

Imām Khomeinī and the Question of Freedom and Freedom Seeking

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Introduction

From the beginning of the Islamic revolution's victory and during the years of the establishment of the Islamic Republic system, there have always been some who, despite enjoying different freedoms like freedom of expression, and freedom of the press and communities, have used parliament benches telling they are not free and that they have not been able to express their opinions to people. During different occasions related in one way or another to freedom and intellectual currents of the country, authorities and those in charge as well as thinkers and scholars and different classes of people alike have expressed their own opinions. Looking at these ideas in *Ṣahīfeh-ye Imām* can uncover a lot of problems and clarify the obscurities. It is on Imām's followers and his advocates to satiate their thirst through pure stream of Imām's ideas and the Islamic Republic within the tumultuous environment and water the tradition of the Islamic Republic with the pure stream of Imām's views. A draft of the Imām's pure saving stream is given to us, which is:

1. He thought that Islam guarantees freedom and independence

The Imām believed that Islam guarantees all kinds of independence and freedom and if the children of Islam are brought up according to the principles of Islam, the independence and freedom of the country is secured.¹ He held that Islam is dependent upon reason and founded on proof, not fearing freedom of the press and expression of the problems. It is for the freedom and reason² and it is neither against freedom of expression, nor against freedom of the press and freedom of speech. It disagrees neither with illumination of the people nor with industry. But Islam is against wantonness and the idea that every body is free to do whatever he wills.³ The Imām thought that Islam has everything in it. When it was claimed that Islam lacks something, for example some words, he became stormy and said that we have our own vocabulary and there is no need for borrowing words from the west. "Islam has the best ones and everything is in it, what we want exists in Islam."⁴ He considered Islam the most progressive school which should be known and experienced practically. He knew the law of Islam the cause of the all freedoms and real democracy, guaranteeing also the independence of the country.

The Imām regards freedom as (fruitful tree) and believes that freedom of human beings is one of the blessings in the world. Man tends to sacrifice all his things for his freedom.⁵ In the modern world, however, the use, definition and comment on the freedom are made by those who are principally against divine freedom.⁶ Only a pen that is not a conspirator one is free. A pen or a newspaper is free that does not want to lead the country to destruction and backwardness.⁷

Likening the intriguing, destructive and degenerative pens to the former bayonets, Imām would say that these pens are the same as previous bayonets seeking to ruin the nation. He believed that the corrupt pens should not be free.

On the pens, which believed, whenever they were debarred, no freedom existed, the Imām wrote:

¹ *Ṣaḥīfeh-ye Imām*, vol. 9, p. 147.

² *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 10, p. 121.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 21, p. 109.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 10, p. 51.

“The problem is that those who are freedom-seekers would become angry and say there is repression when they see that something against the good of the country is prohibited. While in fact repression happens when the pens that are going to write about the interests of your country and to the benefit of you and the nation are prohibited. We cannot say it is repression whenever the pens, which are harmful for our society, for our movement, and for our country are prohibited. This is in fact resisting against corruption. A distinction should be made between these two. Prohibition of immorality and not letting the youths have access to dirty centers and become heroin or opium addicts, or prohibition of gambling and the like are not tantamount to suppression of freedom. It can be called doing one’s own responsibility”.¹

Bayonet is now replaced by reason and pen.² It is the pens today, and the tongues, which are making to delude the nation and the people. You have to be aware of these problems and try not to be deceived by them.³ There is a minority today that wants to rule over the majority. Riḍā Khān ruled with force and these people want to rule with the use of pen.⁴ We have to know those who are not in the path of Islam and Islamic movement and in the path of the nation through knowing their papers, speeches and behaviors. These are doing their misleading activities through their poisonous pens while formerly they were suppressing the literati through their bayonets. And now the pen is the same as the former bayonet.⁵

