

Political Barriers to the Realization of Civil Society in Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract

The long process of the formation of civil society in Iran is the story of a century full of unsuccessful attempts to make political power conditional on the law coming from the will of the nation and complying with human rights standards. This effort began with the rise of the Constitutional Revolution and the Awakening Movement of Iran, which forms a kind of border between old and new Iran, and continues to this day in a progressive trend full of difficulties. Undoubtedly, the formation of civil society in Iran needs to be explained by the reasons for the failure of this issue, so that the question of why civil society has not yet been formed in Iran despite the existence of favorable contexts can be answered. Several reasons can be counted for the non-fulfillment of civil society in Iran. However, this paper focuses on the domination of ideology as a barrier to the formation of the political-social forces necessary for the realization of civil society. However, I must mention that this factor is only one part of the multidimensional equation of the failure to establish the civil society in Iran. This factor alone cannot be useful in the achievement of civil society. Nevertheless, the achievement of this goal requires a comprehensive and coordinated solution for all aspects of the problem. After explaining a brief history of the formation of civil society in the West and providing its definition and features, we briefly mention the views of several Western thinkers about civil society. Defining ideology is the main discussion of research in the history of civil society in Iran. Then, we conclude the study by showing the impact of ideology on the non-fulfillment of civil society.

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Main question:

Which political factor has prevented the realization of civil society in the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Hypothesis:

Due to the ideological political structure of the Islamic Republic, the Western form of civil society would not be formed in Iran.

Variables:

- 1) Dependent variable: non-fulfillment of civil society in Iran after the revolution.*
- 2) Independent variable: political and religious system.*

History of Civil Society in the West:

Civil society is a sphere of social relations that is free of direct government involvement and consists of public and collective institutions. Civil society is the realm of social power, while the state is the realm of political and magisterial power. The distinction between government and civil society became apparent in political thought of the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe. The primary themes of civil society can be found in the feudal society of the Middle Ages. In European feudalism, factors such as the dispersion and lack of central political power, security, private property, aristocratic privilege, the existence of autonomous cities, and etc. paved the way for the emergence of civil society in the later centuries. On the contrary, in eastern societies, autocracy and the Asian production method had created major structural barriers to the development of civil society.

As Karl Wittfogel, in his "Eastern Autocracy", has shown that the construction of the eastern state was willing to demolish all civil institutions(Wittfogel, 1957, p.59). Civil society is one of the oldest concepts of political thought, which dates back to the ancient Greek political literature and has experienced many changes throughout history. Civil society was revived in the Age of Enlightenment and became the focus of attention of scholars with the developments such as the collapse of the absolute state, the emergence of liberal political system and the gradual separation of religion from the state. In these developments, the human cycle should be considered a milestone in the re-emergence of civil society in political arena. After the Renaissance, civil society was built on a philosophical look towards human being and his rights and values. From this era, a new attempt about the concept of civil society began by thinkers. Thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx emphasized that the post-Renaissance civil society emerged strongly. What was emphasized in the sociological conception of civil society during the Enlightenment was that civil society is a layer between state and society, which defends the state against society. Laws in civil society have an impartial role in values and norms. The state in civil society has no right to prescribe regulations which inconsistent with public will or public consent, claiming to adhere the values.

Definition and characteristics of civil society:

Civil society is a society in which non-governmental organizations (independent in terms of formation, management and decision-making) express and defend the interests and desires of different groups. However, independence does not mean coping with the state, civil society is a realm

of social partnership and a notion of society which is formed by the development of private ownership of distinct and independent human relations and activities, and the idea of a modern state with its own legal identity (Mohammadi, 300: 1999). Civil society covers all areas of social interactions, apart from the family and government.

Characteristics of civil society:

- 1) In civil society, the rights of citizens are respected and individuals are held accountable to society and the law.*
- 1) The individual's separation from kinship relationships, the centrality of personal interests, and also the resulting contractual system or instrumental wisdom.*
- 2) Membership, cooperation and partnership of people in the context of unions, parties, syndicates, associations and organizations, delegations and assemblies.*
- 3) Creation of new beliefs, emotions and orientations, such as: belief in the understanding and discovery of the world, belief in the computability of affairs and planning, democratic orientation, orientation towards the future, and the ability to learn, mastery of the environment.*
- 4) The border between the official and non-official media will be removed and the media will be controlled by the people and public opinion through transparency (Mohammadi, 150: 1999).*

Civil society institutions: Including free press, independent universities, independent trade unions, private banks, non-governmental publishers, scientific, literary and artistic associations, types of cooperatives, political parties, charitycorporates and organizations, syndicates, labor unions, independent and non-governmental religious institutions.

