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Taleqani as a Humanitarian Islamist: His Activities and Ideologies under Pahlavi Regime

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Abstract

Ayatollah Seyyed Mahmoud Taleqani (1911-1979) spent most of his life opposing the tyrannical regime of Pahlavi. To save the Iranians from their tyranny, he referred to Quran because he believed it is the book for mankind's salvation. His Quranic interpretation which was opposed by some prominent ulama, attracted some secular intellectuals who were under strong influence of ideologies such as Communism. He also expressed his discontent of ulama who condoned Pahlavi regime's suppression, and neglected their own religious duties. Such a Taleqani's criticism of the fellow ulama, together with his consistent support of Mosaddeq, has been regarded revolutionary. Although Taleqani has been examined in relation to the Iranian Revolution, this research aims to analyze his ideology and activity to extract some unknown characteristics under the Pahlavi's. And the outstanding characteristic of Taleqani as a humanitarian Islamist will be finally found through the above consideration.

Keywords: Intellectuals, Revolutionary, Ideology, Unknown Characteristics

1. Introduction

In short, they (Taleqani and Bazargan) aimed at resolving the deep-seated issues that had helped wreck the constitutional movement as well as the 1945-1953 national struggles.

Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (1982, 459)

It is evident that Taleqani is being distinguished through his Islamic ideologies. In particular, the ideology that makes Taleqani unique among the other fellow ulama is his perception of mankind, which is remarkably different from that of other religious leaders and activists of his time. Another factor is the way he considered religion as a path leading man toward perfection, and ultimately God. Thus, in his words, "Religion has been sent to human beings to act as a savior, not the one to be saved." The noble tasks of Taleqani such as *Partovi az*

*Quran*¹ (A Ray From Quran), and his new Quranic exegesis are outstanding and has been referred to as the splendid horizon that shows the dimensionality of Quran and the way it deals with every situational problem, encompassing the contemporary ones. Another prominent feature of Taleqani that distinguished him from many ulama was his liberality, and being sympathetic to both religious and secular individuals and groups.

Although there are several noteworthy books and articles, written by renowned scholars and researchers, focusing on Taleqani's characteristics, a few aspects of his characteristics seem to have remained unsought. Most of them have examined Taleqani's ideology, religiosity and his anti-Pahlavi regime political activities. However, very little has been said about his outstanding characteristics such as his humanitarian aspect. And the actual reasons of Taleqani's activities and his approach toward socio-political problems have hardly ever been examined. Thus, this paper aims to re-examine the characteristics of Taleqani and his ideological elements which have been overlooked so far. It hopefully gives us sufficient clue and enables us to unveil the diverse ideology and characteristic of Taleqani as a humanitarian and liberal revolutionary who took a firm stand against the tyranny of Pahlavi regime.

2. Taleqani's Biography and Education

2.1. Early Life

The 20th Century can be named the century of revolutions in Iran. These revolutions cost lives of thousands of innocent people who fought for freedom which is every human beings' inalienable right. Although, the Constitutional revolution (1905-1911) did not achieve the desired success, it can be considered as the fundamental stimulant of most political movements that led to the Iranian revolution of 1979, which is said to be quite unique among the modern revolutions. It was led by great thinkers and ideologues amongst who Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani (1910-1979) was one of the most prominent and influential.

Taleqani, whose birth coincided with the post-Constitutional Revolution chaos, was the son of Seyed Abolhasan, one of the most renowned and trustworthy ulama in Taleghan. Having finished his primary Islamic lessons in Qazin, Seyed Abolhasan went to Najaf to complete his studying. He was the *Imam-e jama't* in Qanat abad Mosque, and regarding his piety, Chehabi says, "Unlike many *ulama* who were notoriously venal and led quite comfortable lives, S. Abolhasan had a reputation for incorruptible honesty." (Chehabi 1990, 104) He made a living by repairing watches. His Islamic principles and Quranic lessons had a great influence on his son, Ayatollah Seyed Mahmoud Taleqani, and caused him to become an outstanding symbol of faith and grew him to an important Revolutionary figure that was highly admired. Taleqani grew up in fear and anxiety, and his early life was either filled with or shadowed by a misery that neither left him nor seemed to abate to his very last years. But it was just the beginning, because Reza Shah who got himself into throne shortly after the Coup d'état of 1921 exacerbated the situation, thus increased Taleqani's pain and sorrow.

2.2. His Islamic Education

After learning basic reading and writing in his hometown, Galird, Taleqani moved in to live with his parents in Tehran where he continued his studies. At the age of ten, he was sent to Qom to study at Razaviye and then Feiziye School under Shaikh Abdolkarim Ha'eri's guidance. During this period, he was highly influenced by some well-known ulama such as Ayatollah Kamare'i, known as an intellectual due to his broad knowledge and interest in philosophy. Shortly after his father's death in 1931, Taleqani secretly went to Najaf to study *Kharej*

¹ Partovi az Quran (A ray from Quran) is a series of new Interpretation of Quran written in six volumes, which looks at almost every verse of it from a different angle and deals with them in a unique way. It basically focuses on the essential relationship of Quran and the society. This new interpretation shows the evolutionary aspect of Quran's messages and how it is connected with the social, political and economic matters.

lessons (an Islamic advanced requisite lesson for ulama)² under the guidance of Ayatollah Esfahani, Haj Shaikh Muhammad Gharavi, and Agha Zia Al-din Araqi. He finally received *ejazeh* (permission of *ejtehad*) from Ayatollah Esfahani in 1937. Having returned to Iran, he also received *ejazeh* from Ayatollah Ha'eri in Qom. It goes without question that Taleqani was strongly influenced by one of the most prominent ulama of Constitutional Revolution era, Ayatollah Na'ini and his *book Tanbih al-Ummah wa Tanzih al-Millah*, which was an endorsement to the Constitutional Law. Under this influence, Taleqani spent most of his life in anti-dictatorship activities seeking a solution to save the Iranians from excessive exploitation of the Pahlavi regime.

