majority of Iranians in those days were devoted followers of this religion, we would notice that the arrival of Islam into Iran, the sincere welcome of Iranians to the great religion of Islam, the life that the people of Iran injected into the religion of Islam in various ways and kept it alive in different aspects of their lives, in addition to the vigor and vitality, identity, cohesion, spirit of independence seeking, aspiring progress, demanding rule of law that Islam has inspired into Iran (Cf. Mutahhari, 1994, p.143), have all resulted in the transformation of religion into one of the inseparable components of the socio-political and cultural life of the people of Iran.

‘Democracy has a western origin. Although in the political thought originating from eastern cultures and civilizations – that have developed today and have been taken into consideration by the researchers of the world - there are strains of democratic thought present in them in some way, (for observing such an approach Cf. Rajai, 1993, pp.22 & 41), the words "democracy" and "democratic" are generally attributed to western civilization. If we consider "occurrence to mind" in some way to be a sign of reality, we shall notice that conceiving democracy as a western concept is a widespread phenomenon.

Nowadays when in the presence of the elites or the common people of Iran or the Muslim World or the Third World, we speak of democracy; the minds are unwittingly drawn towards the political system governing the west. Theoretically and in its verbal and written context, democracy is at least a hundred years old in our country. This

welcome or unwelcome guest has not limited its presence to Iran, and has attracted the attention of the public throughout the non-western world. The Muslim World on the whole was caught up in a challenge within itself due to its relations with the advanced western world and comparing itself with it. When Iran for the first time sent students to foreign countries at the time of the Crown prince Abbas Mirza Qajar during the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar and Iranian students educated at western institutions returned from abroad, it got involved in this issue. The resultant comparison of the advanced western world – with emphasis on western countries such as England and France where the Iranian elite received their education – with the backward Iranian world was the adoption of western politics and government as the desirable instrument of prosperity of Iran.

Politics and government of the British kind that was of interest to the Iranian elite was in fact a copy of the kind of democracy that was established in Britain in the form of a constitutional monarchy. In the course of almost three decades before the triumph of the Constitutional monarchy Movement in 1906, this system of government was promoted by these educated individuals through speech and printed material. Political writings of this group is the foremost attempt at official promotion of democracy that has occurred in Iran (Cf. Zarshenas, 1994, p.66). They were known initially as "intellectuals" then "Munavvar al Fikr -an Arabic word'- and finally 'Rowshanfikr-a Persian word". In subsequent decades, the expression 'westernized' was also added to their titles.

These writings that were influential in preparing the doctrinal preliminaries of the constitutional monarchy movement (Cf. Velayati, 1994, p.61), and in the subsequent decades shaped a political movement, imported the idea of democracy into Iran. Gradually, the growth of this rational seed in Iran began to exert a strong influence

on significant aspects of governmental thought and political culture of Iran.

The monarchy regime of Iran that was administered on the basis of "divine representation" (Cf. Tabatabai, 1994, p.125), on being confronted with the arrival of the idea of democracy into Iran was faced with a serious challenge and finally, in the face of social pressures -part of which was the product of the working of this idea- succumbed and was forced to a relative withdrawal. The Qajar king Muzaffar al-Din Mirza was left with no alternative except to agree to a kind of power-sharing and thus he delegated some of his absolute powers to the National Consultative Assembly. This forced consent was the source of the gradual change in the system of government in Iran.

The political culture in Iran that was influenced to a large extent by Shiite Islam, also came under the influence of the idea of democracy in differing layers. If we consider political culture (Cf. Blundell, 1967, p.119), to have arisen from the sum total of the stances of the masses towards the ruling class, the elements that helped to shape this sum total- consisting of ideological substance, theory of government and psychological mindset of the people- were influenced by the arrival of the idea of democracy. There occurred a big challenge between the ideological substance and manifestations of western culture, between the theory of Shiite administration and that of western democracy, and between the psychological mindset of people and the efficiency of governmental system of the west (in comparison with practical manifestations of backwardness of Iran). The history of the last century in Iran has been in some ways a reflection of these challenges.

