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## **Principles and components of democracy in the thoughts of Mohammad**

**MojtahedShabestari; Emphasizing on the methodology of Quentin Skinner**

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### **Abstract**

Today, democracy has been proposed as the most desirable biopolitical way and all political systems use the label of democracy to gain legitimacy and continuity of life and claim the legitimacy by creating some democratic political institutions. Nevertheless, every thinker has paid special attention to it. This article tries to study democracy and its principles in the religious views and ideas of Mohammad MojtahedShabestari, in the framework of Skinner's hermeneutic methodology. By studying the views and ideas of MujtahidShabestari as a religious thinker and influential in the Iranian intellectual currents after the Islamic Revolution, a democratic interpretation on religion can be given to his thought and he with a hermeneutic view, a modern interpretation on traditional concepts such as justice, council, etc. presented that is compatible with contemporary human understanding or modern understanding on religion. Also, MujtahidShabestari has tried to reconcile religion and modernity, and to offer a modern interpretation that is in line with the spirit of the time. He on basis on this approach to modern concepts such as democracy especially to principles of freedom and equality, believes in the possibility and existence of "Muslim democracy". In his view, these two principles should manifest themselves in the heart of society with different traditions as the core of the political system.

**Keywords:** Democracy, religiosity, Shabestari, Skinner, hermeneutics

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### **Introduction**

One of the main issues in the process of socio-political developments in Iran since the constitution has been democracy. Many thinkers in Iran have paid special attention to it and have given various understandings and interpretations on it. In Islamic societies, including Iran, knowing sacred and divine concepts such as government, as opposed to conventional and earthly, has always been a point of contention in theories about government. Islamists have discussed topics such as democracy, acceptance, status, and the role of the people as the foundations of government theory in a variety of ways.

One of the most important issues in the contemporary history of Iran is the struggle between tradition and modernity. What is the position of his intellectual system and how does he prescribe it to the religious community, including Iran, and can a democratic reading of the understanding of religion be considered in his views, and can the principles of democracy be identified in his mind or not? To answer, one must examine the foundations of their thoughts. First of all, it is mentioned that Mujtahid Shabestari is a modernist theologian who tried to pave the way for a modern and pluralistic reading on religion by founding Protestant theologians and hermeneutics such as Gadamer. According to Shabestari and his discourse, the realm of religion has a private aspect which is related to the vertical and heart relationship of each person with God, while the realm of politics has a public aspect and is related to the horizontal and external relationship of each person with other people. Using the hermeneutics of Gadamer's dialogue, Shabestari considers the reading and interpretation on religious texts as well as non-religious texts in each era to be based on the questions and preconceptions on the religious people and commentators of that era. Therefore, he believes that due to the continuous evolution of human sciences and knowledge in each era and the constant change of questions and preconceptions of religious people over time and the different levels and types of their knowledge, we will always see the diversity and influence of religious readings (Masoudnia, Rouhani, 1391: 16).

Shabestari believes that religious thought should change from the traditional method, which was based on the understanding of the

pre-modern period, to the modern method, and the new concepts created in this period need to be reformed in the understanding of religion. In the face of modern concepts such as democracy, he presents his interpretation on the basis of approach of "reconstruction of religious thought", a new understanding that shows the compatibility of democracy with religious political ideas. Mujtahid Shabestari The meaning of the reform of religion is to return to the raw material of Islam, i.e. the book and tradition in order to build a new religious thought and belief structure in accordance with the image and experience that man has of the world and man today. This meaning is the understanding of religion, in proportion to the human understanding of the world and man in recent centuries y, Shabestari, Skinner, Hermeneutics It means putting all the understandings in a "set" and cohesive them and removing their inconsistencies or refining the misunderstandings of the book and tradition and seeking the answer of today's man in the revelatory texts of religion, not being satisfied with the questions of the past and moving from a new perspective To understand revelation (Shabestari, 1393: 160). According to Shabestari, issues such as democracy require a new understanding of religion, which Shabestari's view shows is incompatible with democracy.

### **1. Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

This Paper explains topic of this research by using Skinner's hermeneutic method. Skinner is one of the thinkers who considered hermeneutics as a way to interpreting and understanding texts and, accordingly, presented his own methodology for studying and researching political ideas. In this methodology, the interpretation of the text and the understanding of its meaning based on the method of expressive action or verbal action. This method is rooted in Austin's famous theory of speech action, which is essentially constructed and discussed in opposition to semantic theory. In Austin theory, speech is not always used merely to express a fact, but is also used to perform an action or make a special impact on the audience. Accordingly, Austin distinguishes three types of verbal action, which are respectively: expressive, purposeful, and labor.

