Abstract

I. Introduction
Civil society is composed of voluntary civic and social organizations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society in a state. In generally Civil society is also seems to have opposed to the force-backed structure of a state regardless of that state's political system and commercial institutions. At the same line, the idea of a civil society has a very wide, body of committed supporters in the contemporary world. These supporters, who variously live in post repressive societies of South America, the Philippines, Africa, and post communist society of the Czech Republic, Poland and more widely in eastern Europe and in "postmodern" liberal democratic organizations. All tend to see a marked advantage to the existence of "a dense network of civil associations" in their own societies. Civil society in Iran has been a major concern for many scholars during the past two decades, particularly after the president Khatami’s coming to power in 1997. The importance of the problems in Iran caused the researcher to select this theme to be investigated comprehensively.

The Problem of the Study
The present research is an attempt to study with civil society in Iran. Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, there has been a controversy among the scholars both inside and outside the country regarding whether or not this revolution has contributed to the rise and growth of Iranian society in the country? Has this adversely affected this
process? The other problem of major concern is related to compatibility or incompatibility between Islam and human rights. This issue has gained the attention of observers following the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran. There have been many debates on whether or not an Islamic political system and government is able to promote human rights and not respect them.

Logically, after large public participation in the process of the Islamic Revolution, it was a major research and study concern that if such mass political actions could bring about positive results for the development of civil society and prospects for democratization after the authoritarian regime has collapsed. Due to many domestic and external problems faced by the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran from 1979 until 1997, the issue of civil society has been subjected to less attention on the part of scholars and researchers and elites. But after the landslide victory gained by Mohammad Khatami and the reformist-minded groups and factions in Iran, once again appeared and limelighted the subject come into since 1997. Intensively, public and open debates were initiated within the Iranian society to find possibilities of the growth of civil society and the role it plays in the promotion of human rights.

**Research Question**

The research aims at exploring the obstacles to the growth of civil society and promotion of human rights in Iran beyond the every day’s political debates under president Khatami, and it seeks to find the barriers and problems in the way of more democratization in Iran in the structure of Iranian state. The mindset, viewpoints, values and obligations of Iranian political elite are presented.


**Hypothesis of the Research**

The hypothesis of the dissertation finds that the structure of authoritarian government and the mindset of Iranian political elite did prevent the growth of civil society and promotion of human rights in Iran. Therefore, as long as the Iranian political elite do not change their outlook on democratization and the development of civil society, there will be no major progress achieved in this regard.

Since this research is categorized as a research work in the various phases of development of society in Iran, and hence the relevant issues have been discussed. The issue of the relationship between Islam and civil society has been addressed, it is necessary to understand that the Islamic government of Iran and the majority of people in it are Muslims.

**Research Methodology**

The research methodology used for this research is descriptive and analytical. Also the method for gathering data is mainly of current sources of available data. In order to explore the problems and obstacles to the growth of civil society in Iran, a number of interviews have been conducted with certain authorities in the Khatami’s government who preferred to remain anonymous.

**Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This research covers most of former Iranian President Khatami’s years in office between 1997 and 2004. The main limitations in the way of conducting the research included lack of sufficient academic sources on
civil society and human rights. Indeed, both of these topics have just recently entered the scene of political debates among Iranian intellectuals as well as political elites. The sensitive nature of human rights in Iranian context has been another limitation that prevented the researcher from undertaking interviews with many human rights activists carrying out field study.

II. Conceptual Framework

Middle East: The Middle East in the civil society debate is a section in Chapter two that indicates the dominant presence by the state in all aspects of social and political life of citizens, since virtually the rise of the modern state in the Middle East and elsewhere in developing countries, has made it very resistant to sharing political power with opposition. The major obstacles to commencement of democracy are the presence of strong provinces and weak societies, where there were no effective groups and associations to limit the state's power. The majority of people, due to unequal and rapid modernization, remain poor and uneducated. The more resources the state controls and the more independent provincial elites are from other socioeconomic classes.