The thought aspect of this challenge like its other aspects has strongly impacted on the political literature of Iran during the two periods of the Constitutional Movement and the Islamic Republic. In this sphere, many hold that the idea of western democracy has been in

absolute and all-out contrast with Shiite thought of government and not only has democracy failed to do any service to it, but it has taken steps towards destruction of its bases. Reciprocally, the Imamate theory of government -in this assumption- continues to be in an all-out confrontation with the idea of democratic government. It is evident that in this context, hostile interaction is the most dominant approach that must and can be of consideration between these two ideas.

Some others who on one hand had come to believe in western civilization and its scientific and technological achievements towards helping human prosperity, and on the other hand, for whatever reason, they could not disregard their religious beliefs and their requirements, came to the conclusion that it is possible to make a clone out of these two ways of thinking. Western thought is a human one and the way of mankind is the same way of the prophets. As a result, there are a large number of common points between Islamic thought of government and democratic thought of government. These two are the same except that they live in two different worlds. However, in the end, one will reach the other.¹ In this framework, religion and democracy have a compromising interaction. While apparently being from two divergent foundations and principles, they are finally inclined towards unity.

A group of other Iranian thinkers also came to the conclusion that the idea of western democracy had a separate, unique and distinct foundation while the Islamic theory of government also had its own foundation. However, reiterating the theoretical separation of the principles of these two, Islam has been able to employ many of the experimental manifestations derived from the idea of democracy² and to strengthen the foundations of democratic rule in Iran in this process of employment.

It is precisely in this sphere that the issue of reciprocal services of the two concepts of 'religion and democracy' in Iran can be discussed.

In recent years, especially since May 23, 1997 onwards, a section of the domestic political forces and another section in foreign countries, have strongly emphasized the doctrine of "democracy and democratization" and 'republicanism' versus 'Islamism'. They have blamed the existing problems of the country on its Islamic system and presence of Muslims in the arena of political power (Cf. Hajjarian, 2000). What is inferred from this claim is that the problems of Iran can be resolved in case of the presence of a democratic rule in a western form.

However, this claim has an approximately one-hundred year old theoretical and practical history. In the course of the history of Iran, at least in two periods including the dawn of the constitutional monarchy movement between the years 1902-1926, and the years 1941-1943, the proponents of such an idea almost completely took hold of political power and supported the idea of bringing a democratic government into power for solving the problems of Iran. However, the practical and actual product of such an activity was the emergence of two periods of dictatorship of Reza Khan and Muhammad Reza Shah for a sixteen-year and twenty-five year periods respectively. This practical example makes us ask the important and fundamental question that: supposing religion had not consolidated its position in the arena of political power in Iran, then would there have existed today any trace of democracy or democratic thinking in the country, or instead of it -at least despotic rulers or at most, dependent westernized pseudo-democratic rulers would have been present at the top of the political power in Iran as is the case for other countries of the Third World?!

If we wish to give a realistic and appropriate answer to this important question, it is necessary to investigate the services rendered by democracy to the religion of Islam in Iran and reciprocally, the services that Islam has rendered to democracy. The aim of the study is also to determine the share of each one in ensuring the survival of the

other. However, at the same time, in order to respond to this question, we have no alternative but to present a definition of the concepts in question.

1. What is Democracy?

Democracy is composed of two parts namely "demo" or "demos" that means "people" and "cracy" or "kratos" meaning "rule" in Greek (Cohen, 1994, p.21). Democracy is technically defined as the rule of people over people, or the rule of people by people. The spirit of democracy involves collective decision-making. In democracy two principles are always taken into consideration i.e. public supervision over collective decisions, and equal rights of people in applying this supervision. As a rule, the greater the extent of application of these two principles in the decision-making of a society, the more democratic the society would be (Benham and Boyle, 1997, p.17). What is almost unanimously agreed upon is that democracy is a relative concept, meaning that it is not the case that a society possesses it completely and another society does not enjoy it at all. Rather, what is important about democracy is the degree, domain and depth of actualization of the principles of public supervision, equality of participation in political affairs, and the remoteness or closeness of society to the ideal state i.e. public participation in taking decisions (Benham and Boyle, 1997, p.18). Generally, a country is called 'democratic' if its regime comes to power through competition in elections; is accountable to people, and in which all individuals who have reached the legal age possess equal right to elect and to be elected – except those people that are legally deprived of exercising such a right. In a democratic state, the law guarantees safeguarding civil and political rights. In practice, in no country have the twin principles of public supervision and equality in participation in the political affairs been applied comprehensively and as they should have

been. Consequently, efforts to implement these principles will always be continued (Benham & Boyle, 1997).