3. Taleqani's Political Activities

3.1. Background

Reza Shah constantly imposed new rules and suppressed Iranians on an unprecedented scale making the situation intolerable. In 1928, Reza Shah established a law standardizing the dress code for the officials, from which some ulama were exempted.³ However, this exemption was an evidential appease for ulama in order to keep them quiet. Because, before stabilizing his power, Reza Shah did not want to be confronted by the religious leaders or activists. In 1935, he supplemented the previous law with another which forced Iranian women out of their traditional veils.

Taleqani was arrested and imprisoned for the first time in 1939 because he had forgotten to carry the license for his *ammameh* (turban). Needless to say, this imprisonment played a crucial role in Shaping Taleqani's ideology, as well as his religious and revolutionary movements. Following his first detention that lasted five days, he was summoned to show his license and was sentenced to three months in prison. It was then that Taleqani found the opportunity to meet some prominent political activists, including Ehsan Tabari and some other activists, who later founded the Tudeh Party in 1941. It was quite the beginning of acquainting with other ideologies through discussions with his cellmates. He was not only getting to know various people with different ideologies, but he was striving to attract them to the Islamic principles. Through these discussions, due to their dimensionalities, he found new horizons. However, he consistently took a firm hold to his Islamic beliefs and his faith was never shaken. The torture and the execution of the other prisoners increased his anger toward Reza Shah's dictatorial regime and made him much more determined than ever to fight. Thus, on his release, Taleqani commenced his vast anti-regime activity which turned him to a prominent revolutionary for the rest of life.

Taleqani's early ideological changes toward socio-political matters can be observed in the expression of his view and understanding in *Hokumat az Nazar e Eslam (Government in Islam's View)*. He argues, "As Islam appeared, it brought about a great change in people's thought, morality, and the order of the society. Islam brought ideal and just governments that surpassed humans' expectations and imagination, into existence. But then those governments got different colors and names, and ruled people under the concept of Islamic Khilafat and Velayat, consequently, Islam's fundamental ideas were neither known by the Muslims, nor were they understood by the others. Thus, what we perceive is the outcome of the discussions. Therefore, it is theoretically and superficially religious, and practically has no clear approach, definition or even validity." (Taleqani 1999, 9) Consequently, Taleqani decided to show the genuine principles of Islam which were either compromised or misinterpreted.

After Reza Shah's abdication, there was a quite free political atmosphere. Political activities were not as restricted as they used to be, and a great number of political activists, including members of Tudeh party as well as Mohammad Mosaddeq, were released. As the limitation of political activities decreased, every single political group strived to expand their activities and attract more members that led to several distinctive groups and

² Moqaddame (Introductory lessons), Sath (Surface, i.e. Intermediate lessons), and Kharej (Beyond, i.e. Advanced lessons) are the required Lessons for the Islamic clerics to receive *ejazeh* (the Permission of *Ejtehad*)

³ High rank clerics (ulama), Imam-e jama'at of Mosques, and some of the religious preachers (*va'ez*) who had received license for their turban and gown were exempted from the dress code regulations. However, after his return from Turkey, Reza Shah who was now influenced by modernism changed his policy toward the religious sections and put lots of pressure on them.

movements such as: Nationalist Movement founded by Mosaddeq in 1949; Pro-Soviet Communist party, known as Tudeh party founded in 1941; Religious Organizations and Groups such as Feda'iyān-e Eslām founded by Navvab Safavi in 1946; Pro-Government Movement which was highly supported by Imperialists, particularly Great Britain. This open atmosphere gave Taleqani the proper opportunity to get more politically active.

3.2. *Awakening the Youth*

The commencement of Taleqani's political activities and the development of his ideology found a new dynamic characteristic by awakening the youth and the secular intellectuals. Having suffered from the suppression of the dictator regime, Taleqani saw the ultimate solution in the solidarity of the masses and a unified opposition. He believed that small political groups and opposition parties were not able to bring about any significant changes opposing the powerful regime, particularly because it was strongly supported by the West. Taking advantage of the similarities between the goals of various political groups including the religious and the secular, he looked at the problem from a different angle. Taleqani consistently strived not to be distracted by religious prejudice in order to stay aware of the sacredness of the non-Islamic groups' goals. For this very reason, his thorough understanding and sympathy earned him an outstanding popularity among the members of different groups, particularly the intellectuals and the active youths. However, it also caused some ulama and religious activists to consider his ideologies a combination of the Western modernism if not completely derived from it. Consequently, some of them did not accept his ideologies and some other ulama even went farther and condemned the modern ideologies introduced by Taleqani. Of course, this fact should not be neglected that Taleqani's ideologies which were strongly influenced by Islamic principles and messages of the Quran would not, in some cases, fit the secular groups' ideologies. Therefore, his effort in explaining some of the non-Islamic theories either fell victim to ambiguity or led to complexity or paradox.

