

# Liberty in Discourses of Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Taleghani

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**ABSTRACT:** In the last hundred years, Iranian clergy and intellectuals have been the main reference in the social, political, and intellectual affairs. Before the beginning of the new age, spirituality was the only political spokesman and representative of the people against the governments; however, with the advent of the intellectual phenomenon, created along with introduction of Iranian community with the west and its modern phenomena, Iranian intellectuals appeared as a social stratum on the scene of action. Meanwhile, Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Taleghani, pioneers in the religious intellectual movement in Iran, had religious innovation and moderate views in the diverse areas. Wisdom, the idea of evolution in the field of education and propaganda, revival of pure religious thoughts, struggle for freedom and justice are parts of their cultural efforts and struggles. This paper tries to create a greater recognition and comparison of the thoughts of Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Taleghani, particularly the concept of freedom using the descriptive and analytical methods..

**Keywords:** freedom, dialogue, Ayatollah Taleghani, Ayatollah Khomeini.

## INTRODUCTION

Two decades of 1960 and 1970 were the most importance years of formation of religious ideas and modernism in Iran. During these years, the Iranian thought leaders found opportunity to recall the principles and the political Islam capabilities. These cultural and intellectual movements encouraged people to join the fight against tyranny and participate in the scene of revolution. In this article, ideas of two great thinkers and Islamic intellectual and ideological leaders about the concept of freedom are analyzed. Although many individuals and groups involved in shaping the thinking of the Islamic Revolution, the role of Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Taleghani was more brilliant than other thinkers.

### **Argument on concept of freedom**

Freedom has numerous elastic concepts that can be interpreted in various ways. Naturally, every intellectual trend should clarify its favorite interpretation of liberty and represent its own rejection or acceptance for its ideal form of liberty. Isaiah Berlin's famous essay called "Two Concepts of Liberty," which was written in 1957, left great influence on aggravation of arguments on concept of freedom, and turned into a central issue of freedom. Berlin's most important work was the distinction made between the concept of negative liberty and positive liberty. According to his definition, negative liberty (or freedom for), means not withstanding barriers and limitations imposed by others and positive liberty (or freedom for) not only means the ability to pursue and achieve the aim but also it refers to independence or self- control against dependence to others. Berlin considers negative liberty as a traditional school of liberalism, which started in the 17th century and lasted in the 19th century in GB and France.

However, positive freedom in his eyes is a vague distorted concept. In this regard, he believes that achieving independence through leaving those wants that govern others on human is probably good and in some cases, the best option, but in return, it reduces man's liberty and provides him both internal and external limitations that ultimately

conflicts with man's liberty. This remark is still one of the most important texts in the field of freedom. Critics admit that Berlin's distinction between negative and positive concept of freedom is the starting point for a discussion about the meaning and concept of freedom. Positive freedom is the authority and its supervision. Berlin's positive liberty has several meanings: 1) freedom means Individual autonomy, 2) freedom is to act according to the demands of reason, and 3) freedom means the right to participate in public power (Movahed, 1989:251).

### ***Freedom in Imam Khomeini's discourse***

Imam Khomeini rejected the West liberal Freedom that is the same freedom to the first interpretation (i.e. absolute aspect of freedom). He believed that human misconception is not desirable anywhere and goodness and development of society requires limitations and restrictions on the freedom of individuals. "The western freedom is so vulgar that they will act in any way they wish, there is no provision in their lusts; they are free to immerse in prostitution as they wish" (Imam Khomeini, 1990: 195).

"We must understand that freedom in its West format which ruins young girls and boys is condemned by Islam and reason and those advertising, articles, texts, and magazines that are against Islam, public morals and Iran's conveniences are prohibited. It is said that the press are free, speech is free, but it does not mean that people are free to do whatever they want, for instance they are not free to steal, go to prostitutes, or create their centers of prostitution. This freedom is western freedom. Except theft, this liberty is western that everyone is free to do whatever he wishes whether incompetent or evil; this freedom is not allowed in Iran" (ibid, 1990: 18-19) <sup>4</sup>. In Imam's view, this imposed limitations posed by the Islamic law are not only a threat to freedom but they also grant him more freedom and this analysis is compatible with acceptance of the concept of maximum freedom.

"The amount of freedom that God Almighty has given to people is beyond freedom they have received from others. The latter are irrational freedoms, whereas God has granted them a rational one. All the things they have given are not freedom, freedom must be reasonable and in accordance with the law" (Imam Khomeini, 1990: 202). In his view, real freedom is meaningful just within the framework of Islam, so even though freedom is both a value and a blessing of God, it is not superior to the other instructions of Islam and its teachings are above everything. In fact, liberty boundaries must be drawn within the framework of Islam and its laws. "We seek refuge and independence in Islam, Islam is the essence" (Imam Khomeini, 1990: 259).

