

*Explanation and Critique of the Iranian Reform Movement: Alternative  
Discourses for a Conservative Regime*

Ali Namatpour

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Bettina Koch, Chair

Timothy Luke

Rachel Scott

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**Abstract**

This thesis analyzes the failures, achievements, and some of the possible political ramifications of the reform movement in Iran since the Islamic Revolution. It focuses on religious intellectual discourse in the context of the intellectual trajectory of Islamic thought from the revolutionary period to the post-revolutionary reformist phase. This thesis examines the role of the post-revolutionary intellectuals after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. For reaching this goal, this research presents an analysis of the historical processes which resulted in the formation and growth of the religious intellectuals in Iran. The thesis begins by explaining the basis of Shia political thought and its growth trend which leads to the theory of *velayate faqih* as the main response to the question of the political legitimacy in Shia doctrine. I argue the emergence of the reformist ideas related to the decline of the revolutionary model of the Islamic government, which dominated the decade after the revolution. I discuss how the reformists and the religious intellectuals challenge the socio-economic and the political hegemony of the Islamic government. Finally, I explore the politics of the reform movement after the election of President Khatami in 1997, and consider the failures and achievements of the reformist government in the socio-political sphere. The thesis explores the reformists victory was the first step for reforming the power structure which might lead to the transformation of the socio-political and economic liberalization, and which combines modern political thought with religious framework in the power structure in Iran.

*To the memories of martyrs of Iran's Reform Movements*

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## Introduction

The theory of democratic transition usually explains the transitional process under the framework of secularism theories with focus on secular oppositions. Most experts begin with the assumption that opposition groups who support the process of democratization in authoritarian regimes are led by secular liberals while religious actors play a peripheral role (Carothers, 2002; Diamond, 1999). Some of the scholars who belong to the classical theory of “transitology” have articulated their theories in this way (Donnell & Schmitter, 2013; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Rustow, 1970). They consider the role of religious actors a marginal factor and they investigate as to when, why, and how religious actors are involved with democratic transitions, instead of considering religious organizations/actors as the center of their research.

The lacks of proper attention to the role of religious organizations have caused misleading assumptions about who have struggle with democratic transition. In the context of transitional processes, some studies analyze the trend of pro-democratic discourses and mobilization in secular civil societies without suitable consideration of religious organizations. However, some scholars criticize these approaches and argue that democratic readings of Islam are essential to a democratization process of Muslim societies. And, thus, the role of religious actors and organizations need to be in the center of the analysis (Kamrava, 2008). In this situation, religious intellectuals have an essential role to play for the reinterpretation and the creation of democratic discourse in the public sphere of Muslim societies.

Iran is an important example of these theological discourses that aims of reconciling democratic and liberal values with tradition. In the past two decades religious intellectuals tried to explain why religious practice can be better applied in democratic societies that defend

freedom of speech, organization, and religion. While these discourses are complex and have several aspects, the Iranian reform movement inspired by religious intellectuals is the most important part of pro-democratic mobilization to articulate discourse and mobilize people during the period of transition. Religious intellectuals' impact on the Iranian reform movement is essential to the pro-democratic mobilization. The presidential victory of Mohammad Khatami in 1997 prominently affected the reformist movement. This development occurred against a background of public inactivity and social hopelessness after the regime had established its power in all the state institutions (Nasr, 2007). Thus, the outcomes of that opportunity for reform surprised many political observers and policy makers inside and outside Iran. Khatami used an alternative platform of change to achieve his victory. He pledged to replace the corrupt political system of the post-revolutionary era that had disappointed many people.

This thesis explores the theoretical foundations and analyses the successes and shortcomings of the 1997-2005 Iranian reform period. Moreover, this thesis considers the causes of the reform movement's failure, which led to the rise of populist neoconservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005. What explains the trend of defeat in the reform movement? Why students, journalists and intellectuals were mobilized by religious intellectuals successfully in the election campaign, but could not continue their trend? Why did the reformist ideas about democracy that gave some degree of recognition to Islam mobilize people for election and win over authoritarian actors, but could not maintain and control the unity of the reform movement? What explains the fact that pro-democracy religious actors could contain the anti-regime alliance together for a short time, but not for a long period of time?

To answer this problematic question, it is necessary to analyze several aspects of Iran's politics and society. First of all, it requires an analysis of the reform movement that challenged

authoritarian rule. Second, it needs to understand the relationship between the regime and the opposition. Third, it calls for considering the religious ideas and how they challenged the current political and religious orthodoxies. It also considers how the reformist's ideas practically suggested political alternatives. To reach this goal, the thesis uses the original Persian sources produced during this period (1997–2005), including Khatami's own writings as well as theoretical formulations and articulations by other religious intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, and Mohsen Kadivar.

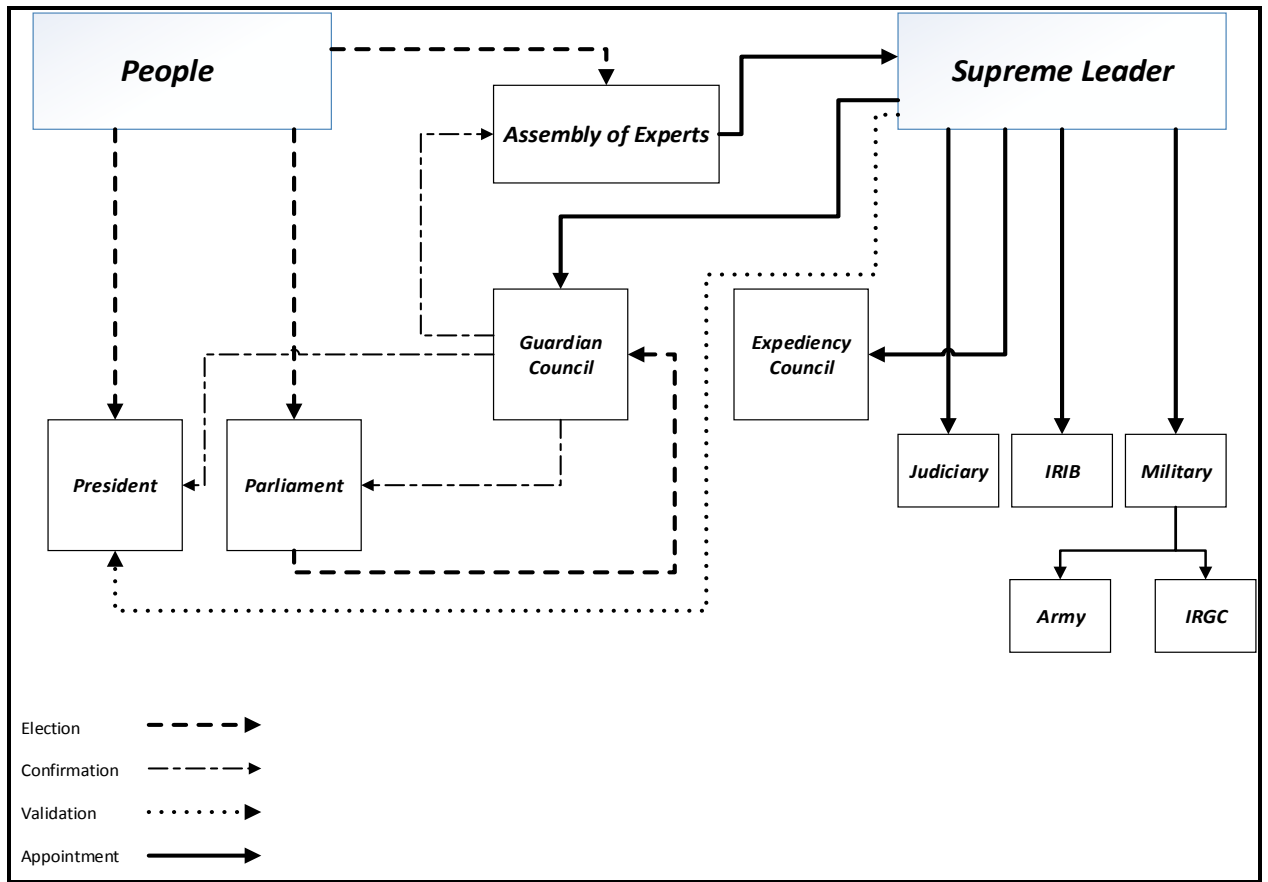
The Iranian Revolution of 1979 succeeded in dismantling a monarchy and led to the rise of hybrid regimes in the contemporary history of the Middle East (Arjomand, 2005). In 1978-1979, most of the opposition groups, which ranged from liberal constitutionalists, Marxists, Socialists, and Islamists, combined together against the last Shah of Iran (Keddie, 2012). Many Iranians believed this upheaval was a turning point obtains an independent and legitimate government.

At the beginning of the Islamic Republic, the government promised democracy for all Iranians; however after the regime stabilized its power, the outcome was rather different; the new regime tried to control all resources of power. This outcome was completely different from what other political leaders expected, and they started to oppose the new regime. The opposition groups emphasized that the new regime betrayed the democratic aspirations of the people. They resisted against this deviation which led to conflict between the new regime and revolutionary groups like Tudeh party of Iran, the People's Mujahedin of Iran, the Freedom Movement of Iran, and National Front of Iran. As Levitski and Way argue, the post-revolutionary clash provides favorable conditions for revolutionary elites "with both a justification and the means to destroy other [often allied] political organizations that could potentially contest for power in the future" (Levitsky & Way, 2013, p. 7). In Iran, the regime campaigned against the opposition groups in

1980-82 to unify the structure of power and undermine the effectiveness of these groups in society. The revolutionary regime not only eliminates opponents, but also destroys alternative centers of power by controlling the structural foundation of future opposition such as monopolization of resources and monitoring the public sphere. As Livetski and Way explain “in the absence of independent source of finance, infrastructure, and legitimacy, the organizational bases of opposition effectively disappear” (Levitsky & Way, 2013, p. 8).

To better understand the nature and consequence of this hybrid political system, the chart below illustrate the categorization of the political system in Iran. This figure shows how organizations overlap with each other and how they compete for centers of power with one another. Kamrava explains the system of governing in Iran and notes, “this political system is made up of a series of highly complex institutional arrangements, whereby institutions with similar or competing roles often check and balance out each other’s powers, perform overlapping functions and, theoretically at least, prevent any one center of power from gaining undue influence over the entire system” (Kamrava, 2007, pp. 84-85). The chart shows how the political system of the Islamic republic works and how this system protects the regime against any instability and threat.

**Figure 1: Iran's power structure**



This study aims to present the Iranian post-revolutionary reform movements as a case study and analyzes the relationship between religion and state in Iran. In chapter 1, I consider the idea of Ayatollah Khomeini's and tries to explain his philosophical and religious notions about the structure of power in Muslim community. In this context, I explore the religious authorities and analyze how Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers dealt with debatable ideas that affect the social and political context.

In post-revolutionary Iran, a new theory of Islamic government was introduced. Islamic ideology and its conception became a mandatory part of institution in the name of the *velayate faqih* (Jurisprudence of Guardianship). Ayatollah Khomeini articulated the revolutionary notion

of an Islamic government to oppose the monarchy and to set *Ulama* as divinely rulers over a government established solely on Islamic laws (Enayat, 2005). The rise of Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of jurist guardianship (*velayate faqih*) indicates a discursive paradigm shift in Shia political thought. He tried to renovate the traditional doctrine of Shia authority based on the theology of the infallible Imam. Ayatollah Khomeini suggested transferring the Imam's political authority to the state institution. His discourse on Islamic government prepared a new solution for an old political crisis for the doctrine of Shia by combining religious and modern theory in Muslim societies. He tried to answer the question of legitimate government and considered the jurisprudential aspect of authority with attending to the other aspects of doctrine such as theological, political and cultural issues that are related to the subject. He used rational reasoning in his discourse of legitimate authority and tried to show the methodological problems of the texts and the chains of narration of the Imam's traditions (Subhānī & Shah-Kazemi, 2001). Khomeini devoted his theory of Islamic government to the idea of the continuity of religion and to the rational explanations of state authority.

Khomeini tried to redefine the notion of justice as pillar of Shia doctrine in the new realm which was not related to the personal leadership of the infallible Imam as an essential element for legitimate state. With this paradigm shift he solved the problem of Shia doctrine in the political sphere and led the *Ulama* to have their own state before the Hidden Imam return. For reaching this goal, Khomeini gave the authority to the qualified *faqih* in the concept of office of Imam instead of considering his qualification with the concept of infallible Imam. With attention to the Khomeini's theory of *velayat faqih*, he tried to articulate a specific interpretation for managing the theological obstacles in the doctrine of Shia to reconcile it with modern notion. He tried to transfer the issue of authority from position of Imam to the political institution.

Khomeini defined the religious character of the government with emphasizing the role of qualified *faqih* as a Supreme Leader and at the same time he asserted the political authority of the *faqih* related to the presence of the state. In this situation, the Imam's authority delegates to the state as a whole and the *faqih* used this power as a part of political system. With this complex model, Khomeini reconciled the concept of modern political system with traditional values and established the legitimate government in the religious context.

He advocated the idea of republicanism that he chose from modern political thought for his theory of Islamic government and applied its implications in his theory (Alsaif, 2007). This combination of modern and traditional doctrine in Khomeini's theory led scholars to rethink about the relationship between religion and democracy.

He extended the doctrine of *velayate faqih* to include the de facto sovereignty of the jurist and established a dual system of control (Hooglund, 2002). The formal government includes an elected legislature, a president, and a cabinet to make and perform a public policy, but these elected structures were controlled by the *faqih* as the final arbiter. After the consolidation of the regime, in the period between 1980 and 1983, the regime started to Islamize the society in the name of the Cultural Revolution. These ideological changes aimed to guarantee an Islamic atmosphere for every subject. The Islamic Revolution, thus, founded a hybrid political regime, with an elected parliament and president under the control of clerical authority (Arjomand, 2005). It harshly resisted controversial views on pluralism and liberal values. Yet, it could not control all of the debates and dissents. Alternative socio-political discourses could not come to an end.

In chapter 2, I explore the effects of socio-political problems in the creation of the reform movement and its discourse in the political structure of Iran. I discuss the emergence of reformist ideas related to the decline of the revolutionary model of Islamic government, which dominated the decade after the revolution. Two factors helped to expand the reform movement among intellectuals and ordinary people: First, the socio-economic problems, which related to the war period and the conflicts between rival groups on the one hand, and the death of Khomeini that resulted in a crisis of legitimacy on the other hand. Second, religious intellectuals criticized the radical notion of the Islamic government, suggested an alternative to reconcile religion and modern values. These philosophical and political discussions have re-emerged and led to the rise of a new self-awareness among the people in the public sphere.

The end of the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 provided the chance for the reformists and intellectuals to challenge some basic ideas of the Islamic government. This situation helped the pragmatic leaders of revolution to guide the Islamic Republic to a realistic model. These changes happened in the name of the Policy of Adjustment, which aim was socio-economic reform in the context of Islamic government. These changes provided the condition for the emergence of reformist ideas, which tried to reconcile religion with modernity. Although the revolutionary model is emphasized to the religious and national traditions, the reformist camp compromised the notion of Islamic government, which accommodated the model of liberal democracy. In this condition, the concept of political participation and criticized the Islamic government was developed by religious intellectuals. These development prepared framework for reformists to expand the notion of civil society and human rights in the context of Islamic Republic, which led to improvement of political parties and independent media in one hand, and expansion of religious intellectuals' discourse on the other hand.

There are some openings in Khomeini's ideas for the system of governing that made room for religious intellectuals and reformists to interpret his ideas in different ways. After the revolution, religious intellectuals tried to reinterpret Khomeini's concepts with focusing on the source of legitimacy (Siavoshi, 2007). This thesis explores the appearance of pro-democratic religious discourses in Iranian society. In chapter 3, I discuss how the religious intellectuals asked questions and criticized the notion of state, law and political authority to challenge the idea of Islamic government. In contrast with chapter 1, I consider the new interpretations of Shiism which is best studied through the religious intellectuals and their notions about politics and structure of power. Religious intellectuals' works have different approaches in dealing with the issue of *velayate faqih* and structure of power in post-revolutionary era. I consider Soroush's works as the framework of religious intellectual and other important members of reform movement in the post-revolutionary period such as Kadivar and Shabestari. I want to assess recent theological developments in Iran by oppositions trying to deconstruct the notion of government and create a non-Islamist, non-secular form as an alternative.

In post-revolutionary Iran, religious intellectuals engaged in serious debates about the importance of politic and its relation to Islam. I explore the main discourse of the religious intellectuals and the effects of their religio-political thought on the Iranian reform movement. I focus on the Soroush's work as a religious intellectual, and the important members of the reform movement in the post-revolutionary period and their influence on the theories of religious reformation. Their ideas about politics, religion, and their relations are highly controversial in contemporary Iran. I explain their framework about the main concept of the Islamic government and how they criticize ideology the post-revolutionary.

Soroush tries to criticize the official interpretation of religion and supports some modern notions such as republicanism, democracy, plurality and power limitation. For him, Islam has the ability to reconcile with democratic discourse. In this situation, he supports a methodological approach, which relates to the modern world and scientific rationality. Soroush claims that Islam does not have a specific plan for governing and does not support a certain definition of Islam as a best model for public and private spheres (Alsaif, 2007).

His main concern has been to lessen the rigidity of Islamic thought and to reduce the resistance of regime against Western civilization (Hashemi-Najafabadi, 2011). He advocates the idea of reform in Islamic thought to reconcile it with the modern notion of human rights and democracy. For reaching this goal, Soroush uses hermeneutic methodology and applies it to religious epistemology and considers Quranic values and decrees in their historical context to establish a constant framework by using reason and collective human experience for the contemporary era (Hashemi-Najafabadi, 2011).

After the war, there was no pretext for the regime to continue its compulsory behavior. The Iranian people expected to improve the socio-political condition, and struggled for political participation and more open civil society. They supported individual freedoms, defended the rule of law and government responsibility, and pursued social justice. This was a promising time for opposition groups, especially religious oppositions, to revive themselves after a period of repression and restriction. Khatami and other religious intellectuals that belonged to religious organizations started to reinterpret the concept of political Islam by infusing democratic and liberal values.

In spite of the fact that Khatami was not supported by the regime In 1997, he won the fifth presidential elections (Vahdat, 2000). Khatami's reform movement saved a voice to the marginalized people previously suppressed by the regime who wanted socio-political change. The social movements organized and supported change under his leadership. Reform movement challenged the basic principle of order in the notion of Islamic government for the first time since 1979. Khatami's manifest of civil society and "the rule of law" challenged the notion of "Islamic government", which served basis of the revolutionary regime (Arjomand, 2005). In chapter 4, I explore the social movement coalitions and their effects on a democratic transition; in addition, it analyzes the reasons for their achievements and failures in Iran. Although the reformists' project succeeded in creating and expanding municipal elections, a multi-party system, and reestablished regulations for the registration of NGOs, they failed to implement civil society and human rights under Khatami's presidency (Gheissari, 2010). The thesis examines the politics of the reform movement, and why it won repeatedly in elections, that could not be translated into lasting political change.

After winning the election, President Khatami began governing the country with a reformist cabinet which brought great hope to civil society for the establishment of democratic politics. Khatami and other religious intellectuals attempted to develop models of democracy that allowed some combination of religion and state arrangements to work alongside with democracy. In this atmosphere, religious intellectuals established a critical theoretical framework to foster an understanding of the tension between modernity and religion (Arjomand, 2002). Iranian Islamic thinkers investigated how the state could create a warmer and more welcoming environment for political claims of the ordinary people without breaking the rights of religious minorities. The reformists attempted to redefine some of the foundational premises of the Islamic Republic that

predicated itself as a revolutionary state. They tried to reconcile them with their democratic and pluralist ideals.

This development is closely associated with the thought of religious intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Nohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, and Mohsen Kadivar at the forefront of the post-revolutionary reform (Mirsepassi, 2000). These religious intellectuals enjoyed support from a large number of followers among the relatively young and well-educated Iranians who were seeking to build a more open and democratic society. Activists, especially college students, organized discussion circles around the works of the leading religious thinkers. These religious organizations worked as communication and mobilization networks in order to mobilize public protests. In this atmosphere, the concept of civil society was revived. The reform movement created a new opportunity to voice the various views of different political notions and developed an alternative culture of critique and dialogue.

The campaigns developed by the student movement, the reformist parliamentarians, the women's movement, and an emerging critical press broke apart as voters lost confidence in the reformists' ability of change. However, the decline of the reform movement happened despite the fact that ideas of the religious intellectuals were still in the air. They were not able to continue to mobilize people and to organize a reform movement. The conclusion summarizes finding of the thesis that explain the causes of the success and failure of the reform movement in contemporary Iran. The reformist campaigns were developed by the reformist government, reformist parliamentarians, and developing critical magazines, but they could not continue their reform approach because they lost their confidence in the reformists' ability to change the socio-political condition of their country. Despite the complicated religious discourses on democratic government and religious intellectuals' effort to reconcile faith and reason, religious intellectuals

cannot present a clear alternative for the current regime. They tried to develop a new sphere to define religious truth and the relationship between religion and state, but their alternative could not be accomplished in the absence of successful coalition among the opposition groups (Cronin, 2013). They were not able to continue to mobilize people and organize a reform movement. In sum, the Iranian regime was established during a violent and ideological struggle and it led to the creation of an elite regime and a coercive apparatus to defend the regime against the threat of reform movement and opposition groups.

The present study has following limitations: first, the thesis was focused to the political and economic events from 1979 until 1997 and it did not consider all aspects of socio-economic during the post-revolutionary era. Moreover, regarding post-revolutionary period, the present study was limited to those issues which are relevant to the thought of Ayatollah Khomeini and Soroush as a founding father of the Islamic Republic and the Reform Movement. Furthermore, most of data related to socio-economic analysis remain classified and are not public. Finally, the present study was limited to researching the essential impact of religious intellectual thoughts on the reform movement and its relation to the social, political and economic dimensions of governance in Iran. Future research should be done to consider the socio-economic structures of the Iranian society on the process of transition to understand the relationship between the reform movement and the public interests.

# Chapter One: A Shia Revolution

## Introduction

The rise of Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of jurist guardianship (*velayate faqih*) indicates a discursive paradigm shift in Shia political thought. He tried to renovate the traditional doctrine of Shia authority based on the theology of the infallible Imam. He suggested transferring the Imam's political authority to the state institution. His discourse on Islamic government prepared a new solution for an old political crisis for the doctrine of Shia by combining religious and modern theory in Muslim societies. He tried to answer the question of legitimate government and considered the jurisprudential aspect of authority with attending to the other aspects of doctrine such as theological, political and cultural issues that are related to the subject. He used rational reasoning in his discourse of legitimate authority and tried to show the methodological problems of the texts and the chains of narration of the Imam's traditions (Subhānī & Shah-Kazemi, 2001). Khomeini devoted his theory of Islamic government to the idea of the continuity of religion and to the rational explanations of state authority.

In this chapter, I explain the basis of Shia political thought and the trend of growth which led to the theory of *velayate faqih* as the main reply to the question of political legitimacy in Shia doctrine. This explanation helps to better understand the background of the current discussions about the jurist guardianship. I briefly overview the elements which effected the development of the Shia political thought. Then, I discuss how the traditional version of Shia political thought has been changing over time and establishing up to now. This consideration helps to identify the main theoretical challenges to the doctrine of jurist guardianship. Thereafter, outline Khomeini's theory and his attempt to change the role of religion from a passive institution, which was not

involved in politics, to the active organization in the political sphere. Before Khomeini, the *Ulama* emphasized the lack of political legitimacy during the absence of the Twelfth Imam but Khomeini with his theory of Islamic government tried to redefine the role for *Ulama* as representative not only in socio-economic sphere but also in political scope. I explore how Khomeini tried to reconcile religion and state and guaranteed the consistency and productivity of the political system. Generally, I argue how he used theoretical framework to advance his arguments and applied his notion to achieve stability and development in Iran.