Pure expressive action merely expresses reality and takes the form of news and information. Whereas in intentional speech action, in addition to telling the truth, something is also done (such as promising, asking ...) and finally in the worker action speech, the goal of the speaker or writer is to influence the audience or make a change in behavior or perspective. It is special, Such as arousing, intimidating, forcing someone to adopt a point of view, etc. (Nozari & Pourkhodagholi, 2009: 110).

By emphasizing purposeful speech action, Skinner bases his methodology on this action. From this perspective, the speaker or writer does something by saying or writing, and there is a purpose to it. Skinner sees the main task of interpretation as discovering this purpose."Skinner himself explicitly defines 'interpretation' as equivalent to 'understanding meaning', and interprets a text as an attempt to analyze it in order to make sense of something" (Tully, 1988: 68).

Skinner believes that every text contains a message or meaning, and that the interpreter discovers that message or meaning; but he seriously warns that it is impossible to reach the correct reading and the presumption of determining the final meaning of the text which must be strictly avoided; because, in his view, such an assumption would prevent the emergence of alternative interpretations; one can only speak on the best reading or the best meaning. Skinner believes that the main task of the interpreter is to prove the meaning of the text, and this meaning is not obtained simply by reading the text, but in order to achieve it, one must go beyond or below the literary level of the text (Toli, 1988: 69) and behind it. In fact, researchers must pay attention to author's motives and intentions, social contexts as well as the linguistic context of its writing.

To understand political ideas, Skinner believes in the combination of contextualism and textualism. In an innovative paper in 1969, Skinner argued that the existing textualist and contextualist processes were completely inadequate and believed in both. The five stages can be well answered as the following five questions:

A) What does the author do or has done in writing the text in relation to other available texts that form the ideological context?

- B) What does the author do or give in writing a text in relation to the available and discussed political action that constitutes the ideological context?
- C) How should ideologies be identified and how should their evolution, critique and evolution be examined and explained?
- D) What is the relationship between political ideology and political action that well explains the spread of certain ideologies, and what effect does this have on political behavior?
- E) Which political ideas and actions play a role in promoting and customizing or customizing ideological change? (Truth, 1391: 445).

According to Skinner, in order to understand Shabestari's thought, one must reconstruct both its practical and ideological context in basis on contextualist and textualist approach, and clarify what Shabestari wants to do.

## **2. Life and time of Mohammad MojtahedShabestari**

Mohammad MojtahedShabestari was born in 1315 in Shabestar and studied religious sciences from the age of eight. From 1330 to 1348, he studied seminary sciences in Qom for eighteen years. Subsequently, he studies and collaborates with various magazines and publications such as the school of Islam, the school of Shiism, the collection of magazines and other religious, political and legal books (Yari, 1397: 14).

After studying in Qom for 18 years, he accepted Dr. Beheshti's invitation to manage the Hamburg Mosque and left for Germany. In Germany, he learns German to resume social and religious activities. Fluent in German, participates in religious discussions and political circles. He recovers himself, explores his mind and is drawn to epistemological endeavors, studies religions in a comparative and principled way. As a theologian, he appears with a new perspective in the field of science and knowledge.

In 1978, a few months before the revolution, he returned to Iran and, along with the people and national religious and intellectual clerics, worked against the monarchy and after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, he became the representative of the people of Shabestar in the parliament. In political management, he approached the freedom (Shabestari, 2016: 600).

After the first round of his representation, he distances from political work and engages in scientific activities at the university. After his forced retirement, he continues his scientific endeavors in various circles and occasionally lectures at European universities or in Arab countries. The ideas of Mujtahid Shabestari were further developed and popularized after the Islamic Revolution. The emergence of religious intellectuals, including Mujtahid Shabestari, apart from the political context and the special religious concerns of intellectuals, was subject to a series of internal intellectual-political factors and movements. Expansion of scientific and technical structures, religious family origin, studying abroad along with internal concerns and religious studies were an important factor in his intellectual structure that caused him to offer a new reading but different on the dominant Islamic reading according to the conditions of the new time (Khasto, 1389: 57).

Among the intellectual and political movements that were formed in the 1360s and 1370s; the growth of the new middle class, changes in foreign policy, changes in the cultural, economic and social spheres, etc., all required the presentation of the values of the Islamic Revolution in a new format and on modern language and reconciliation between religion and democracy. Leaving aside the ideological reading on religion that had been popularized by the late Shariati and influenced the intellectuals, Shabestari believed that religion is to deal with spiritual matters, but it has become a tool of this world. Shabestari tries to offer a minimal reading of religion and this reading is opposite of one believes to maximum religion