Due to the above- mentioned examples and texts remained from Imam, it can be said that his thought and behavior are based monotheistic vision in which the world consists of two dimensions: matter and meaning. Here, human being is presented as a creature that has the properties of authority, freedom, rationality, and wisdom. In other words, his political philosophy refers to achieving perfection along with both these two parts.

On the concept of human freedoms, he has considered moderation rather than priority of individual and collective liberties, but in cases where it is necessary to pay more attention to priority of an individual or society; he has always focused on the priority of society over individual. This bias can be observed in his speech, texts, and political behavior. From his viewpoint, Islamic governance is oriented from the Velayat-e- Faqih, since it is shaped in accordance with the governments' of the holy prophets. These features will meet the needs of people, aids them to achieve excellence, and will provide personal liberty within the Sharia.

Due to this intellectual character and authoritarian political structure in the 1960s and 1970s in Iran, the depending economy and western- imitated culture was accompanied with the regime's anti-religious policies and tried to prove the effects of religion in social dimension ineffective. Imam concentrated mostly on describing and explaining the principles of the theory of velayat-e faqih. In his comment:

- A) The implementation of Islamic law and the rule of God require the government to allow them to implement these provisions.
- B) The prophetic tradition of forming a government and appointing a substitute for future clarifies the necessity of this government.
- C) Since the ruling of Islam is not limited to a specific time or place, implementing the Islamic provisions requires formation of the Islamic government.
- E) The deeds of the Caliphs and Ali (AS) after the death of the Prophet reflect the establishment of an Islamic state and its necessity.
- F) The quality and nature of Islamic law indicates that for the formation of a government and political, economic, and cultural administration of the society, these laws have been described (Afrough and Salehi, 2002: 59).

Then, by using human freedom of choice in its Western form, "democracy" and "freedom to vote" or "republican" and applying the concepts of Islamic symptoms, he articulates the Islamic Republic equality chain with a focus on Islam. In fact, with an emphasis on political subjectivity of the public uprising towards fulfilling this type of government with the above properties, he predicts fulfillment of such government, i.e., a government that will cover all desired ideals of the public including freedom, separation of powers, public participation, Islamic ownership, and the like.

Thus, although it is possible to extract both positive and negative liberties from his statements and writings, his main purpose was to create Islamic government and to deny despotism and western colonialism in political, social, and economic contexts. Therefore, it shows that he has focused more on the concept of negative freedom or "liberty from ." This important issue stems from the floating signifier Justice that shows that freedom originates from the Muslim community. He has absorbed this dialectic element and has turned it into a layer around the central signifier of Islam defined in terms of the Islamic concepts.

He introduces it as a human ideal which is created based on two dimensions, "negation of oppression" and rejection of inequalities and providing equality before the law and make equitable distribution of resources in the Islamic society. He believes its attainment depends on freedom, i.e., liberation of Islamic society from the bondage of tyranny and dictatorship and formation of Islamic government. It also represents their primary focus on ensuring the realization of the negative freedom. These ideals are only attainable under Islamic rule. Therefore, establishing Islamic state provides the basis for achieving positive freedom in the society. In fact, liberation from tyranny and colonial discourse is the points that in Imam Khomeini's view about freedom, the Islamic countries must step forward in the establishment of Islamic government in order to achieve this aim. After the Islamic Republic Revolution and declaration of its hegemonic discourse, imam has defined freedom based on the frameworks of the constitution and says, "Freedom is within the limits of the law, it means that people have the freedom that God Almighty has granted them. They also have unreasonable liberties, whereas God has given them meaningful freedom "(Imam Khomeini, 1990: 202).

### ***Freedom in Ayatollah Taleghani' Discourse***

So far, there have been no categories of modern political concepts in the statements and writings of Ayatollah Taleghani. Moreover, no unified collection of modern political words used in his discourse, so it would be helpful to gather them in order to promote understanding and localization of modern political concepts in his discourse.

The central starting point in the political thought of Ayatollah Taleghani is "belief in monotheism." In his viewpoint, the idea of monotheism is an important barrier for imprisonment of man by his fellowmen; it is only in the light of unity that man reaches his innate freedom. In order to reject the tyranny and to prove the monotheistic idea, many verses in the Quran consider human freedom and choice as a divine gift. In fact, Taleghani takes advantage of these verses and believes that man has the right to choose according to his own will.