Between 1939 and 1941 Taleqani, like his father, began his Islamic teachings based on Quran's interpretation. However, he was attacked by some of the traditional ulama who argued that ordinary people should merely recite the Holy Book. (Chehabi 1990, 123-124) Taleqani recalls, "When I started interpreting the Quran in Qanat Abad Mosque, I was attacked from two sides. From one side, religious communities that said no one has the right to interpret Quran, and it should only be read and sometimes recited for the deceased. And I did suffer for proving that the Quran is for research and pondering upon, not for reading." (Taleqani 1979a, 8-9) And the other side Taleqani was attacked by was some of the fellow ulama who considered his Quranic exegeses intellectually inferior to those of other ulama's interpretations, including the contemporary work of Allame Tabataba'i. Following his anti-dictatorial activities, right after Reza Shah's abdication, Taleqani also took advantage of the opportunity and followed the other political activists, thus established Kanun-e Islam (Islamic Center) in September 1941. He succeeded in attracting a great number of young professionals and students. His aim was to show them the true face of Islam.⁴ Like Shariati, Taleqani basically believed that Quran was either totally neglected or completely misinterpreted. It was in Hedayat Mosque that Taleqani developed his Islamic teachings based on his unique Quranic exegesis that mostly dealt with the contemporary circumstances. He used the modern interpretation of Quran to deliver its social and political messages. In relation to his Quranic exegeses, Haj Sadeq, a lifelong friend of Taleqani and father of Nasser Sadeq⁵ says, "We had never heard anyone speak about Islam with such freshness and clarity. On weekends, young men from neighboring areas would travel 70 or 80 kilometers to attend Taleqani's lesson." (Irfani 1983, 139) It goes without question that his Quranic exegeses got a remarkable popularity among the Islamic activists as well as the secular intellectuals.

3.3. *Challenging the Obstacles*

⁴ By true face of Islam, Taleqani meant: Islam is the religion of Salvation, Equality, Peace, and Brotherhood. Thus, it has answer for all questions, solutions for all conflicts and social problems including political and economic ones. Taleqani did it because, in his words, "With the consciousness that has appeared in almost everyone, some aware youths who have, either deliberately or inadvertently, come across with various ideologies are asking questions about Islam and its messages."

⁵ Nasser Sadeq was a member of the Leadership Cadre (central committee) of the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization

Awakening the Youth was probably the most difficult and crucial task that Taleqani accomplished. However, he was not alone in this mission. Such great Islamic ideologues as Bazargan and Shariati were of remarkable assistance to him, and they all faced with many obstacles in achieving their goals.⁶ Religious activism had become a victim of Reza Shah's dictatorship and the secular ideologies propagated by the Tudeh party. When Tudeh party was perceived as a great danger, it was challenged in three different ways: Repression, which was used by some of the conservative groups such as Seyyed Zia al-din Tabatabai's National Will Party between 1941 and 1953. It was also used by various governments, especially after 1953; Political, national and governmental action, which was the way of National Movement; Ideological level, which was the method that Taleqani and Bazargan found the most effective.⁷

Weren't it for the widespread institutional dissemination, the revolutionary idea of Taleqani, Bazargan, Shariati, and the other Islamic thinkers would have remained socially of no significance. Two of the most prominent religious institutions were "Islamic Societies" and "Muslim Student Associations" which frequently invited Taleqani to give lectures on a number of issues that mattered to young professionals and students. Through contact with them, Taleqani gradually developed a sense of practical politics, without any sentimental attachment to unnecessary pieties, which gave him a discerning understanding. And through the very same contacts, Taleqani became aware of the prevalence of Marxist ideas among the professionals and found it a fast-spreading threat. Thus, confronting Marxism on both ideological and material levels became his most important political plan.

However, the above-mentioned difficulties were not the only obstacles Taleqani and the other Islamic thinkers confronted with. In fact, as far as the Islamic ideology is concerned, they would have to cope with a bigger problem, and that was the destructive propaganda of the politically conservative ulama. Whether those obscurantist ulama were royalist or formalist, they all shared one commonality. In relation to that, Taleqani stipulates, "They called every young and creative thinker an 'infidel'." (Taleqani 1999, 16) They (conservative ulama) also believed that Muslim intellectuals 'wearing suits and neckties had no business mixing themselves with Islam'.

3.4. Proponent of the Political Activists

As an intellectual alim, Taleqani not only tried to understand the ideas of, both secular and religious, socio-political activists, but also he respected them and made a great effort to support them by all possible means. Mojahedin-e Khalq, Fada'iyān-e Eslām, and Fada'iyān-e Khalq were among the groups which were strongly supported and even assisted by Taleqani. Apart from some of the political groups that Taleqani actively participated in, most of his activities were in such a way, i.e. Spiritual guidance and support of political activists. He strived to crystalize the way to the ultimate victory for everyone, especially by Quranic lessons. Even after his death he was considered as a guiding leader. Regarding Taleqani's role, Najmabady says, "To the best of my knowledge the Mojahedin still consider Taleqani their theoretical and spiritual father figure, as they have always." Mojahedin had roots in Nehzat-e Azadi Iran (Iran's Freedom Movement) which will be explained later. It is true to say that contrary to many other ideologues, Taleqani never withdrew supporting Mojahedin. "They (Mojahedin) do have continuity to Taleqani since they originally came from the Freedom Movement. And for a long time even though other figures in the Freedom Movement like Bazargan openly disassociated themselves, Taleqani went out of the way to protect the Mojahedin in both political and material ways." (Keddie 1986, 167)

⁶ Although Taleqani, Bazargan and Shariati are mentioned to have shared the grave responsibility of awakening the youth, their personal relationship is not at focus here.