Mujtahid Shabestari tries to establish reconciliation and intimacy between religion and modernity and believes that traditional religion can't introduce the dynamism of religion and its modern face in harmony with the new world. Therefore, in order to create reconciliation and intimacy between religion and modernity, a modern and time-friendly interpretation must be presented that is in line with the spirit of the time. According to Shabestari, after breaking the foundations of ancient and established traditions, one should try to build a new building with the raw materials of religion in order to be compatible with the minds of human beings and modern society. Accordingly, Shabestari interpretation on political

issues, including democracy, is consistent with a modern understanding of religion. He advocates democracy as a form of government, calling it the least complicated form of government. He sees himself neither as a religious intellectual in today's society nor as a religious modernist, but as a man with philosophical and theological concerns to seeking meaning. As he himself states: "My concern is philosophical and theological one, because my job is to search for the meanings that God has for me, in fact my concern is to understand the issue of God" (Fasihi, 1386: 34).

### **3. The concept of democracy: its principles and components**

#### **3.1. The concept of democracy**

Democracy is originally a Greek word that came into English in the 16th century as the French word. Democracy roots in the two words demos (people) and Kratos (rule). According to this derivative combination, democracy means a kind of government in which the people rule in contrast to monarchical and aristocratic governments and political power is in the hands of the majority (Mirahmadi, 1393: 188). Democracy is one of the concepts that can't be defined precisely. There is no consensus on any of the definitions, but we try to trace some of the key features that are explicitly or implicitly mentioned in the definitions.

To understand what efforts theorists of political science have made to define democracy, or at least to determine its semantic limits, it is worth examining the various definitions of democracy offered. Among the frequently quoted definitions of democracy is the famous phrase of Abraham Lincoln: "(Democracy means) the rule of the people, by the people and for the people." In *The New Democracies*, James Bryce describes the meaning of democracy as follows: "This term refers to a government in which the will of the majority of eligible citizens prevails". Schumpeter said that "The democratic method is organizational order and calmness for making political decisions in which individuals gain decision-making power through electoral competition," (Jahanbakhsh, 1383: 22). Karl Cohen refers to simple definitions of democracy, such as "government based on consent", "majority rule", "government with equal rights for all", "people's sovereignty", but he believes that

these can't get to the heart of the matter. He defines democracy as follows: Democracy is a kind of collective government in which, in many ways, members of society, directly or indirectly, participate, or can participate, in making decisions that affect them all (Cohen, 1373: 22).

Instead of defining its meaning, some other authors have explained the criteria according to which democracy can be researched and interpreted. For example, Robert Dahl in his work called "democracy and its critics" named five criteria and indicators:

1) Effective participation; during the basic decision-making process, citizens should have an equal and equal opportunity to express their priorities.

2) Equality of votes in crucial areas; the citizen should have an equal opportunity to express his or her vote and choice in the crucial areas of collective decision-making, so that he or she is considered equal to the vote and choice of others.

3) Enlightening understanding; every citizen should, based on his or her own interests, have ample opportunity to discover and reason (during the period allowed for a decision) and to make his or her own opinion on the issue to be decided.

4) Agenda control; people should have the opportunity to decide how issues should be put on the agenda so that they can be decided in the democratic process.

5) Polyarchy order; it is an order that has two characteristics; Citizenship covers a relatively large proportion of adults, and citizenship rights include the opportunity to oppose and vote for the highest government officials (Dal, 1379: 48).

Samuel Huntington writes that a democratic political system is one in which the most powerful collective decision-makers are elected through fair, fair, and periodic elections, in which candidates compete freely for votes and virtually all adults have the right to vote. From the point of view of some, democracy provides governments that pursue the public interest; some think that democracy is the guardian of individual freedoms. Others believe that democracy makes it possible to achieve independence, and others believe that democracy creates special and desirable moods.



Some Iranian intellectuals have given different definition about this concept. Some of the main content of democracy is turning votes into law by the people (Malekian, 2003). Others see it as a theory or a method that can be combined with religion. Accordingly Democracy is a way of organizing society so that it can accept all necessary changes without resorting to violent actions. "Democracy is a set of institutions to minimize the mistakes of governing society by maximizing public participation and reducing the role of the individual in decision-making." (Soroush, 1379: 269)

Democracy, in its own sense, expresses the ideal and decisions that affect society as a whole and therefore should be made with the views of all members of that community, and that all members should have an equal right to participate in decision-making. In other words, the existence of democracy requires two general principles of public oversight of collective decision-making and equal rights in the exercise of that oversight (Bethham and Boyle, 1997: 17). According to Bethham and Boyle, a cohesive democratic system has four main elements or pillars: "holding free and fair elections, a transparent and accountable government, respecting civil and political rights, and having a democratic or civil society".

1) Free and fair elections; Electoral competition is the main tool that forces government officials to be accountable to the people and submit to their control. Another important feature of free elections is the guarantee of political equality between citizens, both in terms of access to government positions and the value of their votes.