2. He emphasized freedom of speech and press, thinking positive criticism useful

The Imām believed that the kind of freedom current in the Islamic Republic of Iran is one, which is useful for the country, for Islam and for the Muslims by which the individuals can take part in the communities and be of use to their country. He believed that people are free to tell their opinions regarding the good of their country and criticize the government, statesmen and non-governmental authorities. They are free to talk on social issues and problems related to the good of their country and there is no limitation at all. They are free to criticize the government and whoever puts a foot wrong. On the press the Imām said the press should reflect whatever happens. Sometimes the criticism is a positive one, which is useful. Positive criticism is profitable and is recommended.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Criticism, however, should not be a cause of weakening the government. The press is allowed to take part in communities, to give service to the country. The press is allowed also to talk on the good of the country and criticize the government as well as governmental and non-governmental authorities. It is free in these social problems and in essential issues related to their country, their nation, and there is no limitation at all.¹

He believed that the press is free in all affairs that are to the benefit of the nation. You are free to publish your views, to criticize the government, and to criticize whoever puts a foot wrong. There is no one to object you in this regard.² The Imām deems criticism a divine gift for the growth of the human beings (172/20).

Intellectual growth of a nation is in knowing the right position and when to do what. A large number of deviations human beings face is rooted in their tactlessness. To propound an issue, which should not be told and avoid telling a problem which should be told. You should all care to put your foot right and do the successive actions in their right place and time. Tactfulness is one of those things, which is profoundly rooted in every society (9/100).³

In our evaluations of the government we have to take into account many dimensions. If we look at one dimension only, we will go astray. In evaluating the government's functions, different aspects should be taken into account.

I want to advise all those who have pens in hand and write that they should notice that their pens are the language of their presence before God and they should answer back in the hereafter. It is not the matter of the government or the president. What matters is the system, the system of Islam. What matters is the system of the Islamic Republic, which we all have the duty to protect. All the writers have the duty to protect the system. Suppose a person observes that something is wrong, in this case he can and should give his advice. The language of advice, however, differs from that of besmirching. The pens, we see, are not the advising pens. The government is not important. What matter is the Islamic Republic...? We should notice not to write whatever comes to our mind whenever possible and not thinking about what we write about. The scientists, students, those in charge of cultural affairs and those in the universities should use their strength to help

¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 232.

² *Ibid.*, p. 233.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 100.

the downtrodden. The pens should be used in helping the nation and the language in helping the downtrodden.¹

3. He was against wantonness

The Imām used to divide freedom into two useful and harmful categories. In the former, he knew all things related to the growth of the human beings free,² since Islam is in favor of growth and perfection of the human beings. However, he didn't believe in the permissibility of something, which Islam has prohibited because it didn't help human beings to grow and become perfect and it directs him toward destruction. Imām believed that those interested in such freedoms were either hireling of the foreigners or were unaware and ignorant of the problems. He said: "these intellectuals, liberals and writers (not all but most of them) either do not know to where these harmful freedoms and letting the youths do whatever they want might lead the country or they are unaware, ignorant and hireling of the foreigners. They complain that freedom is dying. They believe that freedom is the kind of freedom, which is dictated to us by the west, while the westerners themselves do not actually believe in this kind of freedom because if they did, they would not develop. These kinds of freedom are imported to our country. These iniquitous advocates of the human rights, these writers and liberals emphasize and advertise this kind of freedom for us. The kind of freedom that these gentlemen are in favor of drives the human power to destruction.

Islam prohibits what leads our youths to destruction. Islam needs militant. It needs warriors against infidels. Islam wants to rear militants. It does not want to rear rakes.³ Those writers who in spite of having freedom to write do not write against Islam and the clergy, are those who are in favor of this kind of freedom. But there is a kind of freedom, which is dictated to us by the west. With a view to leading our youth astray they want their woman and men to be free so that the woman could go to such gatherings, and not to have anything to write about the Islamic Republic and thus undermine it. Hold your hands, hold your pens, and notice that not every thing should be written and published. In the process of any revolution it is tried to avoid chaos and individuals are not allowed to do or to say whatever they will. Now my question is that is prohibition of such a negative freedom harmful to the system or not. Some just think of victory over their rivals and they don't

¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 10, p. 28.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 232.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

care if in the meantime Islam was also hit. Sometimes one sees such individuals. They should revise their attitudes. Do not see the dark and bad aspects only.