Experts believe that the reason for focusing on democracy and valuing it highly is that democracy involves equality of citizenship rights (Benham & Boyle, 1997, pp.19-20), meets the needs of the general public (Benham & Boyle, 1997, p.20), endorses pluralism and compromise, (Benham & Boyle, 1997, pp.20-21), guarantees basic freedoms such as freedom of expression, freedom of association, individual security and freedom of emigration (Benham & Boyle, 1997, p.21) as well as social modernization (Benham & Boyle, 1997, pp.21-22).

Because of the relativity of its concept, democracy does not have a single model. Thus various nations of the world have numerous models of democracy. These models have gone through various stages of history and at each stage some of them have been contemporaries and have been replaced by new ones in subsequent periods.

From this point of view, democracy has left behind its classic models and nowadays, it is going through its modern or post-modern era. The classic models of democracy are as follows: Classic Athenian democracy (Held, 1990, pp.29-62), protective democracy (Benham & Boyle, 1997, pp.15-63), evolutionary democracy (Benham & Boyle, 1997, p.65-117), and direct democracy, (Benham & Boyle, 1997, pp.167-217). The contemporary models are the following: competitive elitism (Benham & Boyle, 1997, pp.221-281), pluralist democracy (Benham & Boyle, 1997, pp.283-313), legal one (idem, p.383) and finally, participatory democracy (Benham & Boyle, 1997, p.397).

The historical presence of models of democracy requires that the fundamental principles under consideration in democracy have in the course of history of mankind undergone changes according to the environmental and social conditions having taken on different forms in keeping with the differing conditions of western countries. These

models are only found in the west and perhaps if we consider politics and government in the eastern world from this point of view, we shall arrive at other forms of democracy that have a lot in common with the above mentioned models. Anyhow, what we can say by relying on this discussion is that the relativity of its concept and various models of democracy are promising of presence of many common points connecting it with religion. This prepares the ground for democracy as a human experience to strengthen religion while religion also is supposed to strengthen the fundamental principles of democracy within the framework of its fundamental teachings. With this explanation, one can find a lot of common ground for interaction and compatibility between these two concepts leaving aside the historical conditions and development of democracy in the west.

2. What is religion?

The historical experience of the life of mankind especially during the modern period of human life has shown quite clearly that religion was and will be an inseparable component of human society. That is why in all parts of the world and in the entire course of history of mankind, there have always been, and still are discussions on religion. Even in the modern world of humanism, theology and studies on religion continue to maintain their central role (Cf. Eliyadeh, 1996, p.115). Perhaps one can claim that research on religion and theology in the western world is more than that in the east, and an extensive amount of literature has been produced on this subject there. A part of this vast literature -that in recent years has also affected our country- pertains to the relationship between religion and democracy. In any case, there are numerous definitions for religion.

The practical experience of religions has caused religion to be sometimes elevated to the level of a holy matter, and at times, to attain a level that is lower than that of an ordinary affair in the daily life of

mankind (Cf. *Idem*, vol. 1, pp.57-68). The holiness of religion has mainly been understood to be a metaphysical affair having no direct impact on the current life of mankind. In this sense, individuals use it solely as a spiritual refuge or spiritual aid. In this case, religion is sometimes relegated to the level of a moral affair that has a role only in making man ethical in his personal living having no relation with his socio-political life. It is evident that one cannot find a direct correlation between this type of religion and democracy, although its indirect impact on religion can not be denied. In addition, based on this point of view, religion at times is reduced to the level of a superstitious affair and is considered as an instance of superstitions.