## **The Construction of Religion and Legal Authority**

After the death of the Prophet, Shiism was confronted with the political issue of authority of the ruler which led to the division from the main stream and as a minority branch of Islam. Shia *Ulama* gradually changed their focus from political opposition to religious discourse as a strategy to avoid suppression from rulers (Kohlberg, 1991, p. 4). In this condition, Shia *Ulama* play a vital role in shifting the political debate to the religious debate. There is a main difference in the social position of the *Ulama* in the Twelver Shia of Iran and that of the *Ulama* in Sunni-majority countries. In the tradition of Shia belief the Twelfth Imam did not determine a successor for the period of great occultation. During the eleventh century and after the absence of the Twelfth Imam, Shia *Ulama* have appeared as a major force in the Shia society. The view became central that during the time of occultation the *Ulama* have the responsibility on behalf of Hidden Imam in the religion and legal sphere (Nasr & Dabashi, 1989, pp. 156-167). In general, the Shia *Ulama* believe that certain features of the Hidden Imam's (*wilaya*) have been given to them since they rule as his general assistants (*nowwabe amm*) during his occultation on the foundation of traditional and rational proofs (Calder, 1982). They used the concept of *Ijtihad* to create the

position for independent judgement as an important source for official decree in religious affairs (Akhavi, 1980, p. 11).

The concept of *Ijtihad* in Shia jurisprudential discourse means “expenditure of efforts by a *faqih* in order to acquire an opinion on a *shariah* value”, or “efforts at deducing a *shariah* precept from the valid indicators of *shariah*” (Motahari, 1980, p. 101). The Shia *Ulama* used the discipline of *usul al-fiqh* (the principles of jurisprudence), as a main framework of general doctrines and regulations for *Ijtihad* to manage how the legal principles are deduced from the valid sources (Matsunaga, 2011, p. 369). The position of *Ijtihad* helped the *Ulama* to engage with socio-political problems of Muslim society and examined the role of *fiqh* in public sphere. Shia *Ulama* tried to use the concept of *Ijtihad* for applying principles which were made by an infallible Imam to other similar situations. In this condition, Shia scholars supported the interpretation of Divine laws with the *Ulama* as true interpreters of these laws. In the realm of political thought, *Ijtihad* helped the *Ulama* to solve the problem of limitations, which were related to the traditional theology and limited Shia political thought to the doctrine of Imamate (Alsaif, 2007, p. 23). For instance, Shia *Ulama* expanded the concept of *Ijtihad* during last two centuries and presented new formulated principle to accommodate Shia principles with new conditions. One of these new doctrines was related to the secondary precepts (*ahkam thanawiya*), which arranged obligation in an unusual situation or in new case which was compatible with the modern world and its developments (Matsunaga, 2011). *Ulama* used secondary precepts for interfering in the political realm and actively participate in political crisis such as Tobacco Boycott Movement and Oil Nationalization Movement.

## **The Process of Transition from Traditional Concept to the Modern One**

The argument related to the valid sources for jurisprudence and over the scope and nature of this authority (Mavani, 2011). There were two main school of legal interpretation in Islamic Shia thought, namely, *Akhbari* and *Usuli*. Some *Akhbari's Ulama* claimed that the only vital sources of legal interpretation were the direct teachings of the Imams. But some *Usuli's Ulama* did not accept this notion and asserted that main sources (the Quran, hadith, and the teachings of the Twelve Imams) should be referred to the judgment of *mujtahid* as the final source for legal decisions. In Islamic thought the term *mujtahid* is related to the Grand Ayatollah, who is qualified to use *ijtihad* in the evaluation of Islamic law and has a wide knowledge of the Quran, the Sunnah, and legal theory (Esposito, 2003). In this condition, *Usulis' Ulama* overcame this discussion and during the Safavid Empire the study of legal theory (*fiqh*) became the main field of Islamic learning in the Shia world (Kunkler, 2008). The *Usulis'* victory over the *Akhbaris* led *Ulama* to use independent judgement (*Ijtihad*) and the methodological advances helped them to articulate and expand their new concept among Muslim society (Mavani, 2011). As a result, the *mujtahids* came into political debates and turn into a powerful religious class in Safavid period.

The creation of the Safavid dynasty in Iran was the most important incident in the history of Shiism since the Occultation. On that period, Iran as a nation and Shiism as an independent religion got together. The Safavid sovereigns tried to reconsolidate Iran and recreate of regional authority which was competitive with the Sunni model of the Ottomans. For reaching this goal, they needed the ideological tools in this competition, and Shiism was a good opportunity for Safavids to unify the country. Therefore, they used popularity and legitimacy of Shia *Ulama* and chose Shiism as the official religion. The Safavid sovereigns supported the development of the Shia ideology for improving the trend of unification among the various ethnic and linguistic

groups to combine national consciousness in country. In this condition, Shiism achieved to its desired government, its national identity, and received the political power, which they needed to construct a unified society (Richard & Nevill, 1995). This approach elevated the position and effect of the Shia *Ulama* and helped them to take the control of educational and judicial structures around the country. But the *Ulama* could not achieve to the high position of power and remained under the control of Safavid state because the Safavids had effectively asserted to the prophetic descent and this claim helped them to legitimize their sovereigns without specific need from the *Ulama* (Minorsky, 1943).

The attempt of Shia *Ulama* to gain political power challenged the traditional belief that strongly supported passively waiting for the return of the Hidden Imam. Shia *Ulama* before the Safavid period believed that all forms of ruling were unjust because Imam is the only person who qualified for governing of Muslim society and the representative of God's will on earth. Cooperation with usurping rulers was impermissible because it led to accepting the oppression and usurpation of Imam's position in society. This interpretation of traditional doctrine led *Ulama* to separate themselves from all ruling powers and denied any participation to take political power. In contrast, the new socio-political growths in Safavid period showed a paradigm shift from traditional assumption. This challenge has encouraged the *Ulama* to rethink traditional doctrine of leadership (Halm, 1997). They articulated their notion in the absence of the Hidden Imam and claimed that *Ulama* would act as the Imam's general representatives. They maintained some duties as administering social welfare funded through *khums* and *zakat*, leading prayer, and administering *shariah* courts (Abrahamian, 1993). As a consequence of these theological arguments, the *Ulama* had obtained two essential social roles: First, *Ulama* had authority in the realm of adjudication to interpret the religious sources and applied them to the

realm of legal judgment; and second, they had financial independence based on the collection of *khums* and *zakat* which helped them build up institutions of welfare for society (Keddie, 2000). The essential problem in this new context related to the question that how the *Ulama* could participate in the state affairs without destructive the doctrine of Imamate.

During the period of war with perennial enemies such as Ottomans and Uzbeks in 17<sup>th</sup> century, which caused weakness and degeneration of the Safavid dynasty, the *Ulama* lost their political impact, but they keep their positions at the local level. This trend led *Ulama* to become independent from political power, and this autonomy process reached its peak during the Qajar period (1791–1925) (Matin, 2013).

Shortly after the rise of the Qajar dynasty, the *Ulama* improved their domain in national politics which they had lost in Savaid dynasty (Cole, 1983). The Qajar's dynasty did not have prophetic ancestry which caused the lack of legitimacy for them to imitate the Safavis' "caesaropapism" (S. A. Arjomand, 1988a). In this situation, they needed the Shia *Ulama* for religious legitimation for their power and autonomy. Therefore, the *Ulama* found a key role for validating the sovereignty which was important for Iran's modern politics (Dabashi, 2006). These political developments during the Qajar dynasty caused many debates about the political application of the *Ulama's* participation in power. The Tobacco Revolt of 1891 was the first opportunity for the *Ulama* to examine their ability in political realm and manage the institution for political activity as opposition groups. Fifteen years later, there was another confrontation with the state in the name of Constitutional Revolution which aim was to limit the authority of Qajar's kings. From the Tobacco Revolt to the Constitutional Revolution, the participation of the *Ulama* in politics raised the question of the nature of authority and its limitation among Shia

scholars. The consequence of their strategy was the system of the “dual sovereignty” of the state and the *Ulama* (S. A. Arjomand, 1988b).

## **The Decline of Religion and Legal Authority of *Ulama* through the Pahlavi’s Period**

During the twentieth century, the dual sovereignty and conflict between religion and state caused difficult situation for reaching a national consensus in the political sphere in Iran. Scholars emphasized to reach agreement about defining the foundations of the political structure are essential for nation-building and political development. It helps to create the national will, decreases pressure between state and society, and enables peaceful participation of the people in political activities. This is mainly significant for the state to distinguish a realm of conflict between the public’s expectations and the state’s reactions (Held, 2013).

Reza Shah rose to power to solve the problem of dual sovereignty by using a modernization project and creating a central government for “comprising state-rationalization, military modernization, bureaucratic expansion, and the legalization of private property in land” (Banani, 1961, p. 604). He knew the social role and popularity of the *Ulama* was one of his most important problems for unity of the state. Reza Shah recognized dual function of religion as a tool for the legitimization of the regime on one hand and as instruments to mobilize people for protest against the structure of power and liberation on the other hand (Billings & Scott, 1994). For solving this problem, Reza Shah applied the model of Ataturk in Turkey which linked modernization by uniting the state assembly and secularizing the public sphere (Omid, 1994). Following the model of Ataturk, Reza Shah wanted to limit the public power of the *Ulama*.

The experiences of modernization in Iran showed that fragmentation was one of the most important outputs of this trend which threatened the stability of the political system and the modernization process (Razi, 1990). Modernization of Iran in the period of Pahlavi had two important transformations for the structure of religion and affected the *Ulama's* role in society. Both were applied with secular power through the regulation of religion by the modern state to seize the authority of *Ulama* in their special institutions.

Reza Shah believed that the regulation of religious institutions had an essential effect on the modernization of Iran. He tried to limit and control the monopoly of *Ulama* over judicial and the educational system which were important realms for them. He pushed forward his program with the standardization of education and the codification of law. With this program he tried to debilitate the Shia *Ulama's* position and reduce their power among Muslim society (Kunkler, 2008).

On one hand, development of the modernization project in Iran and opening the modern schools and universities since the 1920s reduced the monopoly of the *Ulama* over education through the seminary system. On the other hand, Pahlavi's new program for codification of religious laws limited the *Ulama's* role in society. In this condition, religious courts were dependent on the government and needed to be trained at the University of Law or at foreign universities and receive their licenses from the Ministry of Justice (Mohammadi, 2007).

Mohammad Reza continued his Father's modernization plan in the name of "White Revolution" in the 1960s. During the 1960s and 1970s, the government started a large program of modernization to modernize industry, education, transportation, communication systems, and a land reform program to establish a new public instruction founded by secular principles (Bill,

1970). The regime believed that the modernization of the economy, public services, and the education system could help to reestablish the modern forms of socialization and finally restrain the political power of the *Ulama* as a traditional power (Alsaif, 2007). Mohammad Reza's regime tried to control and limit the religious seminaries and schools. In the early 1970s, the regime banned all religious student associations in universities and closed printing offices that provide books on theological subjects. As an alternative, the regime started to proliferate and distribute its own publications on essential theological and religious questions. In 1975, the regime closed several significant religious seminaries and the center of religious discourses such as *Madrasa Feyziyyeh* and *Hosseiniyyeh Ershad* (Kunkler, 2008).

But with all these expansion, the effect of the modernization on the *Ulama* was unclear. On one hand, they lost their revenue from organizing religious schools and religious courts. But they could collect Islamic taxes and manage them with *khums* and *zakat*, and control mosques, shrines, and seminaries. This collecting of Islamic taxes helped *Ulama* to increase their social and financial independence. They tried to resist against the trend of modernization with rationalization and centralization of their economic and official practices and the creation of private educational centers which tried to mix modern and religious programs (Abrahamian, 1989). This organization and rationalization of clerical structures attracted many people from different classes and strata such as *bazaaries*, workers, students, and farmer migrants.

## **The Outcome of Socio-political Change**

During the process of modernization, Mohammad Reza Shah tried to reconstruct the powerful, central, and technocratic state with the modern military machine to guide Iran to the modern structure. Despite all the efforts he was unable to finish the process of modernization and

the Iranian state collapsed from within (Momayesi, 2000). Many sociopolitical factors played essential roles to make the revolution happened.

Most scholars argue that in the 1970s, and during the process of modernization, the regime was confronted with trouble. One important problem related to the lack coordination between supply and demand of food products. The regime had to deal with the problems that demand for food increased while the agricultural productions did not support these demands (Amid, 2011). For solving this problem, the regime accelerated the project of land reform as a part of the White Revolution to increase productivity and tried to limit the feudal system of landownership. In this situation, the regime started to distribute the lands among the peasants. The regime expected that the distribution of resources such as credit, fertilizer, and irrigated water would guide the agricultural area toward large farming industry which relieved needs. With these plans, agricultural production increased and more lands were put into cultivation (Majd, 1991). But this was not enough for solving the increase of food demands, because only 37 percent of farmers received credit and other aids from the state. Most of farmers needed aid because during the process of modernization regime wanted to modernize the agricultural structure. In this situation, government imported the new technology and instruments on the one hand and foreign products on the other hand which related to the process of modernization of agricultural system. The farmers did not have purchasing power to buy these technologies and devices to compete with foreign products. In this condition, farmers became dependent to the aid of government for buying these technologies and products. These inconsistencies for implementation of the programs caused the discontent of the middle and lower classes in Iran. The study in 1972-73 showed that 44 percent of the Iranian population was undernourished, with 23 percent receiving less than 90 percent of their minimum daily calories (Kunkler, 2008).

In this condition, many of farmers and farm laborers migrated to slums in the big cities. This immigration caused the increase of the Iranian population in big cities from 23 percent in 1966 to 34-47 percent in the 1970s and confronted the urban migrants with unemployment (Bharier, 1972). In 1972 survey of 481 male heads of household of slums in Tehran showed 15 percent unemployed and 56 percent holding unskilled jobs, such as peddlers and “keepers of domesticated animals” (Kazemi, 1980, p. 5354).

On the other hand, oil wealth caused class differences and increased inequality among the population (Looney, 1982). According to a periodic survey of household consumption, expenditures showed that the nation’s inequality grew in the 1970s. Iran’s oil price jumped multifold from 1973 to 1974, and caused an increase in the government’s revenue during this period. The increase of revenue of regime affected the growth of industrial exports by more than 50 percent that year, and the economy as a whole (Karshenas, 1990). As Binder explains, “These, together with enormously increased petroleum resources and generous international political support, created the illusion that the Shah needed virtually no domestic support at all, but could take on and challenge all section of society at once” (Binder, 1988, p. 352).

The distribution of petro-dollars also inundated the capital market. The Tehran Stock Exchange increased twentyfold in three years. Billions of dollars were transferred to industrialized countries to invest, and many stayed in Iran to proliferate consumption (Kurzman, 2009). This increase of consumption caused stimulation of the *bazaars* as a traditional system of manufacturing and commerce. As Abrahamian explains, the development of the economy created new social groups that required a political voice adequate with their economic role. He says: “the revolution came because the shah modernized on the socioeconomic level and thus

expanded the ranks of the modern middle class and the industrial working class, but failed to modernize on another level-the political level” (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 427).

In this situation, the *bazaar* used the economic boom for transferring into the modern structure of market (Looney, 1982). In the mid-1970s, the *bazaar* controlled two-thirds of domestic wholesale trade, one-third of imports, and one-fifth of the credit market (Abrahamian, 1982). With all of benefits for *bazaaris*, they had several complaints against the economic behavior of regime. As Kruzman explains “*Bazaaris* had little access to government credit, whose interest ceiling was lower than inflation, generating billions of dollars in subsidies to companies with royal connections. The monarchy’s urban planning showed little respect for traditional markets, as new avenues cut through the bazaar in several provincial capitals, destroying the bazaar in two cities. In addition, the bazaar was targeted in the government’s price-control campaign, when thousands of meagerly trained inspectors were sent into the nation’s bazaars to root out profiteering” (Kurzman, 2009, p. 102).

These complaints and lack of proper attention from regime led *bazaaries* to the revolutionary struggles and changed their demands to the political issued and directed them against the regime. They started to get involved in street protests, condemn the tyrannical nature of the regime, and reject imperialist impact and the state’s dependence on foreign powers. These protests led *bazarries* to coalesce with *Ulama* as traditional allies and participated to the revolutionary reactions against regime (Parsa, 2011).

On the other hand, because of increasing of inflation and decreasing the standard of living, Iranian workers joined in the struggle against the regime. They started several strikes pressed to release their complaints. They had some economic demands such as higher wages, loans for

housing expenses, and medical insurance. Their strikes for achieving their economic goals led them to greater protests with political issues and caused solidarity among worker class with other revolutionary groups (Looney, 1982). The sociologist Asef Bayat argues that the earlier strikes-before October 1978-concentrated mainly on economic demands. As the movement expanded, strikes shifted to the political demands (Bayat, 1987).

In addition, we need to consider the international aspect which helped opposition to expand their protestation. During the 1970s, the notion of human rights increased among Iranians with the election of Jimmy Carter as president of the United States in 1977. He supported political reform in the region which was affected the Iran's regime as an ally of United States (Keddie & Hooglund, 1986).

All of these factors helped revolutionary movement expanded but the main factor for triumph of revolution related to the coalition between traditional and modern groups. Most scholars claimed that this revolution never reached success when different groups in revolution did not achieve to consensus about the goal of revolutionary transformation. On one hand, Modern liberal opposition groups such as the National Front and the Liberation Movement, struggled for the liberalization of the state and resisted against the dictatorship character of the Shah's regime. They criticized the Shah for his dictatorship behavior and advocated democracy and freedom as main basis for modern Iran. They coalesced with religious and traditional oppositions and tried to cooperate with them against tyrannical regime. They also organized other groups such as teachers, bureaucrats, students, and leftists to effectively participate in the process of revolution. This strategy provided the condition for active coalition and a social force which led to balance the power of the religious and traditional groups during the revolution. On the other hand, Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers knew the importance of collaboration with

the liberal groups for succession of revolution. He and his followers were aware of the democratic goals of the modern middle classes and tried to attract them to the revolutionary movement. They understood that the importance of support from these groups were necessarily for the triumph of the revolution and tried to negotiate with them (Momayesi, 2000).

The regime tried to enforce its reforms in the name of modernization and secularization which caused dissatisfaction among people. These plans caused objections of *Ulama* and Khomeini as leader of clergies criticized regime from exile and pushed *Ulama* and other opposition groups to protest against it. He condemned modernization plans such as the land reforms, women's suffrage in local elections, the possibility for citizens to take oaths on sacred books rather than the Quran, and in particular the agreement of legal immunity to U.S. citizens in Iran. He asserted "An American cook can now assassinate our religious leaders or run over the shah without having to worry about our laws" (Abrahamian, 1993, p. 21). In this situation, the institution of clergies used its special tools to resist against the regime. They strengthened their networks of communication through clerical relations and used their independent source of revenue in the form of religious taxes to undermine the regime's regulation of religion and helped them for organizing the revolution against monarchy. In this situation, Shia *Ulama* and religious intellectuals tried to rebuild Shia discourse and religious intellectuals which could be an alternative for the structure of power in political crises and organizational destruction (Mirsepassi, 2000). *Ulama* tried to use their traditional approach for conflating with this trend. They appealed to concepts such as Jihad and martyrdom and asserted to politicize these religious symbols to mobilize people against the regime.

This new approach to reform from above by Mohammad Reza's regime triggered a political radicalism on Khomeini's view. Before the 1960s, Khomeini criticized the regime

within the traditional paradigm of dual sovereignty and he did not call for the revolutionary formation of an Islamic state. However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the radical departure happened when Shah's White Revolution and Pahlavi's modernization project led Khomeini to theorize his notion about the necessity of Islamic government (Matin, 2013). Khomeini began to clarify the argument that the monarchy must be substituted with the governance of the qualified Shia jurist.

The concept of a qualified Shia jurist for governing was a theological creation which had no example in Shia theology (Boroujerdi, 1996). On one hand, Khomeini adopted this development through reinterpreting some essential notions of the Shia theology, on the other hand, the modern concept of republicanism as a model for his theory.

## **A Revolution of the Shia Faith**

Khomeini's discourse tried to combine the traditional Shia doctrine and modern political concepts such as republicanism, self-determination, and liberty which helped him to become famous among both the modern intellectuals and traditional *Ulama*. As Dabashi argues, Khomeini used two main frameworks for his thought: the Islamic ideology and *velayate faqih*. The Islamic ideology was "the ideological radicalism of European origin creolized into an Islamic hybrid" (Dabashi, 2006, p. 491), which was followed by Jalal-e Al-e Ahmad, Ali Shariati, and Mehdi Bazargan. The *velayate faqih* framework depends on native Shia theological resources and discourse characterized by Khomeini who had emphasized to pay attention to the philosophical and political approach to *velayate faqih*. Khomeini attempted to rebuild Shia Islam as an ideology and value system which was appropriate for the trend of rapid modernization in Iran, this notion was able to compete with other secular ideologies. The work of Khomeini consequently characterized the frameworks of the Islamic ideology and *velayate faqih* (Dabashi,

2006, p. 156). He provided the intellectual material for the creation of the ideological foundation of the hegemony of revolutionary Shi'ism over the 1979 revolution.

The dual structure of religious and political power and their relations prepared the potential situation for undermining the political system (S. A. Arjomand, 1988a). In this condition, compromise between religion and state organizations is not only necessary for guaranteeing stability the public order, but also for founding the consensual political order that helps people to accept the state and cooperate with its institutions (Alsaif, 2007). The role of Ayatollah Khomeini was important for reconciliation between religion and state during the revolution. He helped to transform the traditional Shia doctrine of authority from non-interference in politics to interweave with the state (Alsaif, 2007). With this strategy, he enabled the incorporation of the population into national politics. Khomeini became the leader of the Iranian revolution because of his emphasis on political rather than theological or juridical motivations. Khomeini's clarification of the essential Shia belief of Imamate and his interpretation of Islam which include political and religious leadership was significant. For him, the basis of an Islamic government became the religious duty of Shia Muslims and the Shia *Ulama*. He considered internal and external problems for establishing the Islamic government.

In *Islamic Government*, Khomeini begins with criticizing "imperialism" as an external problems which "penetrated Muslim countries [and tried to] extirpate Islam in order to attain its ultimate goals" (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 27). A few pages later Khomeini explained what their goals were:

"Their plan is to keep us backward, to keep us in our present miserable state so they can exploit our riches, our underground wealth, our lands, our human resources. They want us to

remain afflicted and wretched, and our poor to be trapped in their misery” (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 34).

On the other hand, Khomeini considered internal problems that caused Muslim countries backwardness. He critiqued some westernized intellectuals who, “dazzled by the material progress of imperialist countries concluded, that Muslims should jettison their laws” (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 35). Khomeini tried to reorganize a theological subject in the light of modern politics. This approach characterized an important break from the dominant interpretation of the Shia *Ulama* that had traditionally legitimized their social advantage in the name of their particular knowledge of the Quran and the *Shariah* (Matin, 2013). On the other hand, Khomeini rejected the religious apathy to the political sphere and tried to rethink about the doctrines and traditions established in the religious society (Alsaif, 2007). Khomeini’s purpose of formation of an Islamic modern state confronted him with the obstacles from the struggle between the traditional doctrine of Shia and modern thought.

