

Explaining the Form and Structure of Government in the Thought of Allama Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabatabai

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Abstract

Explaining the form and structure of government in Islam from the perspective of the Quran and hadiths has always been one of the most challenging topics in Islamic political thought—a challenge that has gained even greater significance following the Islamic Revolution. In this context, the thought of Allama Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabatabai, a figure who comprehensively integrates philosophical, exegetical, and social dimensions, offers a distinctive framework for understanding this issue. The fundamental question of this study concerns how the form of government is explained within Allama’s intellectual system. Its main hypothesis is built on the premise that, according to Allama’s Quranic approach, Islam advocates a model of “religious social government” in which the form and executive structure of government are not fixed across time. Rather, they are variable matters determined by the requirements of time and place and shaped by the will of the people. To grasp this claim in depth, one must refer to Allama’s distinctive philosophical innovation: the theory of “constructed perceptions” (*idrākāt-i i’tibārī*). He draws a clear distinction between real entities—which reflect fixed, ontologically objective realities—and constructed (or conventional) entities, which are products of the human mind created to meet vital and social needs. From Allama’s viewpoint, political affairs, the state, and government fall within the category of constructed entities. This means their essence and reality are rooted in mental agreements and human social necessities. Since constructed entities depend on environmental conditions and the historical evolution of humanity, the state cannot possess a fixed and eternal form. Its structure is continually reconstructed through a process of trial and error, in harmony with the rational development of society. In continuity with this discussion, the concept of “social sovereignty” emerges as the foundation of political legitimacy in Allama Tabatabai’s thought. He holds that sovereignty and political power are, in their essence, a shared and collective possession belonging to all members of society. Although throughout history tyrants have usurped this right by

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unilaterally employing the people and turning it into despotism, the true nature of social power has always originated from the community itself. Accordingly, any governmental structure that can secure the participation of a greater number of the genuine owners of power—that is, the people—in exercising this right draws closer to social justice. This perspective highlights the necessity of social dialogue and mutual agreement in determining the manner in which society is governed. Through his theory of “interactive realism” in epistemology, Allama emphasizes that truth is not the exclusive property of any individual or particular group. Human apprehensions of political reality arise from the interaction between perceptual faculties and the social environment. Therefore, the most desirable form of governmental structure can only be discerned through collective thinking and communal deliberation. At the exegetical level, Allama concludes from his examination of Quranic addresses that the addressee of Islam’s social rulings is the generality of believers, not the Prophet alone. God demands the establishment of justice, jihad, and prescribed punishments from the community of people as a whole, which reveals the distinctly social character of the religion. Islam is a social reality, so to speak, whose implementation has been entrusted to everyone collectively. Thus, political power derives from the will and consent of society. In the era of occultation, the matter of governance has been delegated to the Muslims themselves without any reservation, so that they may—following the practice of the Prophet and relying on the principle of consultation—appoint the ruler and supervise his performance. Although Allama critiques Western democracy for its materialistic foundations and exploitative spirit, he emphasizes a form of religious democracy in which the sound reason of society, within the framework of divine values, assumes responsibility for drafting executive laws and managing political affairs. In the final analysis, Allama Tabatabai’s political thought establishes a profound connection between human rationality and divine guidance. In his view, religion provides the best method for ordering society because it creates an internal mechanism of supervision and links worldly well-being to ultimate perfection in the hereafter, thereby restraining instinctive excesses and preventing social injustice. Nevertheless, religion does not impose a rigid or unchangeable structure upon government. Instead, it entrusts the management of unfolding events and the regulation of administrative and defensive systems to the discretion of the ruler, in consultation with the Muslims. The outcome of this approach is a model of governance that remains fully faithful to the principles of monotheism while being thoroughly flexible and dynamic, allowing society in every era to develop new managerial structures appropriate to its own level of advancement. This paradigm explicitly rejects any despotic concentration of power in the executive branch, places strong emphasis on the separation of powers and the dignity of the human being, and paves the way for the development of political knowledge and the realization of justice within Islamic societies. Thus, in Allama’s perspective, the form of government emerges as the product of the interaction between the collective reason of the believers and the guiding principles of the Sharia—an interaction that takes place within the domain of social constructs.