Various types of religions involving a superstitious nature have never had a direct impact on the political life of mankind. Normally, superstitious beliefs have always been the cause of backwardness of social living of mankind and the attempts of the reformers of the world too have mainly been directed at elimination of superstitious beliefs from people's traditions and motivating factors of society. This definition of religion too in terms of relationship with democracy has common aspects with the previous definition.

Therefore, one must seek a definition of religion that has common points with democracy. If we define religion as a divine plan for the worldly and other worldly happiness of mankind (*Mutahhari*, 1997, p.67), in that case we shall observe many common aspects between democracy and religion. A religion that regards the world as a preliminary for the eternal bliss of mankind is in reality involving and including a political program for the administration of the life of man. Undoubtedly, participants in this political program are human beings who are ones that implement this divine program and reach it to its fruition.

This definition is perfectly conforming to what is conceived of the religion of Islam. The religion of Islam according to the testimony of

experts in social sciences is a political religion, all of whose constituents are simultaneously devotional and political, and one cannot separate or differentiate between the two aspects. In fact from this viewpoint we say that a kind of democracy is present in the essence of the religion of Islam and especially Shiite Islam. Certainly it is for this reason that Muslims and in particular Shiites, and their leaders always hold that because of its political comprehensiveness, the religion of Islam does not need to adopt models of democracy from humanist schools. Rather, it is quite independent and particular in the foundations of its democratic model. Of course, in the practical development of its model, Islamic democracy considers itself in need of putting to use the achievements and experiences of mankind.

In Iran – that forms the geographical and historical case of our study– since remote past, Islam has been present in the context of the life of people and from the time of the establishment of the Safavid government, the Twelver Shiite school of thought has been considered as the official school of thought for the majority of its people. On the other hand, the term "democracy" has entered the written and political literature of our country for more than a century. Now taking into consideration the definitions of "democracy" and 'religion', we must enumerate the reciprocal services rendered by the two.

3. Services rendered by democracy to religion

What we conclude from the concise explanation of democracy is as follows:

A- The spirit of democracy is collective decision making;

B- Democracy is based on two principles i.e.: public supervision of collective decision making, and equal right of people in implementation of this supervision;

C- The greater the scope of implementation of the two above mentioned principles, the more democratic the society will be;

D- In a democratic system, the government comes to power by means of elections;

E- In a democratic system, the government is accountable to people;

F- In a democratic system, people enjoy equal right to elect and to be elected except those that are barred by law from exercising this right;

G- In a democratic system, the law guarantees safeguarding the civil and political rights of the people;

H- In a democratic system, basic freedoms such as freedom of expression, freedom of association, personal security and freedom to emigrate are guaranteed;

I- In a democratic system, social modernization is considered the primary program;

J- In a democracy, pluralism is one of the major indices;

K- In a democracy equality of civic rights is taken for granted;

L- In a democracy, it is presumed that the needs of the general public must be met.

Now let us see to what extent democracy has succeeded in implementing its indices in Iran.

1) The idea of western democracy globalized the major above mentioned elements and with the homecoming of students who were sent abroad for education during the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar, this idea was imported to Iran by the transferrers of this political philosophy (Cf. Hazeri, 2001, p.28). Concurrent with the formation of the intellectual grounds of the constitutional movement, this idea was strengthened in Iran by supporters of constitutionalism and gained popularity with the backing of Britain in the incident of the sit- in of strikers at the British Embassy (Cf. Huseinian, 2001, p.290). Although the change in the nature of the movement from justice- seeking to constitutionalism -seeking was a deviation that occurred in the

movement, the demand of constitutionalism itself gave voice to the major elements of the idea of democracy in Iran. Constitutionalism was also at different stages and on various pretexts was reiterated by political personalities and groups in Iran. Regardless of its practical advantages, this movement incorporated the concepts of freedom of expression, press, association as well as the concepts of nation, citizen, the necessity of collective decision-taking, elections, suffrage, and public supervision into the general and political culture of the people of Iran.

Before the event of constitutionalism, these concepts had been repeatedly mentioned in the western world and in the writings of the intellectuals. However, with the triumph of the constitutional movement, these concepts were incorporated in the most significant achievement of constitutionalism i.e. "the constitution and its supplements". The major part of the constitution of the constitutional movement was adopted from the constitutions of France and Belgium including substance of western democracy (Cf. Zakir Husein, 1991, p.67) that governed the aforesaid countries in the form of political systems.