⁷ Taleqani and Bazargan believed that the third approach i.e. ideological level is the most effective way because in their opinion an ideology could not be fought with or destroyed by force.

In 1969, the Mojahedin had published a book on Imam Hussein⁸ in which they praised his personality and struggle. Taleqani, Montazeri, Motahhari, and several other opponents ulama had read the book and liked it because of its combative aspects. Khomeini, however, reacted to the book in a different way. He argued that the Mojahedin were not true Muslims and that they were not subject to Islam, but used Islam as a pretext. (Kian 1998, 217)

Fada'iyān-e Islam was also, to a great extent, assisted by Taleqani. On one occasion he helped Hossein Emami when he found refuge in Taleqani's house after the periodic assassination he masterminded. In this regard, Chehabi states, "Taleqani, despite having sided with Mosaddeq after the Devotees of Islam (Fada'iyān-e Eslām) had fallen out with the prime minister, extended his help to the terrorist organization and sheltered Navvab Safavi on a few occasions."

Taleqani, Rafsanjani, Motahhari and Montazeri not only supported the Mojahedin, but also the Fada'iyān-e Khalq. When Ahmadzadeh, one of the leading members of Fada'iyān, was arrested, they urged Khomeini to try to save Ahmadzadeh's life. (Kian 1998, 171) Among the political groups and activists that Taleqani took a firm stand for, Mosaddeq and the National Front must be mentioned. Not only before the coup (1953) that brought Mosaddeq's government to its end, but also after that, Taleqani strongly supported Mosaddeq and his Movement. Later on, he even consistently supported Nehzat e Moqavemat-e Melli (National Resistance Movement) which was founded in 1953 in order to continue what Mosaddeq had initiated, and finally joined the Movement. In relation to the National Front and the significance of Taleqani's role, Chehabi states, "Had the National Front been allowed to function openly, in due course Bazargan and Taleqani might have taken Kashani's place at the center of a reconstituted and reformulated religious wing of the National Front." In 1957, when Taleqani, Zanjani, Bazargan, and some other leading political activists were arrested, the life of Nehzat-e Moqavemat-e Melli as an anti-Shah political group came to a definite end.

3.5. Active Political Participation and Contribution

The political activities of Taleqani can be examined from different dimensions. Founding Kanun-e Eslām (the Islamic Center) can be considered as an initiation of Taleqani's political activities in early 1940s, the decade of Modern ideologies' growth in Iran. Regarding these ideologies' development, Taleqani maintained that, "The greatest challenge confronting religion and the people after August 1941 was the rapid spread of Marxist and materialist principles and the Tudeh party." (Bazargan 2006, 116) Thus, it can be inferred that Taleqani founded Kanun-e Eslām, because he felt a serious threat by the progress of Marxism in Iran. Consequently, he made a solemn determination to expound Islamic ideology in comparison with the Western ideologies and leave the rational decision to the addressee, particularly the youths.

Although the government was trying to annihilate the Tudeh party and hence the Marxist idea, Taleqani constantly held on this belief that the Iranian rulers have always made mistakes trying to destroy or change an ideology that they perceived harmful, by force, jail, or even killing people. Taleqani believed ideology could not be destroyed. He thought it would reappear in a new different shape as soon as it found the proper ground or opportunity. As a matter of fact, by founding Kanun-e Eslām, Taleqani saw himself one step closer to his ultimate goal because lots of young professionals, intellectuals and students were attracted to it and their number was continuously and quite rapidly increasing.

⁸ Husain ibn Ali, also spelled as Hussein; The third Shi'i imam (626-680) who is highly respected by Shia Muslim because he refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid I, the Umayyad Caliph, for he considered the Umayyad's rule unjust. Imam Husain was killed and beheaded on the tenth of Muharram, 61 AH, in the Battle of Karbala (680 AD)

As Taleqani believed awakening people by his lectures were more important than his direct involvement in political activities, to fulfill his mission, he became very active in Anjoman-e Mohandesan (the Engineers association) founded in 1942. Taleqani was invited to the institute frequently and gave lectures on several different issues related to the concomitant socio-economic problems. In relation to the importance of his mission, in one of his lectures, he says, "Before being a political activist, I am a disciple of Quran's school and a teacher of Quranic lessons. Therefore, in such communities, I try to follow the same way, i.e. teaching Islamic principles, because the most significant power which can free all Muslims including Iranians from despotism and colonization is in Quranic revelation." (Taleqani 1979b, 51-52) Following the establishment of Anjoman-e Mohandesan, Anjoman-e Daneshjuyan-e Mosalman (Muslim Student Association) was founded with the aim of resisting against the anti-religious propaganda. Particularly, after Tudeh party began its activities in the campus of Tehran University and developed them, students who felt a threat could no longer put up with this malevolent situation. Thus, they decided to take an action. Anjoman-e Daneshjuyan-e Mosalman was formed by the students of Faculty of Medicine. Taleqani gave lectures under the title of "Ownership in Islam" that several years later became an inspiration for the Islamic economy. And in this regard Chehabi says, "These early talks by Bazargan, Sahabi and Taleqani became the seeds of the LMI's (Liberation Movement of Iran) ideological canon." (Chehabi 1990, 123)

