

History of Politics in the World of Islam

1. Molavi, known as Rumi in the West, in *Mathnawi* tells the story of the caliphate Omar Ibn Al-Khatab, the second caliph after the prophet. In this time, a messenger from the Roman Empire came to Medina (Dar-Al Caliphe) and looked for the palace of Caliph. He was told that the Caliph had no palace and lived like the other people, and that one could see him downtown. The messenger was surprised and wondered how was it that a man who ruled the whole world of Islam from Asia to and East Europe, being the neighbor of the Roman Empire had no palace, court and formalities. Thus, he too dismissed his attendants and ignored formalities, and began looking for the Caliph downtown until he reached a palm-plantation where he asked a woman if she knew where the Caliph was. The woman pointed to a man who was sleeping in the palm-plantation, and said that the man was the Caliph. At first, the messenger could not believe his eyes, yet he got close to the Caliph, looked at his face, and was scared. Although, he had seen a great number of kings, rulers and commanders, and had fought in many battles; however he had never been so frightened and nervous. The Caliph got up and soothed the frightened man, and began talking to him. The subject of their dialogue is not significant for us; and story telling is not our aim. Instead the purpose is to elaborate one of the conclusions that Molavi has drawn from this story: In the teachings and beliefs of Islam, it is the God that is omnipotent, and that people are the representation manifestation of the power of God, and anyone who represents His power and charisma is respected by people.

The explicit conclusion that Molavi draws from this story is that anyone who respects God is respected by all. God's glory which Iranian kings were said to be gifted with, and which has been mentioned in Sohrevardi's philosophy, in the part related to politics in his philosophy, may be the concrete dimension of the power and charisma that Molavi has attributed to Caliph. Moreover, it shows that the politician's power and authority is not always equal to practicing violence and as is mentioned in the story, the caliph's charisma was hand in hand with his compassion and merci.

The Islamic government began in the way just mentioned, and continued in the same manner until the era of Bani Omyaeh, who changed caliphate into monarchy. As stated by Ibn Khaldon and many other historians, the Omavi and Abbassi caliphs studied the government system of Iran and Rome, and established their own government system on these bases. A government that was apparently religious, yet different from a traditional government of the Islam prophet and Rashedin caliphs.

2. Politics in Islam is a controversial issue, so that some scholars ascertain the political aspects of Islam, while the others deny such aspects. Meanwhile, some scholars maintain that the appearance of politics in Islam is a recent phenomenon. However, it is important to consider that the origin of Islamic calendar goes back to the political event of the prophet's immigration (Hijrat) from Mecca to Medina, where he established his government. Moreover, the discrepancies among Shiites and Sunnites are based on some political disagreements, i.e. having different interpretations of the concepts of Imam (leadership) and Adl (Justice), that are undeniably political. Shiites consider them as principles of Islam, just like Tohid, Nabovat and Maad. Shiites approach to the divine essence, attributes, names and actions and the good and the bad gave rise to the principles of Adl. On the other hand, Imam is a consequence of belief in Mohammad as the last prophet. The latter belief is a part of Islamic philosophy so that the Islamic philosophers have used the term "prophecy philosophy" in their works, from the time of Sohrevardi. The Sunnites and Shiites both believe in the God's justice. The Shiites believe that God has created the universe on the basis of justice, and that all his actions conform to justice. The Sunnites too believe in the justice of God. They, however, state that whatever He does is justice, and that one cannot set a criterion for His justice. Regarding imam and imamat, the Shiites consider imam as the one who continues the prophet's way, and who is bestowed with chastity. But Sunnites hold that chastity is exclusively bestowed on prophets. This difference of opinion too has had paramount impact on the works of scholars and the history of philosophy, culture and politics of Muslims. As a result, the Sunnites and Shiites have different political views, works and books.

^ There are four types or forms of Islamic political texts: 1. The works written by philosophers: these are more famous than others. The most prominent of these books is "Opinions of the residents of ideal city (Medina Fazeleh)" written by Farabi. 2. Political books containing reports on the political practices, methods and measures. Nezam Almolk's book called Siasat Nameh (Book of Politics) is one such example. 3. Collection of received wisdoms and pieces of advises of the scholars, whose addressees are the statesmen, and rulers in some cases. Abu Ali Moskuyeh's Javidan Kherad(Eternal Wisdom) is one of the most important works of this category. 4. The books that can be termed political jurisprudence. These are about the religious laws and configuration of religious government. Mavardi's Ahkam Alsotaniehi (The Decrees) may be the most prominent work of this category. Government and administration of philosophers, who have been either Shiite or have had affinity of view with the Shiites, have mostly written the books of the first and third types. The books belonging to the second or fourth group have been mostly written by Sunnite politicians or scholars.