The couriers of western ideas -who played a major role as the writers of the constitution- made great attempts towards incorporating these principles in the text of the constitutional monarchy constitution and its supplements (Cf. Saeli Kordeh, 1999, p.33). In those days, the intellectual elite were the main organizers of the political system that was a product of the constitutional movement and deemed themselves responsible for implementation of western values in Iran.

2) Holding elections towards the establishment of the National Consultative Assembly with the aim of writing the constitution and forming the legislative power was the next service rendered by democracy. According to the constitution, the tenure of every national assembly was supposed to be two years, but during 19 years of the

early part of the constitutional era, the constitutional legislature survived just for seven years, the rest being the interval period (Cf. Ettehadiyyeh, 1996, pp.143-144).

In line with the period of interval, the elections suffered from disruptions and did not follow an orderly trend. Likewise, elections for provinces and states assemblies and the Senate -that had been provided for in the constitution- were not held for a long time. Finally, the second Pahlavi king held it with political motives and exploited elections as an instrument in the early part of 1960's.

3) The National Consultative Assembly along with its committees, the internal charters and procedures it adopted and efforts it made to manage the affairs of the country with the assistance of collective decision-taking, was yet another service that was rendered by democracy. In the period before the victory of the Islamic Revolution, this mechanism was never institutionalized properly and always suffered from disorder. However, it created such a process towards administration of the country that the two despotic Pahlavi kings also regarded it to be in their interest to preserve this mechanism at least as a formality, and never gave their consent to its total abolition.

Therefore, the formation of the constitution and the statutes that were a product of the establishment of the legislative assembly were a service rendered to people under the name of "legislation". However, in general, there were certain problems with this legislation. From the point of view of implementation, it also faced a lot of criticisms and in many political and administrative areas, it was not put into operation.

4) Organizing the executive branch by the name of "Cabinet" or "council of ministers" that was responsible to the National consultative Assembly and the Shah, is considered to be another service. Normally, the cabinets formed at the beginning of the Constitutionalism movement and the 1940's were not very efficient.

The cabinets of the period of despotism and the Pahlavi reign were also mere political instruments. However, despite all the criticisms that have been directed at this part of the political system, the foundation of this executive process in governance is among the services rendered by constitutionalism. Consequent to the formation of the cabinet, the establishment of ministries and administrative offices and modernization of the style of administration and implementation were the aftermaths of this service.

5) Establishing the educational system on the European model in Iran was among the effects and aftermaths of western democracy. Before the emergence of the constitutional system in Iran, the educational system was traditional. However after it, in a gradual transition from the previous educational system - and not in a developing process – it was replaced with schools and colleges.

6) After the constitutionalism movement, the system of judiciary also gradually started to change and take shape on the basis of the western model. With the completion of the new judicial system during the reign of the first Pahlavi king, an important cycle of rendering services of democratic system to Iran was started.

7) Formation of political associations, bodies, societies and parties in Iran (whether affiliated to government or not) was entirely copied from the western experience of this social action. These societies began to emerge suddenly and in countless numbers on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution and became more and more with the passage of time (Cf. Esmaili, 1999, p.1). Even during the reign of the second Pahlavi king, parties affiliated to the government were established (Cf. Saremi, 1999, pp.71-2).

As a rule, based on the definition, political parties and institutions were supposed to perform their principal task (i.e. being an instrument for assuming power, safekeeping it and being the voice of the masses) of putting together and classifying the demands of people, satisfying

them through the government, and supervising over the outcome of the decisions taken, thus complementing the services of democracy to a certain extent. However, the evaluation of the performance of the political parties in Iran reveals something other than this (Cf. Baqeri Kaburaq, 1992, pp.32 & 213).

8) The motto of "answerable government" is yet another service of democracy. In the years after the victory of the Islamic Revolution this motto has gained greater strength. However, for the first time, though not categorically, this motto under the heading of "the government responsible towards the legislative assembly and the Shah" was raised in the constitution of the constitutional movement in a way that implied 'answerable government'. Anyhow, whether the government in Iran has truly been answerable to the demands of people it needs to be further analyzed and investigated.