Keywords

Quran, exegesis, form of government, structure of government, political thought, Allama Tabatabai.

1. Introduction

The question of the form and structure of Islamic government has been one of the most significant issues in Muslim societies. Theoretical efforts to elaborate it can profoundly influence the actions and activities of individuals and institutions. If the form and structure of government are unilateral and hierarchical, no meaningful path is opened for citizen participation or the involvement of social institutions. But if the form and structure are multi-sided and horizontal, then members of society become rightful participants, playing an active role in determining the course of public affairs. In the same way, political parties and civil institutions can exert effective influence in organizing political life. Presenting these discussions in the philosophical and Quranic works of Allama Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabatabai—as a prominent thinker in the fields of philosophy and exegesis—can prove valuable for scholars and researchers in the domains of politics and religion, while also offering practical pathways for political action. The central question of this study is: What is the form and structure of government according to Allama Tabatabai, as derived from his philosophical and exegetical discussions? This article, employing a descriptive-analytical method of the text-analysis type, argues that Allama Tabatabai's political discussions arise from and are supported by his philosophical and exegetical system. His philosophical and exegetical framework is intrinsically linked to his political and social orientations. These discussions are interconnected and coherent, forming a unified and harmonious whole. At the same time, the philosophical and Quranic themes are innovative while maintaining their internal consistency and coordination, ultimately presenting themselves as a comprehensive analytical framework.

2. Genealogy of the Issue

The discussion of the form of government is as old as political thought itself and was already raised in ancient Greece in the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle (Alem, 2008, p. 268). However, the question of the form of religious government has emerged more prominently in modern times, particularly as Muslim thinkers confronted the consequences of modernity, and it has been addressed in various works in connection with related topics. From the perspective of religious intellectuals, the form and method of administering the state—and, more broadly, the organization of human political and social life—can only be carried out rationally through the sciences and practical knowledge (Soroush, 2002, p. 67). In the modern world,

social life is organized on the basis of the rationality embedded in the social and political sciences as well as humanity's historical achievements and experiences. This approach opens the way for the entry of secular institutions. In their view, these matters must be experienced through reason. The Quran does not consider the determination of governmental methods and systems to fall within the proper domain of religion and revelation; rather, it regards the determination of the values pertaining to government as belonging to revelation and religion (Mojtahed Shabestari, 1996, p. 60). They treat issues such as civilization-building, government, and the state as products of humanity's collective lived experience, situated outside the scope of religion. They regard religiosity as precisely the path of monotheistic conduct, which remains compatible with changes in social and political frameworks and mechanisms (Mojtahed Shabestari, 1997, p. 233). Some religious scholars stand in opposition to the above view, asserting that the form of government in Islam and the Quran has been explicitly specified. In their perspective, human beings are wholly characterized by poverty and need; their existence is relational and marked by existential poverty (Javadi Amoli, 2005, p. 30). Consequently, in all their activities, humans require the guidance and direction of religion, and the form of this religion has been delineated in Islam (*ibid.*, p. 26). In light of the preceding discussions, this outlook holds that the purpose of religion is to guide humanity toward felicity in this world and the hereafter through a comprehensive set of executive laws, beliefs, and ethical principles that encompass every aspect of human thought and behavior (Mesbah Yazdi, 1998, vols. 1 & 2, p. 71). Thus, the general form of government has been determined by the luminous religion of Islam (Mesbah Yazdi, 1999, vol. 1, p. 145), entailing a maximalist understanding of religion's role in regulating social and political relations (Mesbah Yazdi, 1999, vol. 1, p. 40). Accordingly, government has been delegated by God to the Prophet, who—by divine command—designated Ali as his successor and caliph. After him, this office passed to the infallible Imams. In the era of occultation, this right devolves upon a just and pious jurist who is likewise appointed by God (Yazdi, 2009). No book or article has yet been written specifically on the subject of the present research. The closest article to this topic is "The Formation of Religious Government with an Analysis of the Governance of Prophets in the Holy Quran" (Ghazizadeh & et al., 2020, p. 91), which examines the form of religious government in the stories of the prophets in the Quran and concludes that no indication of a fixed form or structure of religious government can be derived from the Quranic accounts of prophetic

governance. However, in the works of Ahmad Reza Yazdani Moghadam, related discussions are mentioned indirectly (Yazdani Moghadam, 2009; 2010). To explain Allama Tabatabai's viewpoint, the foundations of his philosophical and exegetical thought must first be considered, as in the volumes of *al-Mizān* his opinions concerning Islamic government are expressed with differences and even contradictions.