2) Transparent and accountable government; in democracies, government accountability to the people has two aspects: legal accountability, i.e. accountability to the courts for adherence to the rule of law, and political accountability, i.e. accountability to parliament and the people for government actions and policies.

3) Civil and political rights; Civil and political rights include freedoms such as freedom of expression, association, and immigration, which are essential to the political action of the people, both in the form of self-organization in society and in gaining influence and influence over government policies.

4) Democratic or civil society; The concept of civil society reflects the fact that in order to maintain democracy, society must

have various organizations that can be run without relying on the government. Only then will the power of the state be limited. In this case, public opinion reaches the ears of the rulers from below, and the society achieves the self-confidence that is necessary for resisting authoritarianism. Their internal organization must also be democratic (Bethham and Boyle, 1997: 54-55).

### **3.2. The basic principles of democracy**

#### **3.2.1. Equality**

James Bryce identifies four different types of equality as follows:

1) Civil equality: is owned by all citizens who have the same status in the field of private law. Everyone has the equal right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

2) Political equality: where all citizens - or at least all adult male citizens - have an equal share in how society is run and in each position; Of course, different conditions determine this equality such as age, education and not being infected with corruption are the conditions. Political equality in today's society is equated with equality of suffrage because of its complexities. H .B .Mio refers to institutionalized political equality in a democracy with the equality of all adult citizens in the right and from his view the vote was equal, although he did not neglect other methods in which political equality or inequality could prevail (Mayo.1960: 62-63).

3) Social equality: which is ambiguous is where the law or custom does not make any formal distinction and privilege between different groups and classes.

4) Natural equality: is perhaps the best name for those similarities that all human beings with the same five senses have at birth. All human beings enter the world naked (and if they are healthy and natural) have the same physical organs and possibly the same mental abilities, desires and aspirations. Bryce also adds economic equality to the four types of equality: the effort to eliminate all privileges in wealth by allocating an equal share to every man and woman in worldly gifts (Bryce, 1931: 60).

Alf Ross believes in the tripartite relationship between equality, democracy and freedom. He believes that "increasing equality is essential to the continuation of democracy and democracy itself is essential to freedom" (Ross,2006:860).

### **3.2.2. Freedom**

The word Liberty, like the word democracy, does not have a clear and precise meaning. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines it as "the word liberty" as a form of freedom, as opposed to political subjugation, imprisonment or slavery. Two of the most well-known divisions of freedom are civil liberties and political liberties. Civil liberty is defined as "the absence of arbitrary restraints and guarantees of a set of rights." "Political freedom implies the restriction of the government - as far as possible - and includes the right of individuals to participate in government through elections and through the holding of government positions" (Jahanbakhsh & Forough, 2004: 34).

### **3.2.3. Majorityrule**

Democracy is more equated with the principle of the majority, the rule of the majority. James Bryce, for example, defines democracy as "a government in which the will of the majority of eligible citizens prevails". In the eyes of Mio, The link between majority rule, political equality, and political freedom is the legitimacy of deputies' decisions based on the "consent of those governed" (Jahanbakhsh & Forough, 2004: 34) According to him, the general assumption is that in an electoral system based on equality of votes, the majority of voters have elected a majority of the representatives, and of course the rule of the majority in the legislature causes the enactment of legitimate laws (Mayo, p. 67).

According to Bashirieh, democracy has a minimum and maximum meaning, in which democracy, in the minimal sense, is a party or group of people elected by the people on the basis of free, competitive, and regular elections to exercise state power for a specified period of time. Naturally, in a minimal democracy or democracy as a method and technology, politics and government need to guarantee public freedoms, especially freedom of expression and association and political party and classification and free transfer of information and ideological competition in the public sphere as the minimum requirements of democracy. It can be said that democracy is the minimum political concept, that is, it

is manifested in the field of politics and power relations, while maximum democracy is a cultural, social and economic concept in which freedoms and civil and public rights in the political sense should be achieved through a fair distribution of justice. Socially supported so that all interest groups and social classes can compete and participate in a relatively equal way in the sphere of state power, and as a result, democratic culture spreads beyond the political elite throughout society, while the concept of democracy is minimal or political. Theories of transition are more prominent, the concept of maximum democracy is confirmed in the study of the degree of consolidation and deepening and institutionalization of democracy (Bashirieh, 1394: 12). He enumerates some of the ideological foundations of democracy as liberalism, pragmatism, relativism, the originality of the contract, the originality of equality (civil equality), law and legalism, citizenship, the rule of the people, and human rights (Bashirieh, 1393: 243-274).