His main supporters’ came from two major groups: the first includes students, political activists, and junior clerics who identified mostly with the Islamic left. The second contains the religious intellectuals which belong to the Iran Freedom Movement. Both groups were familiar with constitutionalist ideas and profoundly persuaded by the anti-traditionalist and anti-imperialist views of Ali Shariati (Brown, 2013). As Parsa argues, Khomeini’s theological ideology was not enough for his leadership of revolution, and his success was related to his opposition to dictatorship and his defense of freedom and national interests. Khomeini added Islamic principles to the nationalist request for creating the just government (Parsa, 2011, p. 76). It is important to note that Ayatollah Khomeini could not have attracted people from different groups if he had limited his discourse to a traditional religious language. Most scholars agree

about the novelty of his political method in which he tried to combine his modernist tendency with traditional learning. As Alsaif explains, his tendency of reconciliation between modern notions and religious approach related to the expectation of his followers with the modernist trend (Alsaif, 2007).

Compared to the *Ulama* among both Shia and Sunni, Khomeini is in fact closer to the modernist trend, but it is hard to approve his thought as a modernist. In contrast to traditional Shia *Ulama*, Khomeini argues that the purpose of government was not a derivative from the Imams' spiritual status and that executive power was delivered to them only because they were best able to establish a just government (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 99). He argued that the *fuqaha* are permitted to the leadership of society on behalf of Imams, and in this way, Khomeini's approach close to the Sunnite position about power and authority. Traditional Shia scholars maintain that only the Imam has the right to be a leader because of his superior divine position and that his authority to govern is founded on his spiritual qualities (Bayat, 1987). Instead of the Shia doctrine which classically advocates only the authority of the Imam, Khomeini is separating from this tradition by emphasizing that the leader should be selected from among the clerical leaders. This approach is close to the Sunni Caliphs who were elected on the foundation of the abilities of knowledge and justice. In this situation, Khomeini's notion is more democratic than other great Shia *Ulama*, because there is at least the opinion of electing the most qualified leader in his argument (Alsaif, 2007). Moreover, his notion is contrasting to the Sunni Muslim scholars who advocate reestablishing caliphate as the best model for Islamic state; Khomeini supported a republican system that highlighted the role of people in the modern world. In contrast with Shia *Ulama*, he maintained the legislative role of parliament, popular will as the source of authority, universal suffrage for all citizens, and the priority of public interests over

some fixed religious rules. These notions challenged the traditional doctrine of Shia *Ulama* and most Shia scholars rejected his concepts because of their Western orientation and conflict with the doctrines of Shia (Abed, 1995).

To answer the criticism of Shia *Ulama*, Khomeini accepted the modern ideas for governing but tried to compromise these ideas with his new interpretation of Shia theory. He advocated the idea of republicanism and the role of modern constitution as an important basis for controlling the power and restricted the potential capability of a monarchy system to be a dictatorial model, but he emphasized the role of Divine Laws and qualified *faqih* as important sources for guaranteeing the state from tyrannical behavior. According to Khomeini, a divine system of government, under the leadership of the *faqih*, cannot be tyrannical or arbitrary in the governing of society. It is not dictatorial because the leaders will not regulate personal improvement in an arbitrary way. It is not arbitrary because the leader knows the limits set by God's laws (Siavoshi, 2007). He asserted that the Islamic government is a constitutional one, but there are some differentiations:

“[a] fundamental difference between Islamic government, on the one hand, and constitutional monarchies and republics, on the other [and that is] whereas the representatives of the people or the monarch in such regimes engage in legislation, in Islam the legislative power and competence to establish laws belongs exclusively to God Almighty. The Sacred Legislator of Islam is the sole legislative power. No one has the right to legislate and no law may be executed except the law of the Divine Legislator” (Khomeini & Algar, 2002b, p. 55).

Khomeini tried to cover a specific union of secular and religious sovereignties of European republicanism and the Shia notion of *velayat faqih*. But this incorporation reconstructed both

ideas. “The former was now legitimate insofar as it cultivated an ethical life consistent with Shia cosmology, while the latter was formally anchored in popular assent” (Matin, 2013, p. 475). In his view, there was not any problem with his definition of religion or modern notions that he supported. The problem related to the failure of the religious seminaries to understand the real world and its changes. Khomeini explained that the religious seminaries had isolated themselves from the real world and therefore, they could not be able to examine how religion could cooperate with the realities of the modern world. He criticized the traditional *Ulama* for their inability to comprehend the flexible nature of religion which allows modern concepts to be reconciled with a religious agenda (Khomeini, 1990). Khomeini explained this difficulty as methodological problem and its solution related to find a proper methodology and applied it in the modern world.

## **Evolution of the Theology of Political Revolution**

Traditional Shia *Ulama*, who believed the separation of religion and politics, had a strong tendency towards apathy and it was related to the limitation in the theoretical concept of the Shia doctrine. Participation in state affairs was never acknowledged as being fully appropriate for the community of believers (S. A. Arjomand, 1984). The Shia doctrine asserted the total necessity of Imams and without him the society could not reach the true form of living and the true path to goodness. Traditional Shia framework emphasized that the concept of Imamate was the only part of the house of the Prophet and, his descendants. The Imam was selected by God as He selected all the prophets to guide people and like the Prophet Mohammed, they were infallible and were to be an explainer and guardian of the Islamic law (Ismael & Ismael, 1980). The Shia *Ulama* believed that the Imam is the valid leader, since other governments are unjust because a usurpation of the Imam’s rights. The *Ulama* emphasized to the office of leadership that was

related to the Imam in their frameworks, which caused difficulties for the doctrine of Imamate to engage with political realities.

The rethinking of *Ulama* about this problem and their new interpretation to solve this problem caused a change the traditional role of the Shia *Ulama* as religious leaders. The occultation period has forced Shia intellectuals to get involved theoretically with the structure and functions of power in the period of the absence of Imam (Ismael & Ismael, 1980). Thus, the positions of *Ulama* and *Ijtihad* became important. “These positions relate to the most distinguished religious authority that provides leadership for the people in religious and temporal affairs.” Ayatollah Khomeini’s political thought is a direct product of this inclination in Shia theory (Hairi, 1977, pp. 55-56).

Central to Khomeini’s claim is his strong belief in the inevitability for an Islamic government in the period of occultation. In Sunni Islam the law itself attained a central role in the creation of government and the state duty is to protect and apply it. In contrast, the Shia concerns the Imam as the source of divine knowledge and interpretation of the Revelation, not only an organizer of the law. They defined Imam which “informs the people about the purpose of God and explains it from God so that his explanation is the proof for the people” (Sachedina, 1981). Shia *Ulama* explained the concept of leadership and authority in the two frameworks: the theological and the jurisprudential. In the theological framework, they focused on the lives and qualities of the Imams in the past which were not relevant to any actual situation. On the jurisprudential structure, *Ulama* focused on the spiritual aspect of Imams and their relationship with their followers in personal issues (Alsaif, 2007). In two frameworks, *Ulama* avoided getting into political issues.

Here, Khomeini's explanation of the Imamate is separated radically from the classical doctrine. He used the concept of *Ijtihad* as an attempt to understand the correct view of the Imam on religious and legal substances and started to reinterpret the basis of Shia theory which adapted with the new concept of modern political thought. Khomeini tried to enter the political issues in the traditional doctrine of Shia and focused on the theoretical barriers of those two frameworks for solving these problematic issues.

### **The Theological Problem**

Most of the theological discussions on authority were focused on the question of infallible Imam and the concept of justice. They tried to answer the following question, is it possible for fallible people to establish a just government? In the traditional paradigm, justice was considered as an ideal type that could be understood in the name of God. According to the Shia *Ulama*, justice can be perceived as the use of reason and free will or the exercise of judgment and responsibility. This concept was understood by obligations and causes beyond obligations, which must be infallible such as the prophet and Imam to explain for ordinary people. The concept of justice is an important basis for governing the Muslim society and according to the traditional *Ulama* this position needs to infallible person for applied the notion of justice and create the just government (Sachedina, 1981). In the traditional *Ulama's* views, all other types of regimes were illegitimate and unjust, and they believed in passively waiting for Hidden Imam to return and fill the earth with equality and justice.

Khomeini criticized the theological concept of passively waiting for the Hidden Imam and tried to redefine the concept of waiting in the active way. In *Islamic Government*, Khomeini tried to describe the importance of the Islamic model for governing Muslims in society to advocate Islamic laws and Islamic government led by a qualified Shia jurist. He used a special project of

political Islam in the replacement of the qualified Shia jurist for the Muslim authority as the representation of social, financial, and ethical development for prevailing backwardness in Muslim countries (Matin, 2013).

Khomeini tried to explain his view about the authority of the Islamic state as a branch of the prophet's total rule. He believed that Islamic government is one of the principal laws (*ahkam-e avalieh*) of Islam and has primacy over all the secondary laws (*ahkam-e sanavieh*) such as prayer, pilgrimage, and fasting. He explained, "The ruler can close the mosques when needed... the state can cancel religious laws when these laws are recognized to be in contradiction of the interest of the country and Islam." In other words, Khomeini with this explanation, wanted to emphasize the priority of the state (*velayat*) and government (*hokumat*) above the religious laws (Behrooz, 1991, p. 604).

Shia *Ulama* believe that God has sent a complete package for the organization and regulation of human life through the Quran and the tradition of the prophet and Imams. Khomeini explained that the execution of this *Shariah* needed an Islamic authority. He used both rational and traditional proofs to justify his concept of *velayate faqih* during the period of occultation. Khomeini believed *Ulama* have special order and the duty to interpret Islamic laws in the social context, and to control the state's interests on behalf of the Imam. Khomeini tried to explain the organic relationship between the Imamate and *velayate faqih* and authority of *Ulama* which is continuing of the authority of the Imams (Mavani, 2011). Also, he emphasized that Islamic government provides a special form of *Shariah* in order to enable the Muslims to live an ethical life consistent with Islam's requirements (Matin, 2013). Under this condition, Khomeini argues that "We believe in the Imamate, therefore, we must also believe in the necessity for the establishment of government" (Khomeini & Algar, 2002b, p. 37). He emphasized that the key

question about the relation between Shi'ism and politics was not only about the essence of an Islamic government but, also who has the right to lead this Islamic government?

Khomeini's new interpretation of the concept of Imamate emphasized the separation between the duties and rights of the Imam and the people. He tried to explain these rights and obligations related to the actual requirements of their lives rather than theological frameworks. He claimed that passively awaiting for the Hidden Imam conflicts with the essence of religion. Khomeini argued that the belief for the returning Hidden Imam in the future to bring ideal justice in a world does not detract from our responsibility to provide proper conditions within Muslim society until the Imam returns. He continued that a Shia Muslim during the period of occultation has the duty to understand the essence of the religion and should apply it in the name of a just government as much as they can (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 25). He criticized the traditional Shia doctrine for the suspension of the Islamic laws in the period of occultation and upset the people's tendency to develop their lives in the structure of the Islamic state. He emphasized that Islamic laws were arranged by the Prophet and Imams to improve and manage the life of the Muslims. This plan of living which was suggested by God in the name of religion, has related for all times and places and no one has the right to suspend these rules in an arbitrary way (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 19). Khomeini rejected the idea that the absence of the Imam validates the postponement of the orders which were required for state power (Alsaif, 2007). He emphasized that the mandatory nature of those rules need a responsibility of the Muslims and the *Ulama* to do their best for the founding of a religious state and applying the Islamic laws (Khomeini, 1971). He analyzed this form of apathy in Muslim societies and the suspension of Islamic rules related to the sense of apathy and lack of responsibility among Muslims and particularly *Ulama* on one hand, and the tyrannical nature of their regimes on the other hand

(Khomeini, 1990). Khomeini used this form of argument to criticize the traditional Shia doctrine and censured the behavior of Shia *Ulama* which they stripped of their responsibility for applying the religious laws or tried for establishing the political power (Alsaif, 2007).

The position of *velayate faqih* in his definition must contain proper knowledge of God's laws and a just person. These two vital qualities promise the observance of God's laws by the leader and the freedom of the Islamic society. He reinterprets the term "Proof of God" (*Hujjat Allah*) to mean the owner of authority in political as well as religious activities. A "Proof of God", he claimed, "is one who had proper knowledge of God and today the jurists of Islam are proofs to the people, proofs of the Imam" (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 39). In his definition, "A jurist means a person knowledgeable in the Islamic creeds, laws, rules and ethics, i.e., he is a person familiar with all that the Prophet brought" (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 76). He explained that the leadership of the jurists is an important substance that is proposed by *Shariah*. The jurists' authority in government affairs is equal to that of the Prophet and of the Imams, since they all share in common the burden of executive power to apply the divine law (Khomeini & Algar, 2002b, p. 23).

For him, having the proper knowledge of Islamic law was not enough for *velayate faqih*. He emphasized that justice is another important quality for *velayate faqih* (Khomeini & Algar, 2002b, p. 59). All senior Muslim jurists could have chance to reach to the capability of knowledge of Islamic law. Therefore, through a second quality, Khomeini tries to narrow down the variety of candidates for the leadership. However, the concept of justice in traditional Shia thought related to the notion of infallibility and *faqih*, by lacking infallibility, is not fit for leading the Muslim society. The traditional Shia *Ulama* argued that the position of infallibility belongs to the descendants of the Prophet with divine essence. Khomeini tried to find a way for

solving this rigidity of Shia belief. Brumberg suggests that, according to Khomeini, there are two kinds of infallibility: one is endowed by God, and the other is a product of perfection (Brumberg, 2001). The second definition is possible through piety and “ascetic exercise.” This “perfect Shia,” Khomeini’s infallible ones, has an advantaged relation to God; they are infallible in deeds, but not in substance. Brumberg continues: “Khomeini does not equate the *Ma’sumin* (infallible ones) with the Imams; instead he speaks more generally of God’s servants, His Prophets, *awliya*, and angels” (Brumberg, 2001, p. 87).

## **Concept of Justice**

Essential in Khomeini’s idea of Islamic government is the notion of a just society. He credited the qualified jurists with justice to his excellence in belief and morals (Khomeini & Algar, 2002b, p. 60). For applying his notion, Khomeini reintroduced a new range of spiritual qualities that were similar but lower than the prophet and the Imams. These qualities were carefully related with Islamic mysticism (*Irfan*), which Khomeini himself was famous in this field. In his view, *Shariah* and mysticism are structurally discordant. The *Shariah* is by nature institutionalized and has a constant structure, while the mysticism is grounded on charisma and has a transient character (Moazami, 2009). According to him, a noticeable feature of *Irfan* is the notion of “presential knowledge”, that is a form of knowledge which produced by direct and unmediated experience of an “intelligible order beyond the visible world, and enlightened inner awareness of the transcendent” (Martin, 2003, p. 35). The cause is that the term *velayat* has its origins in *velaya* (governance, guardianship, supervision, regency, deputyship) and has a deep mystical implication and also connotes spiritual leadership (Moazami, 2009).

In his view, mysticism was founded on personal experience and perception. This form of spirituality had political consequence and it could not change to institutionalization (Moazami,

2009). As he explained, men's hearts are the key to faith, while formal knowledge is "the thickest of veils" (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 354). Man can only try to understand a single dimension of the reality that is God, and he repeatedly warns that the interpretation of the Quran can only suggest possibilities rather than define truths (Akhavi, 1988). However, what was the effect of Khomeini's mysticism on his political ideas and action?

Ayatollah Khomeini combined politics with mystic ideas and tried to apply his views on politics and social issues. For him, a political leader was also a spiritual leader and mysticism's doctrine could be combined into a political system (Seyed-Gohrab, 2011). Khomeini utilized the notion of the perfect man to his political philosophy in the name of *velayat faqih*. He tried to give all power to the Supreme Leader as an incarnation of the perfect man. Khomeini highlighted the spiritual meaning to the concept of *velayat*. The person who takes the position of *velayat faqih* is expected to live a severely self-controlled and abstemious life. As Gohrab argues, "he should continuously contest against worldly desires. He should attempt for unification with God, by calming his ego, and this unification would make him a holy figure on earth" (Seyed-Gohrab, 2011, p. 441).

In one hand, Khomeini emphasized to the mystical nature of Supreme Leader in the context of Islamic government and on the other hand he stressed to social system of Islam as a complete plan for earthly life. He argued that Islam is not only a system of worship, but also it is a social system and its main duty is to apply the operation of divine social legislation, Khomeini states:

"The Quran verses concerned with society's affairs are numerous compared to the verses concerned with private worship. In any of the detailed Hadith books, you can hardly find more

than three or four sections concerned with regulating man's private worship and man's relationship with God... The rest is strongly related to social and economic [affairs], with human rights, with administration and with the policy of societies" (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 9).

Furthermore, the goal of the Islamic social system in Shia *Ulama's* doctrine is the arrangement of people's relationship for increasing human's happiness and it's related to the growth of the spiritual sphere in the human life. In Khomeini's view, only in a just society can people follow their perfect growth. For him, just society is a society that places things in their correct place and gives people equal treatment. For reaching to this society, Khomeini supported the idea of Islamic government and denied the ideas that reduce Islam to its rituals and moral principles. In *Kitab al-Bay* Khomeini explained:

"If one looks at various teachings of Islam including its social dimensions, concentrates over its rituals like prayers and hajj pilgrimage which pertains to man's relation with God and takes into account social, economic, political and legal laws of Islam, one would conclude that Islam does not deal only with rituals and moral matters ... but it is meant to establish a just government and has certain rules on tax, public finance, legal issues, jihad, and international relations as well" (Khomeini, 1971, p. 460)

He assumed Islam covers all aspects of human life and build a just government, which bring social justice for Muslim society. In Khomeini's view, by creating an Islamic government people can reach justice and perform the Islamic laws (Khomeini, 1971, pp. 465-466). In his view, the attainment of this form of society is an important aim of Islamic government and has been the exact defeat of the industrialized East or West:

“Let them go to Mars or anywhere they wish; they are still backward in the sphere of securing happiness to man, backward in spreading moral virtues and backward in creating psychological and spiritual progress similar to the material progress. They are still unable to solve their social problems because solving these problems and eliminating hardship requires an ideological and moral spirit. The material gains in the sphere of overcoming nature and invading the space cannot accomplish this task. Wealth, capabilities and resources require the Islamic faith, creed and ethics to become complete and balanced, to serve man to avert him from injustice and poverty. We alone possess such beliefs, morals and laws. We should not cast aside our religion and laws just because somebody goes to the moon or makes something. These laws are directly related to man’s life; they carry the nucleus of reforming society and securing happiness in this world and in the hereafter” (Khomeini & Algar, 2002b, pp. 17-18).

Khomeini used philosophical and mystical views to support his systematic thought on politics to justify the ideal political order for the Islamic society. For him, an Islamic government in the period of absence must offer a system of governing to imperfect human interpretation and application of the Divine Law. According to him:

“If we [the *Ulama*] want to immortalize the rules of the *Shariah* in practice, to prevent violation of the rights of weak people, to prevent corruption on earth, to apply the *Shariah* laws justly, to fight the heresies and the deviations decided upon by the sham parliaments and to prevent the influence and intervention of the enemies in the affairs of the Moslems, we [the *Ulama*] must form the government because all this is carried out by a government led by a trustworthy, and pious ruler who commits no injustice, deviation or corruption” (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 39).

## The Jurisprudential Problem

The jurisprudential discussions involve the foundation and development of powers maintained by the leader. In the period of Safavid, *Ulama* partly engaged in the political issues and tried to initiate the position of *faqih* as a potential successor of the infallible Imam. However, there was controversial debate about how and in what degree the Imam's powers should be given to the *faqih*. The central dispute related to the right of a fallible person to use compulsory power such as taking people's lives and possessions or by seizing or limiting individual rights in the sake of national interest (Sachedina, 1981).

Most of these debates focused on the role of a person as a leader in the name of Imam or the *faqih*, instead of emphasizing to the institution of the state. Because these discussions happened in context of the Muslim society, which the institution of state has never been independent from the ruler and all the sources of control and foundations of power have been related to the leader. In this situation, *Ulama* were worried about the function of fallible leader which was authorized to govern in the name of Imam and there were not any instrument to control his authority. For solving this problem, some *Ulama* suggested intuitional limitation for leader's power to control rulers' desires and due to public demands. As Naini explained, oppression and decadence are the result of the monopoly of power by the sovereign and it is not related to the character of a leader in the name of *faqih* or anyone else. He advocated the idea of institutionalized limitations on power and he thinks with this concept Muslim society can control the tyrannical inclinations of the leaders (Na'ini, 1955).

Khomeini continued the idea of Naini and used the authority verse (4:59) in the Quran: "Obey God and obey the Apostle and those in authority among you" to justify the concept of institutionalized authority. The Shia *Ulama* before Khomeini interpreted the last part of this

verse to decree an only “executive function” by the Shia principle of *velayat*: “successorship to the authority of Muhammad” (Dabashi, 2006, p. 440). The traditional Shia interpretation of the authority verse emphasized the difference between *velayate* (execution of the *Shariah*) and Imamate (leadership of the Muslim community). The Imamate’s right limited to the Prophet and the Imams by quality of their divinely given infallibility. According to the Shia orthodoxy, the right to the guidance of Muslims was a source of the spiritual assets of the Prophet and the Imams, which were not attainable for humans.

As mentioned earlier, after the occultation, Shia scholars tried to differentiate between the office of Imamate and the person of the Imam. They tried to define the function of state as an indispensable for securing the common interest in conventional terms (Alsaif, 2007). In contrast, Ayatollah Khomeini tried to prove legitimacy for the institution of authority and jurist as a Hidden Imam’s general deputies (*nowwab-i amm*). Khomeini highlighted an “unrecognized” difference between the “intrinsic spiritual status and extrinsic political function” of the Prophet and the Imams as legitimate Islamic governors (Brumberg, 2001, p. 86). Khomeini argued:

“It is one of the essential beliefs of our Shia school that no one can attain the spiritual status of the Imams [but] to assume the function of government does not in itself carry any particular merit or status; it is a means for fulfilling the duty of implementing the law and establishing the Islamic order of Justice. The authority that the Prophet and the Imam had in establishing a government, executing laws, and administering affairs exists also for the *faqih*” (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, pp. 64-65).

Khomeini argued that it was a misconception to limit the *velayat* to secondary executive roles. In his view, *velayat* means direct governance. He used the Quran, the traditions of the

Prophet and Imams, and *Ijtihad* to prove his notion about authority of *Ulama* and their roles in society (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, pp. 40-45).