Taleqani was politically active in different dimensions and one of his most remarkable and daring activities was using the mass media. In early 1947, the Internal Propaganda office of the Ministry of Labor and Propaganda invited Taleqani as a distinguished orator to contribute articles which could be read over the radio. (Chehabi 1990, 124) Taleqani's response to the ulama who condemned using radio because it spread corruption was impressive. He said, "Although this mysterious device is used for corruption (*Lahw*) or spreading that, it was not invented for this purpose. And ulama by avoiding that leave the field free for the propaganda of the ignorant." And in 1952, when lots of immigrants from Taleqan in the north invited him for the election of the seventeen Majles (Parliament), Taleqani become the candidate of the Caspian province. His candidacy was warmly endorsed by Ayatollah Kashani. (Chehabi 1990, 127)

In 1961, Taleqani, Bazargan, and Sahabi founded Nehzat-e Azadi Iran, basically because the performance of parties had become dramatically disappointing and the Iranians were too individualistic to cooperate. The fundamental principles of the movement were as follows: Its members were Muslim, Iranian, adhered to the Constitution, and Mosaddeqist. The Movement was active for less than two years because most of its leaders were imprisoned. During its nineteen months activity, it put out regular "internal publications," and important junctures which were widely distributed in Tehran.

3.6. His Role as a Prominent Link

Taleqani has been considered by many Iranians as an outstanding link between the secular activists and ulama, especially Khomeini. Regarding Taleqani's prominent role as a link, Hamid Algar says, "There has been operating within Iran a group the special concern of which is to create and maintain links between the ulama and other elements opposed to the regime. This is the Nehzat-e Azadi, or Freedom Movement." (Algar 1972, 254-255) And Jahanbakhsh stipulates, "Taleqani was generally regarded as the most liberal and progressive among the Iranian ulama both before and after the 1979 Revolution, serving as he did as a link between lay and religious groups. Taleqani played a significant role in establishing the clerical leadership. He was crucial in bridging the political gap between the opposition ulama and radical intellectuals." (Kian 1998, 217-218) Considering the above-mentioned facts about Taleqani, it is quite obvious that his liberal stand toward different ideologies made him a strong link between the revolutionary elements, thus earned him a remarkable popularity, particularly among the youth and secular activists. However, he did not gain the same popularity among the fellow ulama. But Taleqani did not mind it because he believed that solidarity was the important message of the Quran and said, "We Muslims should make it known to all the people around the world that unification (*wahdat*)

is our ultimate goal and we are all responsible toward it. It is unity and solidarity against the despotism and idolatry that brings them to their end.” (Taleqani 1979c, 48)

3.7. *Criticizing the Fellow Ulama*

Like Shari’ati, Taleqani in some cases severely criticized ulama. He believed that some prominent ulama either assisted the dictator regime of Pahlavi, or condoned the tyranny of the rulers. Regarding this matter he says, "Again, certain ulama, using the messages of Quran and the traditions of the prophet, impose a conceited selfish man (Reza Shah) upon people. Some other ulama, with their quietism or conservatism, have endorsed his dictatorial government. But, when he got the power and got people devastated and destroyed whatsoever they had, the very same ulama started praying and asking God to send Imam-e Zaman (the twelfth Imam of the Shiite Muslim who is in occultation)." (Taleqani 1999, 11) In this relation, Taleqani refers to a hadith from Mohammad, narrated by Imam Hussein in Karbala, “Anyone who witnesses a dictator authority breaking the divine law and opposing the Sunnah of the prophet, and does not stand against him/her or does not cause them to change their behavior, either by advising or forcing them, God may have no mercy on them, because they are the accomplice of the dictator.” (Taleqani 1979d, 25)

Having faced with the rapid increase of Reza Shah’s tyranny, and seeing the ulama supporting him Taleqani consulted the Quran and Nahj al-Balagheh (the Shitte Book derived from Imam Ali’s sermons) for guidance and inspiration. He admits, “This contradictory practice of some leading ulama, this dark environment, caused me to study the Quran, the Nahj al-Balagheh, the Sunnah and the righteous Imams much more carefully.” (Taleqani 1979d, 11-12)

Taleqani also criticized the religiosity of the ulama who had confined themselves in their private faith and had kept silent. He believed that they had left the external world in the control of the absolute rulers. Thus, asked, “What is the point of sincere faith?” (Taleqani 1979d, 14) He argued that the absolute rulers always opposed the prophets because they felt a threat. If the religions were separated from politics and were restricted to the practicing of the private faith, the rulers would never stand against the prophets because it would never harm them. (Taleqani 1979d, 14-16) He criticized Ayatollah Borujerdi for the very same reason. In Taleqani’s view his quietism caused the Pahlavi’s government to hold firm on to the power.

