The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imām Khomeinī's Works

Towards a cultural approach of the

Islamic Revolution

Propounding the subject

Nowadays, with the unprecedented increase in cultural communications as a result of the development of communications networks and means of mass communications as well as widespread migration, the disparities between cultures have become more conspicuous. On the other hand, following the spreading and expansion of modern culture, we are faced with new cultural issues such as globalization of culture or in other words, globalization of values. Under such circumstances, the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution as an unexpected phenomenon that helps to shape the thinking and cultural performance of the world, can be extremely significant from the viewpoint of presenting new achievements or challenges.

The words and actions of social and political players show that the Islamic Revolution is of special significance in the modern history of Iran and the world. Some analysts have described the Islamic Revolution as a political spiritualism, as the most modern form of uprising in the course of history, as the foremost and greatest uprising of mankind and as the foremost post-modern revolution – a revolution in which the spirit of religion has been breathed into and whose leader is a mythological personality.

On one hand, the empirical realities of the society of Iran reveal the fact that the 1979 Revolution of Iran is a value-based revolution. It is a Revolution whose aim was a return, revival and restructuring of the fundamental traditions of the religion of Islam. This Revolution was made possible by means of changing the values of the people; and the change in the values in turn resulted in change in society's cultural composition. Studies conducted on certain empirical reviews

pertaining to the Islamic Revolution of Iran reveals that the cultural circumstance of the Pahlavi regime in particular was among the most important factors of occurrence of this Revolution. Some western analysts too in their studies and explorations of the Islamic Revolution of Iran have stressed the role of "beliefs of Muslims", "the Shiite school of thought", "Islamic ideology" and "creation of a culture independent of the influence of western powers" as the factors for the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution and establishment of a new regime.

Efforts at obtaining a better perspective and idea of the Islamic Revolution, of the essence and basis of its occurrence leads us to understanding the culture and values of this Revolution through analyzing the relevant approaches or cultural dialogues and informs of a new way of analyzing and viewing the Revolution. In particular, that this analyses has been performed together with focus on the points of view and opinions of the architect of the Islamic Revolution and leader of the movement.

Although a relatively large number of topics compiled by domestic and foreign analysts about the essence, identity and causes of the Islamic Revolution have been published, however, so far an observation devoted exclusively to the cultural dimensions of the Revolution or taking note of culture as an infrastructural factor of occurrence of the Revolution has seldom been given much attention. Focus on this affair seems to be necessary that by concentrating on the specialist points of view of culture and its components and ingredients, in addition to giving depth to existing analyses, it makes it possible to add more appeal to the collection of analytical topics of the Islamic Revolution. The question that arises here is that among the various analyses presented, what are the features and peculiarities of the subject under discussion? What elements and components because of their specialization can be attributed to being a cultural factor? According to the viewpoint of Imam Khomeini, which of these cultural dimensions have been taken into consideration and been analyzed and what is the share of each of the factors? In order to answer the questions put forward and considering the need to understand culture mutually, we clarify the definitions, components and elements related to it.

Basic Definitions

A. Definition of culture

The discussion and dialogue of the topic of culture is considered an easy and facile task. The definitive changeability of culture in various areas and fields of science from literature and history to sociology has caused us not to have a coherent situation in this sphere. Despite all these, extensive efforts have been made to get on top of this problem. One of these efforts is the presentation of general grouping and categorization of the definition of culture. In the literature of cultural studies while grouping the various cultural definitions, three general definitions of culture have been presented as follows:

1) The common process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetical perfection and development that embraces the entire philosophy, thinking, art and intellectual creativity of an era or country.

2) Culture as a product of intellectual and artistic activity including poetry, literature and various arts.

3) Culture as a way of life of a specific people or certain period that consists of the customs and rituals, habits, ceremonies and festivals of a race or period.

In sociology there is a far more variable situation of culture present. Some sociologists have attempted to define culture by separating it from the rest of sociological definitions while some by creating inherent distinctions and differences from culture want to reach to this goal. It appears that creation of a definition of culture as a key definition in sociology has been extremely weak. For this reason in various sociological theories, culture fluctuates from a primary instigator to a secondary and residual element.