Sometimes due to some considerations, say when some one wants to weaken Islam either on purpose or unknowingly a new circumstance appears. In such a situation man can no longer say that for example that mentioned person is my friend or my brother.¹

If we confront with such a situation, our religious duty is to prevent it by every possible means even through denouncement, even though it may involve sacrificing a person or a group for a nation.² Sometimes the writers do not care what they write since they write well. They are good writes but they do not write good things. They write beautifully and in detail on something the content of which is harmful to the country and in which the youths may be interested.³

Our youths and our nation should be cognizant. They should notice that America does not come to the battlefield with bayonet but by pen.⁴

My dear brothers, my enlightened and scholar brothers, my brothers at universities, dear students, respected clergy, market associates, precious workers and employees all unite. Come and use your pens and speeches to the benefit of the downtrodden. You intellectuals and writers use your pens and speeches for the sake of the downtrodden and curing the unclean and dirty eyes of the men. You should put this chaotic situation in order. By this kind of freedom they want to destroy and corrupt our youths and men. They want vice to be allowed.⁵

All things helping the growth and perfection of our sisters and brothers and beloved children are allowed. What is prohibited is what Islam has prohibited.⁶

They were trying to import from the west all things. They wanted to import into Iran colonial culture and make the people love that culture through their extensive propaganda. They wanted, under the name of truth, to import into colonial and semi-colonial countries a particular sort of democracy named Western democracy. All their things brought here under the name of perfection, freedom, democracy and culture are imported into here in particular ways. The freedom they prescribed for the eastern countries

¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 20, p. 35.

² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 10, p. 66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 231.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

was the cause of the destruction of our nation and our youths... the freedom and democracy they brought is not true. The fact is that they do not want our country to be free and have one ruler and have the rule of people over people. These problems are not important for them. Unfortunately some of our writers and intellectuals and some of those who are educated either have been deceived by what they have said during the last fifty years or so and are unaware of the problems or are quite aware and on purpose are trying to foment the problems. In the later case they are hirelings. Not all things that exist in the west including their sciences exist here. They only want to develop the universities to a certain extent with no moral and religious background and content. Even scientific content of the universities is not the same as theirs.¹

4. He by no means believed in the negation of the people's freedom

Believing that the Islamic Republic of Iran is the result of the protection and self-sacrifice of the people, the Imām held people's services the cause of the survival of the revolution. He believed that the authorities of the Islamic system should try to satisfy people's will and avoid non-Islamic and non-human behaviors. Since he believed that people are in favor of Islam, he would assert that people's freedom should be observed and that we have to let people be free and that the government should pay attention to prevent any deviation.

The Imām's belief in freedom is the zenith of populism not found in any other schools or theories particularly the modern ones and is indicative of his sublime views on Islam, people's rights and their cooperation in their self-determination. On the freedom of people in taking part in the elections the Imām says:

"People should be free in the elections. We should behave in a way not to impose a particular person upon people. No person, group, foundation, society, party or community can interfere with the choice people make and no one can decide for other people a particular person or persons and canvass support."

He said:

"Thank God, our people have favorable political-religious growth and are religious themselves, they know the suffering of the downtrodden and try to

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

select a person familiar with political-religious problems and in concordance with the downtrodden. He would recommend people to consult the clergy and the individual they trust and then vote for whomever they like. The people should not step aside. If they do we will fail. People themselves should not let the dictatorial and inept persons to intervene. If certain individuals decided to choose an inept person, the people should avoid voting for them. If the people failed to discern their ineptness, the parliament should not receive them. People should not vote for those who are suspicious and those who are astray.”

In other guidelines the Imām says:

“People are free in the elections and need no guardian. No person, group or party has the right to impose a certain person on people. The Islamic society of Iran, which through its wisdom and political growth has chosen the Islamic Republic of Iran and its sublime values as well as the sovereignty of God’s laws, will undoubtedly have the power to differentiate and select the best candidate. Consultation is one of the Islamic prescriptions. People consult their confidants and those they trust. The individuals, groups and the clergy can introduce their candidates as far as they are allowed and no one should expect others not to express their opinions. People, altogether, identify certain candidates through wisdom, clairvoyance and research, regarding the experiences, case history and political-religious characteristics of the candidates. Brave people of Iran vote for candidates, who believe in Islam, are loyal to people, feel responsible in giving service to them, have experienced the bitter flavor of poverty and are in practice and word defender of the Islam of the bare-footed, Islam of the downtrodden, Islam of the martyrs of history, Islam of the militant mystics, Islam of the mystic good-natured and in one word defender of the pure Muḥammedan Islam. Those who are in favor of capitalistic Islam, Islam of the arrogant, Islam of the stony affluent, Islam of the double-faced, and Islam of the luxurious and in one word those who are defenders of the Americanized Islam are better to be rejected and made known to people. Since the parliament is the house of all people and is the hope of the downtrodden, no one should expect within current circumstances to see parliament members from one particular group or party.”¹

¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 20, p. 194.