Khomeini proposed two different meanings for the notion of *velayate* in the doctrine of Shia: *velayate takwini* and *velayate itibeari*. He explained the *velayate takwini* is related to the supernatural qualities of the Imams and explained these qualities that related to infallibility of Imam are not related to the requirements for the position of political leadership (Khomeini & Algar, 2002b). His definition of *velayate* (authority) in the political sphere related to the concept of *velayate itibeari* and it needs rational and conventional nature and they are related to the human qualities and necessities of the office. In his view, the total authority of the Imam related to his existential authority (*velayate takwini*), which is linked with his personality as an Imam and it is conventional authority (*velayate itibeari*) that is related to the society's religious and political affairs (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a). For Khomeini, the theory of power is considered under the conventional authority which he emphasized on the objective necessities of the office such as relevant knowledge and personal piety rather than divine authorization and infallibility of person (Khomeini, 1971, pp. 466-467). The main part of Khomeini's framework is that the Imam's authority is not related to special character of Imam such as infallibility, but it is related to the office of Imamate. He applied this form of authority to the *faqih* and explained that the authority of the *faqih* only justified in the context of Islamic government. In his view, this authority was applied when the majority of people agrees with this contract and accepts the authority of office can safeguard public consent (Alsaif, 2007). This new interpretation in Khomeini's idea suggests that the Imam's powers are not given to the person of the *faqih* but it gave to the state as a new institution for the office of Imamate (Alsaif, 2007). In this concept, the authority is legally transferred from the Imam to the state. Therefore, this transition of the

Imam's authority should be understood in context of the state's functions (Khomeini & Algar, 2002b, p. 170).

This method suggests a new solution to the argument over the allocation of power to the *faqih* and the nature of authority in a modern state. In his political thought, Khomeini seems to emphasize to the office of governing than the position of Imam (Akhavi, 1988). He explained:

“The topic of *velayat faqih* deals with extrinsic and rationalist matters and has no reality [in itself] except that of being a construction similar to assignment of a guardian for the feeble. There is no difference between the assignment of a guardian for a nation and that of a guardian for the weak and feeble. It is as if the [occulted] Imam... appoints someone for custody, governing, or for a position among positions. In this sense, it is not rational that *faqih* would be different from the noble Prophet...and Imam” (Khomeini & Algar, 2002a, p. 25).

Khomeini tries to reduce the effect of the spirit from the concept of Imamate and translate it fundamentally political. He emphasized to the justice and connection with especial form of knowledge as vital quality to the leadership requirements. Furthermore, he emphasized the idea that the Supreme Leader in the Islamic government should have both theological and transcendental knowledge for leadership. Since from Khomeini's perspective, “presential knowledge” is more important to the technical knowledge of the law. In Khomeini's view the perfect man in consequence has a greater power of judgment that allows him to use justice without returning to the *Shariah* law (Matin, 2013, p. 473). Khomeini claimed that the subject of humans as a noble creature, but he emphasized that his nobility is limited to the territory of sensorial understanding of the world. This is remarkable in his Shiite epistemological thought and closed to the Mutazilite approach in medieval Islam (Akhavi, 1988).

## Conclusion

Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of *velayat faqih* tried to adjust the traditional doctrine of Shia authority to the modern state. On one hand, he belonged to the traditional doctrine of Shia which helped him to use some notions from this traditional spectrum and on the other hand, his interest of philosophy and modern politics led him to think about the gap between these paradigms. He knew that the problem of the Shia doctrine which limited the scholars to solve the problems and reconcile these paradigms together.

Khomeini tried to redefine the notion of justice as pillar of Shia doctrine in the new realm which was not related to the personal leadership of the infallible Imam as an essential element for legitimate state. With this paradigm shift he solved the problem of Shia doctrine in the political sphere and led the *Ulama* to have their own state before the Hidden Imam return. For reaching this goal, Khomeini gave the authority to the qualified *faqih* in the concept of office of Imam instead of considering his qualification with the concept of infallible Imam. With attention to the Khomeini's theory of *velayat faqih*, he tried to articulate a specific interpretation for managing the theological obstacles in the doctrine of Shia to reconcile it with modern notion. He understood the conflict between traditional and modern notion of authority related to the meaning of construction of power which in Shia theory depended on the characters of infallible Imams and in modern state the authority related to the political institution. He tried to transfer the issue of authority from position of Imam to the political institution.

Khomeini defined the religious character of the government with emphasizing the role of qualified *faqih* as a Supreme Leader and at the same time he asserted the political authority of the *faqih* related to the presence of the state. In this situation, the Imam's authority delegates to the state as a whole and the *faqih* used this power as a part of political system. With this complex

model, Khomeini reconciled the concept of modern political system with traditional values and established the legitimate government in the religious context. He advocated the idea of republicanism that he chose from modern political thought for his theory of Islamic government and applied its implications in his theory (Alsaif, 2007). This combination of modern and traditional doctrine in Khomeini's theory led scholars to rethink about the relationship between religion and democracy.

It is important to pay more attention to his theory for finding ways to interpret his notion. There are some openings in Khomeini's ideas for the system of governing that made room for religious intellectuals and reformists to interpret his ideas in different ways. After the revolution, religious intellectuals tried to reinterpret Khomeini's concepts with focusing on the source of legitimacy (Siavoshi, 2007). In the next chapters I consider how they challenged the conservative explanation of Khomeini's ideas on politics that related the role of the people in politics. With this process, they tried to protect the role of God as a source of legitimacy for a governing system and at the same time moves to popular sovereignty.

## **Chapter Two: Socio-economic Reform**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I argue the effects of reformist discourses in the political structure of Iran. I discuss the emergence of reformist ideas related to the decline of the revolutionary model of Islamic government, which dominated the decade after the revolution. The reformists present an alternative model, which is fundamental different than the previous model. The reformists emphasized the importance of human rights and their opinion in the public domain. The reformist stressed the priority and primacy of republicanism over Islamism. They highlighted the public desire for a civil society, which intensified the pressure for reform among the Iranian society during the 1990s. Two factors helped to expand the reform movement among intellectuals and ordinary people: First, the socio-economic problems, which related to the war period and the conflicts between rival groups on the one hand, and the death of Khomeini that resulted in a crisis of legitimacy on the other hand. Khomeini's rule was based on the principle of the charismatic leadership, which allowed him to suppressed rivaling ideas. After the war and the death of Khomeini, the regime has confronted with the crisis of legitimacy. The new leader did not have a similar charisma and he was not Grand Ayatollah, which undermined his power as Supreme Leader. It allowed for competition over power among the elites and increased the conflict among opposition groups. Second, religious intellectuals criticized the radical notion of the Islamic government, suggested an alternative to reconcile religion and modern values. These philosophical and political discussions have re-emerged and led to the rise of a new self-awareness among the people in the public sphere.

This chapter explains the evolution of the revolutionary paradigm, and how it overcame other rivals. Then, I consider the trend of consolidation and unification of Islamic ideology and its failure, which led to emergence of the reform movement. I explore it in the context of the post-revolutionary era and describe how the paradigm shift happened, and how the reformist ideas challenged the basic ideas of the Islamic government. I discuss their solution to resolve the crisis of official ideology of Islamic republic such as monopoly of one group in the structure of power, the legitimacy crisis of Supreme Leader's position, the lack of attention to human rights and role of people in public sphere, and the problem of official interpretation of Islam as an ideology for revolutionary regime. I discuss the main argument between the reformists and the conservatives about the Islamic Republic and how they saw the conflict between human rights and the power of the state. Moreover, I focus on the pragmatic nature of the Islamic Republic and its major actors which led to socio-economic reforms during the post-revolutionary era. I explore the demands and claims of the public and appearance of opposition groups who participated in the revolutionary process.

## **The Revolutionary Paradigm**

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 succeeded in dismantling a monarchy and led to the rise of the hybrid regime in the contemporary history of the Middle East (Arjomand, 2005, p. 27). This revolution rests on the ideological justification, which led people to deny Pahlavi's sovereignty and support the revolution as the best way for solving the problems. The Islamic revolution "brought together a diverse cross-section of religious and secular lay leadership, social classes, and political parties as well as guerilla movements" that they wanted to defeat the Palavi's monarchy (Esposito, 1998, p. 194). In 1978-1979, most of the opposition groups, which ranged from liberal constitutionalists, Marxists, Socialists, and Islamists, joined forces against the last

Shah of Iran (Keddie, 2012). This coalition of elites formed while they had different notions about the form of governing after the revolution's victory of revolution. These intellectuals knew what they did not want, but they did not know what they want. Khomeini, as the leader of the revolution most of the time, spoke in general principles of Islamic institutions, but he had not defined clearly which type of government he preferred (Mohaddessin, 2003). This heterogeneity of the elites caused some irregularity and inconsistency after the triumphs of revolution such as power struggle between revolutionary elites, disagreement over the model of the new government, and conflicts over interpreting the revolution and the public's impact.

Many Iranians believed this upheaval was a turning point for an independent and legitimate government. In this revolutionary situation, many different groups had an opportunity to form political parties and associations. Most of these organizations were established under the impact of leading intellectuals, rather than having a modern and democratic structure (Razavi, 2010). The Islamic Republic appeared without a coherent definition of structure of power in the political arena. Most of the strategies, which revolutionary leaders used in the period of revolution, related to the context and practical thoughts. These heterogeneity of elites needed for comprehensive ideology, which tried to attract all types of political groups caused to combine different ideologies. This revolutionary ideology did not have enough integrity for managing the difficulties of transformation from the former structure of power to the new political system.

As Nikpay argues, the progress of political Islam during the pre-revolutionary period significantly emphasized to the challenges of modernization, but its answer to this problem varied from the notion which asserted to modernize Islam to Islamized modernity (Alsaif, 2007). These different inclinations caused conflicts among the political elites about how the new political structure would be created. On the other hand, many political groups tried to participate

in building the new political system. According to Kamrava, it is typical for revolutions that, with the downfall of the old regime, a variety of social groups aimed at “seeking to reap maximum benefits from the emerging political vacuum” (Kamrava, 1992, p. 67). In this situation, these groups tried to get the good deal by using pressure and personal influence instead of informed debate.

## **The Creation of Ideology**

Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers were politically active during the revolution, but they did not have a specific ideology for governing and transforming the old regime to the new one. They articulated an ideology for mobilizing people and socialization of revolution, but they did not have a comprehensive ideology of the state. After the triumph of the revolution, Khomeini’s charismatic character helped him control the revolution, and the different groups participating in the revolution who had different visions of Islam (Ashraf & Banuazizi, 2001).

The absence of appropriate mechanisms of state politics in the notion of Khomeini caused the religious revolutionists to not pay enough attention to the difficulty of the procedure of transformation from the old political system to the new one. We can see this form of simplification in the word of Ayatollah Khomeini:

“Once you have succeeded in overthrowing the tyrannical regime, you will certainly be capable of administering the state and guiding the masses. The entire system of government and administration, together with the necessary laws, lies ready for you. If the administration of the country calls for taxes, Islam has made the necessary provisions, and if the laws are needed, Islam has established them all” (Khomeini & Algar, 2002b, p. 86).

Many religious activists had the same idea about the establishment of the Islamic state and the rule of God in society. Some of them just referred to the some verses like: “If the people of the towns had but believed and feared Allah, We should indeed have opened out to them” (Holy Quran, 7: 96). According to Ibrahim Yazd, who was a member of the Revolutionary Council and the interim government:

“Prior to the revolution, all of us thought that, as Muslims, we had the answer to every question. [We thought that] the Islamic Republic would ensure both freedom and justice; such an issue was taken for granted. No one, including the religious intellectuals and clergy, had had any doubts about that. After twenty years of experience, we see that those questions are not as easy and basic as we have anticipated. We thought of a state which was not against the religion, observant of the people’s faith... We did not think of [such questions as] what Islamization means exactly” (Yazdi, 2000, p. 404).

Kamrava explains the Islamic Revolution as a spontaneous uprising and he emphasizes that the evidence shows there is not specific plan for governing the society (Kamrava, 1992). In this situation, the ideology of the Islamic government formed after “the ultimate winners of the revolution have become clear and have established their reign over the country” (Kamrava, 1992, p. 35). According to Rafipour, the new system of governing constructed through the process of trial and error (Rafipour, 1998, p. 124). Many factors affected building the new political system, including economic and political pressures from the United States and the war with Iraq. Under this condition, Ayatollah Khomeini turned crisis into opportunity to establish the stable state and apply his notion of the Islamic regime to construct the model of identity for increasing the stability of the regime. He demanded a new constitution, presidential elections, and a parliament through the ballot box. He emphasized that the participation of the people was vital for shaping

the new political system. It was important for Khomeini and his followers to reach the consensus on the legal and formal model of the new political system. This was an essential task, because it needed to extend the consensus to the cultural and political principle. In this condition, the new regime confronted lots of debates about the consensus around the identity of the Islamic government (Alsaif, 2007). Many people and groups accepted the religious character of the new political system, but they had different ideas about details and principles in the Constitution, including the realization of religious ideals in the public sphere, constitutional rights, and the sources and limits of authority.

The leaders of the Islamic Republic tried to revolutionize the political sphere by making a political system based on religion, and they tried a revolutionary interpretation within the Shia faith. To reach this goal, they aimed at bringing the concept of the *velayat faqih* to the 1979 Constitution. With the approval of the 1979 Constitution, the *marjaiyat* was involved with political power for the first time in Shia history. As some scholars have explained, the *velayat faqih*, as considered in the 1979 Constitution, was theologically new in two ways: First, it expanded the order of the Shia jurists in the period of occultation from the religion and legal realm to the political sphere; Second, it focused this order on one leader or a council of selected Shia Jurists on the total authority of Shia *Ulama* (Kunkler, 2008).

With the popular referendum for the new Constitution in 1979, *velayat faqih* was officially announced as the new form of governance in Iran, which was prepared a veto power to the *Ulama*. The first draft of the Constitution had not contained the concept of *velayat faqih*. Only the final draft submitted by the Assembly of Experts did encompass the guardianship of the Supreme Jurist. According to the last draft of the Constitution, all three offices of government would rule under the supervision of the Supreme Leader. In addition, a Guardian Council would

control the trend of the legislature and check bills for their agreement with Islamic principles' and the Constitution. With the power of veto, any law could be canceled in the name of contradiction with the central doctrines of Islam (Arjomand, 2005).

In this situation, the follower of Khomeini tried to unify their authority by defeating or marginalizing their political competitors in the name of the Line of the Imam. The process of unification of the regime assisted the Line of the Imam to give an important position in the political sphere for shaping the political process of the Islamic government. They combined the Khomeini's interpretation of Shiism and anti-imperialist opinion of intellectuals for creating hegemony around new state and suppressed other opposition groups (Alsaif, 2007). They used this domination for directing and influencing many principles in the Constitution. The approval of the Constitution throughout its 175 articles was an important step for establishing the political ideology of the Islamic Republic. The main goal of the Islamic government was clarified as "to create conditions conducive to the development of man in accordance with the noble and universal values of Islam" (Amuzegar, 1997, p. 26).

Additionally, several articles guaranteed the Islamic nature of the regime. Art. 4 of the 1979 Constitution clarifies that laws must be based on Islamic principles; Art. 2 emphasizes that the Islamic Consultative Assembly (*Majles*) cannot pass laws against Islamic principles; and Art. 177 explains that "the Islamic nature of the system [...] cannot be amended or changed in the Constitution" (Algar, 1980). The regime, after the revolution, tried to ban all non-Islamic laws; the Islamic Republic started the project of the complete Islamization of the legal system. They tried to enroll the new programs in harmony with the new interpretation of Shia School of Law. Mayer explains "Significantly, the specific legal impact of Islamic principles on Constitutional rights has never been clarified with any precision [in Iran]. The clerical elite has dismantled

many elements of Iran's largely French based legal order but has not replaced them with a firm framework of effective legality using Islamic standards, leaving Iran in a kind of legal limbo" (Mayer, 1991, p. 38).

On the other hand, the Constitution guarantees participation by all members of the society in decisions of on important affairs (Alsaif, 2007). The Constitution emphasized to the notion of Islam, justice, public participation, and independence. While most of the revolutionary groups agreed with those concepts, they could not be applied in the real political sphere as an acceptable ideological because there were different interpretations, which led to conflict among revolutionary elites. In the following pages, I will argue how the ideology of the state was applied in the economic and political area.

### **Implication of New Ideology on the Economy**

There were lots of debates about the social justice and the fair distribution of income among elites in public sphere. The new regime emphasized the traditional forms of socialization in which society is defined as a group of "small producers, where everybody owns his own workshop and where production on a mass scale and the relations of wage-labor do not arise" (Bashiriyeh, 2011, p. 174). Under this condition, the regime tried to control and eliminates the role of the upper class through the distribution of national resources and political position. This was important for the majority of people because the major source of national income (oil exports) was in the hands of the government. According to Parsa, in 1974, forty seven of the richest families controlled nearly 85 percent of the large companies, and the Pahlavi's family managed 137 of the 537 largest companies and financial institutions (Parsa, 1985, p. 668). The Islamic Revolution tried to eliminate this process and controlled the lack of equality, which was related to the regime's unfair distribution of sources in one hand, and managed the expansion of

a free economy and effect of the international market, on the other hand (Alsaif, 2007). Most intellectuals and ordinary people advocated these reforms from above because they did not see any alternative solution for solving the problems, which were related to the last regime. In this situation, Abulhassan Bani Sadr, the first president of the Islamic Republic, suggested the doctrine of “Monotheist Economy”. It was supported by majority of the people as the best model for the Islamic economy. He criticized the dependent economy of old regime and emphasized for establishing an economic model, that contradicted the Western model of development. He emphasized that “in Islam there is only the right to ownership of labor and its product and this right is relative” (Bashiriyeh, 2011, p. 72). In his view, the relativity of legal right of possession related to the Islamic principles of ownership, which was legitimized by the rule of *velayate faqih*. This analysis led the revolutionary regime to control main aspects of the economy and the direct redistribution of wealth from the richest to the poorest parts of society. The Line of the Imam defended this form of governing because they thought it was related to the Shia tradition and Imam Ali’s inclination when he emphasized “Allah, the Glorified, has fixed the livelihood of the destitute in the wealth of the rich. No destitute person would starve if the rich did not consume the resources at their disposal excessively” (al-Radi, 1978, p. 533).

This new form of governing led to the control of the markets and caused some discontent among the *Ulama* and the *bazarries* who disagreed on the centralist plan of government. During the revolution *bazarries* and traditional *Ulama* were important allies of Khomeini. Yet, after the revolution they began to oppose and protest against this model of governing. They criticized the socialist notion of wealth distribution, which was promoted by the Islamic government and Khomeini’s support of this interpretation of Islamic economy. They rejected these plans because they believed these legal codes were against the right of property and Islamic rules of market,

which are important principles in the Islamic traditions (Alsaif, 2007). However, the revolutionary intellectuals advocated this project and supported Khomeini's jurisprudential doctrine for the managing of the transformation from an unjust dependent economy to an independent Islamic just society. It led to the centralist government and affected the major economic sectors through nationalization and land redistribution. eventually, the government controlled the large banks, seized almost all of the major firms, and nationalized all industrial companies (Rashidi, 1997, pp. 58-69). The total seized resources were valued at about 31.2 percent of the whole private investment in the country (Jenan-sefat, 2002). These reforms helped the regime to control all aspects of public life and expanded its power over to all resources.

In general, this command system after the revolution had some benefits and caused some advantages for middle and poor classes in the short run. According to UN human development reports, Iran's human development rating rose in a health, education, and a standard of living from 0.57 in 1980 to 0.61 in 1985 and 0.65 in 1990 (UNHDR, 2004). Moreover, the rating of income equality growth and Gini rate has dropped from 0.512 in 1979 to 0.437 in 1989 which was a good result for improving the social justice after the revolution (Rusta & Ramazani, 2002, pp. 177-178). These numbers illustrate that regime tried to tackle the inequality and improve the socioeconomic justice during the first post-revolutionary decade.

## **The Process of Consolidation**

Khomeini and his followers tried to apply the notion of republicanism during the post-revolutionary period and realized that the new political system needed people to participate in the political sphere. This notion attracted many scholars and ordinary people for participation and helped the regime to show the regime's stability and popularity (Kamrava, 1992, p. 112). The regime used elections and ballot box to increase the participation of the people in the new

political system. The revolutionary regime could not deny the role of the people because these people defeated Pahlavi's regime and helped the revolutionary regime to create the government (Sanasarian & Salehi, 1989, p. 151). In this situation, it was very important for the Islamic government to show a better form of governing than the last one. Under Pahlavi, the regime disregarded the role of the parliament and did not pay enough attention to public opinion, which caused the people's discontent. As Kamrava explains, the legitimacy of the new political system "depends on their ability not just to lead revolutions but to deliver on the promises they made during the revolutionary struggle" (Kamrava, 1992, p. 75). Furthermore, the new regime needed the participation of the people, because Khomeini and his followers did not control all aspects of power, which was related to the previous regime. This sense of fear and insecurity intensified with the rising of separatist groups, worries about a military coup, and foreign countries' about intervention. In this condition, the new regime needed faithful support of ordinary people as a reliable source to overcome difficulties (Sanasarian & Salehi, 1989, p. 151). This process helped the regime to consolidate its authority and improve its popularity among people.

On the other hand, the regime tried to limit the independence of opposition groups, because the revolutionary elites thought these groups and parties weakened the regime and challenged its authority. In the name of solidarity and unification, the regime tried to restrict the independent groups and parties during the period of war (Yazdi, 2000, p. 380). After the revolution and the war, power struggle and conflict between rival groups led the public sphere to the civil war and terror. It pushed regime to militarization of the system and reacted against these opponents with brutal repression and violence. These conflicts led the regime toward the radicalization of the political sphere in the Islamic Republic. As a result, the strength of radicals in the Islamic Republic caused the take-over of the American Embassy in 1979, the ensuing hostage crisis, and

accelerated the fall of the liberal government of Prime Minister Bazargan (Ashraf & Banuazizi, 2001). On the other hand, Iraq's invasion in September 1980 pushed the regime to control all aspect of the public sphere. The new regime needed to mobilize people for supporting the war effort. In 1981, the regime tried to restrict all leftist groups and radical organizations such as the *Mojahedin-e Khalq*, *Fadaiyan-e Khalq*, and several Maoist groups.

On the other side, the radical Islamic-socialist organizations used a strategy of armed resistance and confrontation against the regime's pressure and violence. They started a violent movement against the government and assassinated leaders of the revolution, including several high-ranking clerics, the incumbent president, the prime minister, the head of the judiciary, and the *Majles* deputies (Abrahamian, 1992). In consequence, the regime started to limit the social and political in the name of a Cultural Revolution to increase its authority and limit the impact of leftist and non-Islamic faculty, students, and other members of academics. During the Cultural Revolution, many opponents of the regime were arrested or went into exile. Many political organizations, women organizations, labor unions, and several independent newspapers and journals were closed by the revolutionary regime (Ashraf & Banuazizi, 2001).

This strategy weakened the oppositions in the post-revolutionary period superficially but it also weakened of public sphere. These limitation processes related to the view of Khomeini and his followers about political parties and their legitimacy in the Islamic thought. Traditionally, the *Ulama* were concerned about the parties and their participation in the Islamic government. As Rafsanjani explains, many *Ulama* thought parties harmful for the Islamic society because they would weaken public unity (Rafsanjani, 1999). Moreover, Ayatollah Khomeini "was not comfortable with party" politics (Rafsanjani, 1999, p. 80). He preferred direct approaches of cooperating with ordinary people and supported the idea of *Basij* for extirpating the poverty and

scarcity in the poor areas and defended the borders during the war with Iraq (Alsaif, 2007). These tendencies caused some conflicts between the regime and influential Iranian parties such as *Nehzat Azadi*, *Mojahedine- Khalq*, and *Mojahedin Enghelab*, which led to their elimination from the structure of power in the post revolution era.