According to Archer, at the explanatory level, the idea of culture has remained excessively ambiguous; and despite the least doubt about it being pivotal from the point of view of methodology, due to such a weakness in creating definition, still no single description for the term 'culture' has been offered. At the explanatory level too the position of culture fluctuates from an independent variable with a power extending beyond society to a dependent variable in social bodies.

As an example, Stewart Hall of the Center for Cultural Studies in Birmingham, defines culture as activities that a society, class and particular group undertakes in a specific period of history that comprises the practical ideologies which enable a society, class, or group to undertake an experience, description and interpretation and bring about a definition of 'existing circumstances'. Also

'Bella' while defining culture as "definitive models that any group or society applies for interpretation and evaluation of itself and its environment", categorically rejects any point of view that explains culture in terms of economic and political factors.

Cultural Studies of England and Center for Cultural Studies in Birmingham also deal extensively with the issue of relative autonomy of cultural activities and attempt to design a movement beyond the inner-outer structure model. Because the cultural system possesses composite categories and elements too, some points of view have assigned four main components for culture including: beliefs, values, norms and technicalities. Beliefs respond to the question "what is it?" values to the question "what must it be?" Norms, the question "what should be done?" and finally, technology answers the question "how it is done?" In a more precise point of view, which is of our consideration within the context of this research and which appears to have a greater capability for conformity with revolutionary conditions and for analyses of their occurrence, is the division of the cultural elements into beliefs, values and goods? The substance of a culture is the nucleus or basic hypothesis of its established beliefs. Displays of this nucleus are exposed through values and norms of behavior. Values, norms, choices and the rest of actions influence the members of that culture and ultimately, the guided cultural actions produce the goods. When new values enter the cultures from outside, the cultures are exposed to change. In this way, if the desirable repercussions and the advantages gained from new values become established for the members of the culture, they are accepted and gradually enter through the surface of hypothesis of the culture.

In summary, one can say that culture can be considered as a system of ideas and values that while seeking recognition as an element of an idealistic system that responds to the questions of the individual concerning the world, the society, the human being and the objective, activates and guides him. In our definition, this individual can be a revolutionary player, a leader, a revolutionary group or organization and be in revolutionary conditions. Based on this, the cultural system can also be deemed to be a relatively permanent system that is established among the cultural elements of a society or social system. Thus these cultural elements are the same idealistic elements such as the values, ideas and beliefs that are transferable in the bedrock of social relations, communications and interactions among the revolutionary players, organizations and revolutionary groups.

B. Cultural theories of the Islamic Revolution: re-identification of the elements and categories

John Foran is among those individuals who in his theorizing of revolutions, stresses on the role of culture. He deems the role of culture to be formation of political action and uses a category called 'political culture' in his analyses of revolutions. According to Foran, culture plays an important and complex role in making revolutions and in their outcomes. He attempts to show that beliefs and ideology lay a very significant role towards this end. (Foran, 1997, page 207)

According to Foran, the meaning of political culture is "potential radical and plurivocal methods" for understanding the conditions that various groups in a society mention once in a while in order to be able to comprehend the economic and political changes of the society in which they live.

Thus it is here that Foran's definition of political culture finds an expressive nature – a nature that in the theories of Scott, Sewell, Skochpol, Tilly, Farhi and even Swidler takes on the meaning of a belief. Foran refers to a different and enduring political culture that speaks of cultures that make use of all their past historical experiences about their disputes in order to establish the feeling in relation to injustice, durable religious exercises and political ideologies that have spread officially. Such cultures have communal and factional nature and can be both religious and physical.

In his studies of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, he attempts to study the realm of culture in the context of the role of revolutionary Islam. According to Foran's point of view, political cultures backing the Iran Revolution have laid a bridge between Islamic and material dialogue; and have established the Islamic Revolution by joining hands with social forces and powers. To this end, the dialogues and material currents included the democratic nationalism of the National Front, the orthodox Marxism of the Tudeh Party, Fadaiyan - -Khalq, Marxist and Maoist groups. The Mujahedein Khalq Organization was also of importance in the religious-material categorizing with priority of Shiite Islam but with Marxist interpretations and analyses. Other dialogues included the interpretation of Islam presented by Khomeini, the radical Islam of Dr. Shariati and the liberal Islam of Bazargan.