Western thinkers' views about civil society:

A New Interpretation of Civil Society:

George Wilhelm Frederick Hegel (1770-1831)

Hegel, the modernist philosopher, has had a significant effect on the popular perception of civil society with his new interpretation, until then the Western political thinkers had considered no connection between the two domains of state and society. Hence, Hegel was the first theorist who separate civil society from the state and viewed civil society as an intermediary between the family and the state. In addition, he considered civil society, unlike the family and the state, as the hallmark of competition among groups, and recognized the influence of social groups in shaping the general will. But he believed that social groups shall represent classes and guilds rather than masses of citizens (Plamtones, 229: 1992). Hegel uses civil society as a public sphere apart from the state.

Civil society; the achievement of the modern world

For Hegel, the ancient governments, whether the eastern states or the Greek city states, lacked civil society, and the discovery of civil society, which represents the early stage of the formation of state, is a feature of the modern world (Bobbio, 330: 1989). Civil society, in the Hegelian sense, is a bourgeois society that was realized only in the modern era after the Middle Ages and special social changes of the West. Thus, the Hegelian civil society is a set of social relations in which the logic of capitalist economics has influenced. In the footnote to paragraph 190 of the "Elements of the

Philosophy of Right”, he writes: “(The object is in right a person, in morals a subject, in the family a member, in the city generally a burgher (bourgeois)”(Jahanbegloo, 20: 1999). Hegel's term for civil society in German means bourgeois society.

Karl Marx (1818 - 1883)

Marx's analysis of civil society was proposed in two phases: 1) The Critique of Hegelian Philosophy: In the first phase, Marx's critique of the Hegelian philosophy revealed that the claim of universality and inclusivity by the state and political principles are illusory. Hegel began with the primacy of civil society and proceeded to subdue it. While Marx revived the primacy of civil society and brought the state into its subjection (Chanduk, 87: 1998). In Marx's view, the state is not the foundation of civil society, but on the contrary, civil society is the foundation of the state.

Marx enters the Hegelian concept of "bourgeois society" into his system of thought, but this time calls this concept as a political reality, which is a part of the historical process. According to Marx, civil society is the product of the collapse of the medieval feudal society (Because the feudal society could not tolerate the independent private realm). In Marx's thinking, civil society is the sphere of economic relations or infrastructure relations, and also a set of relations between individuals and classes outside the state's superstructure (Bashirieh, 332: 1995). Marx calls civil society a bourgeois society. By civil society, Marx explains the set of various theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, and etc. and then pursues the emergence and development of civil society from these products.

Civil Society as an Instrument of the State's Domination:

In Marx's view, the order in civil society is in fact the order imposed by the class government to protect the capitalists and exploit the working class. Therefore, in a class society, economic and political subjects are both dominant tools. The state is an active demonstration and a dominant tool of a part of civil society, the capitalist class. In civil society, the capitalist class with the possession of state-owned machine has an ideological and economic domination over the society (Khamei, n.d: 175)

History of Civil Society in Iran:

In the last century, despite the availability of many opportunities for the development of civil society, such as the creation and expansion of new civilization institutions, the growth of specialties and the intensification of social division of labour, the intense political competition between various groups of the social and political movement, the spread of media and so on, the Iranian society cannot be called a civil society, but it is oscillating between a traditional society and a mass society (Mohammadi, 47: 1999). Finally, it can be said that some of the aspects of civil society were created in Iran after the revolution, but these aspects did not have their actual function, such as parties (220 registered parties), unions, etc. Therefore, the history of civil society in Iran should be sought from the angle of non-fulfillment of civil society and the presence of its manifestations in the discourse of democracy (resistance discourse). This discourse has been formed since the Constitutional Revolution and emphasized the practices such as power constraints, legalism,

participation, competition, tolerance, modernity, and democratic interpretation of religion (Bashirieh, 332: 1995). Historically, the discourse of democracy has had three main manifestations: firstly, against Qajar's patrimonialism in the form of constitutionalrevolutionary movement; secondly, against Pahlavi's totalitarian modernism in the form of national movement and the 1979 revolution. The Islamic Revolution, especially with the changes that have taken place in the society, provided the contexts for the emergence of this phenomenon more than ever, but civil society was not formed due to culturalreasons, political structure and ruling ideology, and the Iranian authoritarian history. Thirdly, against the domination of ideological traditionalism after the Islamic Revolution, and especially after 1997, in the form of a civil society movement. In the last reading of this discourse after the June 1997 elections, elements such as legalism in the form of constitutional movement, and modern and democratic interpretation of Islam in the form of religious intellectualism can be found (Bashirieh, 64: 2002).