9) "Suffrage" was recognized for the first time in Iran with the victory of the constitutional movement. This "right to vote" was granted initially only to men but in the 1960's women were also granted it. At the beginning, the suffrage of men was also based on class distinction, and each stratum or class would give its ballots exclusively to its own representatives. The composition of the members of the first constitutional legislative assembly -that was a product of this sort of elections- was class-oriented. In the next stage, voting in the course of second class and then first class elections, direct and general elections continued until the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Although voting became common in Iran from the constitutional period, it took a long time for people to be granted the equal right of electing and being elected.

10) The charter of civil and political rights of the people of Iran is the same constitution of the constitutional movement and its supplement that was mentioned earlier on. With the formation of the National Consultative Assembly, ordinary laws were gradually passed

in Iran and other regulations, pursuant to them, were derived from them. The aggregate of these laws must have as a rule, reflected the political and civil rights of the people of Iran and be considered as an instrument for their protection in the course of time. It cannot be denied that at some juncture in history such a protection of civil and political rights of people has been achieved. However, unfortunately the extent of this protection has not been very high. Out of the 72 years of constitutionalism (1906-1978) at least for 41 years the absolute despotism of the two Pahlavi kings ruled during which except for the command of the Shah, practically nothing else mattered. In the remaining 31 years, the political scene in Iran witnessed the anarchy and inefficiency of the seemingly constitutional political system in satisfying the rights of people and their basic freedoms (Cf. Azimi, 1996, pp.465-467).

11) Although the terms ‘freedom of expression’, ‘freedom of association’, individual security and freedom to emigrate that have been grouped under the heading of basic freedoms were recognized in the constitutional movement, most of these basic freedoms remained as mere words and ideas. If these basic freedoms had been secured, perhaps there would have been no need for subsequent political struggles whose main slogans reflected these basic freedoms. Therefore, this gift of democracy also did not get a chance to succeed in Iran.

12) Since remote past, there has been talk of social modernization and its necessity. The entire efforts of the revolutionaries verbally were directed towards removing the backwardness of Iran. However, when the first group of constitutionalists at the early part of the constitutional era assumed power from the 1906 to 1925, instead of social modernization, the country became more and more backward day by day. Interestingly, the social modernization plan was implemented in Iran by Reza Shah despite the absolute conflict

between his character and way of rule on the one side and the idea of democracy and democratic system on the other.

13) Pluralism which is among the practical indices of democracy did not get a logical chance to emerge in Iran. During the reign of the two Pahlavi kings, the talk of pluralism would appear to be futile. During the two periods at the beginning of constitutionalism and the 1940's too, the country was so entangled in daily crises and problems, and political groups were so deeply involved in violent and political identity struggle with one another that pluralism never got a chance to be born and grow logically.

14) About the two remaining indices i.e. equality in civic rights and satisfying the needs of common people, it must be said that these two also met with the same fate of the rest of the indices of democracy in the course of the period before the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

4. The services of religion to democracy

A brief look at the nature of the Shiite school of thought reveals the point that this school is centered around the concept of Imamate. Therefore democratic values within the framework of a republic are available in the core and context of Shiite Islam – values that are inseparable from this school of thought. The domain of these values, if not greater than that of liberal democracy, is not lesser than that. If believers in Islam have not been able or have not wished to theorize these values and apply them is a blame directed at Muslims, not Islam.

An overview of the contemporary history of Iran reveals two points. Firstly a religion that was forced towards the margins from the time of the reign of Reza Shah, and was totally marginalized during the reign of the second Pahlavi king (in terms of governance), was able to motivate the masses toward participation in an opposition campaign against the political system by playing a democratic

function. It could create self-awareness in them and transform them from indifferent and indolent human beings into inquiring and politically aware individuals making tremendous demands on the political system. Ultimately, it could defeat the Shah's regime that lacked even the minimum democratic values by means of a religious revolution. It was here that for the first and last time, the political thought of divine succession of monarchy retreated in the face of religious political thought of Imamate and accepted defeat.