These dialogues with the political cultures of resistance and having two key joint elements were able to achieve their joint objective which was to topple the Pahlavi regime by forming a single front. The first element was ending the monarchy regime while the second element or need was to cut off Iran's dependence on America. The Islam of Imam Khomeini was the most visual and most apparent of both the need and element that tried to pile up the support of all

sections and groups or at least because of his symbolic leadership pay respect to this issue. Khomeini was able to downplay the importance of the discordant aspects in his program. In political culture, Foran correlates culture with ideology and dialogue and stresses on the affair that operations be handled by social forces. In a single word, in his view from the seed of culture blooms the flowers of resistance, endurance and salvation.

In addition to John Foran, other western intellectuals also have emphasized on the cultural definition of revolution and reliance on the role of various cultural elements:

Using the theory of collective action, considers the belief in mutual values in a revolution to be fundamental. From his point of view, reliance on the element of 'value' plays a significant role in cultural analyses of revolutions.

Hamid, Algar has attempted to show that the roots of Islamic revolution lies hidden in the structural and ideological changes and it has taken shape in the Shiite school of thought in Iran after the sixteenth century A.D. In his view, beliefs concerning Imamate, illegitimacy of non-religious systems, martyrdom and analytical thought have played an important role in formation of the Islamic Revolution. In his point of view reliance on the element of "beliefs and convictions" in cultural analyses of revolutions is noteworthy. Smelser too considers the Islamic Revolution to be a value-oriented revolution whose objective was to reform and establish social values. considering that value-based upheaval is reckoned as being a deeper layer of social phenomenon, in the way explained by Smesler, social upheaval and their changes also brings about changes in the relevant norms. Thus the Islamic Revolution was not a norm-oriented revolution whose objective was purely to redefine and change social norms on the basis of the previous regime's predominant values; rather, social values appeared to be more fundamental than the social norms. From the point of view of Smesler, in cultural analyses of revolutions, reliance on the element of "value" and that too values that are the source and origin of profound changes in norm and behavior are of significance. Therefore, this point of view places emphasis on the prominent behavioral role of values in the course of revolutions and focuses a lot of attention to it.

Fred Halliday too deems five factors to be significant in the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution that include, speedy and imbalanced economic development, political weakness of the monarchy because of its low legitimacy and little popular basis, huge coalition of opposition groups, the political mobilization role of Islam especially of the Shiite school of thought that secures both ideology and

organization as well as enlightened leadership. Finally to add it all up was the ambiguous and blurred international conditions of the Pahlavi regime.

Nikki Keddie also attempts to refer to the cultural, political and economic reasons in explaining the causes of the Islamic Revolution. In his opinion, a combination of inflation, shortages and blatant unequal distribution of income probably increased the discontent rather than the factor of speedy reconstruction that has been pointed as being normal in the west. Generally, it was the manner of implementation of reconstruction and the results of these policies that were important in this regard and the cultural self aggrandizement and alienation that occurred in the latter part of the 1970's also played an important role. As is evident from the observations and investigations of the above mentioned theories, each one of them has taken into consideration various elements and categories of culture. However, one may not be able to find a point of view that incorporates all the elements and components in a comprehensive and perfect form. Some stress the role of ideology and beliefs of revolutionaries while some others give importance to values and system of values of revolutionaries. Focus on both the elements simultaneous with an appropriate selection of judgments from the various schools of thought and with the dismissal of the behavioral element of revolutionaries, can add to the analytical richness of the cultural approach to the Islamic Revolution. For this reason, towards complementing the cultural points of view under investigation, we present the point of view of the architect of the Islamic Revolution and discuss the position of analytical elements of culture in it.

Imam Khomeini and the cultural reasons of the Islamic Revolution

From the point of view of Imam Khomeini, social changes and revolutions in particular, are incumbent upon the cognitive and epistemic changes of human beings. Towards this end, the favors of God accrue to human movement and these results in their awareness and awakening. This self-awareness and awakening also in turn prepares the groundwork for social-cultural changes.