3. Sunnites' and Shiites' differences are rooted in politics; yet, there are numerous common views on political instructions. There are cases where both refer to the same sources, one of which is the speeches, lectures and statements of Imam Ali Ibn Abi Taleb. His first instruction is that the ruler must not be the captive of or subdued to political power; he should not try to achieve it at any cost. In his first speech after being elected as caliph, Imam Ali stated that if the people had not asked me, and if God had not committed the wise to help the oppressed to challenge for their rights against the oppressors, I would hand over the reins of power. In this speech, the religious and ethical politics are summarized into four principles:

1. Ruling is not desirable on its own. 2. The wise and those familiar with the way of God must not ignore aggression and tyranny; they must not let the aggressors and tyrants to do whatever they wish, and let the needy people be hungry. 3. Under appropriate conditions, the qualified people are obliged to accept the responsibility of the government. 4. People's satisfaction of government and their assistance and support are the prerequisites of establishing the government and ensures its maintenance and stability.

When Malek Ashtar was assigned to rule Egypt, Imam Ali wrote him a letter in which he enumerated the duties of a ruler:

collecting, maintaining, and spending the taxes and incomes in the right way 1.

Defending against the attacks of enemy and establishing security. 2.

Striving to improve people's affairs and well-being 3.

Developing the cities 4.

When these instructions are compared with the ruling manner of the Omavi and Abbasi caliphs, one notices that they had a vast domain and territory of authority,

as those governments were mostly engaged in collecting taxes or fighting against enemies. There were only a few of them who possibly cared about the development of the cities. Nevertheless, the welfare of people had no place in their ruling mandate. Nezam Almolk for instance, established Schools called Nezamieh, simply because he intended to compete with Ismaeelis' teachings and institutions, who had founded the School of Al Azhar in Egypt. Obviously, we do not aim to diminish Nezam Almolk's great task, considering Ismaeelis and Nezam Almolk for the first time in the world of Islam and Iran joined science and politics in a way that science would be at the service of politics (However, one may consider Maamoon's views and discussions on science and philosophy and the use of science for achieving political purposes precedes Nezam Almolks discussions). It is noteworthy that in the Alavi politics plan, the primary aim has been the education and training of people. Nevertheless in Imam Ali's view, the interference of government in people's affairs has not been very much when it is compared with the government's duties in the modern era, or even comparing the views of those who support the minimum interference of government. Imam Ali's government was neither despotic nor totalitarian.

The Muslim philosophers who had become acquainted with the Greek 4.

philosophy, interpreted Plato and Aristotle's political views from religious

standpoints. Their views may be summarized in this way:

4-1. Philosophy and prophecy are not against each other. Rather, philosophy and religion are two manifestations of a single matter. Thus, Farabi holds that the master of Medina Fazeleh (Utopia) is the prophet who he sometimes calls the king-philosopher and king legislator.

The ideal of politics is to achieve happiness, and happiness is achieved by 4.2. wisdom. Thus there exists an ethical politics or even the ethics itself in the political truth set forth by Islamic philosophers.

In the philosophical plan of politics, more attention has been paid to the master 4.3.

of ideal city and the purpose of life, since the authentic laws in the world of Islam are the religious and Quranic laws and regulations. The philosopher's involvement in the field of politics was to clarify the relationship between prophecy and philosophy, and if he concluded that the origin of the prophet's and the philosopher's instructions is the same. Regarding the existence of Shariat, it would not have been necessary for the philosopher to devise the codes and rules for politics.

i 4.4. In the works of the Islamic philosophers, there have always been relations between politics and prophecy. Gradually, however, the tie has become firmer and stronger. For instance, when we review Farabi's and Ekhvan Alsafa's works, we may find philosophy as the dominant element. Abolhassan Ameri, AVECINA and Sohrevardi attempted to make a balance between the two and finally in Mola Sadra's political views, politics became more religious.