5. He did not believe in conflict and violence in encountering opposition thoughts and currents

In encountering different political and intellectual currents in the society, the Imām believed that they should be treated culturally up to the moment that it is felt they are intriguing. In case intrigue is felt on their part the government determines how to treat them. The Imām would say:

“you can talk in return for what they say, write papers in return for their papers, give speeches in return for their speeches and reflect to them their errors, which are sometimes due to negligence and sometimes on purpose.¹

You can find some that want, under the name of freedom, import a particular kind of freedom into the country and are interested in chaotic freedom in which every one is allowed to do whatever he wants and talk of democracy and the like, showy terms whose meaning can be found nowhere in the world. Pay attention not to have conflict with these individuals. Conflict is not a proper behavior. We should not behave in a way that proves them self-righteous. When a conflict happens and you have the majority with you some may think that you had no reason to take part in the conflict. As a result it is better to encounter them with no conflict. If they had a certain community you can make a larger one and talk with them. Do not give in to skirmish. But if it is understood that they are going to intrigue our duty will be different.² You can discuss the matter with them and invite the Islamic scholars to discuss with them in order to prove that they are hollow. If they wrangled over the problem, try to avoid conflict because one of their tactics is to make you give in to a conflict and use the situation to their benefit. We are in favor of reason and freedom but our duty would be different when we see intrigue and sabotage.³

6. He believed in people’s freedom and their cooperation in all affairs

The Imām believed that people’s cooperation is necessary in all affairs. He believed that the revolution is dependent upon the people and that the problems can be resolved through their aid and that the government alone cannot carry out the responsibilities. He deemed criticism and evaluations of the works necessary and essential unless the criticism aims at weakening and besmirching:

¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 182.

² *Ibid.*, p. 183.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

“Let people take part in all affairs. Through their participation you will be able to manage the country. Let people take part in economic and cultural activities. Do not hinder what people want to do.”

He also asserts:

“People should partake in the affairs of the universities and they themselves should have universities of their own. In the meantime monitoring and criticism is also important both by the government and the people. Problems should be uncovered if there is any. But the government, the parliament, the clergy should not be besmirched. It is a crime. It is an unforgivable sin.¹

We should not deprive people of freedom. The government should monitor. Do not stop people; only supervise the affairs in order to prevent from any deviation.

On the freedom of the thoughtful youths and the way of treating them the Imām believes that their pure feelings should be respected. He addresses the clergy saying:

“Today a large number of our youths in the free atmosphere of the country feel that they can freely express their opinions on different Islamic issues. Listen to them with open arms and show them the right Islamic path friendly and with deep emotions if they go astray. We should notice that we cannot ignore their pure spiritual feelings and emotions and label their writings with deviation and lead all into doubt. The heart of the youths who express their opinions today undoubtedly beat for Islam because there is no reason to bother them by propounding these problems. They think that the view of Islam is the way they think. Treat them paternally and kindly instead of rejecting them and treating them in a quarrelsome manner. If they didn't accept what you said do not become disappointed with them, because they might fall into the trap of the liberals, nationalists, communists or the *Munāfiqūn* and this is no less than the sin of deviation. We can be hopeful of the future to the country and these future-makers only if we give value to them, ignore their slight mistakes and errors and be proficient in all the methods and principles that lead to an appropriate moral teaching. The atmosphere of the universities and non-*Hawzah* (seminaries) centers is in a way that is more familiar with the realities compared with the pure theoretical and philosophic atmosphere. By merging these two cultures and lessening the distance between *Hawzah* and universities we have to widen the field of development and expansion of Islamic teachings.”

¹ (30/5).