3. Concepts

This part of the article elucidates certain terms and notions used in the research.

3-1. Definition of Government

In the terminology of political science, government is the organization of the state and the agency through which the will of the state is manifested. Government is a more limited concept than the state and encompasses the three branches of power, along with various organs and institutions. The state formulates, expresses, and implements its objectives through the government. The essence of government is everywhere the same and rests upon obedience (Alem, 2008, pp. 123 and 267).

3-2. Form and Structure of Government

By "form of government" is meant the structure and methods of governance. In this article, it refers to the set of political systems and institutions that together constitute the structure of a specific government. Governments are classified in various ways. Plato discusses five forms of political systems: aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny. These five regimes progressively decline in a downward sequence, beginning from aristocracy at the top and descending to tyranny at the bottom. Aristotle classified governments according to their ends or purposes and the number of individuals who rule (Alem, 2008, p. 269). Governments are also divided, based on the distribution of power within their structure, into republics and monarchies. Another classification is based on the social and economic system of society. From a historical perspective, most political systems have taken shape and been structured according to social-economic ideologies. The experience of movements that have come to power, along with the deep and firm attachments they have developed to certain specific forms of government, can lead them to define a particular form of government as their identity and to recognize themselves through it. Governments can thus be classified according

to ideology into capitalism, communism, feudalism, socialism, welfare state, and religious government.

4. Allama Tabatabai's Account of the Form and Structure of Government

In this article, Allama Tabatabai's political thought is pursued through the approach of political philosophy and Quranic exegesis. The inquiry examines whether it is possible, by elaborating his views, to arrive at a path for understanding the form and structure of government. Allama Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabatabai presents discussions in political philosophy and Quranic exegesis under the headings of constructed perceptions, social sovereignty, religious social government, his distinctive reading of Quranic addresses, and interactive realism. By drawing upon and reconstructing these elements, a clear and evident way can be found to comprehend the form and structure of government. Let us now address the principal elements of his political thought concerning the subject of the article.

4-1. Constructed Perceptions, Form and Structure of Government

To understand Allama Tabatabai's viewpoint on the form and structure of government, close attention must be paid to one of his most important philosophical innovations, which serves as the foundation for political affairs and the state: the theory of constructed perceptions. This is an original theory developed by Allama Tabatabai (Yazdani Moghadam, 2005, p. 111), which has been set forth and explained in works such as *Risālat al-I'tibāriyyāt* (Treatise on Constructs), *Risālat al-Insān fī al-Dunyā* (Treatise on Human Before the World), his marginal notes on *Kifāyat al-Uṣūl* (Ākhūnd Khurāsānī's seminal work on principles of jurisprudence), *Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism* (especially the sixth article on constructed perceptions), his Quranic exegesis *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, and the book *Nihāyat al-Hikma*. It forms the bedrock for his discussions on these matters (ibid., p. 111). The discussion of constructed perceptions, as Allama Tabatabai has presented it, has no precedent among the earlier scholars. Constructed perceptions stand in opposition to real perceptions. Real perceptions are mental reflections of objective reality and things as they are in themselves. Real perceptions can be attained through philosophical, mathematical, and scientific demonstrations; they possess logical value and do not change with shifts in natural needs or environmental factors. These perceptions are absolute, permanent, and necessary. In contrast, constructed perceptions lack