On the one hand, the 2nd Khordadelection indicates that this delayed demand of the society is significantly important for all people, even those who do not understand it correctly. On the other hand, the old thinking about the Iranian society is fundamentally nonsense because of the changes that have taken place in the demographic structure of Iran, the changes made in the light of the women's entry into the scene, the involvement of lower class women in the daily political streams, and so on (Civil Society and Iran Today, 350: 1998).

But again, civil society was not formed at this time. Two issues should be addressed concerning the reasons for the non-fulfillment of civil society during this period (reform period): 1) The lack of a proper definition of the

concept of civil society by Seyyed Mohammad Khatami and his associates known as The 2nd Khordad Movement. During this period, Mr. Khatami proposed the Prophetic Civil Society Plan, calling it the equivalent of civil society. This topic was a kind of confusion; they were actually seeking for a civil community. However, civilization is a part of human nature and Islam itself has also created a civilization. As well, the Prophet (PBUH) has formed the first civil society of Islam. Therefore, Madaniyeh al-Nabi cannot be considered a civil society by the (existing) conventional definitions. According to the common theories, the emergence of civil society essentially dates back to the era of the emergence of independent cities with independent legal systems within the feudal system (Civil Society and Iran Today, 200: 1998). The formation of civil society is conditional on the emergence of citizenship, on the basis of which one can decide individually and enter into institutions voluntarily and set the rules and norms. If we put this prevailing reading as the basis, then we cannot prove the existence of civil society in the early Islam or prophetic civil society. Civil society is a customary concept, but the prophetic society is a religious concept. 2) The 2nd Khordad movement did not notice that the public culture, the political culture, the political structure and the ruling ideology in the Islamic Republic do not have the capacity to establish, form and build civil society on a Western basis. Finally, it should be noted that long historic stages have undergone in the West to achieve today's concept of civil society, and we did not pass such steps.

The role of ideology in the non-fulfillment of civil society in the Islamic Republic:

There are various definitions of ideology, but in a general definition, ideology is a system of interdependent beliefs, thoughts, traditions, principles, and ideals reflecting socially, morally, religiously, politically and economically institutionalized behaviors of a group or community and tries to rationalize them. In other words, ideology is a system of clear, explicit and generally organized ideas and judgments that justify the position of a group or a society. This system is strongly inspired by the values and offers a specific direction for the social actions of the group or community.

Simply saying, ideology can be considered as a network of political and epistemological perspectives that give meaning to the social and political life. Given the centrality of systematic and coherent ideas and the natural judgment of ideology, it is related to the interests of individuals; i.e. those who want to protect and maintain their position and / or those who want to improve their position. This concept was first used by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But it was later highlighted in the writings of Karl Marx. In a negative attitude, Marx called ideology a false consciousness, which justifies the demands of the social classes. In his opinion, the dominant ideology of any society is, in principle, the ideology of the ruling class. However, he later withdrew the negative holistic treatment with ideology by proposing the liberal and revolutionary ideology of the proletarian class. Historically, ideology is the product of industrialization and disintegration of modern societies in the last two centuries. Ideologies are born out of social conflict while at the same time they are in conflict with them (Piez, 45: 1989). The ideologicalization of religion in Iran is the product of social struggles of the 60's and 70's. In this period, religious people or those who know well

that they live in a religious society are looking for a means of struggle. Therefore, the presentation of religion in the form of ideology (the formulation of ideology) would be at the top of their goals. The ideology that has been translated and interpreted as "school" in the Iranian society is a new term. This word was imported to Iran mainly by the Marxist and Socialist forces.

This conference emphasizes a definition of ideology that determines a range of overall and coordinated votes as unchangeable dogmas for explaining human behavior in its social and political life. According to this definition, ideology judges the issues from the angle of this network of perspectives. In a simple word, ideology is a political and partisan view that determines the friend and foe for the insider and outsider (Mohammadi, 250: 1999). Therefore, ideologist is a person or a group seeking to mobilize the masses and public opinion in pursuit of its ideology. Their interpretation of ideology is a set of unbreakable common beliefs that can exclusively respond to the needs of society. It searches for the good life and absolute truth in the realization and consolidation of ideological paradigms, and in this regard, he considers the achievement of political power as an effective tool. It defines an ideological mission for the government that should guide people toward prosperity and good fortune. This flow includes a friend-foe system, which divides the society into friends and foes. Understanding the conditions and changes is not important in this flow, and it only follows a series of unchangeable categories and theories, like dogma. The reality does not matter for it, but the realities must be adapted to its views. It looks at all the events of the universe from the ideological perspective, and in some cases this perspective prevents the recognition of the truth.