III. Iranian Political System – An Analytical View

Chapter three outlines and explains Iranian political system – an analytical view. Since Iran is located at the Middle East region and many of the characteristics of this region are found in Iran as well, it is suitable to first identify what traits are found in the Middle East politics that in turn
affect Iran’s political system and its civil society. These characteristics are partly common with the other developing countries of the world and some of them make this region distinct from the other regions.

Current trends in Arab-Islamic region have caused a viewpoint contrary to the conventional one according to which a part of the world resists the democratization process. Since the early 1970s, when the process of democratization began in the developing world, notably in Latin America, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe, the Middle East has gained a reputation for its exceptionalism. This is because the Middle East has been unable to experience the same democratization process that has been underway throughout the developing world since the 1970s and especially since the 1990s. There is no doubt that the entire Middle East has lagged behind in terms of political development, constitutional government which have never been realized in most of these countries. However, the Middle East has experienced a kind of “transition” away from authoritarianism during the past two decades, in most instances, the changes have been reversed, and most of the achievements have been nullified.

The Chapter also discusses Middle Eastern political leaders typically fill their speeches with ideological terms, nationalist and religious imagery, and attacks on domestic opponents and foreign enemies. By comparison, political discourse in the emerging industrial states of Asia tends to focus on more explicitly on economic issues, economic growth than what is in the Middle East. In order to understand political trends of the Middle East, attention should be paid to beyond formal structures of governments -monarchs, parliaments, and prime ministers. Informal structures of family and social networking are of special importance.
Ordinary citizen in the Middle East whether Arab, Israeli, Turk or Iranian find them in influencing politicalloyalties generally.

In the section on the nature of political system in the Islamic Republic, it is suggested that theory of the Islamic Republic represents a new theory in the area of the existing political systems which was called religious democracy in another version, and its realization is subject to offer new definitions of the two seemingly inconsistent and sometime contradictory categories as well as subject to the specification of the role Velayat Faqih (i.e. the first authority in religious and political affairs in the country also tutelage of the Shii jurisprudent) plays as the contact and coordination link between republicanism and Islamicity and as the only factor combining these two.

In Iran, the balance of social forces supporting democracy and republicanism are opposed to the forces advocating the limitation of national sovereignty. This trend determines the existence or lack of democracy and republicanism. No conception can be derived from the Constitution and official philosophy of the government in Iran.

IV. Changing Perspectives and Developments Civil Society in Iran under Khatami

In Chapter four, developments in civil Society under Khatami are addressed. Khatami was regarded as Iran’s first reformist president, since the focus of his campaign was on the rule of law, democracy and the inclusion of all Iranians in the political decision-making process. However, his policies of reforms led to repeated clashes with the hard-line and conservative Islamists in the Iranian government, who control powerful
governmental organizations like the Guardian Council, whose members are appointed by the Supreme Leader. Khatami lost most of those clashes, and by the end of his presidency many of his followers had grown disillusioned with him.

As President, according to the Iranian political system, Khatami was outranked by the Supreme Leader, and had no legal authority over many key state institutions such as the armed forces (the police, the army, the revolutionary guards, etc.), the state radio and television, the judiciary, the prisons, etc. To understand the dynamics of changes and reforms under Khatami in Iran, first the main turning points of the political history of the revolution are emphasized. Without detaching them from their historical context, the dynamics of change and the emergence of different political positions need to be seen as mechanisms of transformation that have been in operation for near three decades.