logical value; they change, develop, advance, and evolve in accordance with vital needs and environmental conditions. Constructed perceptions are relative, temporary, and non-necessary (Motahari, 1989, vol. 2, p. 130). He explains that the portion of human perceptions and thoughts which alters in response to environmental circumstances and external factors, thereby acquiring relativity and instability, constitutes constructed perceptions. Political affairs and the state are constructs arising from the constructive human mind; that is, both their existence and their essence are constructed. Human existents come after human beings and are subject to human limitations. Political affairs and the state are not pre-human realities; rather, their values—whether fixed or variable—are produced by the human mind's act of construction. Over the course of time and across the pages of history, they advance through trial and error and undergo reconstruction. Consequently, the state has no fixed and eternal form; its form and structure change in accordance with historical circumstances and human needs. Constructed perceptions are thoughts and apprehensions that possess practical value; they serve as means for attaining the perfections and advantages of life and represent external entities (Tabatabai, 1988, vol. 2, p. 115). Constructed perceptions are, first, products of positing, institution, and convention; second, they depend on the will and approval of individuals; third, they are subject to abrogation and alteration; and fourth, one can escape from rulership and its consequences. From Allama's perspective, the judgment that human beings require civil society and social justice arises from a pressing necessity inherent to their condition. This is just the meaning of the natural sociability of human beings, which springs from the human inclination toward employment and domination (*ibid.*, p. 170). The construction of headship and subordination belongs to the post-societal conventions. Those who possess greater physical and volitional capacity employ others. The construction of headship on one side and subordination on the other gives rise to the principle of employment, society, and justice. He explains the three notions of employment, society, and justice as follows: "Human beings, guided by their nature and innate constitution, constantly seek their own benefit from everyone (the construct of employment), and for their own benefit they seek the benefit of all (the construct of society), and for the benefit of all they seek social justice (the construct of the goodness of justice and the evil of oppression)" (Tabatabai, 1989, vol. 2, p. 199). Therefore, government is a necessary post-societal construct. The existence of society, composed of diverse human beings with differing goals and wills, inevitably gives rise to conflict. The solution to this

problem lies in establishing a coercive power and a restraining authority that holds sway over all members of society and assigns each to its proper place (Tabatabai, 1988, vol. 3, p. 154). Therefore, in this perspective, human beings play an active role in constructing and instituting government. Day by day, as they observe its shortcomings and errors, they strive to reform its form and structure. The essence of government is constructed and human in nature, because constructs are fundamentally human entities. Since constructs are inherently bound up with human interpretation, the form and structure of government likewise change in dependence upon social conditions, environmental factors, and in accordance with human inclination and will.

4-2. Social Sovereignty

In one philosophical perspective, the path to social life is paved through the theory of constructed perceptions and the capacity for human employment. Sovereignty—that is, authority over individuals—is among the necessary constructions that human beings require, and it comes into being after the construction of society. Due to the existence of diverse individuals with varying goals and wills, conflicts of interest and purposes arise, giving rise to the need for a coercive power that holds dominion over all members of society. Even after the formation of government, some may, driven by the instinct of domination, reduce others to slavery and ownership, thereby adopting monarchy. Yet social sovereignty is something shared and belonging to all individuals. Under historical and temporal conditions, one-sided domination emerged, deviating from the original implicit contract and from social justice, causing society to depart from the true meaning of sociality. This gave rise to the reprehensible form of domination and despotism. Nevertheless, even in this one-sided domination and despotic political regime, political social power remains derived from the community of people and belongs to them—though the injustice and transgression of despotism prevented people from recognizing the construction of social sovereignty and its true nature. The struggles of people against tyrannical and despotic governments and monarchies led to the establishment of constitutional systems and subsequently republican structures. In all of these, the construction of sovereignty ultimately returns to society, whose members are its true owners (Tabatabai, 1988, vol. 3, pp. 144–147; vol. 4, pp. 92–94). When people witnessed the oppression and despotism of kings, they enacted laws that transformed absolute monarchy into constitutional rule and other governmental structures. The necessity of leadership capable of managing the