Taleqani did not only criticize the quietism of the ulama, but also constantly stood for righteous actions, regardless of the consequences. He even criticized Ayatollah Kashani⁹ whom he highly admired, while he withdrew his support from Mosaddeq. Although, Taleqani admitted that it was not all Ayatollah Kashani’s fault. Because the agent of internal despotism and the external spies came to Ayatollah Kashani, after disparaging Mosaddeq and causing the Fada’iyan-e Eslam to part with him, and told him that the movement was actually his and would not make without him. They convinced Kashani that Mosaddeq was not important. (Afrasiyabi and Dehghan 1982, 139-140) However, it is also believed that Ayatollah Kashani expected Mosaddeq to offer him a higher position in the government. It was due to the opinion that whitout Kashani and his support, Mosaddeq could not have definitely succeeded in regaining the power. Therefore, when Mosaddeq refused to do so, Ayatollah Kashani withdrew his support. Taleqani, not only criticized Kashani, but also warned him not to part with Mosaddeq, but when it happened, like many other ulama Taleqani stood by Mosaddeq.

⁹ Ayatollah Seyed abol-Ghasem Kashani (1882-1962) was a prominent Anti-capitalist. He consistently opposed oppression, despotism and colonization. Because of his beliefs, he was highly respected by the poor, and for the same reasons Taleqani admired him. Ayatollah Kashani was a Twelver Shia Muslim cleric and former Chairman of the Parliament of Iran. Due to his Nationalist position, he was arrested and exiled by the British and Soviets. After he returned from the second exile in 1950, he organized a movement and joined Mohammad Mosaddeq in his campaign to nationalize the Iranian oil industry.

4. Taleqani's Islamic Ideology

4.1. Resuscitating an Old Book

As it was mentioned earlier, Taleqani was under great influence of Ayatollah Na'ini¹⁰ and his Book, *Tanbih al-Ommah va Tanzih al-Mellah*. And since he believed that the Islamic Ideology could not be limited to opposing the modern ideologies of the West or the authoritative terms of Marxist economics, Taleqani determined to revitalize the Islamic texts. Therefore, he decided to give a revolutionary manifestation to Na'ini's Book, and in July 1955, after consulting with Bazargan and Sahabi, who consistently encouraged him in this crucial task, he edited the Book and published it with an introduction and extensive commentaries. In Taleqani's view, constitutional government could bring rampant despotism under control, and he emphatically urged that such a government could be brought quite closer to the supreme objective of divine government. His rhetorical question "Do we have no other solution?" (Taleqani 1999, 15) can be considered as an indicator of a reform or a revolution, which he puts forward in this way: "I hope that the vigilant religious leaders, as well as the honorable Muslims, would carefully consider the issues discussed in this book, open their eyes to the conditions of the Muslim nation, and with unity struggle for the salvation and redemption of Muslims. I hope they would no longer tolerate this wretchedness and indignity of Muslims perpetrated by a gang of lecherous hoodlums who are instruments of others." (Taleqani 1999, 15-16) As Taleqani persuasively asks Muslims, particularly the religious leaders, not to tolerate the wretchedness and indignity, a message for a thorough revolutionary action might be inferred.

Taleqani's intention, by editing this book, was to introduce an "Islamic Government" and to give ulama an important role in active politics. According to Taleqani, "Although this book has been written to validate the religious legitimacy of a constitutional government, its significance lies more in its having mandated the Islamic social and political principles, as well as the blueprint and the overall aims of the Islamic governments." (Taleqani 1999, 28) It was Taleqani's bravery in stating such opinions that earned him popularity among the Iranians, though it afflicted him and cost him years in prison.

To speak of the Islamic government in 1955, when Mohammad Reza Shah's increasing reliance on American power made him bolder in his egocentric self-perception, was not only courageous but also indicative of the firm determination of a committed religious leader on his political aspiration. (Dabashi 1993, 229)

Taleqani also made a significant statement in showing the contemporary relevance of the book. His intention was to validate a politically active religiosity in the model of Na'ini and to demand ideological obedience on the part of the masses. According to Taleqani, this book is firstly *Rational* [estedlali], i.e. Political activists do not need to believe dogmatically in the fundamental doctrine of Islam in order to follow Na'ini's political mandates; secondly *Judicially binding* [ejtehad], by which Taleqani wished to make it equally authoritative for ulama and lay Shi'ite; thirdly *Exemplary* [taqlidi], in other words, Taleqani wanted to make it virtually compulsory for all Shi'i Muslim to consider and obey the contents of the book. Therefore, Taleqani's attraction to Na'ini's book can be considered a part of a larger method of appealing to historical figures and text of authorities.

4.2. Taleqani's Understanding of Mankind

¹⁰ Allameh Shaikh Mirza Muhammad Hossein Na'ini (1860-1936) born in Na'in, was a prominent Shia cleric and a distinguished jurist of the constitutional and early Pahlavi period who was actively involved in political event of his time. Having finished his early education, he moved to Esfahan and then to Najaf to pursue his studies with the celebrated Mirza-ye Shirazi. He was also closely associated with such pro-Constitutional jurists as Akhond Molla Muhammad Kazem Khorasani. During World War I, he joined Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi in opposing the British presence in Iraq, and was also instrumental in boycotting the Iraqi election when the country was under British occupation.