Khatami’s ascendancy to the presidency represented a profound turning point and created a system of two powerful political blocs, conservatives and reformists, and a third bloc that consisted of relatively weaker groups. Those political factions that give precedence to defending the status quo and opposing reformist demands represent the conservative camp. The main point of reference for conservative groups is the institution of *Velayet-i Faqih* which is considered of as the bastion of all laws and norms. Other issues call for continued Islamization of the state. This is the reflection of religious character in all matters of state, and Society which is totalitarian. The foremost groups in this camp are the Hizballah (Islamic group) along with more moderate conservative groups.
During his two terms in office, Khatami was able to introduce some reforms to the Iranian political system, he is widely considered to have lost the power struggle with his opponents. The root cause for his failures is widely considered to be the limited powers of the President in the Iranian political system. As President, Khatami had little or no authority over many key state institutions such as the judiciary, the state radio and television, the armed forces including the police, the military, etc. nonetheless, some observers also believe that Khatami had a great influence on Iranian political discourse. He spoke of fostering human rights, civil society, and democracy -- terms that are now being used even by some conservative politicians. Most observers believe that the changes that have taken place in Iranian society are irreversible.

Khatami’s landslide election victory owed a great deal to support from female voters. Women make up about half of Iran’s eligible voters, and Khatami actively courted their backing. Khatami appeared to recognize this constituency’s backing when, following his election, he appointed a woman, Masumeh Ebtekar, as his vice president for environmental protection and appointed Zahra Shojai as his women’s affairs’ adviser.

In the section on obstacles to the reforms, it is noted that according to a famous statement made by Khatami, his government survived an average of one national crisis every nine days during his term of office. The leftist reformists argued that the most important obstacle to the development of Iranian society is the failure to expand public participation in the political realm and provide more freedom. They see this as necessary to overcome what they see as a bottleneck in the Iranian political system. They argue that the minority which holds political power
in Iran is not open to popular accountability and that their performance leaves a great deal to be desired.

V. Dynamics of Political Development – State-Society Relations

Chapter five includes dynamics of political development and state-society relations. The history of the Iranian political system since the early days of the revolution might be called a "transformation process." An analytical study of this experience can provide clues on the system's future shape. The revolutionary elite, operating under the heavy impact of the Shia legacy concerning the legitimacy and authority of political relations, created an ideological political system which has been controlled by a set of institutions dominated by religious leaders and pro-revolutionary elites. The gradual transformation of the political system has led to a two-track model, based on the hegemony of bureaucratic institutions or state elites and the limited role of conventional political elites in this system.

The aggressive effort by conservatives to suppress the reformists in Iran raises the question of whether the future of democracy in Iran is doomed. Can the limited democratic gains in Iran, through fairly open and competitive local and national elections, be rerouted by conservative forces that see democracy and popular sovereignty as Western values and incompatible with Islam? In other words, can conservatives through their control of central political institutions and the military removed the Republic from the Islamic Republic of Iran? While it is impossible to predict exactly what is in store for the future of democracy in Iran, it is certain that the nature of the state society relations in Iran in the past 30 years have been altered drastically by domestic and international events,
making a return to authoritarian rule, under any ideological disguise, very unlikely.

Iran's leadership is divided into broadly defined conservative and moderate Islamic camps. This group, along with media has provided some debate on issues of national concern, such as the role and function of Iran's leader. These issues remained explosive and have already created to arrests, newspaper closures, and public demonstrations. The central issue was whether the leader should be popularly elected or not, given that his leadership is ordained by the Shi'a belief in the infallibility of Imams and by implication, the leader.

The transformation of the state and society in Iran has been a function of sociopolitical and ideological transformations within both the state and society, compounded with severe and persistent economic crises. The state policy to propagate "Islamic justice" mainly to the dispossessed has helped mobilize Iranian population from the ground of process roots and of better civil society and civic state. Through the expansion of access to clean water, electricity, roads, education, and even political power through local elections, the government under Khatami has opened the gate to the flood of massive social mobilization.