#### **4. Democracy and religion**

In this article on democracy, first of all, according to Mujtahid Shabestari's religious ideas, the relationship between democracy and religion is discussed. In his opinion, the principle of freedom is necessary here. Freedom in democratic governments means that every human being in society, regardless of his opinion, morals and nationalities should be respected only as a human being and as a free person in practice, but responsible for the freedom and rights of others (Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 138).

Mujtahid Shabestari says that even faith can't be realized without freedom of thought and human will. In his point of view, the freedom of thought and will of human beings is compatible with certain political and social realities and incompatible with certain other political and social realities. Human enjoyment of external freedom means living in the healthy society whose political and governmental realities are compatible with the freedom of thought and will of individuals. The definite condition for their enjoyment of internal freedom is the same freedom of thought and will. The conclusion of this analysis is that the logic of faith requires that believers seek to create such political and social realities and such a government in which they can believe freely

and be better able to purify everything for God (Mujtahid Shabestari, 1997: 70-71).

Shabestari's view on government, whether the Muslim system of government should be based on the principles of values originated from the book and tradition, or the system should not be incompatible with those principles of values? In response to his opinion, some say that we can talk about the Islamic form of government, i.e.; the system of government must be based on the accepted values of Islam. Others argue that only incompatibility can be said in this regard. These thinkers say that no system can be said to require certain principles of value. It can only be said that this system is not contrary to certain value principles. According to Shabestari, what is debatable and practically instructive is the proof of "non-contradiction" and therefore we should only talk about it (Mujtahid Shabestari, 1997: 75). According to these thinkers, in matters related to government, we can only say that we are trying to implement Islam, for example, we can say that the constitution is not against Islam, but we can't say that we are trying to make the Islamic constitution. According to Shabestari, whether recognizing that the system of government is not incompatible with Islamic values or that some political work should be done is the specialized work of religious scholars? The meaning of these principles is to comment on the compatibility or incompatibility of a system of government with it, it is a common practice and is related to the political development and the political and technical information available in society.

According to Shabestari, the democratic form of government means that the many groups and individuals that actually exist in our society and have different ideas, interests can understand the general problems of life that are related to all of them and have a common identity in Collectively resolve and manage a government organization, and this collective effort is to solve public problems and issues. Their political and social unity as a certain society and country should be in a certain time and place. But this collective endeavor has rules and customs, has well-known theoretical foundations, and has special ethics and values. These theoretical pillars, the most important of which are: freedom of expression and propaganda of political and non-political opinion, freedom of association, freedom of religion and equal rights for all members of

society in choosing and forming political parties and communities and participation in government (Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 140-141).

In democracy, the concept of people must be preserved, and people are the same individuals and groups that are pluralistic in every way. A democratic government, in addition to the theoretical foundations mentioned above, has its own morals and values. First of all is tolerance of government and individuals on dissidents, whether these dissidents are political or religious, or whatever. Second, differences of reading in all cultural contexts must be recognized and be the basis of individuals living with each other and rulers with individuals. Second, the recognition of the right to political life is equal for all political groups and individuals. Everyone should have equal political rights. Third is the consideration of minority rights when shaping public political will. When they formulate public political demands and want to impose things on them, the rights of political and non-political minorities must be protected in these formations. Fourth, consider the decisions of the majority as acceptable and temporary and validate them until the next government, because other decisions may be made later. Fifth is the ethics of compromise between political groups (Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 143).

According to Shabestari, these are moral values, that is, a democratic society must be nicknamed after these people. These are the main values of democracy. Without the validity of these values, democracy will not be established in any society. According to Shabestari, the important question here is what democracy can mean with a religious suffix if democracy is its theoretical foundations and its ethics and values have been explained. Some answer is that the religious suffix indicates that people in society view democracy and accept it from a religious perspective, and that religious people find democracy the most appropriate form of government in the present age, without prioritizing its realization and process. In this case, religious people should try to absorb the principles, values and ethics necessary for the formation of democracy in the value system existing in their society and incorporate it into the value system.

If the values of democracy in that society are denied, then a problem arises and the realization of democracy is ruled out. This is where the existing value system in the society must be reconsidered, and this is part of the problem of reconstruction in religious thought. Religious thinking in line with values needs to be reconstructed. If religion is to survive in the new age and convey its spiritual message to human beings, there must be a review of the social values of religious communities, and interpreters of religion must do the same from the standpoint of religion (Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 147).