## **Transformation from Radical Aspects to the Thermidorian Phase**

The Islamic Republic, as I mentioned before, was a political system that was created without a proper ideological plan. Its political ideology was completed when the revolutionary elites were confronted with the real challenge of post-revolutionary period. This process could not be responsible for the trend of changing in the long-term, and caused some discrepancy between the revolutionary paradigm and the actual circumstances in different eras especially in economic level (Alsaif, 2007). During the war with Iraq, the regime was confronted with difficulties related to the war. The war had negative effects in the daily lives of people, and their lives depended on state expenditure, that came mostly from oil exports (Behdad, 1988). These conditions increased discontent and led Iran's regime to agree with ceasefire, which was interpreted as the regime's retreat from its ideological principles of the revolution (Ghareeb, 1990, p. 22). For Khomeini, that was a severely painful retreat, "halting this just war is like drinking poison, death would have been easier to bear" (Khomeini, 1991, p. 46). According to Ehteshami, this was a starting point for transforming the regime from radical aspects to the Thermidorian phase of the Islamic Revolution (Ehteshami, 2002, p. 30).

Soon after the ceasefire, Ayatollah Khomeini passed away and pragmatism was institutionalized through a major amendment of the Constitution. Shortly after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in June 1989, Ayatollah Khamenei was elected as the new Supreme Leader by the Assembly of Experts. His position was quite different from Ayatollah Khomeini's; he was

not a charismatic person and he did not have Ayatollah Khomeini's popularity. Also, he was not Grand Ayatollah and he did not have the same religious credential to take this position (Fazili, 2010). Under Khomeini, there were not any major conflicts between revolutionary elites in the structure of power, because Khomeini, as charismatic leader, was able to control the ideological divisions and managed different ideas in the political sphere. However, after Khomeini these disunions strengthened and created the space for intellectuals to explain their ideas about economic and sociocultural situations, which caused political factions in public sphere (Rakel, 2009).

For solving this problem and sustaining his position, Khamenei accepted the presidency of Rafsanjani and agreed with his practical approaches to consolidate his position. Khamenei did not have Khomeini's charisma and educational standing, which led him to rely on Rafsanjani and his pragmatic thoughts. On the other hand, he was not a Grand Ayatollah, which decreased his credibility in the position of supreme leader. Rafsanjani defended a pragmatic and practical approach and focused on action rather than ideology of the Islamic Republic whose major concern was the stability of the Islamic regime (Rafsanjani, 1999, p. 60). Rafsanjani tried to increase the power of the Presidency and political institution without interference the power of the Supreme Leader (Fazili, 2010).

### **The Primacy of Economic Construction over Socio-political Reform**

After the revolution the society became more modern and progressive. During the Islamic revolution, the country had a low illiteracy rate, a high rate of higher educated people, and a large number of highly educated women, which led society to become more aware about their personal needs and push them to declare their desires (Rakel, 2009). After the death of Khomeini two intellectual frameworks emerged, which were affected by the political sphere and influenced

the reform discourses in Iran. The first paradigm was related to the pragmatist faction that Rafsanjani supported. The second paradigm emerged in the same period among dissident religious intellectuals, such as Soroush, Shabestari, and Kadivar. They tried to criticize the principle of the *velayate faqih* with the Supreme Leader as the ultimate decision maker, and supported an Islamic state that limited the authority of the Supreme Leader. None of these groups signified a consistent social movement or supported the separation of religion from politics but they aimed finding a way for reform in the context of the Islamic Republic (Gheissari & Nasr, 2004).

This process of the reform movement was intensified by public demands after the first decade of revolution that was associated with political restriction and economic crisis. The population increased during the period of war and caused baby boom crisis for revolutionary regime. These children grow up and came to the public sphere in 1990s who demanded equality of opportunity in job, education, and socio-political welfare. However, they were confronted with socio-economic problems and disappointed with the sociocultural restrictions in Iran (Rakel, 2009).

After the war the country needed economic reform because of the danger of economic failure. The GNP in the 1988-89 was still 6 percent less than it was in 1978-79 (Amuzegar, 1997, p. 341). According to Alsaif, the decline of real per capita income caused manufacturing companies' production dropped and the 210 industrial units managed by the National Industries Organization were running at 54 percent of their nominal capacity (Alsaif, 2007, pp. 77-78). In this situation, Rafsanjani believed Iranian society and its government need some fundamental reform. He favored in the priority of economic reform as a base for socio-political reform. He tried to improve the economic prosperity as an important step for reaching to the political

reforms. He chose pragmatic approach and explained that political reforms should grow gradually to decrease the conflicts between modernists and traditionalists. He used theoretical framework and argues that democratization must be led by advances in the people's life. According to Wright, his main concern was to "fashion a durable state as the basis of authority and to make its survival less dependent on the credentials, personality or clout of the Supreme Leader" (Wright, 2010, p. 21). In the economy sphere, he advocated the role of the private sector and foreign investments in financial and technical levels (Rafsanjani, 1999). Rafsanjani, unlike the paradigm of revolution which advocated the direct redistribution of wealth, emphasized that the concept of social justice should be applied in a systematic and gradual process. He asserted this form of distribution could increase economic production, which would lead to an egalitarian way and guarantee a fair distribution of assets through the nation (Safari, 1999, p. 158).

Rafsanjani tried to focus on practical aspects of the revolution and limited the power of some of the paramilitary groups. During his presidency, 1989 to 1997, he stressed economic stability and growth, and redefined the ideology of revolution in a moderate way (Gheissari & Nasr, 2004). Rafsanjani tried to improve unfinished projects, which were related to the Pahlavi period and focused on the gradual opening of sociocultural sphere after Khomeini. Through these projects and policies, the public sphere was revived and led to expand the idea of civil society and democratic government among intellectuals and ordinary people. People openly criticized the role of the state and its ideological foundations and questioned the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic (Kerman & Wood, 2012).

Rafsanjani applied his notion in the economic sphere in the name of Policy of Adjustment (*Siasate- Tadir*) and the economy started to grow. According to a survey, from 1989 to 1992, the GNP had an annual growth of 7 percent, compared to an annual average of less than one percent

in the previous decade (Rashidi, 1997, p. 161). Public services were confronted with a similar development: by 1998 electricity grew 40 percent more than in 1991 and reached 14 million homes. Telephone lines improved from 2.45 million in 1991 to 6.69 million in 1996 (Statistical Center of Iran, 1381). The rate of unemployment had dropped below 10 percent by the end of 1994. The output in agriculture and industry made a good increase and non-oil exports reached \$4 billion in 1993 (Ehteshami, 2002, p. 115).

Rafsanjani's reform policy could not succeed without improving the relationship between state and society after the difficulties of the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. During his eight years of presidency, Rafsanjani tried to reduce the control of the regime over the public and the private spheres. According to Rafipour, these changes related to the economic reform as an important step for political reform and had a vital effect on society. For reaching to economic prosperity, Rafsanjani used technocrats and this shift to the technocracy led him to accept the role of academic-oriented administrators and professionals who had liberal tendencies (Rafipour, 1998, p. 150). Rafsanjani's Policy of Adjustment caused to reduce the regime's control over the market and led it to the more liberal economy. These changes affected the society and led it from closed to an open one and decreased the rigidity of traditional religious norms.

These changes in regime's structure power had an essential influence in cultural sphere. The number of magazines and newspapers were raised from 99 in 1986 to 662. The number of books published during that period grew from 3,812 to 14,459 (Statistical Center of Iran, 1382). The economic revitalization and relative political openness had essential effects on the behavior of intellectuals and ordinary people, which they agreed that the Islamic Republic could not continue its revolutionary paradigm and needed some reforms in different aspects of the Islamic government. These requests led to the new consensus and regime was forced to accept them

because the survival of regime relied on the acceptance of process of reform in economical and socio-political aspects.

Iran, during the first decade of revolution, had been under control of a religious regime that continued the project of the official interpretation of Islam. As Skocpol has argued, this Islamic government like other revolutionary regimes produced a powerful coercive structure (Skocpol, 1982). The revolutionary regime resisted against most of controversy about pluralism and liberal values and used coercive apparatuses for restricting the socio-political sphere and protecting official interpretation of Islamic government. However, this coercive structure was not able to control the entire public sphere and restricted the debates and dissents. In the closed society people avoided involving themselves in the controversial issues because they feared from suppression, or they believed that the rulers were not willing to listen. But after the end of war and death of Khomeini the development of socio-political continued and led to the relative open society. The socio-political opening led to increased discussions over the revolutionary paradigm. These public debates around the issue of reform caused democratization and reforms in revolution paradigm became a national issue.

In this situation, the society prepared for shifting from revolutionary paradigm to the new era. According to Alsaif, this shift depended on a range of elements “including the significance of the anomalies, the flexibility of the establishment in handling discontent, and crucially, the availability of an alternative paradigm capable of invoking a wide appeal” (Alsaif, 2007, p. 79). These changes prepared society to realize their dreams and accept the risk and pay for the cost. On the other hand, reformists used language of democracy and liberalism and tried to establish the hegemonic paradigm in their publications and public meetings. In the period of presidential election in 1997, the reformist groups coalesced together to support Muhammad Khatami and his

reformist program. The won of Khatami to the presidency of the Islamic Republic is to be considered as an important step for expanding the new paradigm in the structure of power.

## **The Emergence of Reform Movement**

Chapter one considered that the establishment of the Islamic Republic caused to decrease the division between state and society, which was related to the claimed inconsistency between the state and religion. The revolutionary regime succeeded to solve this division but after one decade a new division happened between two forms of interpretation of Khomeini's Islamic government. On the one hand, people are confronted with authoritarian interpretation of religious discourse, which was grounded in traditions and on the other hand, there were reformist groups that supported a democratic model of religious governing, which led to the modernity and democratic model of governing. Both forms had supporters from the state and society, but the authoritarian paradigm was supported by conservatives, which had a strong presence in structure of power while the other was supported by society (Alsaif, 2007). Since 1997, most of the surveys have shown that the reformist's ideas supported with majority of people (Constitutional Council, 1382). During their eight years rule, the reformists tried to use legal rights through the parliament and the government to expand the political atmosphere and improve the relationship between the state and society. They succeeded in some parts and were unsuccessful in others. In this respect, president Khatami explained his aims in the name of "comprehensive and sustainable improvement" (Khatami, 2000, p. 41). He clarified this task in the name of "human development" which was explained and proliferated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). He asserted to create a social atmosphere, which led to democracy and increase of human choices.

The reform movement clarified the content of struggle between conservatives and reformists. They tried to explain their notion about the Islamic government and made clear their differences in this context. Conservatives believed that government should control the economic aspect of the country and *Ulama* should interfere more in the affairs of society. In the sociocultural aspect, they supported the ideological definition of Islamic rules and regulations, and they preferred absolute power of the office of the Supreme Leader who got his authority from God, not the people. On the other hand, reformists believed that the legitimacy of regime came from the people and the ballot box. They denied the absolute power of the Supreme Leader and try to control his authority with the organizations that had been mentioned in the Constitution such as the Assembly of Experts and Expediency Council. Reformists emphasized the value of the modern world and defended the concept of civil society and its values such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of belief. In the economic prospect, reformists tried to have Iran participate in the global economy and attracted foreign investment. They advocated privatization and decreased the role of government to control the economy (Fazili, 2010). Khatami's government continued the reform program of the previous government, but they emphasized on political insinuations and their effects on the development of democratization.

## **The Socio-economic Background**

After the Islamic revolution new regime focused to the poor class and tried to prepare a better situation for those who suffered under the consequences of structural weakness, which was related to the previous regime. New government emphasized to improve the organizations such as *Jihide-Sazandegi* (the Jihad of Reconstruction) and *Nehzat-e Sawid-Amozi* (the Movement for Literacy) which aimed to help the poor and middle classes to have better life. In addition, the

new government focused to the marginalized and poor people for preparing the food and essential products to deal with the international sanctions against Iran during the war with Iraq and the economic restriction by the United States. On the other hand, the Islamic government started development plans to improve the lives of disadvantaged classes, which included the development of transportation system, communication systems, electricity, and primary schools. These programs had structural effects and changed the class status in Iranian society and linked the disadvantaged class to the middle class and public sphere of the political and economic processes. These plans led to the rise of the level of education among people and growth of the percentage of students at the middle and higher levels of education, as well as in the overall expansion of literacy. Moreover, these programs caused the change of the lifestyle of the poor and middle class in urban areas (Abdi & Rezaie, 1999, pp. 97-102).

According to a survey from 1976 until 1996, the literacy rate increased from 47.5 percent to 80 percent. In 1976, 18 percent of the women in the rural areas and 64 percent in the urban areas were literate and could read and write. In 1992, this amount increased for women to 62 percent in the rural areas and 82 percent in urban areas. Furthermore, the number of students in all levels of education rose from 7.25 million in 1979 to 19.32 million in 1996, of which 1.2 million were at university (Statistical Center of Iran). The other improvement is related to the elevation of employment status and development of job market. During this period, the number of self-employed workers increased from 182,300 to 528,000 (Abdi & Rezaie, 1999, p. 115). Most development theories emphasized the process of educational growth in the developing countries as a major incentive for social change and reform movement. According to these theories, educational growth helped to increase the individual and collective awareness that led to increase the tendency to participate in public affairs (Alsaif, 2007). The electoral behavior in

the 1997 presidential election supported this supposition. According to Piran, the model of voting in peripheral regions and small towns was similar to the main cities (Abdi & Rezaie, 1999, p. 34). He emphasized that the growth of educational system led to increase the numbers of students in country as a major reference group in Iranian society who had a significant role for increasing the participation of people on that election. In addition, the increased tendency in poor and low middle classes to follow the urban lifestyle helped the reformist discourse to spread out quickly and won the election (Abdi & Rezaie, 1999, p. 34).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I consider the growth of the reformist paradigm and its effects to change the public sphere and political structure. I explain that the lack of a proper ideology and the heterogeneity of the revolutionary elites after the revolution caused conflicts, which led to the failure of the revolutionary paradigm. These problems intensified with war and internal conflicts. For solving these problems the regime tried to apply the revolutionary notion of justice, which helped to redistribute resources directly and control all aspect of life in the economic and political spheres. These solutions created new problems for the regime and increased dissatisfaction among ordinary people and intellectuals.

The end of the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 provided the chance for the reformists and intellectuals to challenge some basic ideas of the Islamic government. This situation helped the pragmatic leaders of revolution to guide the Islamic Republic to a realistic model. These changes happened in the name of the Policy of Adjustment, which aim was socio-economic reform in the context of Islamic government. Rafsanjani suggested the pragmatic plan in the name of the Policy of Adjustment for solving these problems. This plan helped to improve the economy of the country and affected the political and social spheres to make them more

tolerable. These changes provided the condition for the emergence of reformist ideas, which tried to reconcile religion with modernity. Although the revolutionary model is emphasized to the religious and national traditions, the reformist camp compromised the notion of Islamic government, which accommodated the model of liberal democracy. In this condition, the concept of political participation and criticized the Islamic government was developed by religious intellectuals. These development prepared framework for reformists to expand the notion of civil society and human rights in the context of Islamic Republic, which led to improvement of political parties and independent media in one hand, and expansion of religious intellectuals' discourse on the other hand.

## **Chapter Three: Soroush and Theological Discourse**

### **Introduction**

Two decades after the Islamic revolution of 1979, the quest of intellectuals and ordinary people in Iran for reform in structure of power and its ideology produced a new socio-political movement. After the war and death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the leaders of the Islamic Republic started some socio-economic reforms, which led the oppositions to express their demands in the name of the reform movement. Iranian intellectuals engaged in serious debates about the importance of politics and its relation to Islam. In the late 1980s, a serious controversy over religion's role in the state appeared among religious intellectuals in Iran. They tried to answer the questions about the relation between Islam and politics and whether there is a theory for final interpretation of Islam. What is the role of religion in politics? Is Islam compatible with democracy? Has the post-revolutionary experience guaranteed the needs for reform the clerical establishment? In the following sections, I explore the religious intellectual's ideas about proper model of governing. The controversies over democratic and republican models desire to govern in the name of Islam and the ideology of the revolution.

I explore the main discourse of the religious intellectuals and the effects of their religio-political thoughts on the Iranian reform movement. In this chapter, I focus on the Soroush's work as a religious intellectual, and the important members of the reform movement in the post-revolutionary period and their influence on the theories of religious reformation. Their ideas about politics, religion, and their relations are highly controversial in contemporary Iran. I explain their framework about the main concept of the Islamic government and how they criticize ideology the post-revolutionary. In addition, I clarify their conception of modern

political thought. I discuss their notion of role of religion in politics and their alternative plan for an official interpretation of Islamic government.

## **The Role of the Religious Intellectuals**

The process of the socio-political reform helped the religious intellectuals to revive and transfer to the new era (Boroujerdi, 1992). The term “religious intellectuals” explains the group of scholars whose worldview is constructed by the basic values of religion (Alsaif, 2007, p. 112). According to Alavitabar this groups of scholars stand between the traditional *Ulama* and the secularist intellectuals. He recognizes the religious intellectual trend as a group whose concerns are related to growing a rational interpretation of religion and religious principles. He emphasizes that these intellectuals are criticizing the social system, its institutions, relations, and attitudes due to the values of liberty, equality, and progress as fundamental elements for the social institute (Alavitabar, 2000, p. 25).

As Vahdat explains the ambivalence and lack of transparency about exact model of the Islamic Republic before the revolution and among the leaders such as Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Khomeini and Murtaza Mutahari caused different approaches among religious intellectuals after the revolution. The lack of transparency led to the philosophical debates and confusion in political opinions such as the conception of citizenship, the role of law, and human rights. Debates around these notions led to the bifurcation among scholars. The conservatives have supported the traditional position and used religious notion for clarifying the notion of citizenship and its related political rights. By contrast, the reformist discourse used the modern notion of individual subjectivity and its political embodiment as universal citizenship (Vahdat, 2003, pp. 602-603).

These debates and bifurcation revealed the transformation of the Iranian political culture from absolute ideology to the individual independent awareness. After the revolution the dominant group tried to reconstruct the national identity of the Iranians as absolute and perfect, while other identities such as national, ethnic and culturally-based have been viewed as low-grade or opposing to Islam (Alsaif, 2007). Revolutionary leaders used this new identity to consolidate the sources of power in the hands of the regime. The regime tried to unify the structure of power and limited all institutions, which might symbolize or mobilize different identities of any institution in the first post-revolutionary decade. As a result, the political parties, public sphere, and the independent press were limited and controlled by the regime. But after the war and the death of Khomeini the Iranian society was confronted with a decline in the ideological mechanisms of power through confictions conservatives and reformists are the structures of power. This struggle caused an increase to individual self-awareness and the growth of individualism in a liberal sense. The tendency toward individualism and liberal democracy was expanded among the intellectual and ordinary people (Jalaipour, 2000). With these historical events the people were ready for change and accepted the ideas of reformist intellectuals. Religious intellectual discourse started before the revolution with the Movement for the Liberation of Iran (*Nehzat-e Azadi-e Iran*). The founders of this party (Ayatollah Mahmoud Talegani, Mahdi Bazargan, and Yadullah Sahabi) supported the idea of reconciling Islam with modernity. Their goal was to protect religion against the trend of rising secularization during the process of modernization in Pahlavi's period. This new movement defined itself as a new way from traditional *Ulama* and used modern language for solving this problem (Arjomand, 2005). This trend completed with Ali Shariati as an important leader of revolution. He tried to

reinterpret Shia traditions and thoughts in a new way, which were opposing to the established paradigm of Shia by *Ulama* (Akhavi, 1980).

After the experience of the first decade of revolution, reformist started to criticize the foundation of the Islamic government by using an independent media. They criticized the official ideology of hegemony, which was related to formal interoperation of traditional *fiqh*. The dominated judiciary limited these form of criticism and closed their magazines as an important tool for awareness of society and reform movement. However, these forms of behavior by regime had reverse outcome and made people sensitive to reformist arguments. The daily *Salam* and the monthly journal *Kiyan* initiated the new discourse. The reformists used daily *Salam* for expanding their political opinion in a practical context and used the monthly journal *Kiyan* for explaining their intellectual principles. *Kiyan*, which was managed by Soroush, became the intellectual circle and a center for communication and discussion among reformist intellectuals. The *Kiyan* Circle was an important place for reformists to talk about their ideas and publish their notions. Most of the scholars emphasized that the *Kiyan* has an essential role for expanding of reformist ideas and important step in the history of Iran's cultural press (Sadri, 2001). Moreover, in the period of presidency of Rafsanjani, 2500 postgraduates were sent to the Western universities to modernize the academia and state administration in the early 1990s (Jalaipour, 2000). All of these efforts helped the process of reform movement to become as an alternative for conservative's model of governing.

These situations broke the cohesive ideology of the Islamic Republic and led to criticism of the role of religion in political sphere. The regime and society were confronted with the questions such as: should religion be involved in politics? Why do the *Ulama* have special rights or duties to be involved in political affairs? Moreover, religious intellectuals questioned the

Khomeini's articulation of the concept of *velayat faqih*, such as the necessity of this position and its limitations.

## **Main Subjects in the Reformist Movement**

Many religious intellectuals involved with these questions tried to construct the reform discourse. Most of these religious intellectuals expanded the doctrinal controversy such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtabeh Shabestari, Hasan Yosufi Eshkevari, and Mohsen Kadivar. These intellectuals tried to reformulate the relationship between Shiism and politics and they applied their notions in the political sphere for solving the problem of authority in the Islamic Republic (Kamrava, 2003).

Among these intellectuals who supported the reformist discourses, Abdolkarim Soroush is an eminent intellectual who is known as a father of reform movement. He studied secular education as a chemist in Tehran and later in London and he also studied the history and philosophy of science (Sadri, 2001). Soroush claimed to reform Shiite political theory and became one of the most famous and controversial theorists in the post-revolutionary era. He articulates his philosophies and ideas that helped reformist to shape their concepts about the reform movement (Alsaif, 2007). Soroush was one of the first intellectuals to advocate a scientific approach to Islam during the Islamic Republic. He was also one of the most important religious intellectuals to question the position of the *velayat faqih* and its institutional and ideological concept. He tries to interpret Islam in a democratic way, which coordinated it with the needs and logic of today (Soroush, 1994a). He focuses on the importance of justice as a main value of social structure and human ethics and he explains the relationship between justice and moral values in *Morals of the Gods* (Vakili, 1996). Soroush tries to base his discussions outside

the realm of the political system because he believes the current system is transitional. In this situation, he seeks to create a democratic discourse outside the dominant system.

Soroush tries to support the role of religious intellectuals by improving religious thought and social life. He claims that “No revolution can be sustained if it fails to regenerate its theory and that is the job of intellectuals” (Soroush, 1996b, p. 125). In his mind, religious intellectuals play an important role for “they always motivated the clergy to regenerate; they are needed today more than before because the clergy has engaged with power and become more ready for degeneration” (Soroush, 1996b, p. 49). He emphasizes the main problem of *Ulama* and that their religious knowledge is related to their faithfulness to the past:

“We see no significant contribution by the clergy to the debate on such questions as rights, freedom, justice, happiness, and the other theoretical issues related to modernization [... ] In comparison, the intellectuals simultaneously recognize the significance of the traditions and modern knowledge, they analyse the traditions in the framework of modern notions and practical requirements, and by so doing they bridge the present and the past” (Soroush, 1996a, p. 53).

The religious intellectuals emphasize that the “reading of religion is grounded in the principle of the plurality of interpretation” (Alsaif, 2007, p. 132) and pluralism is one of the main basis for explaining their political ideology. Soroush in his book (*Right Paths*) tries to challenge the doctrine of the single right path with support from traditional *Ulama* and revolutionary leaders. He tries to undermine the regime’s ideology of the formal authoritative interpretation of the religious basics. In his book, he criticizes the main claims of the official interpretation of religion and explains “it serves to marginalize the political role of the people; it serves as a

pretext to suppress those who hold different opinions; and it lacks scientific authenticity” (Alsaif, 2007, p. 132).