affairs of the nation is universally acknowledged. However, the titles of such leadership vary according to the historical and cultural conditions of nations, and human beings continually refine and reform it through their reason. Therefore, different forms and structures of government emerge in accordance with historical and temporal conditions and the needs of society, shaped by the will of its members. Here, the role of religion becomes evident with the advent of prophets who called people to submission before God, confronted the pharaohs and their social and political oppression, and sought to reform government (*ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 144-147). In this analysis, social sovereignty underlies social life through an implicit and practical contract grounded in the common benefit and expediency of all, based on social justice. Political social power arises from the individuals of the people and belongs to all of them. Since social sovereignty and political power are the right of the people, their exercise must also be carried out with the view and consent of the general public. Therefore, any form and structure of government that can involve a greater number of the true owners of political power in exercising this right is more desirable. Hence, social dialogue and mutual agreement regarding all matters pertaining to political life—including the structure of government administration (which belongs to the members of society)—is a necessary requirement.

4-3. Interactive Realism

Tabatabai's view on interactive realism can open a path to understanding his view of the form and structure of government. According to this view, human beings can attain reality in a general and approximate manner, yet this requires social dialogue. Human apprehension of reality is partial; what a person perceives from the external world results from the interaction between external factors and his own perceptual faculties. Thus, what appears in the mind is not merely a simple reflection of the external in our minds. The human perceptual apparatus—together with environmental factors, social traditions, culture, education, and media influence—plays a role in shaping understanding and perception (Tabatabai, 1988, vol. 3, p. 208). Likewise, beliefs, culture, ethics, and human actions also affect knowledge and insight (Tabatabai, 2008, vol. 4, pp. 127–131). Therefore, truth is not the exclusive possession of any individual or particular group; rather, what we possess is truth in a general and approximate sense. This epistemological foundation can serve as the basis for collective dialogue in determining the form and structure of government. In other words, grasping the most desirable structure for administering society

becomes possible only through collective thinking and communal deliberation, in which reason and religion complement one another. Constructed concepts—including government and the state—are not entities that exist in the external world; they are mental and imaginative constructs that human beings posit and create. These constructs undergo change over the course of time. Therefore, social dialogue and the interaction of ideas hold a special place in understanding, apprehending, and discovering truth. Individual thinking alone is not sufficient to arrive at truth. These discussions leave no room in the domain of politics for a fixed conception of the form and structure of government.

4-4. Quranic Addresses and Social Religion

From various Quranic verses, it becomes evident that their address in the implementation of Islamic rulings is directed to the generality of Muslims. Therefore, religion is a social reality, and God demands the execution of Islamic rulings from the community of people as a whole. In the realm of practice, a perspective is adopted that relies on dialogue and consultation among Muslims. Evidently, this principle extends to the form and structure of government as well. From Tabatabai's viewpoint, the members of society are the addressees of the Quranic verses concerning the form and structure of government"

Here is another point that requires the researcher's attention: the address in all verses enjoining the establishment of acts of worship, undertaking jihad, implementing prescribed punishments, retaliation, and the like is directed to the believers in general, not to the Prophet alone. ... From all these verses it is understood that religion has a social character, ... and God Almighty demands the establishment of religion from the people collectively. Therefore, in the society formed by the people, its affairs belong to the people as a whole; there is no exclusive prerogative for some over others in these matters. The Prophet and others are equal in this regard. God Almighty says: "Indeed, I will not allow to be lost the work of any worker among you" (Quran 3:195), and the generality of the verse indicates that the natural influence of the members of the Islamic society upon their community and in the sight of God is legislatively taken into account, just as God has taken it into account in the created order (Tabatabai, 1988, vol. 4, pp. 121–123).

Thus, the religion of Islam has a distinctly social character, and God has

required its implementation from the people collectively. In this regard, Islam is a social religion.

4-5. Democracy and Popular Sovereignty

One way to understand Tabatabai's viewpoint on the form and structure of government is to examine his conception of democracy and popular sovereignty. If he holds a positive view of democracy and the role of the people in governance, it naturally follows that he would accept the role of the people in determining the form of government. Regarding whether he accepts democracy as a desirable political system, it should be noted that in some instances he rejects Western democracies and rejects the idea of majority rule (half plus one) (Tabatabai, 2008, vol. 2, p. 297; Tabatabai, 1981, p. 94). At the same time, in other passages he praises the regulations found in advanced Western countries.