There seems to have been no relation between philosophers' political plans and 5.

the current policies and dominant despotic traditions of the time. Particularly, in

the case of the emerge of weakness at the caliphate; the wars were to determine

the destiny of governance in Islamic lands. Yet, there are some points that should

be considered in order to understand the history of Islam in its true sense: Most

movements against the caliphate, was the one that was associated with the wisdom and gnosis domains or were supported either or by the philosophers and the Shiites. Ghaznavian and Saljughian were Sunnite and were supported by the jurists and scholars. They themselves tried to invite the scholars to the court. The other important point is that in the world of Islam, judgship, education, science and school have been separated from and independent of political and military power. Yet such monarchy is not the same as despotism because the monarchs of the

Islamic nations had to observe and consider people's beliefs and religious laws.

6. When the Islamic countries became familiar with the West and modernity, the historical and cultural geography of the world of Islam began to change. At the initial stage, Muslims acquainted themselves with the military and political aspects of the West, and still associate the West with its military political power (This imperfect familiarity still dominates the minds of people and has complicated things.). Confrontation of the old societies and the Islamic countries with the West was a shock, and resulted in thoughtless reactions. The lay people were not aware of the true nature of the West, and those who were aware, reacted on the basis of their perceptions, talent, and the degree of their beliefs in their own traditions and religious and ethnic background. They accepted, rejected, proved, or opposed West on the basis of the above criteria. There were few people who would ask what modernity was and where it had come from, and what relationships they had or should have with it. The agreements and disagreements were not effective, and on the whole, neither had a profound and determining effect on the state of affairs.

The most vivid and principal opposition was from mystic community who believed in the truth and essence of religion. They even fought against the colonist i military forces, and lost their personal belongings for the sake of their belief and country. Obviously, they were unable to win a formal war. Among them, Abdolghader Aljazayeri was one of the greatest combatants. The later anti-colonialism nationalists fought to achieve Western values. They were similar to the former group in some respects, yet they did not continue their way. A major part of the political history of under developed world is devoted to the national movements and for our present purposes what was just mentioned suffices to illustrate the point.

There was another group who adopted modernity; they held that the unconditional adoption of it was in line with expediency and wisdom. To pave the way, they began looking for the flaws and shortcomings in the religious and cultural traditions of the past- This was by no means criticism in its true sense- They were socialists, or social democrats or supporters of democracy who wrote books and articles against the heritage of the past and in favor of the necessity to approach the world of modernity and to adopt its rules. These works did not have many readers, and the succeeding generations were not even aware of their existence either. Yet, one cannot deny their effects altogether. The other effect of getting familiar of the West was that it was felt that the time was ripe for the advent of the promised Mahdi, the savior. Hence, claims on Mahdaviat appeared in India, Iran and Africa in different forms almost concurrently, and its fever covered the whole world of Islam, from India to Sudan. This had some political outcomes as well, but it failed to have any

direct influence on political views; therefore, there is no place for it in the history of political thinking. There was also a circle of people who concluded that Muslims had gone away from the original Islam and the practices of the pious predecessors, and that committing sins had become

) common. The circle advised Muslims to avoid unnecessary, and to follow the Islamic regulations properly. These people were heterogeneous and were mostly superficially religious, and the ones who were the most superficial religious men gave way to fundamentalism. On the other hand, as the acquaintance of Muslims with the West increased, their concerns about the future of the religion decreased.

This decrease of concern had both a good and useful dimension and a bad and undesirable dimension. It was good because it was the result of awareness, and it was bad because it reduced the motivation to research about the West and modernity and as a result, any relation with West would become merely economic and military. This happened about 100 years ago and so the subject of modernity that had been set forth ambiguously was completely neglected. That is, the principle of secularism influenced the affairs in an obscure and ambiguous way. In the view of the inhabitants of the non-western world, the West had two opposite faces: one of which was the face of science, democracy and welfare, and

| the other, the face of colonism and colonist. The first had to be welcomed and the second to be avoided. Consequently, the encounter with the West took the form of national and anti-colonist movements. A great number of religious figures joined the movements, while being silent about its secularism.

During the last 50 years, while national movements have faced difficulties and disillusionments in achieving political independence and modernization, religious movements have soared. In Iran, such movement resulted in the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Ever since, there have been issues about the policy of the Islamic government and the relationship between religious policy and socialism, democracy and other ideologies. The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with its anti-despotism nature, was sanctioned. People's right to choose and political freedoms are emphasized in the constitution. How the plan of Islamic democracy should be is a topic that experts in politics should deal with and conduct research on. What can be said now is that our country is on its way towards freedom.