He claims clergies use the claim of an official interpretation of religion to gain ultimate power in the Islamic government, which led Soroush to deny Islamic ideology and its doctrine. He tries to explain the negative effects of this model and how a religious state prevents the growth of religious knowledge (Vakili, 1996). Soroush accuses the conservative part of regime and clergies’ corporation to prohibit the proper development of religious knowledge.

### **Soroush and His Conception of Islam**

The main goal for Soroush is to understand a religious reform and revive Islamic thought in the Muslim world (Soroush, 1991). Some contemporary Muslim thinkers argue that Islam needs to be revived in order to respond to the demand of Muslim in modern society. Soroush accepts that the modern world changes and there is a demand to create a new relationship between world values and religion, but his solution is not the revival of Islam. For Soroush, Islam cannot change and desire to change the essence of Islam is false trend. In his view “Islam does not need to change, but the human understanding of Islam must be changed” (Soroush, 1994b, p. 99). According to Soroush, when Muslim face to challenges of modernity, they should not try to change their religion, but they need to reconcile their understanding of religion with the real world (Soroush, 1994b).

The main goal of Soroush’s critiques is to demonstrate that the right of authority based on absolute knowledge, sacredness, and perfect man leads to authoritarianism (Soroush, 2000). He believes there is a difference between the *shariah* itself and the understanding of *shariah*. Religion is related to the divine but religious knowledge is the product of scholars when they

study of the source of Islam such as Quran, hadith and tradition. In other words, human understanding of religion, such as our understanding of nature and the system of being, is an evolving process. In this situation, our understandings of non-religious subjects affect our understanding of religion. Soroush argues that religious knowledge is one of the branches of human knowledge and it can change like others (Soroush, 1994a).

Soroush explains that religious knowledge changes over time and becomes more complex because growth in human science pushes scholars to think in different ways and leads them to different interpretations of Islam. They are influenced by the knowledge of their time to study the main religious texts. Their understanding is related to their era and came from outside of main religious text (Soroush, 1991). Therefore, the religious knowledge is relative to circumstance of other knowledge of the time. This leads to dialogue between religious and non-religious branches of human knowledge that Soroush calls evolution of religious knowledge. His theory of the evolution of religious knowledge helps him to reconcile faith with rationality in the modern world (Mir-Hosseini, 2002).

## **The Role of Religion in Politics**

Soroush tries to articulate his theory and apply it in the modern world. He confronts significant social and political problems when he wants to implement his theory in the real world. He confronts the practical challenges of his theory and tries to solve and illustrate them. One of the main problems for his theory is related to the relationship between religion and politics. Soroush assumes that Islamic ideology inhibits the growth of Islamic knowledge and the ideological form of governing is not sufficient for managing a modern state. He rejects any government that claims legitimacy based on the ideological reading of Islam as a model for a modern state. Instead, he suggests a democratic government as the optimal model for ruling in

the name of Islam. Soroush totally rejects using Islam as an ideology and explains why he denies this method and why this model is not proper for the modern world.

One of the problematic issues in the contemporary Muslim societies is the improvement of Islamic political ideology and using political Islam as an alternative for the political system of nation-states. Soroush believes Islamic ideology is a problematic issue in the modern Muslim world. He completely opposes any form of Islamic ideology because this form can prevent the growth of religious knowledge (Soroush, 1993b).

Soroush defines ideology as a social and political instrument that affects public behavior. He said, "It consists of a systematized and ordered school of thought ... that situates itself as a guide to action... and acts as a determining factor in people's political, social, and moral positions" (Soroush, 1993a, p. 4). In order to accomplish this role, ideologies provide a particular interpretation of the world that is easily comprehensible to the public and that can mobilize individuals against other ideologies. In this trend, Islamic ideology is forced to reduce the complexity of religion to a fixed ideological position (Soroush, 1993a). According to Soroush, it is impossible at any time to defend one form of Islam as a final interpretation. All understanding changes over time, so we cannot have a fixed form. When we reduce religion into an ideology, we must define it as a final and unchangeable form. The religious intellectuals try to explain the problems of *velayate faqih* with using the concept of Shia tradition and modern thought. In one hand they criticize the Khomeini's advocacy of the *velayate faqih* with providing reasons from Shia traditional thought to prove there is no relation between this conception and traditional trend. On the other hand, they argue in the philosophical level to a challenge of the current orthodoxy by maintaining on the proper place of reason in faith. For instance, Shabestari criticizes the focus on *fiqh* in conservative religious discourse and tries to stress the role of

reason in faith and interpretation. Shabestari claims that belief is a result of “free will and emancipation”, which is the creation of a dialogue with God and other human beings over science and philosophy (Shabestari, 1996, p. 238).

For Soroush, this form of using religion as an ideology causes an important challenge to the free growth of religious knowledge and limits the free interpretation of religion. Religion as a political tool loses its depth and complexity of religious knowledge for the political struggle. This form of government needs an official class of government-allied ideologues to formulate and protect the official ideology of Islam and religion becomes the servant of the government to legitimize the concept of power in the ideological base (Soroush, 1993b). In this condition, religious knowledge cannot grow freely and it limits the transformation and evolution in religious understanding. He explains that religious knowledge needs connection with other human sciences for proper development and these limits to official reading condemn the possibility for expansion of religious knowledge. Lack of free thought and rational exploration in this form of state causes serious destruction for normal growth of religious knowledge:

“In principle the possibility for the internal growth and development of a political system exists only when that system is flexible, and when the possibility for new reasoning and change exists within the system... if this does not exist, inevitably for reform, the foundation of the system must be inverted, and upon this inversion, a new foundation built” (Soroush, 1994b, p. 13).

In contrast with the notion of reformist intellectuals, conservative scholars try to articulate Islamic government to provide for the emotional and spiritual needs of the Muslim community. They claim for human’s growth and divine evolution as the bases of Islam and regulation

becomes a main duty of the Islamic government. They believe it is essential for the government to command the good and forbid the evil and responsible for applying the Islamic laws. They argue that it is necessary for Islamic government to found institutions to perform the religion's orders and to make laws in ways that please God. They conclude that Islamic laws need Islamic government (Kamrava, 2008). Conservative scholars support new theory of Islamic government as a mandatory school.

In contrast to the notion of *velayate faqih* religious intellectuals supports the idea of reform in religion itself. Soroush published a series of articles on the relative nature of religious knowledge, which attracted many reformist scholars and provoked lot of debates. Soroush in *The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of Shariah* (Qabz va Bast Theoric Shariat) shifts from criticizing Marxism and the religious traditions in general, to the criticism of the traditional *fiqh* and clerical culture in particular. Soroush, in his book, investigates the relation between religious understandings and development of belief that Islam and democracy are complementary (Soroush, 1994b). He highlights the important distinction between religion and religious understanding by emphasizing that religious understanding is only related to the human understanding. Religion remains constant, while religious understanding changes (Soroush, 2000). Therefore, secularism and democracy do not threaten religion, they only help to increase the understanding of religion in modern world (Schmid, 2002).

For Soroush, religious ideology is dangerous both for the proper growth of knowledge and the religious society. He believes religious societies resist the improvement of ideological regimes and transformation into an ideological society. He explains there are important differences between these two types of societies:

“In an ideological society, the government dialogized the society, whereas in religious societies, the society makes the government religious. In an ideological society, an official interpretation of ideology governs, but in a religious society, there are prevailing interpretations but no official interpretations. In an ideological society, the task of the formulation of ideology is relegated to the ideologues. In a religious society, however, the issue of religion is too great for it to be relegated solely to the hands of the official interpreters. In a religious society, no personality and no fatwa is beyond criticism. And no understanding of religion is considered the final or most complete understanding” (Soroush, 1994b, p. 19).

Soroush argues that religion contains all the ideas of religious ideology, but it is not limited to these ideologies alone. Religion is more comprehensive than ideology and unlike religious ideology, it is not limited to the combative aspect of religion, but also includes the more peaceful, esoteric and mystical aspects (Soroush, 1996a).

## **Islam and the Nature of Religious Government**

Political elites in Iran have different ideas about the nature of authority, and Republicanism is also a controversial concept in the reformist and conservative’s discourse. The reformist and conservative’s argument over the Islamic republic emphasized the republican character of the regime and its relation to sovereignty. Conservatives assume that sovereignty is totally related to God and submit to the *Ulama* who have the knowledge of God’s rules for governing the Islamic society. On the other hand, reformist intellectuals advocate the people’s sovereignty and choose an open and participatory political system. Conservative scholars tried to differentiate between two different meanings of sovereignty. On the one hand, Political authority is related to the people while legislation is controlled by the religious scholars. In this condition, elections and public interest are accepted as an appropriate technique to choose government agencies and

legislators, but the state and parliament have no right to enact or perform any decisions, which are against Islamic *Shariah* (Alsaif, 2007).

On the other hand, the Reformists stress the idea of representation as the main aspect of authority in the Islamic Republic. In their view, a republic is a social contract in which the rulers are responsible for their decisions. Reformists claim that the state should be limited to the public sphere and the common good is the objective to be pursued by the state. In this situation, people have the right to participate in the process of decision making that is related to their future and structure of power (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 2014).

The Reformists emphasize that the political system in Iran is a legitimate contract which it authorized on the foundation of religious principles and framed in the 1980 Constitution (Alsaif, 2007). They emphasize article 56 of the Constitution, which asserts that the sovereignty of God is devoted to the people:

“Absolute sovereignty over the world and man belongs to God, and it is He Who has made man master of his own social destiny. No one can deprive man of this divine right, nor subordinate it to the vested interests of a particular individual or group” (Algar, 1980).

The religious intellectuals reject the idea of any divine character of power and claim that Islam has not chosen any specific model of political systems. In their view, Islam suggests a system of norms, which people can recognize through the institution. Religious intellectuals emphasize that the Islamic government is similar to other states in the model of ruling and is led by fallible people who should be responsible for the process of decision making. In this condition, legitimacy is related to the concept of justice and not related to the religious leader (Soroush, 2000, p. 68).

Soroush rejects the role of Islamic ideology as a governing platform, but he does not advocate a simple separation of religion and politics. He argues that in the religious society, politics is related to the religious notion of society and they cannot separate from each other (Soroush, 1994a, p. 21). In this situation, the main question for Soroush is how he can explain the interaction between religion and politics in religious society. Finding the answer of this question guides him to the concept of religious democracy.

Soroush asks about religious government and its religious right to governance in the religious society (Soroush, 1993a). To answer this question, he considers two traditional ways; one of them is in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and the other in *kalam* (theology). The jurist's response emphasizes a framework to perform religious justice, and the role of the *faqih* is interpreting and applying this justice. The task of *faqih* in the religious society establishes a specific type of religious (*faqih*-based) government. This is the right of the *faqih* to govern. The exercise of this right requires the establishment of an Islamic government. Soroush rejects this idea, because it is based on a limited interpretation. He says *faqih* knows one dimension of religion, and while *faqih* provides legal responses, he is not able to answer the deeper issues like the meaning of justice and freedom (Soroush, 1994b, p. 49). To find the answer to these questions, Soroush turns to *kalam*: "The question of religious justice is a question for *fiqh*, but the question of a just religion is a question for *kalam*" (Soroush, 1994b, p. 50).

Soroush continues that religious government must be a just government and that justice is a term that is explained outside of religion (Soroush, 1994b, p. 52). Religious justice based on *fiqh* is related to the different interpretations of *Quranic* law, but the concept of justice is not defined by referring to the Quran alone. This concept agrees with religion but the definition cannot conform the religious texts alone: "we do not draw our conception of justice from religion, but

rather we accept religion because it is just” (Soroush, 1994b, p. 52). The relationship between religion and justice can be understood only by entering into a theological debate. This debate reveals that some certain rights are not defined in the core of religious texts. In this situation, religious state that reduces the notion of justice to the realm of *fiqh* can be dangerous for religious rights (Soroush, 1994b).

Soroush argues that religion does not have any plan for governance and there are not any specific religious methods for authority. For him, the concept of just government is over the framework of religion and there is a differentiation between political and religious justice. Political justice related to the real world but religious justice linked with divine concept, which is beyond human knowledge. Islamic government’s rules are based on *fiqh*, and they reduce the level of human rights (Usman, 2002). Soroush explains that Islam has specific legal orders that are interpreted with *fiqh* and these rules can only respond to the restricted field of legal issues. However, modern societies need a legal system more than religious law because societies have become more complicated than before. Modern methods of governing require social sciences to manage the societies (Soroush, 1995). Soroush does not reject the participation of a religious leaders or *faqih* in government, but he emphasizes that they are the same as other participants. People can criticize them freely and remove them from power if they do not want them.

On the other hand, the state which is reduced to *fiqh* creates an ideological state, because it needs to legitimize and the structure of *fiqh* is the best instrument for governing. In this situation, religious states reject other aspects of religion except special interpretation of *fiqh* to respond their requirements (Soroush, 1993b, p. 11). The practical result of this interpretation is an official reading of religion and blocks the growth of religious knowledge by limiting religion to an ideological notion of *fiqh*. Soroush explains that we can see this form of governing in the

doctrine of *velayat faqih* that tries to lead the society with *fiqh*. He argues this form of political theory cannot be derived from *fiqh*. The theory is based on the historical and theological importance of the Imamate and prophecy and the *faqih's* relationship to them. This attention changes to the roles of *fiqh*, which is limited to legal issues: "...the debate concerning it (*velayat faqih*) is outside the scope of *fiqh*, because the questions of prophecy and Imamate are theological (*kalami*), not jurisprudential (*fiqhi*). Therefore the theory of *velayat faqih* as a theory of governance must be debated in the realm of theology, prior to jurisprudence" (Soroush, 1996b, p. 2).

## **Islam and Democracy**

The religious intellectual's notion of religious democracy relates to their ideas about the role of religion in the power structure. In their views the function of the state represents the public interests in the public sphere and manages the clashes in society. In this situation, the regime needs a model of management to control and solve the conflict of interest in a proper way. Religious intellectuals claim the only way to reach a peaceful society is through democracy (Alsaif, 2007). Soroush explains that the realm of religion relates to the man's relation with God and ethics, which emphasizes submission and altruism. In contrast, the sphere of the state is related to reason and material realities, which is display by pragmatism, cooperation and use of violence. In his view, religion and state pursue different goals, which caused two different forms of performance (Soroush, 1994a, p. 361).

Soroush criticizes the Islamic ideology and rejects its claims about the right of governing in the society. He notes that Islamic ideology distorts religion and blocks the development of religious knowledge. In this form of state, governments emphasize the religious right of people and improve the foundation of *fiqh* to apply this goal. He argues that the only alternative form of

religious government, which does not transform religion into an ideology or limit the growth of religious knowledge, is a democratic one. Soroush considers democracy a form of government that is compatible with political Islam (Soroush, 1993b). He stresses a religious society and explains there is no contradiction between a democratic rule and religious duties. In the religious society the government reflects public opinion and it may be color of religion. Citizens in this society do not worry that their government will break a law or interpret the opinion of the society to satisfy on its own desire. According to Soroush, if a government has both religious and democratic characters, it can protect the holiness of religion, and the rights of human. To protect the holiness of the religion the government should not advocate a particular conception of religion and the government should not choose religious values over human rights (Soroush, 1993a). He believes that the best focus for governance and their operation is dealing with human rights.

Soroush argues that the legitimacy in the democratic state relates to the wills of its citizens. A government based on the social capital of the people does not derive its legitimacy from an Islamic ideology. According to Soroush, unlike an ideological government, a democratic government is based on the public understanding and it cannot block the growth of religious knowledge. A democratic state opposes reducing religion to the *fiqh*, instead, it allows different interpretations and expansions of religious and non-religious branches of knowledge for society (Soroush, 1994b).

He proposes a new civil society that includes the religious dimension by considering the individual faith of believers. According to Soroush, this religious civil society does not need any Islamic norms from above to manage and control the religious society without approval of its members. The notion of civil society is popular among the reformist intellectuals in contrast to

*velayat faqih*, which the state dominates by Islamic leaders and enforces religious norms regardless of public opinion (Khosrokhavar, 2004).

Soroush makes it clear that religion is not confined to its formal interpreters. Islam is larger than the *Ulema's* Islam and richer than the *fiqh*. For Soroush, “the idea of democratic religious government” would shift the center of power from the *velayat faqih* to civil society and would transform the religious oligarchy into a democratic politics. For Soroush, democracy is a value system and a method of governance. As a value system, it supports human rights and public right to elect leaders, and defends public opinions of justice. As a method of governance, democracy includes the traditional notions of separation of powers, free elections, free and independent press, freedom of expression, freedom of political assembly, multiple political parties, and restrictions upon executive power (Vakili, 1996). He discusses that a government should be responsible for the public and this form of democracy helps to rationalize the political sphere (Soroush, 1994a).

Soroush supports a plural democracy in which the religious organization like other groups has the right and obligation to participate in politics. In this situation, the clergy are not eligible for any special privilege in the political sphere. On the concept of *velayat faqih*, Soroush's approach is based on his assumption that in the modern world a fundamental change occurred regarding concepts of rights and obligations in the political sphere. He believes the foundation of a democratic government does not threaten a religious society and its values. If the society supports the religion the democratic government must preserve the religion's role in government. If the society loses its relationship with religion, a government cannot force people to be religious; this concept is something that individuals choose for themselves (Soroush, 1994a). He argues it to be the trend of secularization; the democratic form of state can protect faith more

than government, which tries to apply the principle of *fiqh* for protecting them. He asserts religious government can only continue if its citizens maintain their faith:

“In a religious society and a religious government, everything, including its government and law, rests on the believers’ faith, and if this faith crumbles or changes, [the society’s] government and religious law will be no different than in secular civil and legal systems. Islamic *fiqh* also may be implemented in a faithless and secular society with [some] profit. But both the practical success of Islamic *fiqh* and its existence and attractiveness are wound together in the faith and belief of the faithful...” (Soroush, 1994b, p. 4).

Soroush describes the differentiation between the two models of religious societies. The first is a society that is only superficially religious and the other is truly religious society (Soroush, 1994b, pp. 315-317). In the superficially religious society the members only accept by their religious duties such as prayer or fasting, without focusing about the role of religion in their lives. Soroush explains these duties are important, but they do not reveal the depth of faith in the society. People may do their duties because of habit or obligation, but not for their depth of faith and love of God. It is true that this society is a religious society, but it does not have advanced public religious consciousness. In contrast, a truly religious society, members keep these obligations with honesty and they support the role of religion in their private and public lives (Soroush, 1994b).

The relationship between religion and democracy has some difficulties in relating his concept of social religious consciousness to practical political affairs. He tries to explain that social consciousness can protect society against secularization. Soroush emphasizes that a state

cannot guarantee the religious nature of society but society for itself can define the nature of government and social consciousness plays an essential role in this situation.

The best way for fortification of consciousness among scholars and people is to accept the need for change in religious knowledge. Soroush argues that this method needs to deny all monopolies of particular groups on religious knowledge. In this situation, the society of religious scholars plays an essential role to motivate this development.

According to Soroush, these developments in religious understanding and religious activity prompt and extend the religious consciousness among society. He emphasizes that the free interaction of these interpretations is an essential guarantor for improving religious consciousness. In this condition, consciousness among people can be powerful enough to supply their demand for coordination between political state and religious values.

## **Conclusion**

The growth of the religious intellectual's discourse implies the development of liberal inclinations in public sphere and led to structural changes during the 1980s. It supported modernity and tried to compromise some basic elements of revolutionary regime for increasing the stability of Islamic Republic.

Soroush tries to criticize the official interpretation of religion and supports some modern notions such as republicanism, democracy, plurality and power limitation. For him, Islam has the ability to reconcile with democratic discourse. In this situation, he supports a methodological approach, which relates to the modern world and scientific rationality. Soroush claims that Islam does not have a specific plan for governing and does not support a certain definition of Islam as a best model for public and private spheres (Alsaif, 2007).

Soroush supports the idea of reform in religion itself and also pursues “the reconstruction of social and religious institutions” (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, p. 157). His main concern has been to lessen the rigidity of Islamic thought and to reduce the resistance of regime against Western civilization (Hashemi-Najafabadi, 2011). He advocates the idea of reform in Islamic thought to reconcile it with the modern notion of human rights and democracy. For reaching this goal, Soroush uses hermeneutic methodology and applies it to religious epistemology and considers Quranic values and decrees in their historical context to establish a constant framework by using reason and collective human experience for the contemporary era (Hashemi-Najafabadi, 2011). He rejects any form of “intermediary between God and people” as well as “official, custodial religious establishment” (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, p. 161). In addition, he is opposed to “state religion” and so, unlike Ayatollah Khomeini, he emphasizes the independence of institution of religion from state. Soroush advocate freedom of religion and belief “within the framework of the democratic laws and regulations of society” (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, p. 162).

Soroush’s theory of the contraction and expansion of religious knowledge creates well framework “to bridge the gap between the divine nature of religion and its appropriation by humans” (Fletcher, 2005, p. 549), which helped reformists to apply his notion during the reformist government. The reformists used his theory and notions for expansion of concept of human rights and democracy within the system of Islamic Republic. It seems his discourse about the relation between Islam and authority shows a paradigm shift for solving the conflict between religion and state in the public sphere, which combines modern political thought with religious framework in the structure of power in Iran.

## **Chapter Four: Achievements and Failures of the Reform Movement**

### **Introduction**

After the war, there is no pretext for the regime to run the country with central power without enough attention to the public demand. It used compulsory behavior for eliminating opposition groups in the name of the revolutionary ideology. Iranian society expected to open the socio-political condition and struggled for political participation and a flexible civil society. These demands forced the regime to accept some reforms after the war. Rafsanjani implemented some economic reforms in the name of Policy of Adjustment, which aimed was socio-economic reform in the context of Islamic government. These reforms caused to decreased regime's control over the public sphere and led society to the socio-political reforms (Hoodfar and Sadr, 2010, 893). After economic reforms succession, reformists stepped forward and actively supported individual freedoms, defended the rule of law, and pursued social justice. This was the best time for reform movement to revive themselves after a period of repression and restriction.

The post-revolutionary period, particularly after the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, reformists started to criticize the regime's policy towards social and political issues. The failures of the regime in social policy helped the reform movement to openly criticize the status quo and challenged the structure of power and laws that related to the Islamic based ideology. In this situation, religious intellectuals started to pay more attention to the role of the people in society and tried to reinterpret the implementation of the shariah for adapting Islamic laws to improve the concept of civil society (Kunkler, 2004). Soroush was one of the most important religious intellectuals and was well known as the intellectual mind behind the reform movement in Iran. He tried to transform the ideology of the revolutionary regime into some kind

of Islamic democracy. Khatami and other reformist leaders used Soroush and other religious intellectual's framework and applied his notion in the context of Islamic Republic for reconciling between religion and state. Reformists tried to apply the notion of civil society and human rights in the period of presidency of Khatami by emphasizing on municipal elections, multi-party system, and reestablished regulations for the registration of NGOs.

This chapter explains the politics of the reform movement after the election of president Khatami in 1997, and considers the failures and achievements of reformist government in the socio-political sphere. For understanding the succession and failure of the reformist government we need to consider their policy and operations. Reformists supported a proliferation of socio-political discourses and changed the context of the revolutionary regime. Khatami and other religious intellectuals that belonged to religious organizations started to reinterpret the concept of political Islam with democratic and liberal values. Khatami's victory was the first step for reforming the structure of power which might lead to the transformation of the socio-political and economic liberalization, and maybe democratization of the country.