There are two kinds of religious values, one is eternal religious values and a series of values are the servants of those values, that is, we accept these second-order values, so that those first-degree values that are eternal can always survive. For example, the value of justice is an eternal value. The second-order values of the value system require the revision and reconstruction. The values of democracy must be absorbed there. Shabestari says that if I am asked by what reasoning Muslim people can absorb these democratic values and ethics in their value system, I can retell their argument from a religious position as follows:

We accept the system of democracy, because in the present age it is the only system in the shadow of which the two great truths of justice and human dignity can be relatively realized, and human beings can realize their humanity in the realm of this realization (Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 147). If in human societies justice and freedom are not adequately guaranteed in the form of legal frameworks, the members of that society will face many problems in the practice of human responsibilities. If these frameworks that allow for free moral choice are neglected and only want to instill beliefs in the minds of people with a series of propaganda inductions, what is the difference between this religiosity and the promotion of goods on television? ((Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 148). According to Shabestari, true religiosity is that which deals with the meaning of human life and the heart of man, where man in the secret of his heart reaches discernment and decision, is where man stands before God and says: God willing. In a society where the possibilities for the realization of human humanity are ready, such a decision and diagnosis can be made with a high probability; this is how a Muslim can say that he wants

a democratic system because its foundations and values allow me to consciously build spiritual self. As the second part of his argument could be, in the present age it is only in the shadow of a democratic government that one can contribute to the material and spiritual growth of other human beings, that is, to serve the people.

Of course, in a democracy, there must be a commitment to spiritual morality. In societies where democracy was fully valued but human capital and spiritual heritage were forgotten. Today, those societies are facing a crisis of spirituality and morality. Today, especially after the First and Second World Wars, this wave of power has not been separated from morality. Politics is not separated from a series of spiritual values (Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 149). According to Shabestari, in order to rebuild the system of values that religious democracy needs, religious readings are necessary. The negation of the multiplicity in a society is exactly the negation of democracy.

Shabestari talks about how a believer relates to politics; Our history shows that the prophecy of the Prophet, unlike Christianity, was not the embodiment of divine power on earth. With the advent of the Church in Christianity, which dates back to the beginning of Christianity, in addition to the "worldly power" (human-rational) that engaged in politics, another power emerged that was the "embodiment of divine power" on earth and the power of the church in Christianity. But the message of the Prophet of Islam was "faith in God, the Day of Judgment and righteous deeds." It was an invitation to save mankind from "losses" and to bring human beings to a spiritual life. In one of the short chapters of the Qur'an, the essence of this message is stated as follows: "In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. There was no mention of the incarnate power of God on earth at the beginning of Islam and the prophethood of the Prophet, and therefore when the Prophet died, everyone believed that he was like all human beings in the past (Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 155).

So if we want to answer the question that there were several types of power on earth during the time of the Prophet and after the advent of Islam, we must say that there was no more power and that was worldly political power or earthly power and that was when the Prophet passed away, the Muslims sat down and



established a government based on a conception of power through the method of allegiance and religious color. And the differences between the companions of Ali (AS) and others were not in the fact that they said that in addition to worldly power, there is a divine power embodied on earth and Imam Ali (AS) is an example of that. They never had such an interpretation, but the difference was that they said that the Prophet had appointed Ali to hold the same earthly power in order to protect the interests of the Muslims, and such installations were common at that time, he ruled according to the customary rules of that time. "Shura" was used in matters related to the administration of the ummah, and Shura was a rational institution at that time. Rationalism was also endorsed in terms of revelation, and a religious political government emerged. The new thing that was related to the prophethood of the Prophet and was not before his coming and was found with his coming and the Muslimization of Muslims was realized with it was that the Prophet told these people to stop polytheism, believe in the one God and the Resurrection and do righteous deeds make sure that this righteous act covers the realm of politics as well (Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 157).

According to Shabestari, the Prophet's work in the field of democracy, governance and ideology was not a change of social structures because they all remained, but a moral and legal reform within the same structures that took place. The Prophet at that time dealt only with the same social structures in which he lived, and was only aware of them and could only seek their moral and legal reform, and nothing more (Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 168). According to Shabestari, a study of Quran and prophetic hadiths shows that the Prophet of Islam did not give a new definition of "justice" other than what was understood in his time. He says that in the relationship between faith and politics, it is not necessary for us to define politics from the standpoint of faith, but we must formulate general moral-strategic principles to which our politics must be committed and have a clear application and moral defensible ability. Today, the transition from caliphate to democracy is not about their departure from a sacred extraterrestrial system to a worldly rational system, but about the transition from a traditional earthly rational system based on

custom and habit to a contemporary and new earthly rational system (Mujtahid Shabestari, 2004: 171-172).

## **5. Democratic components in the thought of Mohammad MojtahedShabestari**

Mohammad MojtahedShabestari is a religious intellectual and his reading on religion in terms of politics and government is consistent with the principles of democracy. He builds his political theory with profound thought on new political issues and concepts, and presents his understanding of political issues, government and democracy on the basis of the new definition and interpretation in harmony with contemporary human culture. His ideas on political issues are all based on a modern understanding and have a deep rift from the past. With such a definition and interpretation, he does not consider democracy to be contrary to religion. In the following, each of these concepts and how to understand it, which is a kind of foundation of democratic governance in his mind, is explained.