Thus, he emphasized on human freedom in all dimensions, and believed that " in the monotheistic Islam, we are commands such as" there is no reluctance on the religion", so why should we be afraid of different aspects of freedom and prevent eliminating the freedom of others, because Islam says, " it shows majority of the cancelled ." in this case, we won't face any problem with freedom of mankind "Accordingly, despite the backing of monotheistic thought, fighting with arrogant governments (in present terms authoritarian) has an important place in his thoughts and deeds. Since imprisoning other people is part of tyranny, and this is incompatible with the natural discipline that is based on human freedom. Regarding freedom and human dignity, he believes that there should be rules governing communities to defend freedom. Of course, it is not righteous but in the shadow of forming a pious government (Parivar, 2010: 3-4).

### ***Interaction, tolerance, patience and emphasis on social thinking in Taleghani's discourse***

It can be inferred that during that period, Taleghani was the link between clergymen and intellectuals believing that their separation was the main barrier for their friendship. He did not consider clergymen and intellectuals as reactionary and radical, respectively. After the Islamic Revolution and the emergence of dozens of parties and numerous press releases as well as great disagreements and clashes between them, Taleghani sought for unity and avoided disunity and without bias to one side, like a paternal adviser, he invited all parties to unity and affection and recommended them to avoid prejudice and bias.

He says: "I need to remind you that all of you are my children among whom there is no difference. My children are different, but they are part of my soul. I behave you just like my own children. Some pace in one direction and other choose another with a specific idea, but I try to bring out from the wrong. I am wrong; they bring me out of the wrong. You can have a healthy family. We are a family and we need to build it all together. Differences should remain in a family level, not more. Families should not smash each other. I hope our dear sons and brothers, who have a good sense toward me, do not feel disturbed with my parental advice, since as a father and a counselor who is spending the last days of his life, i just wish goodwill and welfare for the nation "(Esfandiari, 2000: 57).

### ***Foundations of Council theory and the Council system in Taleghani's discourse***

Taleghani had deep conviction of the Council, since the council passed the spirit of democracy in the political system. He has repeatedly insisted that this issue has remained from the Prophet's tradition that is based on

revelation. He argued that although in some cases, the council may have some side effects; it is worthwhile to be considered. Hence, in selecting appropriate authorities, Taleghani did not concern people's deviation from the straight path of God at all. On the other hand, his main concern was:

Lest the pretext of the non-diversion of people, few of them take the reins, tend to tyranny, and prevent people from political growth. In his view, society is like a child who should be given chances to enable himself to walk, even at the cost of several falls, since these fallings are a part of walking and will strengthen him (Shirkhany 21, 2001).

According to these principles in the field of social and political action, Taleghani also pioneered in implementation of the Council's approach in Iran. During the first months after the revolution, he attempted to make it accomplished; therefore, he offered the local executive committee as "local councils." It acted as an independent set of executive delivered advisory and decision-making in different cities and communities and tried to convey the needs, aspirations, and views of the smaller units to the government through hierarchy. It meant distribution of power in the inner layers and in another sense, in all social constructs.

### ***Pluralism and Political Activism in Taleghani's discourse***

One of the implications of freedom and equality is the presence and activity of different classes, parties, and organizations in the communities. These communities are the main part of people and classes. In other words, the most essential factor for communities is a set of elements that combine people and classes, create a lively body, and help such communities to survive. Taleghani argued that in past centuries, different nations have kept their power based on ethnic, linguistic, and geographic tendencies and after the political- intellectual developments that have taken place over the last centuries, collaborate has occurred based on thoughts and notion. On the same terms, parties and classes have been formed and ultimately, each class presented their own points of view in society and among their followers and they have formed the population. He is of the opinion that more common thoughts and social ideologies will result in weaker racial titles and the emotional aging of the nation, so it needs stronger national societies mostly placed on opinion and notion; it will solve other social problems by these populations. Thus, if the parties have dabbled in the past days postpartum in a tertiary perspective, Taleghani believes, preservation of independence and intellectual and social progress of nations is an obligation in order to prevent cruelty and violations of the governance (Parivar, 2010 12). Societies are the main framework of people and classes. The most fundamental concern for societies is a set of factors connecting people and classes creating such a lively figure that aids society to survive.

### ***Fairness and justice, limits of freedom in Taleghani's discourse***

From Taleghani's perspective, one of the major factors in the definition of freedom in Islam is justice and equity. "What is justice?" he asks. Justice is giving everyone's rights to him; it means to put everyone in his place, to restore the fruit of his deeds and labor to him, rejection of exploitation.... Exploitation means to enslave men that is by itself the worst phenomenon in human societies since the beginning of history, since man has been created with free will and a free thinker by his God to enjoy the natural resources .... So we have three mottos; Who does not agree these slogans: rejection of colonialism, rejection of tyranny, and generally, rejection of exploitation.....<sup>11</sup>

Taleghani's aim of establishing the council theory was to distribute political power among the lowest strata of society, so he considers this justice to focus on the wealth of the society and he rejects its domination at the hands of a person or a group of class, which leads to social, and class oppression. The issue of social justice is so brilliant in the works of Taleghani that it may be concluded that the main point of his discussion of wealth, with no resistance, was reconciled with social democracy (Jahanbakhsh., 61: 2003).