## **Loss of Hegemony**

The victory of the Iranian reform movement was the effect of a separation between the central power and some of its previous allies. It led to "a shift in allegiance of center and moderate groups from right to left" in the period of President Rafsanjani (Wells, 1999, p. 37). Many scholars believe what created a force of movement for the reformist victory was the division between traditional and modern groups and the threat of monopolization of power in the country by conservatives (Shakibi, 2010, p. 154). In discursive terms, the victory of the reform movement was an important step to the deconstructive development that led to the different

interpretation of social and political relations and created a new dialogue in the Iranian culture, politics, and society. Behravesht notes,

“*The 2nd of Khordad* (Reform movement) signified a profound shift in the Iranian nation’s socio-political life; a shift which, on the one hand, summoned Iranians to once again play an active role in the socio-cultural scene of their society, and on the other hand, blatantly brought the passivity and sterility of that period before their eyes. *The 2nd of Khordad* was the culmination as well as the start of a deconstructive transformation in our society. In spite of the sacredness of the pillars of the system remaining intact in this process of change and transformation, those moments and elements constructing and constituting the structure and sphere of society were subjected to a different reading and a new discourse in the domain of politics, society, and culture was shaped... The deconstructive movement of *2nd of Khordad* was the movement of incorporating the margin into the text (as its complement); it was the politics of attention to the overlooked and dismissed; therefore the multitude of its devotees were the “Other” of the Defined in the society, that is those who had been disregarded and had no place in the minds and hearts of political planners of the age” (Behravesht, 2014, p. 265).

This movement wanted to correct the ill-consequences resulting from the official interpretation of power discourse in the Islamic Republic and compromised revolutionary ideals. In this condition, the reformists emphasized structural changes of the prevailing ideological interpretation and political apparatuses of governance. To reach this goal, they started to reinterpret the whole social, political, and economic conditions which were related to the public sphere (Behravesht, 2014).

In 1997, Mohammad Khatami won the fifth presidential election, in spite of the fact that he was not supported by the regime. Yet, seventy percent of the voters and ordinary people supported Khatami (Nasr & Dabashi, 1989). Khatami in his reform movement represented the voice of the marginalized people, who were suppressed by the regime and wanted socio-political change. The social reform movements organized and supported this spirit of change under his leadership. The reform movement challenged the basic principle of order in the notion of Islamic government for the first time since 1979. His manifest of civil society and the rule of law confronted with the notion of Islamic government was the basis for the revolutionary regime (Arjomand, 2005). This development is closely associated with the thought of religious intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, and Mohsen Kadivar at the forefront of the reform movement in post-revolutionary Iran (Mirsepassi, 2000). They enjoyed support from a large number of followers among the relatively young and well-educated Iranians who are seeking to build a more open and democratic society in the post-revolutionary Iran. Activists, especially college students, organized discussion circles around the works of the leading religious thinkers, and religious organizations worked as communication and mobilization networks in the arrangement of public protests (Kamrava, 2008). In this situation, Khatami's triumph was the turning point to change the structure of power which led to the socio-political and economic liberalization, and led to the democratization of the country.

### **Khatami and His Conception of Islamic Democracy**

After the revolution, Khatami had several jobs such as a Parliament member, chief editor of *Kayhan* newspaper, minister of information and the director of the National Library. These positions and his attention in epistemology and the sociology of religion helped him to engage with intellectual discourses (Menashri, 2001). During his careers in the first decade of the

Islamic Republic, he was confronted with lots of intolerance and annoyance by conservatives who insisted on the application of the ideological interpretation of Islam and eliminated all other ideas and thought in political and cultural sphere. These experiences led him to think about the relation of religion and power in Islamic government. Khatami began his intellectual journey for considering the structure of power in Islamic thought and the lack of normative structure to promote a democratic discourse (Alsaif, 2007). He considers the trend of political thought in Islam and its growth under the impact of autocratic leaders (Alsaif, 2007, p. 117).

In his books, *From the World of City to the City of World* (1994) and *Fear of the Wave* (1997), Khatami explains the main challenges between the Western culture and the Islamic ideology in general and the religious Iranian identity in specifically. He suggests the possibility of mixing there two competing ideologies into a reasonable and stable preparation for the Islamic society. In this situation, he considers the force of Western cultural attack that may conduct the destruction of Islamic culture and fail of Islamic–Iranian identity. To solve this problem, he suggests using the constructive elements of Western liberalism and liberal democracy and adapts them to Islamic thought. In his view, modern Western political thought stresses some positive values such as individual and national autonomy and accountability of the state for protecting people’s rights. On the other hand, he believes Islam stresses religious values such as morality, justice, and social responsibility of individuals that Khatami considers as “the limitless materialism, atomization and hedonism” (Shakibi, 2010, pp. 150-151).

In addition, Khatami proclaims that legality is an important value for legitimacy of government. In his view, sovereignty of law is one of the main issues in his writings and speeches. In one of his speeches, Khatami declared:

“I have repeatedly said, and I particularly told the Supreme Leader that the Constitution is the highest institution of our regime. *Velayate faqih* is significant for it has been signified by the Constitution. Outside the Constitution, *velayate faqih* is just a theory like the many other theories of jurisprudence” (Khatami, 2000, p. 81).

Khatami used conceptual framework which prepared by religious intellectuals and tried to apply their notions in context of Islamic Republic. He stressed to find a way for reconciling between Islamic and Republican notion of system with emphasizing to return to the Constitution as the most important arbiter to control authoritarian character of regime. He focuses on responsibility, the rule of law, and the constitutional framework of political achievement to restrict the ideological interpretation of Islamic government. Khatami asserts the implementation of the Constitution and the limitation of power in the Constitution.

For Khatami, democracy is one of the most important aspects of modernity (Khatami, 2000, p. 285). In his view, most Iranians support modernity and democracy as political mechanisms of the modern world for the reestablishing of Iran as a great nation. Khatami rejects both the blind imitation of Western models as well as the total refusal of modern thoughts because they related to the others (Khatami, 2000, p. 285). He encourages Iranian intellectuals to critically study the main concept of Western thoughts as a basis for modern civilization such as liberalism, individuality, priority of rights, and rationality. According to Khatami, modernity characterizes a point in the long history of humanity, and Iranian intellectuals need to read and criticize them. He emphasizes dealing with modern thoughts as one of the solutions that can help us to improve our development and reliability (Khatami, 2000). For him democracy “is a human achievement bearing advantages and disadvantages and not a locked system to be taken all-or-none” (Alsaif, 2007, p. 126). Khatami claims that for establishing the model of democracy, we

need to define and interpret the main doctrines of the modern world in the local cultural ground. He explains “the localization of democracy aims to maintain its major theme, namely the sovereignty of people, and concurrently to enable the people to choose the appropriate methods to put it into action” (Khatami, 2000, p. 44). He argues the ultimate model of democracy and its principles depend on people’s expectations about the model of governing. He explains, due to the religious atmosphere of the country and public demand for reconciling between religion and politics, the best model for contemporary Iran is religious democracy which covers public interest and basis of revolution (Alsaif, 2007).

Khatami resisted against the existing interpretation of Islamic Republic, which tried to expand its total control over the public sphere in the name of Islamic principles. He fought against the expansion of the clerical hierarchy’s arbitrary who preferred the rule of Islam without enough attention to the republic principles of Islamic government (Duffy, 2000). For achieving these aims, Khatami tries to reinterpret the authority of the Islamic leader under the authority of the Constitution. In Khatami’s reform notion, the Iranian Constitution tries “to weigh both factors of powers and responsibilities equally,” that refers to a type of “*faqih*-guided democracy” (Khatami, 2000, p. 181), which led to control the authority of the Supreme Leader based on Constitutional law. Khatami emphasized:

“In this society, because man is who he is, he is respected and honorable, and his rights are observed. In an Islamic civil society, citizens can determine their own destiny, supervise their own affairs, and choose their own leaders. These political leaders are servants of the people and not their masters. They are answerable to the people, whom the almighty has put in charge of their own future” (Khatami, 2000).

For him, the Constitution was the main source of power and it is necessary for the appropriate working of social and political organizations, which would guarantee security and wealth for society. According to Khatami “The foundation of a progressive society, is security, and the foundation of security is for the society to become lawful and for the establishment of sustainable security in the society, the rule of law should become sustainable” (Behraves, 2014, p. 267). He emphasized respecting the rule of law and he tried to apply the notion of civil liberties within the legal basis of the Constitution. According to Khatami:

“We need organized political parties, social associations, and an independent free press to provide channels to convey to the state the people’s needs. The government must eliminate obstacles to the expansion of these channels... We have no other path except moderation and dialogue... and to people intending to use violence and harshness, even if they have good intentions, we say that violence and harshness will not work. The more independent and free the press, the greater their representation of public opinion. The press has two main roles: proper transfer of the demands and occurrences of the society to the authorities and the true transfer of the issues that the establishment engages in to the people” (Khatami cited in Shakibi, 2010, p. 233).

Khatami’s reformist discourse was a mixture of new modern thought and traditional elements. He tried to adapt and mix “tradition and modernity, civil society and *faqih*-ruled society, young and old forces, woman and man, earthly law and *Sharia*, want and value, and theocracy and democracy”. He used an inclusive, dialectic, and pluralistic discourse for these opposite positions within which the pillars of the Islamic Republic would be defined and protected and also found solutions for these complex issues (Behraves, 2014, p. 269).

Khatami believed that the Islamic Republic has important elements for developing a democratic character. He claimed we can prepare different interpretations for Islamic government which has the proper capability to reconcile with democracy. Khatami's demands for Islamic reformation, religious and social tolerance, and the creation of an open society improved the reformist paradigm on reformism and the reconciliation between Islam and democracy (Rivetti & Cavatorta, 2014). In this situation, Khatami and his cabinet focused on the dynamics of development from within the Islamic system and its organizations.

### **The Emergence of a Dissident**

Most of the scholars in Iran believed that Islamic reform as a framework helped oppositions to fight for human rights within an Islamic context and it was the best legitimate approach in Iran to change the structure of power and laws (Kunkler, 2004). Religious intellectuals tried to reconcile Islam with democracy and human rights. As I mentioned in chapter two, they attempted to lessen the conflicts between the Islamic law about human rights and democratic ideals. They struggled with the conservatives' interpretation over human rights in Islam. Conservatives insisted on saving the ideological discourse of the revolution but reformists wanted to reconcile it with the discourse of human rights and democracy (Mir-Hosseini, 2002). These scholars argued about the egalitarian spirit of many verses in the Quran and tried to show the paradox between true Islam and ideological reading of it as instruments for regime's interests. They explained some verses which were used by the regime to restrict people and push them to the private area. This contradicted with the egalitarian essence of Quran and needed to consider the historical context (Keddie, 2000).

These religious intellectuals were supported by a large number of followers among the relatively young and well-educated people who were seeking to build a more open and

democratic society in post-revolutionary Iran. Reformists organized discussion circles around the works of the leading religious thinkers (Bayat, 2007). These religious organizations worked as communication and mobilization networks in the arrangement of public protests. In this sphere, the concept of human rights and gender equality were revived and increased.

After winning the election, President Khatami began governing the country with a reformist cabinet which brought great hope to civil society for the expansion of democratic politics. Khatami and other religious intellectuals attempted to develop models of democracy that allowed some combination of religion and state arrangements to coincide with human rights. In this atmosphere, religious intellectuals established a critical framework for understanding the tension between human rights and religion (Arjomand, 2002). Religious intellectuals tried to reinterpret human rights more liberally than the conservatives. They explained that Islam supports equality between men and women, and some inequalities in the context of the Constitution about women is rooted to the ideological and patriarchal readings of Islamic texts by regime (Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010). At the political level Khatami emphasized the representative and republican structures of the system, while the conservatives stressed the authority of the Supreme Leader as representative of the Hidden Imam's authority. This deviation caused debates around the concept of the republican and the Islamic character of the Constitution. Reformists accused the conservative part of the regime of wanting to coup against the republic (Katouzian, 2010).

Religious intellectuals argued about the basis of Islamic government in public discourse. They tried to redefine some elements of Islamic framework to improve human rights, gender equality, and public participation (Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010). In this atmosphere, religious intellectuals investigated how the state could create a warmer and more welcoming environment

for new claims of public participation and human rights. They tried to reconcile them with their democratic and pluralist ideals.

In this atmosphere, the faded civil society was revived and increased. The reform movement created a new opportunity to voice the various views of different political notions and developed an alternative culture of critique and dialogue. A new political culture based on Islamic reformism and modernism was born, and the state political economy tried to make a balance between market liberalism and social justice. On the foreign policy, this new state tried to establish constructive relations with the regional actors as well as Western powers. Khatami's conception of dialogue among civilizations was presented at the global level. These changes reshaped a new perspective and identity of Iran among other countries. The prominent Iranian foreign policy making identified a "pivotal synergy" in Khatami's worldview between domestic reforms and international peace (Ramazani, 1998, p. 177). This is the major reason why his ideas about democracy and dialogue resonated with the Iranian youth, who formed his greatest support base among the electorate.

### **Reform Movement: Its Achievements and Failures**

Most of the scholars emphasize to the role of civil society for changing the structure of power and successfully expanding the democratization process (Rivetti & Cavatorta, 2014). These scholars focused on student activism, democratic transition and consolidation. They assumed that the development of civil society in authoritarian contexts had an essential role for reforming the structure of power because it puts pressure on the regime to gradually accept the demands of organized institutes for open society and admit the process of liberalization and democratization (Rivetti & Cavatorta, 2014). Two important aims which were essential to the reform movement were expansion of the civil society and the implementation of democratic

services, such as NGOs, press, and development of Constitution law as the highest authority. This form of changing happened because people expected democracy and wanted a different form of governing which could not force any type of autocratic or arbitrary rule. Instead, they looked forward to the new form of governing that emphasized to the rule of law and its equal application. After the war Iranian society started to struggle for political participation and flexible civil society. Reformists supported individual freedoms, defended the rule of law and government responsibility, and pursued social justice (Ramazani, 1998). For reaching to these goals, Khatami emphasized to reform in the structural and institutional level which helped to improve the role of the people. Therefore, the reformist paradigm emphasized the increase of political participation which led people to increase their role in society.

These reformist groups wanted to redefine human rights in Islamic interpretation and articulate the new method of Islamic interpretation for solving this problem. In this way they challenged the contemporary pillars of Islamic theology about human rights and accused this framework which does not give proper attention to the time, place, and social context for regulating the Islamic laws.

## **Struggle for Human Rights and Gender Equality**

Women and the youth had an essential role to play Khatami's win in the 1997 presidential election. During his campaign, Khatami several times emphasized the role of women and the young people as important members of the reform campaigns whose goals and demands must be valued by the government. Khatami highlighted women's political, legal, and social rights as one of the main priorities of his administration. He advocated for women's participation in his cabinet and other executive officers to support women's role in society and structure of power. Reformist government, with the help of reformist members of parliament tried to pass different

bills to legitimize women's right in the public and private space. He asserted to the rights of women as a vital part of society and declared for greater participation of women in society which was new in the political sphere of Iran (Mir-Hosseini, 2002).

To support reformist government, reformist activists and lawyers, who supported human rights, tried to publish articles and spread these discussions about Islamic laws for challenging religious notion of regime from a humanitarian perspective. As Afsaneh Najmabadi had shown, the coalition of reform activists and religious intellectuals on human rights had been novel which led them to interpret official texts from the outlook of people's experiences, demands, and desires (Razavi, 2006).

On one hand, these reformist opposition groups and religious intellectuals tried to expand the discussion about the global human rights and women's rights conventions like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). On the other hand, they emphasized the new interpretation of Islamic sources that supported human rights. They challenged the monopoly of the regime for defining Islamic based laws and its official reading of Islamic laws about the role of people in public sphere. For instance, their insistence in approving CEDAW caused serious discussions in the structure of power about women's rights and affected the attitude of some parts of regime for the notion of gender equality and need for reform in this realm. Reformist government and parliament supported international human rights order and were involved in discussions that related to approved of CEDAW and emphasized its importance for Iranian society. This progress created the opportunity for feminists to declare their demands to the high level of power and pushed at least some part of regime to seriously consider human rights as a main issue that needed to be implemented. They tried to explain how global human rights trends were related to Iran's

conditions (Keddie & Matthee, 2002). These debates affected the parliament and government and pushed them to accept the ratification of some of the global human rights in 2002. Reformist government helped reform groups and argued that human rights should be ratified without any excuse. The parliament approved human rights but the Guardian Council as unelected institution of regime strongly resisted against this demand and rejected it in the name of protecting Islamic principles. This Council criticized the parliament and reformist government for supporting this ratification (Razavi, 2006).

In this situation, feminist movements attempted to increase knowledge of women about their legal rights and they advocated protective legislation for women to improve their economic, political, social, and legal status. They also encouraged women from all parts of the country to participate in public politics and social activities. On the other hand, reformist government and parliament tried to improve rights for women by enacting supportive laws in divorce, domestic violence, greater equality in inheritance, and unemployment. They attempted to ban stoning and gave approval of the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Osanloo, 2008). In the political sphere, many reformist organizations joined forces together to push reformist government to accept human rights in political institutions.

### **The Formation and Expansion of Parties**

Khatami's victory in 1997 enabled some important political openings for the public sphere that were vital for intensifying the civil society in post-revolutionary era. Khatami's administration started for the first time to perform municipal elections for city councils, which were essential for developing of public participation in the socio-political arena and paved the way for the growth of a multi-party system (Kunkler, 2008).

Khatami applied the notion of political participation by people with his execution of the local election for Local Councils. His reformist government held the first local election as a part of the reformist program for expanding democracy. After he won the election for presidency, Khatami insisted on the implementation of Constitution specially those which related to participation of people in political sphere. He tried to implement the Articles 100-106 of the Constitution which were related to contribution of people in regional and local affairs. According to Articles 100-106 of the Constitution, “regional and local affairs are to be administered by locally-elected councils” (Alsaif, 2007, p. 100). According to article 7 of the Constitution, these local councils are the main councils for decision-making and administrative arm of the state in local level. The council’s responsibilities included of electing mayors, supervising the activities of municipalities; study of social, cultural, educational, health, economic, and welfare requirements of their constituencies (Algar, 1980). These bills were passed by the parliament in 1982 but regime postponed these laws because the revolutionary leaders worried that they could not control these forms of participation during the first years of revolution (Alsaif, 2007). Khatami emphasized the implementation of this part of the Constitution as an important step for breaking the domination of central power, and increased the participation of people in public sphere. For reformist, Local Councils were important not only for increasing the participation of people in socio-political area, but also these forms of participation provided a useful experience for helping ordinary people become involved in socio- political skills and thought how to prepare for political positions at the national level. Local Councils helped ordinary people and minorities participate in the political process and provided an opportunity for contributing in the decision making (Tajbakhsh, 2000).

Moreover, the regime did not have the confidence for allowing the founding of political parties and resisted providing official permission until the mid-1990s. As I explained in chapter two the political parties were inactive because the revolutionary leaders worried about instability of new regime during power struggle between different groups which participated in the revolution and the war with Iraq. The revolutionary leaders thought the country needed integration and unification, and political parties increased the conflicts between different groups and people. The rise of the reform movement in 1997 helped the public sphere to come out from inactivity and supported the idea that people had the essential role for changing the socio-political sphere of the regime by using the power of public opinion (Asayesh, Halim, Jawan, & Shojaei, 2011). Official statistics demonstrate that until May 1997, Iran had six political parties with official permission. After the victory of reformist government, they increased to 114 parties and 171 interest groups which thirty five organizations pertained to religious minorities. Furthermore, until 1997, Iran had seventy five official NGOs which increased to 2500 NGOs in 2003 (Alsaif, 2007).

### **The Press Improvement**

One of the great achievements of the reform movement is related to the establishment and expansion of reformist press to improve the notion of new interpretations of Islam in the public sphere. As Moghadam emphasized, the reform movement in Iran could reconcile reformist ideas with new interpretations of Islam. These activists and scholars tried to publish their thoughts and ideas about new interpretations of Islam and how they wanted to reconcile between human rights and Islamic laws (Kunkler, 2004). This caused an increase in the level of understanding among people and challenged the official reading of Islam with the public sphere.

During the reformist government, the independent press played a key role in information's the people about the idea of reform movement and the problems of inequalities and exclusion, which were related to the ideological reading of revolution with conservatives. These magazines pushed society to support people against these restrictions and led them to mobilize themselves for resistance against injustice and violence.

Reformist journalists were the most important opposition organizations against ideological interpretations of Islamic Republic and post-revolutionary laws. They criticized regime's ideology about the Islamic government and the Constitution laws and presented the idea of religious intellectuals' as an alternative for official interpretation of Islamic government in their press. Some of these magazines were very popular among people and mostly read by the middle-class who belonged to reformist organizations (Kunkler, 2004). This popularity of reformist press helped the reform movement to spread their notions and standpoints about the structural equality and the Constitution law in the post-revolutionary Iran. Most of these journals were independent from regime and spoke out against people's restriction and oppression. These magazines discussed ideological concepts against the people in public discourse and published critical articles about civil society and human rights in the modern world and the role of the judicial system to protect these rights. Most writers argued about reinterpretations of the *shariah* and other religious texts and the importance of reconciliation between religion and modern world values (Amirpur, 1999). According to Jalaipour, "most of these mass Media not only have religious concerns, but also attempt to critique the performance of cultural, religious, political, and economic institution from the point of view of modernity. Instead of calling for a revolution, they all also aim at reform and improvement of current conditions" (Jalaeipour, 2000, pp. 3-4).

Khatami's government tried to expand the independent press and issued a number of new licenses for mass media. The number of official mass media was around 62 at the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, but it reached 850 in 1998. According to Bayat, Khatami's reformist government accepted 2,228 new applications including 174 new dailies for new publications (Bayat, 2007) which showed vital growth under the reform government. In 1999, newspapers, for the first time, reached circulation digits of 1,000,000 (Jalaeipour, 2000). In this situation, conservatives and the unelected part of regime felt threatened and tried to restrict their effectiveness by closing down these newspapers and magazines several times by judiciary. To deal with this situation, the reformist Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance supplied new licenses which permitted its journalists to re-open the newspaper in different names (Kunkler, 2008).

Reformist movements used these magazines to improve reform organizations in Iranian society and encouraged people and oppositions to be an active member in the political, cultural and religious life of their communities. They believed these active participations of people forced regime to change and accept equal society for all men and women with different ideas and beliefs. With these organizations, reformists wanted to increase the network for educating and mobilizing people in different classes and areas. They used these organizations to support women against gender inequality, to create coalitions with other reformist organizations, and to lobby within the political system for improving the status of citizens in public and private area (Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010).

## **Economic Reforms**

Khatami's administration aimed to reform the country's ruined economy that had been suffering from years of mismanagement and disorganization. The economy of Iran was known

for a high level of inflation and unemployment, and its main problem related to the lack of equal wealth distribution. Khatami determined that Iran needed a vital political strategy for solving these problems and reaching to the essential economic reform and development. He claimed that to solve this problem, the economics of the country need to be released from state control and protect from the intervention of regime in the name of social justice and fair distribution. Therefore, his reformist cabinet moved toward supporting greater foreign investment, efficient resource management, elimination of monopolies, enhancement of market competition, and effective privatization (Tazmini, 2009, pp. 75-76).