### **5.1. Transformation in social ideas and communication**

Shabestari says that the new issues such as social and political freedoms in today's world have their own history and somehow go back to the two historical developments in the new centuries that took place in the West. Those two historical developments are: 1) the change in the thinking of the Western man, 2) the change in his social relations and social organization. Transformation in human thinking means freedom of thought, that is, there is no pre-determined criteria for the accuracy and precision of thought and its content. When you allow thought to determine the standard of right and wrong, you have in fact created the ground for epistemic pluralism. In epistemological pluralism, truth can be pluralistic. Epistemological pluralism is the result of the same evolution that has taken place in thought. In the second type of evolution, one of the important issues that was considered is the inner freedom of man, which is interpreted as the freedom of the human will. According to him, because man can recognize a moral duty, his will can benefit from the blessing of freedom by turning to that law. Freedom is based on the moral law and is the basis of three kinds of human rights. These three categories of rights are: the

rights of political freedoms (freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of employment, etc.), the right to citizenship against the state (the right to participate and work and to participate as a citizen in the continuation of society and the social rights of each individual in terms of being a member of society. According to Shabestari, all these new discussions are related to human social life and human relations and how the organization and structure of society, government and politics, and not human spiritual happiness and human relationship with God, which should be discussed in religion and theology(Shabestari, 1379: 59-61).

An important principle in social organization is the distribution of power, which must be fair, and becomes the most important issue in the political science. The only justice can and should restrict the freedoms of individuals, and no other principle, no taste of individuals or the authority of government officials. Therefore, Mujtahid Shabestari says that new concepts such as society, individual, citizenship, social and political freedoms and rational management, policy-making and political participation, etc., were not in the old era. In that age, other concepts and topics have been proposed, such as "ruler", "advice of Muslim imams", "religious policy", "duties of the Imam", "conditions of the Imam", "allegiance", "people of settlement", "public guardianship" etc. and all these concepts and issues had been discussed in the framework of individual government. These political concepts were based on a specific meaning of the individual and society, which is quite different from the meaning of "individual" and "society" in modern political discourse. The rights of freedoms, citizenship and social rights are alien in the image of man and society in Islamic theology and jurisprudence.

## **5.2. Justice**

According to Shabestari, the justice in this new social life is a very complex philosophical concept. In the past social life, there was a series of simple criteria and examples of individual justice and individual oppression with which the actions of the government were measured and the just ruler was the one who observed the known examples and criteria of individual justice and individual oppression. In the new social life today, the situation has changed completely and justice has a social meaning and each of the schools of liberalism and socialism claims to provide justice

better than the rival. Democracy although at the forefront of the aspirations of politicians and nations, but its interpretations, models and ways to achieve it in different countries has been much debated and contested(Shabestari, 1379: 17).

In today's world, only the government has political legitimacy that is based on public opinion and will be able to analyze and defend its actions in a just manner. Shabestari believes that the new social life, which is centered on "all-round human development" and that Muslims have been forced to submit it since the beginning of the twentieth century, cannot be governed by what is lawful and what is unlawful in jurisprudence. This new social life, as can be seen from its specific and enumerated characteristics, can only be managed with scientific management and long-term planning (Shabestari, 1379: 18)

### **5.3. Denial of the official reading of religion**

From Shabestari's point of view, the reading of Islam at the beginning of the revolution was a rational-human reading. According to the reading was that Islam has a political message: Muslims should fight against tyranny and colonialism based on values such as freedom, justice and independence. He says that the first constitution of the revolution, the form of government was a combination of democracy and the theory of Shiite Imamate. This was not the work of jurists and theologians, it was an attempt on the basis of jurisprudence and politics, and the political values in the constitution are the values of modern times, values such as liberties, citizenship rights, social rights that are not mentioned in the book and tradition. When "jurisprudential Islam" gradually emerged as the official reading of the government, the proponents of this reading said that the religion of Islam has fixed eternal political, economic and legal systems. The form of government is inferred from the book and tradition and is not a rational issue. The duty of the government among Muslims is to implement the rules of Islam.

### **5.4. Tolerance**

Tolerance in its political and social sense can seriously exist where human rights are accepted in its modern sense. Tolerance exists where the foundations of the constitution of the society positively assess the existence of differences in religious, political

and cultural beliefs and consider the principle of differences a blessing. Shabestari says that tolerance does not mean moral indifference and abandonment of values or skepticism about the truths that each person reaches in relative terms. Tolerance is sometimes a form, sometimes a content. He says we should avoid formal tolerance and believe in content tolerance. We will not be able to talk about tolerance if we do not allow the critique of formal and informal religious beliefs. He says that the religious nature of society does not necessarily mean that the religious beliefs of the majority act as the ideology of government without criticism. Society can be religious in the sense that its people live religiously and in political participation, the ultimate and first-hand values of religion are involved. A religious community can have a democratic government as long as the door to *ijtihad* is open in the principles and sub-principles of religion in that community. He says that one should pay attention to religious pluralism in the contemporary world (Shabestari, 1379: 72-83).