> "God wanted to come to the succor of this nation so that he awakened the people; God awakened the people…it was the invisible Hand of God that overturned them from that state of listlessness, from that state of indolence, from that state of ignorance to a state of awareness - everyone became prepared. Such a development within a year is not possible without Divine assistance…"

Or:

> "…the Almighty and Exalted God wanted; and He was on our side; and he transformed a nation and a state that was indifferent to religious concerns; he transformed them such that everybody gives importance; everybody came into the arena armed with faith…"

As revealed by the above-mentioned sentences, change in the political and social system is possible with change in 'beliefs and convictions". Focus on the conceptual element of recognition and its role in future changes and transformations is as though it is a fundamental and infrastructural role and is the source and foundation of all changes and transformations and of revolutionary changes in particular in countries and societies. As mentioned earlier, he states thus:

> "The Qur'anic verse that 'God does not change the circumstances of the people unless they themselves change their own circumstances' is a fact and a command. It is a fact in the sense that changes that take place in a nation, in a race becomes a source of existential changes, of global changes, of seasonal changes. It is a command in the sense that the changes you make are changes that bring about changes which is to your benefit.
>
> You noticed that the progress made by the people of Iran was indebted to that change, that transformation that was created in the self. We were a nation; our nation was a race who because of the misrepresentation that occurred throughout history; and because of the all-round domination of foreigners and their handpicked stooges had taken on an appearance that caused it to accept the former regime…it was a change that had transformed the sound human nature into an unsound human being…and praise is to God, in this agitation the change and transformation occurred from the other side. It means that a nation under pressure that had become accustomed to this pressure in the course of history and had accepted this injustice and had accepted this plundering, was transformed in a short period into a nation that no longer tolerated any of these injustices; it means it created such a revolt…thus our nation underwent a transformation; it established a change. Until this change had not been taken place, unless there was no change produced in the self; unless this nation did not go through a real change – which was the removal from power of an evil "Taghuti" regime and the taking power of a regime that is God willing Islamic – this objective would not be realized."

> "The inner revolution of this nation caused the birth of this Revolution; and it was their inner revolution and their understanding of Islam; and their devotion for the Almighty and Exalted God that resulted…we must look for the cause of the victory of the revolution in the inner self of the people; and until we do not attain this objective then revolutions would be revolutions of transfer of power from one power to another power and there shall be no change in the condition of the nation."

As is evident from the words of Imam Khomeini, the source of change and transformation outside and in the social – political life of human beings must be looked for in their inner self. These words in themselves are yet another endorsement of the importance of change in the cognitive, intellectual and ideological discipline of individuals and groups. In other words, in the course of these ascents, the Imam attempts to introduce every kind of change in the political and social systems without taking into consideration the fundamental layer of epistemology of individuals and groups to be a formal, superficial and unfounded change that is basically temporary.

Awareness and awakening from the viewpoint of Imam Khomeini depends on understanding the true and genuine Islam as well as in recognition of the false Islam. The necessity of understanding the genuine Islam lies in the importance that it has in the lives of human beings because genuine Islam sponsors justice, fights injustice and infringement of rights, develops and builds human beings and in this respect, in contrast with the false Islam which is the source of dependence and decadence of Muslims, it is a source of pride and honor. Thus he states:

> "We have a duty to clear the doubt that they have created in relation to Islam. As long as this doubt has not been cleared from the minds, we cannot do anything. We must…remove this doubt that has been created even in the minds of many of our educated individuals as a result of the propaganda unleashed against Islam in the course of several centuries; they should present the weltanschauung and social disciplines of Islam; they should introduce Islamic rule so that people know what Islam is all about and how its laws operate…people do not know Islam…rest assured that if you present this doctrine and introduce Islamic rule in the way it is to the universities, the students shall welcome it."

As can be observed in this anode, the role of the element of awareness and recognition is not only effective in occurrence of revolutions but in their preservation and consolidation as well. Thus the fundamental element of culture is both a creative as well as a constituting factor and the necessity to remove its

trimmings is felt at all stages of revolution and also for perpetuation of the revolutionary conditions.