In the words of Maulana

The blue glass was in front of your eyes; so, you were seeing the world blue

From the perspective of an ideologist, the desirable society is a single-voice and uniform society that the diversity and plurality of society must be integrated and destroyed in the single, integrated ideological form. The diversity of benefits, demands, values and goals is not accepted. But a review of developments in democratic countries shows that the non-ideological government is one of the main elements for the realization of civil society.

Since the ideological government has merely one value and one absolute truth, the right to individuality and free choice will be eliminated. In such a society, humans must think and live in a way that the rulers think it is correct. For example, in the system of Velayat-e Faqih, the limits of everything are already clear, and people have the right to think or act only within the limits already set by the supreme leader. Therefore, there is a fundamental conflict between civil society and ideological government. In the example of civil society, the government must be ideologically neutral. The position of ideologies and schools is in society where they must compete by accepting the rules of the game and pluralism. The winner shall place its ideology behind the state and operate there only within the framework of the common standards. Avoiding the blending of ideology and political power is a prerequisite for the realization of civil society, but the separation of ideology from the government does not mean to deprive the followers of these schools of participation in political life.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the government has a divine mission in order to guide people toward salvation based on Shi'i jurisprudential doctrines and the combination of religion and political power. They reject modernity, as well as civil society as one of its obvious manifestations, and

give the government a heavenly legitimacy. According to the theory of Velayat-e Faqih, it grants special privileges to a part of the clergy who believed in this theory (Bashirieh, 70: 2002). It is obvious that civil society in this view has no place, but also the rule of jurisprudence was important during the rule of Allah and the continued rule of the Imams.

The ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on several basic principles; the basic principle is to emphasize the Islamic tradition as the origin of all acceptable values and norms; rights, duties and social privileges are accepted only within a traditional context interpreted by the jurists. Accordingly, anything outside the Islamic tradition has no inherent originality and value. Here, the realization and implementation of the tradition is considered to be the highest value, and the system of Velayat-e Faqih is responsible for the implementation and surveillance of Islamic laws. From this perspective, the lifestyle and ethics are not considered individual affairs; meaning that it doesn't depend on the choice of individual's conscientiousness, but it is defined and explained from the perspective of Islamic tradition. The Islamic government is responsible for the implementation of general law enshrined in the Islamic tradition and governs all human affairs. According to this Islamic tradition, clerics and religious scholars enjoy a privileged position in the right of government (Bashirieh, 70: 2002). The jurists as scholars of religion and tradition have the privilege of access to religious knowledge references and consider themselves as the successors or representatives of the Shiite Imams for the exclusive right of government. Therefore, the opposition to the Islamic government means the opposition to Islam and its laws. As a result, the clerics are the main representatives, guardians and commentators of the Islamic tradition, and the authority of the Islamic

tradition depends on the political authority of the clerical and religious scholars (Bashirieh, 65: 2002).

In the ideological context, a group of religious opponents of civil society has also prevented the realization of civil society. The problem of this group with the phenomenon of civil society begins from the fact that they say a single unit only issues a single unit. They think that civil society causes chaos. They believe that any kind of diversity and plurality is a sign of dichotomy and multiplicity, while there is no reading close to the truth about Islam and its interests. Accordingly, any interpretation and establishment along this reading would instigate a conflict in society (Mohammadi, 320: 1999). There is similar discussion about the feasibility of parties in the Velayat-e Faqih. If the parties have their own plans and collect vote in favor of their plans, so what will be done to the advices announced and applied by the supreme leader in the framework of public policies? These people think that accepting diversity and plurality requires or involves lowering the authority on top, so they do not like it because they see the authority at the top.

The dominant political discourses in Iranian history:

- 1) Qajar's Traditional Patrimonialism Discourse*
- 2) Pahlavi's Totalitarian Modernism Discourse*
- 3) Ideological Traditionalism Discourse After the Islamic Revolution*

Since the present research seeks to find the political reasons for the non-fulfillment of civil society in Iran with an emphasis on ideology, we only investigate the ideological traditionalism discourse and refrain from mentioning the details of other discourses.