The second point is that religion was able to establish a political system that is a religious republic. In this republic, administration of affairs by public poll has been considered an unalterable principle (Article 17 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). Besides, in every part of the identity of this system, public participation towards election of the administrators of the system and towards adoption of policies has been frequently mentioned. In addition to the national covenant of the Islamic Republic (the Constitution), "religion in power" has rendered the following services to democracy in the past 30 years in Iran:

1- Giving significance to the opinion and vote of people in the stage of establishment of the Islamic Republic system, writing of the constitution by forming the assembly for the final consideration of the constitution of the Islamic Republic (Assembly of Experts), national ratification of the constitution of the Islamic Republic by holding a national referendum.

2- Giving importance to the opinion and vote of people in the stage of making political institutions by electing the president, establishing the Islamic Consultative Assembly and ultimately, forming the Islamic city and village councils.

3- Being determined in holding numerous elections in an orderly and organized way and at their due time without any interval in their function, and observing the tenure of the legislative assembly and the

presidency. This by itself is a part of the process of creating a procedure that is considered a milestone in Iran's progress, unprecedented throughout the era before the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

4- One of the important yardsticks of democracy is political stability. In the course of the last quarter of the century, despite the presence of various crises, democracy has endured and the system has been able to continue its existence.

5- In the constitution of the Islamic Republic, a legal chance is devoted to organizing political parties and associations. After the war, the establishing of political bodies has been on the rise on a daily basis.

6- In the Islamic republic, the government has been described as being service-rendering. The term "service-rendering" has a wider sense than "answerable".

7- One of the things about which there is general consensus in the Islamic Republic is the equal right of voting for all those qualified to vote. This has also been the focus of attention of the departed leader of the Islamic Revolution and no one has raised any doubt about it.

8- In the course of recent years, more attention has been paid to issues such as codification of the laws of political crime, greater and better spelling out of the mechanisms of supervision over elections, the need for the accountability of officials towards the people; and inquiring the judiciary system as well as the legislative and executive powers, a fact which reveals that steps have been taken towards greater observance of the rights of people.

9- Securing basic freedoms has always been a serious concern of the leaders of the Islamic Republic. In the chaotic years at the beginning of the Revolution, everybody remembers the nine-clause statement of Imam Khomeini that was issued towards the protection of the fundamental rights of all people. It cannot be claimed that these

rights have been secured in a perfect manner. However, it cannot be denied that they are on the pathway of realization.

10- The modernization of Iran has been the focus of the revolutionaries since the initial years of the Revolution. If we consider the interruption at the time of war to be natural, from then until now, three development plans have been formulated and implemented, the fourth plan being also in the process of implementation.

11- One of the most important of the services rendered by religion to democracy in the years following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, has been the shaping of political pluralism. Two types of political pluralism have existed in Iran after the Revolution: the primary pluralism in which four political forces of liberals, socialists, eclecticists and Islamists were present; and pluralism after the year 1981 in which various branches of Islamist forces were present. This pluralism has survived.

12- On this basis, political competition has always been there. This competition has changed from primary to secondary based on the existing pluralism and is continuing among the various groups of the Islamist wing at present.

In any case, the trend that has been initiated under the auspices of religion in the field of putting democracy into action, is novel and worthy of consideration. So the gradual elimination of its problems can promise a bright future for Iran and the world.

In the end, I should say although the values of democracy (that are also present within Islam) have been imported by western democracy into Iran, it was the religion of Islam in Iran that endowed them with practical life and guaranteed their survival.

Now the important question is if the faithful and pious had not come to power in Iran, would there have been any trace of the values of democracy in this country?

Notes

1. The most outstanding doctrine in this field is the total sum of the thoughts of Mahdi Bazargan. The best work that reflects the extract of this approach is his work entitled "Way of the Prophets; Way of Mankind" (in Persian).
2. It seems that the combined sum of the thoughts of the enlightened men of religion- from Seyyid Jamaluddin Asadabadi to Imam Khomeini as the standard bearer of this movement -in laying the foundation, reinforcing and flourishing of the idea of religious democracy is manifested in this idea (Cf. Imam Khomeini, 1982).

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