The major achievement of the spiritual transformation of the people as a result of the awareness of the leaders and enlightened intellectuals (after the wish for martyrdom) is unity of expression that from the viewpoint of the Imam's thinking, arises from shunning personal differences and is one of the secrets of victory:

> "The power of faith of our people resulted in overcoming them all with fists and blood. The secret to this victory after the power of faith was that the power of faith resulted in the real secret which includes unity of expression of our nation in this affair that brought about the defeat."

Or

> "We had nothing; we had God on our side…but the Almighty and Exalted God caused their hearts to be overcome with fear and horror so that they did not get a chance to cause any great damage…this was because it was an Islamic agitation."

What can be deduced from these words is that following recognition and gaining religious-revolutionary knowledge and judgment, the thing that becomes apparent is a feeling of mass agreement and compassion for attaining the objective. In the literature of culturology, (as pointed out earlier) this factor or in more precise term, this category and element can be reviewed and recognized under the heading of empathic desirability or social and group values. In other words, at this stage, beliefs and convictions after undergoing an internal, conceptual and logical change have crossed to the stage of conversion of hearts and feelings so that they are able to create an emotional change and a change in the collective desirability.

This is in a situation where with the appearance of commitment to genuine Islam (first element) and spirit of cooperation in initiating an Islamic uprising (second element) the regime because of not reforming its method is faced with reduced religious legitimacy so that the grounds for revolutionary action, mutinies, protest demonstrations and clashes begin (third element):

> "When it is decided that a country comes to this state where the people become separated and the government with all its paraphernalia also becomes disunited, this government does not have a backing. The people

must back the governments. A government that does not enjoy backing will be defeated."

In a general summing up of the viewpoint of Imam Khomeini about the cultural explanation of Islamic revolution, it must be stated that awareness of genuine Islam which has been neglected culminated in the spiritual metamorphosis of individuals and this itself brought in its wake total devotion to the Sacred Truth, desire for martyrdom, inattention to personal disputes, unity, solidarity and cohesion among the people and ultimately, alongside other important factors such as inefficiency of the ruling body, offers the conditions for victory of the Revolution.

As mentioned earlier, increase in the level of awareness of the people, disregarding religious and cultural values of the people and many other factors contributed to the discontent of the people that resulted in the popular uprising and victory of the Revolution.

This affair has been produced from experimental investigations carried out of the slogans. Thus the largest number of slogans of the Islamic Revolution was concerned with the aims and aspirations of the Revolution at the cultural level. Perhaps this shows that the discontent of the people had been converted into political discontent and had manifested in the form of political slogans depicting the inappropriate circumstance of the former regime. However, considering that in these investigations the number of slogans concerned with the political aims and aspirations of the Revolution was in second place, it reveals the lesser importance of the political dimension vis-à-vis the cultural aspect. With the least number of slogans devoted to economic objectives and aspirations, it reveals that the people were not too dissatisfied with the economic situation during the Pahlavi regime so that it is considered that the most important aspiration of the revolutionaries was focused on transformation of the economic situation. This means that the people of Iran taking into consideration their intense dissatisfaction of the ruling political system and its cultural circumstance, wanted to install a system that they named 'Islamic Republic' and to attain political freedom, political rights and political independence within its framework. In this manner, they wanted to install Islam and Islamic cultural values in society and establish an Islamic system in which poverty and economic deprivation also did not exist.

Summary and Conclusion: Cultural Review of the Islamic Revolution

Based on the cultural approaches and explanations of the Islamic Revolution, before the Islamic Revolution value-based changes in society was among the reasons for the reaction of the people of Iran to the rule of the Shah and the dawn of the Revolution. In other words, if we define revolution as positioning of two value-oriented systems opposite one another, according to the point of view of analysts the Islamic Revolution of Iran can be viewed as the arena of conflict of a value-based Islamic-revolutionary systems versus value-based monarchial-feudalistic system and admit that before the Revolution in Iran, the society was afflicted with a turmoil in its value-based system so that the people saw the reasons for this turmoil as lying in the political actions of the rulers.