The ideological traditionalism discourse emerged in response to Pahlavi's totalitarian modernism. This discourse reflects the interests and values of the declining classes of the traditional society, exposed to modernism, reform, and revolution from the top. On the other hand, the emergence of a new mass society due to the modernization of the Pahlavi era provided a favorable context for the spread of ideological traditionalism, and these two had a profound effect on the occurrence of the Islamic revolution (Bashirieh, 107: 2002) In this discourse, the Islamic tradition became the ideology as a solution to the problems of society and the modern age. On the whole, this discourse was the product of pressures from modern society and the decline of traditional society, which created a sense of fear and insecurity amongst the traditional classes. This discourse was composed of different elements such as Shiite political theory, some elements of modernism (such as parliamentarism) and a kind of populism and charismatic authority (Bashirieh, 109: 2002). The ideological traditionalism considers the modern world and the democratic lifestyle as the main enemy and invaded the various manifestations of Westernization. This discourse has been confronted especially with pluralism, civil society, liberalism, the West's Enlightenment tradition, as well as Iranian nationalism. In contrast, it has emphasized leadership, social and moral discipline, traditional values, political elitism, and cultural control. The ideological traditionalism discourse involves two main tendencies: the charismatic and populist tendency dominated from 1979 to 1989, and the more conservative and traditionalist tendency ruled from 1989 to 1997. Indeed, the first tendency revived and renewed traditionalism as a dominant ideology against modern ideologies. According to these two tendencies, life and political practices are determined within the discourse of ideological traditionalism. At the beginning, the Islamic

Republic was founded on the traditional charismatic authority of Ayatollah Khomeini. After the adoption of the Constitution, a combination of traditional and charismatic authority was created in the Velayat-e Faqih. During 1979 to 1989, the ideological traditionalism discourse was oscillating between charismatic and traditional tendencies, although the charismatic one prevailed (Bashirieh, 109: 2002). However, the traditionalism overcame in the later period by the institutionalization of the authority of the Velayat-e Faqih. Altogether, the ideological traditionalism discourse has sought to create subordinates obeying traditional authorities. Loyalty, trust and personal and religious devotion to the leaders and their accepted values form the basis of political practices in this discourse. There is no place for individualism, critique, intellectual competition, pluralism, civil society, and democratic lifestyle in such discourse (Bashirieh, 109: 2002). In contrast, obedience, surrender, silence and passivity can be fostered in this ideology. Ideological traditionalism, as a dominant discourse, is increasingly opposed to globalization in the fields of economics, culture and communication (which appeared on the domestic scene within the framework of democratic pressures and forces). This opposition is one of the main pillars of ongoing conflicts in Iran's political system and society.

The ideological traditionalism discourse that was dominated after the revolution created an enclosed mass and military society. This discourse has nothing to do with self-engagement, ideological competition, and other democratic processes. The basic principles of the ideological government of the Islamic Republic should be found socially in the mass as a political mobilization, politically in the prominent position of clergy in this system

and, ideologically, in the traditionalism and combination of religion and the state (Bashirieh, 107: 2002).

Conclusion:

In general, it can be said that the institutionalization of civil society is not only the goal of political development, but also the principal of political development and involves its means and objectives. Hence, when we talk about civil society and its institutionalization, we mean not only the organization of social forces in political life and their freedom in political participation and competition, but also we consider developing a dispute settlement mechanism in the political structure, institutionalizing the political life and legitimizing legal institutions for political participation and competition. In this sense, civil society is not just a social issue but a kind of political life (Bashirieh, 689: 2003). However, the main purpose of the Islamic ideological traditionalism was defining and creating a committed and obedient Muslim to form a droplet of the sea of loyal masses. The love of values and the leader establish the link for such masses. The new collective conscience found its most important manifestation in this link. Collective conscience and mechanical solidarity in the mass society prevent from the formation and determination of group differences. In the case of Iran's mass society, any kind of partisanship was in contrary to the spirit of unity ruling the revolutionary movement. The revolutionary movement also used the growing pace of mass society and strengthened it by its normalizer aspirations. Hence, the interest in leader, revolution and Islam was considered to be the highest interest and superior to any collective and social interests. According to the Constitution, the Islamic state does not come from class positions and individual or group

domination, but also is therealization of political ideal of a coreligionist and like-mindednation that organizes itself in order to advance toward the ultimate goal, Allah. In general, the state in Iran suppressed civil society organizations and expanded the platform of mass society by resorting to mass mobilization.

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