Taleqani's ideology, as it can be seen through his works, enjoys a basic stability that depicts his unique personality. However, once faced with or exposed to other ideologies, subtle changes and flexibilities can be perceived. As Taleqani considers mankind free and of autonomy, his perceptions contradict some of the Islamic thinkers' and fellow ulama such as Ayatollah Khomeini's, or at least do not fall in the same categories. (Dabashi 1993, 263)

In Taleqani's view, human is free and decides freely for his future, however, he does not deny the opinion expressed by Khomeini that man's salvation is in avoiding what is 'other than God'. What makes Khomeini's opinion very different from that of Taleqani is considering all the existence as an illusion, and God as the only reality. Accordingly, man has no independence and, in fact, is appropriately seen as a 'non-being'. Taleqani, on the other hand, believes that God has provided mankind with *tafviz* (ability to own) so that man can realize his 'inner capacities' as the God's vicegerent on earth. (Taleqani 1979d, 5) And hence, man having the agency should use his unlimited capacity in thinking and decision-making. It does not definitely mean that God has left man on his/her own, or forgotten them. In fact, by doing this, God has put a burden on man's shoulder and given them a grave responsibility which is to act in accordance with the divine law on an evolutionary path toward perfection. It should not also be neglected that man is ultimately going to take the charge for their action on the great judgment day. In contradiction to Khomeini, Taleqani strongly believes that mankind is composed of *nafsiyat* (inner frames) which in turn contains scientific curiosity, searching for truth, justice, logicity, power, love and spiritual values. (Taleqani 1948, 115-116) These inner frames' roles, making rational decisions as well as the conflict between the man's desire and logic, are the elements that distinctively separate man from other creatures. Shariati, one of the prominent Islamic ideologues, shares the concept of man's free will as an autonomous being with Taleqani. However, he makes it somewhat complicated by expressing the fusion of God, man and nature.¹¹

4.3. Taleqani and the Theory of Reason

Another remarkable feature that makes Taleqani stand unique among some other prominent ulama and the religious leaders is his perception of aql (Reason) and his approach toward it. If one accepts that the key to faith is the heart, as stated by Khomeini, the truthfulness of the faith will sound compromised, because it could be regarded as an emulative faith, i.e. the faith that man has not reached or gained all by himself. True faith must be obtained through reasoning, rationality and knowledge, which are the greatest gifts bestowed upon human beings by God. Therefore, Taleqani argues that aql is the key to man's development and spiritual perfection, and this matter causes Taleqani to be regarded more rationalist. He also argues this point that the more knowledge and rationality dominate the emotion of man, the more the aspect of his humanity evolves and develops. (Taleqani 1948, 115)

Taleqani considers reasoning a controlling mechanism over other qualities and as he has mentioned it in his book *Jahad va Shahadat*, man's reason directs his other faculties. (Akhavi 1988, 407) Thus, as far as reason and rationality are concerned, if they are separated from religion, they can be destructive or at least can cause man to go astray. On the other hand, if the spiritual side of man overindulges in the effort to please God, it might lead to abandonment of responsibility for social action and commitment in the world. (Taleqani 1979d, 44)

In contradiction with Taleqani, Khomeini believes that reason betrays man, formal learning is the thickest veil, and that man can only obtain a single dimension of the truth which is God. He also believes that Quranic interpretations can only express the possibility and the plausibility of the truth and not the precise explanation of it. (Akhavi 1988, 406) Shahrough Akhavi, regarding this contradiction by crystalizing Taleqani's opinion, delicately stipulates, "Man's continuing search for knowledge is a manifestation of his greatness and the one thing that preempts stagnation and decay." (Akhavi 1988, 408) Taleqani agrees that human's mind is too limited

¹¹ Shariati, in fact, insists on the separation of the three elements, i.e. God, man and nature. He argues that the source is the same and ALL have a single direction, move and live with one will and spirit, but they are separated from one another.

to understand the supreme essence that is God. However, mind does not stop trying to comprehend it. That in turn is significant and outstanding about human's mind.

Concerning man's agency and rationality, Shariati holds a similar stand with that of Taleqani., and makes a great effort in defending man's free will. Nevertheless, he does not explicitly explain if this free will truly makes changes in the concrete objects of the everyday world, or only changes the appearances. Because Shariati believes whatever exists in this world is capable of being known, experienced and scientifically studied and what is perceived by us is appearances, not its existence.

In Taleqani's opinion, the bright and glorifying world that Quran causes man to enter is the world of *tawhid* (unity). The unity of inner mind, the unity of power, the unity of existence, the unity of world's order, rules and regulations, the unity of thought and human's will. He believes that this clear aim of Quran has been either neglected or remained veiled. The first message of the prophets, according to Taleqani, is to distinguish right from wrong, to refute and reject other than God and to verify and prove the existence of God through reasoning. The aim of Quran has not only been to ask man to have a sincere believe in God and to pray. (Taleqani 1999, 12-13)