In the view of Shabestari, the inherent structure of Islam is completely compatible with the republic. The For followers of such a religion, "republic" means the most natural political situation for the people to decide to set their own goals and implement their own political solutions. He considering the openness of the system of religious thought and rationality in Islam and concludes that official custodians of the interpretation of religion does not necessarily limit the thinking and title of the audience (ie the Muslim people)(Shabestari, 1379: 97)

### **5.5. Equality**

According to Shabestari, in the existing Islamic jurisprudence, the inherent equality of human beings in cases such as the rights of men and women or Muslims and non-Muslims is not fully taken into account, what should be done in these cases? The book and tradition in their time have made changes in favor of human beings in all these cases, but this does not mean that everything that can be added to human rights in other times has been given to them. This issue is related to the evolution and social changes of human beings, and perhaps in an age, considering the changes and social evolution of human beings, it is possible to imagine rights for a part of society that did not exist in previous eras. In fact, in such matters, the book and tradition show the direction of social

movement and regulation, not that all possible eternal laws and rights are stated in them together.

### **5.6. Council and Democracy**

One of the issues related to democracy is the issue of the council. Regarding councils, Shabestari says that the issue of councils and parties cannot be raised outside the democratic political system in the sense of today. A democratic system can only be realized in a society whose political system is based on humanity and equal rights. A democratic political system means that human rights - in its modern sense - are accepted as the manifestation of social justice, which is the highest and ultimate political value, and are the basis of political life. In such a system, councils contribute to the survival and functioning of democracy through the participation of the people in the management of society. The mechanism of the councils is to create political power from the lower levels of society and to establish the system of power on it and to generalize management and decision-making. The most important goal of the council is to establish political justice. The institution of the council is the practical oversight in the political management of society from low to high levels. If a system is established in this way in the societies of the councils, it can be said that in that society, democracy, meaning the rule of the people over the people, has taken. Councils are a mechanism for rationalizing and democratizing the democratic political system in order to realize the ultimate value of political justice in the concept of this age, and councils did not exist in this sense at the time of the Prophet. "Washaurham fi al-Amr" say that you should consult with them in political matters. These advisory opinions, which were only for the heads of the tribes and later in jurisprudence for settlement and marriage. The political freedom of the society was such that they could advise the ruler and command the good and forbid the bad (Shabestari, 1379: 154-157).

### **6. Democracy**

Shabestari considers political freedom and democracy crucial for the Iranian nation. He considers the meaning of political freedom to be the intellectual, voluntary and practical freedom of man and his participation in determining his social destiny while

being responsible before the law. In response to those who oppose democracy, Shabestari says that the main claim of the religious opponents of democracy is that democracy means the prioritizing the will of man over the will of God, and that human law takes precedence over the law of God. According to Shabestari, this claim is based on the misconception of democracy. The fundamental question is whether man should follow the divine values and laws as a legislator or not? It is related to the philosophy of law and the philosophy of ethics, not to the form of government, but to democracy. Democracy in today's world is a form of government as opposed to the form of dictatorial government. "Democracy is a form of government in which the people, as far as possible, govern themselves and control the destiny of social life," he said (Shabestari, 1379: 107-109).

### **Conclusion**

As mentioned, Shabestari offers a democratic reading on religion. He on the basis of the pluralistic view, interprets history, sacred texts, jurisprudence, and culture, believes that due to the differences in preconceptions, our perception will be different at different times, and emphasizes it must consider in our interpretation and understanding. He paid attention to the general orientation of the school of Islam and weighed new issues with it. In his thought, democracy is the way and form of government as opposed to the way and form of dictatorship and what separates the democratic government from other forms of governments is the law. Shabestari considers the existence of democracy to be conditional on the existence of conflicting organizations and beliefs, and believes that democratic government is neither a majority government nor a minority government, but its duty is to ensure the interests and welfare of all groups. Shabestari sees democracy as a way of life in this world, not a criterion for judging the human beings. Mujtahid Shabestari believes in the existence of "Muslim democracy". He considers the two principles of "freedom" and "equality" to be the vein of democracy. According to Shabestari, democracy is not just voting, but the "essence" of democracy is "competition", not "participation", and even 100% participation in elections does not guarantee the existence of democracy, but participation is only one of the basic pillars of democracy.

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