To reach these goals, Khatami's government tried to support civic business by permitting it to work with foreign companies in order to perform some of the main projects in the mother industries and large scale businesses such as oil industries, factory building, dams and other infrastructural projects. These plans helped his reformist government extend the liberalization of policies and development of privatization. However, Khatami's government knew that a complete shift towards a market economy could not be attained without compensating the legal and cultural obstacles which were related to the revolutionary paradigm. In the revolutionary paradigm, these forms of privatization and foreign investment are related to exploitation of Western countries. Article 44 of the Constitution emphasizes that:

“All large-scale and mother industries, foreign trade, major minerals, banking, insurance, power generation, dams, and largescale irrigation networks, radio and television, post, telegraph and telephone services, aviation, shipping, roads, railroads and the like; all these will be publicly owned and administered by the state” (Algar, 1980).

The reformist government tried to break the legal stalemate by passing a new law to encourage and support foreign investment, establish private banks, insurances, and large industrial firms, despite the opposition of the Constitutional Council (Alsaif, 2007, p. 84). These plans were a major step for changing the economic sphere by growing the program of privatization and permitting foreign and private companies for investment in mother industries and large scale business. The plan was passed by the reformist parliament but rejected by the Constitutional Council.

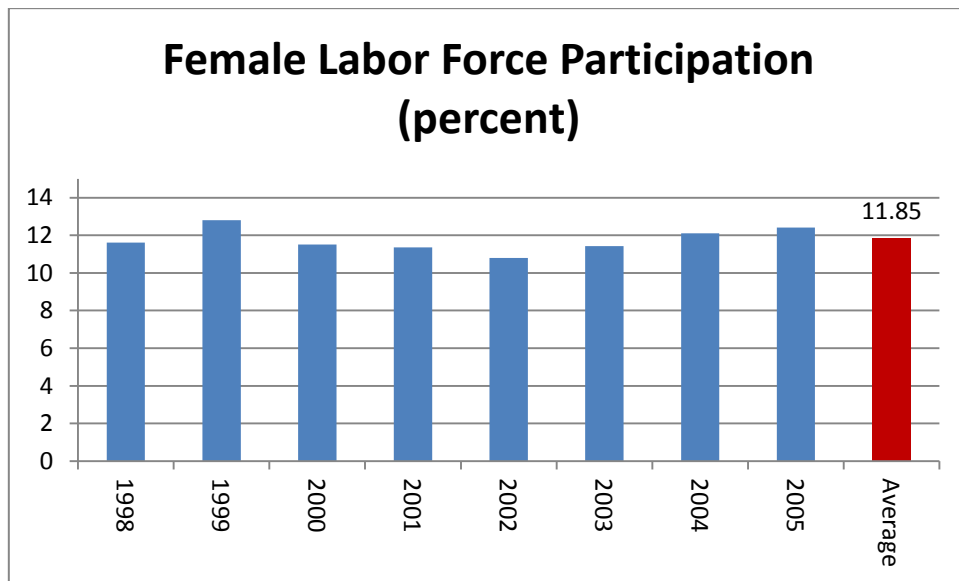
### **Opportunities for Civil and Political Society**

The reformist movement has succeeded in some of its goals and expanded human rights in the public sphere. One of its achievements was changing the marriage laws to support women's rights. They also passed the Family Protection Law and allowed courts to return back the wealth of women during marriage to the women when they want to divorce. Moreover, they succeeded in limiting official polygamy by emphasizing a new interpretation of Islamic laws. They forced regime to limit the polygamy by utilizing the courts to protect the Family Protection Law. In this situation and as a result of these struggles, male judges were more aware of women's rights, and for the first time since the Islamic revolution, women were admitted as judges (Kunkler, 2004).

In education, reformists pushed the government to provide equal access to all fields and instruments in the systems of education. Their attempt increased the number of female students to 62% in the undergraduate level, and one third of all doctoral degrees are related to women (Kunkler, 2004). These reformist movements pushed parliament to pass bills that prevent father or husband from limiting their daughters or wives from working, and it led to an increase in the number of females in the labor force in Iran. The female labor force participation (FLP) is quite low in Iran. During the Khatami administration (1997-2005), the average FLP was 11.85%. It

was about 11.62% in 1998 at the beginning of Khatami’s presidency, and it reached 12.41% by 2005. These numbers show that the Khatami administration improved the situation of women in terms of employment, however, based on all attempts have been done regarding to this issue, the improvement was quite small. Figure, shows the trend of FLP in this period.

**Figure 2: Percentage of Female Labor Force Participation (1997-2005)**



Source: Iran Household Expenditure and Income Survey Data, Statistical Center of Iran, Author’s Calculation

During the reform movement, student organizations had an essential role to play development and expansion of reform ideas during the Khatami’s presidency (Rivetti & Cavatorta, 2014). Khatami’s reformist government invigorated a large number of students which were inactive during stabilization of regime and in the name of the Cultural Revolution. This development was intensified by the entering of a new generation of student activists into the political sphere. These students were well informed about trends of socio-political changes during the post-revolutionary era and wanted to increase their participation in public sphere

(Mashayekhi, 2001). In this situation, the number of student organizations increased to 2500 (Alsaif, 2007). These students' organizations involved with other reformist groups such as labor and women's organizations. These coalitions helped reform movement to expand their discourse and attracted other students in the name of general demand for democracy.

Reformist campaign struggled to increase the strength and persistence of the ordinary people to confront with the conservative regime and defend their human rights (Kunkler, 2004). In this process, the reformist government helped them to challenge conservative's legislative processes and make encourage growth by providing some opportunities for them.

### **Consequences of the Power Struggles**

While Khatami won the election and more than 70% supported his reformist movement, the unelected part of the regime tried to weaken his government by using different tactics. After conservatives lost the election they tried to increase their monopoly over the unelected part of regime to confront the reformist government (Razavi, 2006). These unelected institutions generally appointed by the Supreme Leader Khamenei, succeeded in fighting against demands for greater respect to human rights and gender equality. As scholars have mentioned, the coercive apparatus is central to understanding the regimes' durability (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Khatami's administration was confronted with a lack of control over the state radio and television organization whose head was appointed by and accountable to the leadership office. Another main obstacle was the control of the parties and mass media by the judiciary, which actively worked to maintain the status quo and check the politics of change by using punishment against reformists. Moreover, military services which were led and controlled by the Supreme Leader and Expediency Council, (which was improved after the death of Khomeini), were more active to undermine the main body of the reform movement (Kunkler, 2004). They tried to limit

the reformist governments' relationship with the opposition groups and control the power of mobilization that Khatami and his followers wanted to use as an important tool for changing the situation. On the other hand, conservatives tried to restrict people's roles and rights in society and pushed them into the private space, but people refused these limitations and tried to save their role in the public sphere. They resisted against their elimination the regime by using civil disobedience tactics and found new ways for avoiding elimination (Esfandiari, 1997).

### **The Judiciary and Authoritarian Consolidation**

The conservatives used the Constitution and the unelected part of the regime to restrict and control the reform movement in the name of protecting Islamic principles. They used effective judiciary to repress dissents. For instance, on March 18, 2001, the Tehran Revolutionary Court ordered for the closing of the religious-nationalist Iran Freedom Movement because they recognized that this party wanted to weaken the principal of the Islamic Republic. The Court also ordered the arrest of many reformist activists and leaders of the reform movements around the country in the name of acting against national security and associating with the subversive groups (Kunkler, 2008). The conservatives arbitrarily used the Constitutional and the judiciary for controlling the reformist government and expanding the power of the unelected part of the regime for consolidating the authoritarian aspect of the regime and restricting the public sphere (Kunkler, 2008).

Guardians Council as an appointed institute used its constitutional power of "approbatory supervision" (*nizarat-e estisvabi*) to control and monitor all aspects of elected offices such as government and parliament to make sure that the executive part of the regime acts based on official interpretation of Islamic criteria which the regime used to manage and eliminate its oppositions. The Guardians Council also has the power to approve the authorizations of

candidates for elected office. Article 99 of the Constitution says: “The Guardians Council has the responsibility of supervising the elections of the Assembly of Experts for Leadership, the President of the Republic, the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and the direct recourse to popular opinion and referenda” (Algar, 1980). This controlling power helped the conservative part of the regime to use the Constitution as a tool for monitoring the public sphere and suppressing any development to the democracy in Iran (Samii, 2001).

They used these forces such as the security apparatus, the Revolutionary Guards, and the *Basij* militias because the Constitution allows them in the name of protecting revolution. They used the judiciary system for controlling and eliminating the opposition groups that supported the reform movement. They prosecuted and imprisoned many reformist activists and religious intellectuals by the judiciary system which was set up for this purpose in the period of the reform movement. They blocked most of Khatami’s legislative reforms such as freedom of the press and ratification of CEDAW with legal authority provided by the Constitution. For instance, Guardian Council, which takes its authority from Supreme Leader, rejected many reform bills in the name of protecting Islam and the spirit of revolution (Razavi, 2006).

Moreover, the Iranian reformist discourse was not a constant dialogue and it did not have a homogeneous structure in the domain of a sovereign nation-state (Kinnvall & Lindén, 2010). The broad spectrum of reformist groups also reflected different definitions of important issues and topics, especially about human rights and gender equality. They did not have unity to apply their notions to the government and other parties and groups. This lack of coordination and integration affected their performance to resist conservative parts of the regime and establish more a tolerable form of governing. These differentiations and disputes affected reformists’ abilities to pursue their main plan for human rights and gender equality, which was needed for

democratization of the Constitution and political institutions (Razavi, 2006). On the other hand, they feared improving their systematic change; because they worried that popular mobilization could lead to a radicalization of the reform movement. These behaviors affected the public sphere and caused discontent among oppositions about why the reformist government was not able to find an alternative way to change the structure of power (Halliday, 2005).

Finally, changes in the world after 9/11 affected the reforms in Iran when the US president claimed that Iran threatens world security and is part of “the axis of evil”. In the period of Khatami, Iran tried to cooperate with the US on in various subjects to normalize the relations between those countries by supporting the US intervention in Afghanistan and by condemning the 9/11 attacks. At this time, the reformist activists helped Khatami’s government to pursue a normalization of relations with the US. Some scholars interpreted these strategies of Iranian reformists as an opportunity for both side to increase their cooperation and relationships (Leverett & Mann, 2006). Despite the opportunities for policy makers in both sides to increase the level of relations, cooperation became indefensible due to the Bush administration, which emphasized for a more forceful method to pressure Iran. In this situation, conservative part of the regime that controls the unelected and military part of regime used the US’s hostile rhetoric and behavior toward Iranians undermine the reformist government (Poulson, 2009). These behaviors helped conservative parts of the regime strengthen their notion in the structure of power to militarize and confront opposition groups. These confrontations of the US and its allies with Iran caused weakness of democratic forces (Razavi, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

In fourth chapter I consider the social movement coalitions and their effects on a democratic transition and the reasons for its achievements and failures in Iran. Some of the

religious intellectuals have often been referred to as the intellectual minds behind the reform movement in Iran that guided and supported the public sphere to the election of president Khatami in 1997 and for several years emphasized the desire to transform the regime into some kind of Islamic democracy. Although reformists' projects succeeded in creating and expanding municipal elections, a multi-party system, and reestablished regulations for the registration of NGOs, they seemed defeated to apply the notion of civil society and human rights in the period of the presidency of Khatami (Gheissari, 2010). The reasons for this failure are related in the specific nature of the Iranian political regime that is able to efficiently use law and the judiciary to control and subvert oppositional sphere.

The reformist campaigns were developed by the reformist government, reformist parliamentarians, and developing critical magazines, but they could not continue their reform approach because they lost their confidence in the reformists' ability to change the socio-political condition of their country. Despite the complicated religious discourses on democratic government and religious intellectuals' effort to reconcile faith and reason, religious intellectuals cannot present a clear alternative for the current regime. They tried to develop a new sphere to define religious truth and the relationship between religion and state, but their alternative could not be accomplished in the absence of successful coalition among the opposition groups (Cronin, 2013). However, the decline of the reform movement happened despite the fact that the ideas of religious intellectuals were still up in the air. They were not able to continue to mobilize people and organize a reform movement. This chapter examined the politics of the reform movement, and why it won repeatedly in elections, but why these electoral victories did not continue into political ones. In sum, the Iranian regime was established during a violent and ideological

struggle and it led to the creation of an elite regime and a coercive apparatus to defend the regime against the threat of reform movement and opposition groups.

## Conclusion

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 succeeded in defeating the previous regime and led to the rise of the hybrid regime in the contemporary history of the Middle East (Arjomand, 2005, p. 27). Ayatollah Khomeini, as a founding father of Islamic government, tried to compromise between religion and politics during the revolution in Iran. He formulated the theory of *velayat faqih*, which tried to adjust the traditional doctrine of Shia authority to the modern state. He used some modifications in the realm of religion as well as some of the values of the modern world to reconcile between Islamic tradition and modern political thought. This was important for revolutionary leaders to reestablish a model of governance, which included the major doctrines of democracy and the principles of the religious society.

Khomeini and his followers were confronted with a difficult process to create harmony between institutions of religion and political organizations. The revolutionary paradigm tried to solve this problem and there was some progress such as the increase of social justice, wealth distribution, and equality of opportunity among people, but there were substantial issues that are still unresolved. From the beginning of the revolution scholars engaged with some significant issues such as the source of sovereignty, the function of the state, the religious society, and constitutional rights which are related to the modern world. Ayatollah Khomeini started to reinterpret the traditional Islamic thought and offered some solutions for reconciling between religion and politics. However, these issues need lots of theoretical and epistemological work to create a sustainable framework for reconciling religious values and modern principles.

This study attempted to analyze the failures, achievements, and some of the possible political ramifications of the presidency of Khatami by focusing on the religious intellectual

discourse in the context of the intellectual trajectory of Islamic thought from the revolutionary period to the post-revolutionary reformist phase. The purpose of the study was to examine the role of the post-revolutionary intellectuals after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. This thesis has a three-fold purpose: 1- to present an analysis of the historical processes which resulted in the formation and growth of religious intellectuals in Iran, 2- to consider the Iranian intellectuals ideology for responding to the socio-economic and political hegemony of Islamic government, and 3- to investigate the social position and structural function of modern intellectuals in the post-revolutionary period.

The development of reconciliation between Shiism and democracy in post-revolutionary Iran can be separated into two parts. The first part was accomplished during the first decade of the Islamic Republic, which tried to rule out the religious principles in the structure of power. The regime used religious values to legitimize the political power and resolve the state's need for governing. The first trend was led by religious leaders who emphasized the Islamic ideology and anti-imperialist characteristic of Islamic revival in Iran. I explain that the lack of a proper ideology and the heterogeneity of the revolutionary elites after the revolution caused conflicts, which led to the failure of the revolutionary paradigm. These problems intensified with war and internal conflicts. The challenge between modern values and religious principles led religious intellectuals to question many of the assumptions of the Islamic government, which was obvious for the revolutionary leaders. These criticisms were spread to other areas such as socio-economic, politics, and culture.

The second part is related to the religious intellectuals and reformists who criticize the official interpretation of Islam and emphasize the republican character of the regime. They defended human rights, gender equality, and civil society in the context of Islamic Republic.

There are some openings in Khomeini's concept of Islamic government that made opportunities for religious intellectuals and reformists to interpret his ideas in different ways. I consider the theory by Soroush, an important intellectual mind behind the reform movement and founding father of the reformation process, in a religio-political sphere as an alternative for revolutionary ideology. He tries to criticize the official interpretation of religion and supports some modern notions such as republicanism, democracy, plurality and power limitation. For him, Islam has the ability to reconcile with democratic discourse. The reformists used his theory and notions for the expansion of concepts of human rights and democracy within the system of Islamic Republic.

This process was improved by the ordinary people who belong to the middle class and young generations. They wanted to reconcile the Islamic government with democracy through a comprehensive amendment to the religious basis. The end of the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 provided the chance for the reformists and intellectuals to challenge some basic ideas of the Islamic government. This situation helped the pragmatic leaders of the revolution to guide the Islamic Republic to a realistic model and focus on the source of legitimacy. With this process, they tried to protect the role of God as a source of legitimacy for a governing system and at the same time move to a popular sovereignty. These changes provided the conditions for the emergence of reformist ideas, which tried to reconcile religion with modernity.

The reformist trend was prompted by the failure of the revolutionary paradigm to manage the public sphere after the end of the war and the death of Khomeini, which led to change the circumstances and increase the expectations and demand from citizens. The new generation born after the revolution was unsatisfied with the post-revolutionary's ideology of Islamic government and pushed the regime to accept their demands for social transformation. This demand coincided

with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which condemned the totalitarian and centralized political systems.

The paradigm shift happened when the revolutionary paradigm could not meet the socio-economic demands. In this situation, the rise of the reform movement provided the alternative for solving the problems and prepared a new socio-political agenda, which deviates from the ideological paradigm and includes the principles of ruling, religiosity, and socialization. Some scholars explain the advent of the reform movement as the second republic or second revolution (Alsaif, 2007). These developments prepared a framework for reformists to expand the notion of civil society and human rights in the context of the Islamic Republic, which led to expansion of political parties and independent media on one hand and expansion of religious intellectuals' discourse on the other hand.

After the victory in the political sphere, reformists were able to apply their reform notions to the structure of power. They achieved limited success but were confronted with some trouble which led them to fail in their reform plans. They could not solve the problem of authoritarianism in the regime, which caused some failures in their plans to continue the democratization process in the context of the Islamic Republic. Reformists seem to have been defeated in their efforts to apply the notion of civil society and human rights in the period of the presidency of Khatami. Despite their failure to develop the process of democratization, the reformists succeeded in achieving some of their main goals in the socio-political realm, such as running the municipal elections, a multi-party system, and reestablishing regulations for the registration of NGOs (Gheissari, 2010).

For evaluating the achievements and failures of reformist government I examine its functions in different areas. On the pragmatic level, the reformist government could not apply its pragmatic notions for changing the structure of power because unelected institutions resisted this form of change and blamed them for deviating from the principles of the revolution. The reformists requested that democratization be pursued in the context of Islamic Republic in the framework of the reform movement, and they did not want to act as revolutionary groups. They believed that the existing regime had the potential ability to transition to democracy and had the proper institutions to apply the democratic system. They supposed that the Constitution of the Islamic Republic had capability to harmonize with the doctrine of a democratic system. In this situation, the reformists' main duty was to redefine the doctrines, characters, and institutional structure in the context of the Islamic Republic to allow the public sphere to choose and establish their preferred form of government.

In this thesis, I emphasize religious discourse as an important feature of the reformist paradigm to admit liberal democracy and create a framework for resolving the problem between religion and politics in the modern world. Religious intellectuals confronted questions like the religious character of the regime, the source of sovereignty in Islamic Republic, and the role of the people in the structure of power in Islamic government. They used a religious framework, a new method of interpretation, and modern political thought for answering these questions. They suggested religious based democracy as an alternative to provide a practical solution for the deadlock in the structure of power to the democratization in Iran.

Considering the trend of reform movement in Iran shows the progress in democratization of the country compared to how it was in the 1970s. The reformist government era demonstrates a tangible development in the course of democratization, despite the obstruction from the

conservative part of regime which tried to hinder the process of reform movement (Alsaif, 2007). With all this, the reform movement needs much works to reconcile between religion and politics, and established the democratic systems.

This thesis has addressed the politics of the reform movement after the election of president Khatami in 1997, and considers the failures and achievements of reformist government in the socio-political sphere. Democracy is a long process which often contains difficulties and failures. In my thesis I try to explain the process of reformation and democratization in Iran which is possible because the main foundations on structural and institutional level have been prepared in the socio-political sphere. Reformists tried to expand awareness in the public sphere which caused progress on the cultural and structural levels and led the regime to accept the gradual institutionalization. The paradigm shift from the revolutionary paradigm to the reformist happened because the ordinary people became aware of their role and religious intellectuals prepared a proper framework for changing the structure of power (Rakel, 2009). However, the reform movement confronted some problems which were related to the Constitution, culture, elite structure, and other institutions to be applied in post-revolutionary era (Alsaif, 2007).

Today Iranian Shiism stands at the gates of historic doctrinal changes. There is a challenge between religious conservatism and religious reformism. The religious conservatism supports the theoretical assumptions and the institutional arrangements of *velayate faqih* and the religious reformism pursues changes of the interpretations of the Islamic doctrines and notions. Three decades after the success of the Islamic Revolution, the religious conservatives resist against the reformation of the Shia doctrine while the religious reformists put some distance between themselves and the conservatives and admit the undergoing fundamental changes. The reformists try to develop a new domain to define the religious truth and the relationship between religion

and state. However, their alternative could not lead to an accomplishment in the absence of a successful coalition among the opposition groups.

The religious reformists' alternative has popularity among the middle class but it suffers from some shortcomings. One limitation of the reformists' alternative is that some of their main arguments are too abstract and too philosophical to be easily understood by most of ordinary people in Iran. In addition, the arrangement of the reformist movement and its relationship with the Islamic government is problematic. In this context, the reformists share some similarities with the Islamic government both theoretically and ideologically which obligate them to play in a framework accepted by the regime (Kamrava, 2008).

Many critics try to challenge the reform movement on a wide range of theoretical and historical issues. Traditional *Ulama* argues that religious intellectuals have a poor understanding of both Islam and democracy and they cannot reconcile them. They discuss that in the democratic state citizens forget their religious legacy and lose their faith as a vital element for a religious society (Vakili, 1996). They accused of the religious intellectuals and the reformists that they want to undermine people's Islamic faith.

At the different level, some critics have interrogated the Soroush's approach towards reconciling his understanding of Islam with democracy. They argue that Soroush emphasizes on the role of social consciousness for establishing of political structures and pays little attention to the institutional foundations of a religious democratic state. According to these critics, public attention to the religion and expansion of understanding of Islam among people could not provide the grassroots of a religious government. They emphasize that society require to establish the religious institutions. They believe his notion about religious democracy is

theoretically and historically weak. It is theoretically weak because it does not present an institutional mechanism for translating the public beliefs into the political structures. It is also historically weak because many religious societies in the contemporary world do not have religious democratic states. This situation shows that a social religious consciousness is an insufficient guarantor of democracy or that these societies are only superficially religious (Vakili, 1996).

The reformists have a claim that the context of Islamic Republic has a good potential to change into a democratic political system but there is a long way for reestablishing the new model and needs lots of theoretical and practical works to arrive at that point. They need to redefine the Islamic Republic's doctrine, Constitution, and institutions of the political system for harmonizing with the democratic forms of government and socialization. Moreover, reformists need to expand their dialogue with the conservative part of the regime to solve the problems of the authoritarianism character of the Islamic government. They should actively involve to the discourse of civil society and participation of people against any inclination of conservative part to discrimination and suppression which are intrinsic in their framework and interpretation of Islamic government theory. In the Islamic Republic both Islam and Republicanism are in danger. Emphasizing democratic values too much will cause termination of the dialogue between reformists and conservatives which would lead to civil war and a power struggle. In this situation, increasing of conflicts will reduce the power of civil society and decrease the capacity of religion to reconcile with modernity. In contrast, inattention to the Islamic character of system and neglecting the need for reform will destroy the reliability of the Islamic government and Islam as a religion. With all this, it seems reformists' discourse about the relation between Islam and authority shows a better paradigm for solving the conflict between religion and state in the

public sphere, which combines modern political thought with religious framework in the structure of power in Iran. However, the process of reformation and transformation from the ideological paradigm needs time and energies to go through a peaceful process to the reform paradigm.

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