4.4. *Confronting Marxism*

Since Marxism was steadily and at a very high speed spreading and dominating the political discourse in the 1940s and afterward, Taleqani could not but pay serious attention to the economic issues, too. As a Muslim intellectual he believed it was his responsibility to show the folly and the weak points of this very ideology that had dominated an immense part of the world and greatly influenced the Iranian young professionals, secular and Muslim intellectuals, as well as the students. In Dabashi's words, "Because of primacy that Marxist historiography and sociology gave to economic factors, Taleqani felt obliged to address 'Islamically' the issue thus raised." (Dabashi 1993, 224) Therefore, Taleqani wrote the book, *Islam and the Ownership* in which centralized and free market economies were both criticized. In fact he borrows the idea from Quran and the traditions of the Prophet as well as the Hadith. In Taleqani's opinion worshiping a school of thought is a kind of idolatry, and in this regard he says, "Our progressed parties are trapped in hypocrisy, because they worship their ideology and are not willing to see beyond it to realize the realities of human and their lives." (Taleqani 1979d, 39) He argues that the righteous ownership and the absolute power of expenditure belong to God and that God, according to his own judgment, gives the power of ownership to whomever he wills. One of the main reasons why Taleqani criticizes Marxism is the unacceptable concept of religion being placed at the second level next to the economic matters. According to his opinion, it means to denigrate human who is the true and righteous God's vicegerent, the shaper of the society, the creator of the economy and the history. Taleqani also says that, "It is wrong to think man takes economy over everything, because what matters to man most is freedom and agency." (Taleqani 1979d, 43) In addition, he expressed his thought that in communist countries the individuals are deprived of their freedom and exploited by economic ideas.

4.5. *His Stance on Minorities*

As Islam is the religion of equality, most religious individuals and groups appear to care about minorities, and Taleqani's stance on minorities remarkably differ from the other fellow ulama, because he takes a step beyond theory and goes out of the way to support them. He does not only take a firm stand for ethno-religious minorities, but also supports individuals and groups with ideologies that stand at odd. For he strongly believes that all human beings, as long as they do not break the norm of the society, have the same rights, including the freedom of speech and ideology. He also supports them and says, "In prison and out of prison, I have witnessed how these young leftists, whose thought and inspiration are freedom, sacrifice their lives. For some reasons they

have been attracted toward left. We do respect them.” (Taleqani 1979d, 43) Like Bazargan, Taleqani highly regarded the identity of Iranians, and this matter also caused him to be considered as a nationalist.

Certainly Taleqani withdrew his support from the ethno-religious minorities for a short time after the Islamic revolution. But he returned to his stance before long, maintaining that it was all because he feared the country would face a chaos. Thus, he later declared, “You, young people with any kind of ideology, your nature is pure and you are Iranians. You are in pain. You are skeptical to religions. I know all these facts, and I know them even better than you, because I have been with you for years. But at this critical moment these people are not looking for an ideology. They are looking for freedom, and they are afraid of being beaten again. From this aspect I humbly request you to be awake and aware of the schemes of the tyrants. We seem to have won the victory, but our enemy is still alive and looking for an opportunity to backlash.” (Taleqani 1979d, 49)

5. Conclusion

Taleqani’s ideology was remarkably influenced not only by his studies but also by interactions with Intellectuals, other Islamic ideologues, as well as religious and secular political activists. It consequently caused him to feel more and more responsible toward mankind, particularly his fellow Iranians. They were exploited by the dictatorial regime of Pahlavi and were on the verge of being drowned in modern secular ideologies such as Marxism. In Taleqani’s view the latter one was really dreadful, because it would not free them from the exploitation, but also would cause them to lose their dignity, agency and eventually would deprive them of their rights.

The Islamic aspect of Taleqani’s ideology can be perceived quite easily at the very first glance over his teachings and activities, whereas, one would probably become aware of Taleqani’s humanitarian aspect by examining his approaches toward socio-political problems and reasons of his actions. Taleqani’s liberal approach toward secular ideologies, for instance, was based on his opinion which is expressed in this tangible way: “Whatever idea or action, as long as they get mankind closer to freedom from slavery is sacred and of Islamic view, even though they are not the ultimate goals of Islam.” (Taleqani 1999, 15) Another significant approach of Taleqani that indicates his humanitarianism is his support of ethno-religious minorities. He takes a firm stand for them due to his belief that all human beings are entitled to enjoy the commons which are given to them by Almighty God.

Taleqani confronts Marxism for two obvious reasons at least. First: He believes it desecrates the religions, particularly Islam because in Taleqani’s opinion, Islam is the perfect religion which has solutions for every grave as well as trifle problems mankind faces with. And second: In Taleqani’s opinion it devaluates human’s glory and dignity. He believes Islam considers man, God’s true vicegerent, i.e. they are being given the right and the power to solve their own social, economic and political problems.

The reason Taleqani criticizes the fellow ulama is also one of the most outstanding proofs of his humanitarian aspect. Taleqani cannot but castigate the leading ulama once he figures out that their quietism, deliberately or inadvertently, endorses despotism of the regime and gives it eligibility to keep exploiting the Iranians, and on the other hand it diminishes people’s faith and makes them skeptical toward Islam, thus causing them to seek a non-religious solution.

In contrast with the conservative ulama, Taleqani always took the risk of confronting the Pahlavi regime, and never cared about his own profit and desire. He strongly believed it was the worldly desire that caused man to forget the other human’s pain. It would also cause them to overlook their responsibilities toward the others and eventually to forget God. In closing, it is necessary to mention that Taleqani as a Muslim alim¹² believed Islam

¹² Although ulama is considered uncountable in English, alim is suggested as its singular form, both in Persian and Arabic, for a Muslim scholar.

was a perfect religion. Therefore, it has solutions to all human's afflictions and answer to every social, economic and political problem. Once he felt man's dignity and glory were disparaged and that they were exploited, he raised his voice for the righteousness without being afraid of the consequences, even though he would have to stand against other Muslim ulama including the ones he admired like Ayatollah Kashani and Khomeini.

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