In another section of chapter six, discourses of political development in Iran are presented. The main purpose was to discuss political development dialogue at any time, which comprises reviewing the status of political development proposals such as freedom, rule of raw, civil society, and pluralism in the words and deeds of rulers. This will reveal a picture of political development and discourse on Iran during the post-revolutionary period. At last, it is argued that the democratic
transformation of the theocratic system, to which many Iranians had aspired at the beginning of Khatami’s reform movement in 1997, was not possible. The reform movement did change the culture of political debate, and expanded the boundaries in the realm of freedom of opinion, but in the realm of power structures and constitutional reforms no substantial progress was achieved, insofar as the institutionalization of democracy was concerned.

VI. Status of Human Rights in Iran during Khatami Era – Select issues

In Chapter six, first human rights are defined as referring to the "basic rights and freedoms to which all human are entitled." Examples of rights and freedom which are considered as human rights, include civil and political rights, such as the right to life and liberty, freedom of expression, and equality before the law; and social, cultural and economic rights, including the right to participate in culture, the right to food, the right to work, and the right to education.

Elements and three generations of human rights are the other sections of this chapter in which it is discussed that first-generation human rights deal essentially with liberty and participation in political life. Second-generation human rights are related to equality and began to be recognized by governments after World War I. They are fundamentally social, economic, and cultural in nature. Third-generation human rights are those rights that go beyond the mere civil and social, as expressed in many progressive documents of international law. This includes the 1972 Stockholm Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human
Environment, the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and other pieces of generally aspirational "soft law."

Respecting human rights situation in Iran under Khatami, it can be suggested that following the rise of the reform movement within Iran and the election of moderate Iranian president Mohammad Khatami in 1997 numerous moves were made to modify the Iranian civil and penal codes in order to improve the human rights situation. The predominantly reformist parliament drafted several bills allowing increased freedom of speech, gender equality, and the banning of torture. These were all dismissed or significantly watered down by the Guardian Council and leading conservative figures in the Iranian government at the time.

VII. Conclusion

In the conclusion chapter, it is argued that Iranian civil society's heyday was the late 1990s and early years of this century under former President Khatami, whose government provided subsidies to help develop an NGO sector but failed to put in place safeguards to prevent its dismantlement. Under Khatami, civil society really went through a period of Renaissance and its development was one of the most valuable outcomes of Khatami's reform movement.

Nonetheless, Iran enjoys one of the region's most robust civil societies, partly as a result of the brief openness that blossomed during the tenure of reformist President Mohammed Khatami (1997-2005). Yet his hard-line successor, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has rolled back those reforms, as evidently established by the recent arrests of four Iranian-American scholars and journalists on dubious charges of espionage and plotting to carry out a “velvet revolution” in Iran. His
government has curtailed academic and cultural exchanges and stifled the independent media.

Three principal positions have emerged in the civil society debate now raging in Iran. First, there are those who regard the whole concept as antithetical to the basic values and ideals of an Islamic society and state. These are the hard-line conservatives, who occupy the most powerful positions within Iran’s political establishment. They control all the means of violence in Iranian society (the Revolutionary Guards, the security services), and they hold much of the economic power as well.

Second, there are those who want to Islamicize the idea of civil society, to make it compatible with the existing norms and values of the present order. They advocate an “Islamic civil society” that would be clearly distinguishable from its secular, Western counterparts.

Third, there are those who view the concept as ideologically neutral in terms of the ultimate goals and values of society, but useful as a basis for structuring state-society relations, protecting the relative autonomy and freedom of citizens and their associations, and promoting a more tolerant, pluralistic and democratic order. For the most part, these were the aspirations that inspired the supporters of Khatami’s so-called “May 3rd [1997] Movement.” Their overwhelming victory in that presidential election, and in many subsequent polls until Ahmadinejad’s victory in 2005 presidential elections showed them to command a clear majority.

The successful experience of the Third World’s newly democratic countries reveals that democracy can be established in any country where there are political elites willing to pursue the objective of democracy and where a responsible civil society exists.
In future, conservatives and reformists alike might realize one day that the very survival of the Islamic government and the quest to combine Islam with republicanism and democracy requires discourse and dialogue at the national level among elites and peasants as well in Iran.