### ***Property in Taleghani's discourse***

Taleghani wrote his book on Islam and property in the 1950s. During his speech entitled "Property in Islam" in the Religious Society Monthly in 1962. He also referred to the following verses of Surahs, Baqarah and Al-Umran, and Nesa, published at the light of the Qur'an from 1967 till 1983, and expressed Islam's and probably authentic hadiths of the infallible Imams about the property. Inferring from the verses and sayings and having a deep understanding of the historical experiences and the performance of the Communist bloc and countries claiming socialism, he was brought to this conclusion that it is necessary to form a capitalist and economic system based on faith in God and human public interest and guarantee a form of economic life proper for human dignity which, of course, requires human rebellion. Such an economic life and human existence may provide an independent political justice, social freedom, and democracy. Finally, regardless of the concerns of exploitation and oppression, men will worship the monotheistic God and will found a monotheist community in its true sense (Jafari, 22: 2008).

## **CONCLUSION**

According to the discourse theory, political culture of communities lacks stability and determination. In fact, discourse has always potentially spurred formation of otherness and other competing discourses. Generally, identity discourses are dependent on presence of the others. Although the discourses mentioned in the article are attributed to the great Islamic Revolution leaders, they do not fit together in the concept of otherness and hostility. However, due to some differences in discourse referent of the common elements or absorbed floating signifier. Each of them has gained its hegemonic power in the social classes. Therefore, this article tries to compare the notions dominant on the Iranian society regarding the concept of liberty in a specific time span on the subjectivity of the formation years of the Revolution and discuss the ideals of two great intellectuals of the Islamic Revolution by focusing on their liberty discourses.

As it can be seen, the central evidence in both intellectual discourses relies on Islam. However, due to the advent of schools of thought which are the result of recent western developments and revolutions in the twentieth century into the intellectual climate of Iran (including liberalism, Marxism, modernism, tradition, and postmodernism), there is a deep difference between the Iranian intellectual leaders' views about liberty which show the effects of these schools. In fact, considering his intellectual atmosphere, each of them has tried to interpret liberty and its limiting factors.

Based on the above-mentioned concepts and by reviewing the history of Imam Khomeini's revolution, it can be observed that struggle against exploitation as well as tyranny has been the main consideration for him since the beginning of this movement, so it is possible to refer to Imam's discourse as "the discourse of militant Islam" which has attempted to accomplish an Islamic-democratic hegemonic government. In fact, its other main foundations of this discourse, such as liberty, stem from this framework. Meanwhile, it can be inferred that the main principle of Taleghani's discourse has been belief in monotheism. Politically, it depends on various factors such as fight against tyranny, liberty, governmental structure, and social justice, which generally are the floating signifiers that can be defined at the shade of this central signifier. Absorbing these factors from the current competitive discourses on subjectivity like liberalism, communism and other side discourses at that era in Iran, militant Islam, liberal Islam, and western discourses along with the Islamic hegemonic thought of Iranian people and by transferring their meanings to discourse contexts, he created a fresh meaning to them in respect with the Islamic view points and analyzed them thoroughly in his discourse. Then, he articulated these analyses to make an equality chain to establish a government led by people's opinions under the supervision of the faqih with the optimum degree of liberty and justice. Nevertheless, it can be claimed that articulating these elements together in Taleghani's discourse has formed based on the liberty signifier and in fact, the most effective factor for this articulation has been the equality chain. Beside the militant Islam under the leadership of Imam Khomeini and using other discourses, he invited people to make a political subjectivity against Pahlavi's tyrannical system and ultimately, achieve their ultimate aim, the Islamic system.

The aim of this paper is to compare the dominant ideas of Iranian society regarding the concept of freedom in point of time or the position of subjectivity during the formative years of the Revolution, focusing on the ideals of the two major intellectual discourses attributed to them.

Given the above issues and reviewing the history of the movement of Imam Khomeini, it can be observed that conflict with the colonial tyranny has been Imam's focus from the very beginning. Thus, it is possible to consider his attributed discourse along with the discourse of militant Islam under the leadership of Imam Khomeini and other discourses which invite people to fight against the autocratic monarchy as a political subjectivity. It is the main goal of the regime, i.e. the Islamic system.

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