In fact, the thing that had a greater impact on the people than the economic problems was the change in the cultural and social fabric of Iran which under the influence of western culture had pulverized the religious, ethical and cultural criterion of Iran. (Mohammadi, 1995, page 66) In other words, encouraging, urging and spreading of western aspirations and beliefs resulted in extension of the turmoil, cultural eradication, and self-estrangement and damaging of national identity. The desire to revive and return of national character and identity was transformed into a widespread struggle against a regime that sponsored foreign values, desires and influences.

Every revolution is in possession of a specific organization, leadership and ideology. The Islamic Revolution too with the leadership of Imam Khomeini and propounding Islamic ideology launched the struggle against the Shah's regime. It is in the context of ideology that aspirations, wishes and likewise, values under consideration of the people is expressed in the language of the revolutionaries; and this affair will attract the opinion and support of the masses in its wake.

> "Ideologies stand up as competitors opposite the archaic value-based structure and define and explain the value-based structure of a society that has a balanced and active system. Whenever the cultural and practical values of a society are not able to justify the political activities, ideologies are transformed into important sources offering the new values and leanings. The possibility exists that an ideology attains perfection and universal acceptance over a period of time that not only is it considered a method of political activity rather, as an acceptable alternative to the existing value-based structure as well…therefore, some ideologies pursue superficial changes while some revolutionary ideologies pursue more profound upheavals in the value-based structure."

The Islamic Revolution of Iran that occurred under the leadership of Imam Khomeini contained a specific ideology. This ideology wanted to bring about a fundamental transformation to the existing situation. The values put forward by the ideology of the Revolution were for the most part present in the religious sources and culture of the people. The people themselves were in favor of this ideology and were ready to lay down their lives for it. With the presentation of the ideology of revolution by the Imam and the clergy, the people became more aware of their situation. Emphasis on preparing the grounds and the foundations for growth, supremacy and perfection of human being as well as emphasis on ultra national and global values were of the special features of the ideology of the leader of the Revolution. He reckoned his mission to be the salvation of human beings and helping the entire oppressed people of the world and the Muslims all over the world.

This cognitive element taking into consideration the characteristics and role of ideology in investigations concerning the Revolution, was particularly important. Revolutionary ideology which is a system of ideas and clear, firm and generally organized judgments operates with the help of global values and with the aim and intention of liberating all human beings. Considering that ideology expresses its interpretations with easy and comprehensible words and sentences, it is capable of being used as an effective means of awareness. Another characteristic feature of revolutionary ideology is that normally, values on which the ideology is firmly based and relies on them are manifested and crystallized in "us" and in fact, "us" is responsible for crystallization and manifestation of the values. It is possible that these values in turn are old or not very old or modern and ultra modern. Here this matter must not be consigned to memory that ideology itself is considered to be the birthplace of new values as well and these modern values that are generally widespread but are in a dormant state, finally appear in the form of an explicable ideological plan. Therefore, revolutionary ideology directed towards outright rejection and cancellation of the existing situation, speaks of a future that is totally different from the present. It speaks of a future that comprises of great humanitarian principles that comprise the general and universal foundation and basis of revolutionary traditions of "freedom of human beings, perfect and true equality, and collective welfare, society based on justice and fraternity as well as solidarity." Therefore, it can be said that the Islamic Revolution using revolutionary ideology, was started and reached to its victory with the aim of reviving Islamic values, spreading it all over the world, supporting the oppressed of the world, strengthening Islamic civilization and propagation of ethics and spirituality in society. Adapting ideology of the Revolution with the needs, wants, aspirations and beliefs of the people of Iran caused general acceptance and victory of the Revolution. Ideology of the Imam

was not a nationalist ideology and did not contain nationalist slogans; it also seldom incorporated the traits and characteristics of a nationalist ideology or that it did not emphasize them; rather, the values mentioned in the Iran Revolution were ultra national and global values as well as values that had no limits with particular boundaries and frontiers.

By deeming the ideology of the Iran Revolution as a religious one, it can be concluded that the Islamic Revolution with its victory and collapse of the monarchy system aimed to revive the religious and spiritual values. The people of Iran with the attachment that they had for these values made efforts to remove the obstacles on the path of the administration of these values.

With the victory of the Revolution, both the revolutionaries and the masses made intense efforts to propagate and administer the new values; and in this path with the selflessness and sacrifice of many lives, we were witness to major social, political and cultural upheavals.

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