According to Tabatabai, the differences between Islam's method of administering society and Western democratic methods as well as other approaches to social management are as follows (Tabatabai, 1981, pp. 94–97):

1) Other (non-Islamic) methods, because they are founded on material benefit, inherently contain the spirit of employment and exploitation. Accordingly, every possible means is used to take advantage of others.

2) In Islam there is no class distinction. The only criterion of superiority is piety, not wealth, status, position, or any other worldly consideration. In accordance with the practice of the Prophet, people are equal in social terms and participate in civil society to the same degree.

3) The executive power in Islam (government) does not constitute a privileged group. Rather, all members of society are equally responsible for establishing government and implementing Islamic rulings.

In light of these discussions, Allama Tabatabai rejects employment and exploitation of others in civilized governments. The administration of society belongs to the community of Muslims, which is to be managed through consultation. This aligns with popular sovereignty, yet it is a form of popular sovereignty in which the Islamic community must always, with social unity, strive for the establishment of religion. It is not claimed here that Allama explicitly advocated a democratic system for governing the Islamic society. Rather, from the totality of his foundational principles, one can derive a form of religious democracy. In his view, the administration of Islamic government in the era of occultation has been entrusted to the Muslims themselves. According to Allama Tabatabai, human beings, by making use of the God-

given gift of reason, are capable of organizing their social life and formulating the necessary laws. In contrast to those who discredit reason, he holds that God has equipped humanity with common sense or sound reason, enabling people—through the soundness of their intellect and perception (their God-given faculties)—to discern properly. Islam entrusts the management of both individual and social aspects of human life to sound reason and permits no interference from deceptive emotions except within the limits that reason approves. For this reason, Islam opposes anything that weakens or undermines reason. Reason is a divine gift that distinguishes human beings from other animals (Tabatabai, 2008, vol. 2, pp. 232–233). According to Allama Tabatabai, human reason is capable of grasping truths. The Quran, in numerous verses, guides people toward rational evidence, inviting them to reflection, reasoning, and contemplation of the signs in the horizons and within themselves. Moreover, the Quran itself freely employs rational argumentation when establishing truths, and no other heavenly scripture is known to recognize demonstrative knowledge and rational proof for humanity to the extent that the Quran does. In his view, the truths of Islamic teachings are understood through rational demonstration; that is, all genuine knowledge is comprehended by means of rational reasoning (Tabatabai, 1995, pp. 78–79).

The concentration of power and political domination constitute obstacles and afflictions of modern democracies, which may well be one of the reasons for Allama Tabatabai's censure of both Western and non-Western democracies.

The great calamity lies in the concentration of all powers in the hands of the executive ruler. Relying on this unparalleled power, he comes to regard the rest of the people as weak, leaving no force capable of moderating his will. As a result, his desires become the absolute sovereign over every aspect of the people's affairs. History is filled with the stories of tyrants and powerful figures who unjustly mounted the backs of the people and established foundations of oppression and injustice—and even today, such rulers are abundant (Tabatabai, 2008, vol. 2, p. 226).

In this passage, he believes that the concentration of power in the hands of the executive branch undermines the people, suppresses the reflection of their views, and prevents them from exercising sovereignty over their own political destiny and affairs. This indicates his defense of the separation or independence of powers and his opposition to the domination of force and power over human relations. He also addresses the domination of global powers over backward nations and, overall, considers domination—whether

exercised by the state internally or by domineering powers in the international arena—as contrary to freedom, human dignity, and virtues. He views it as paving the way for enslavement, humiliation, and injustice (Tabatabai, 2008, vol. 2, p. 226). In light of the foregoing, no room remains for doubt or ambiguity: the form and structure of government in the era of the Shiite Imam's occultation is neither fixed nor definitive, and it is not only the duty but the right of the people to delineate the type of government as well as its form and structure. In his view, the Islamic society, like other societies, requires government and the state for its administration and advancement, yet the form of government within it has not been specified. From Allama Tabatabai's perspective, the matter of government and authority over society belongs to the people themselves, and in this regard they are equal. The guardianship of the community and their political leadership is specifically assigned to the Prophet, who bears responsibility for calling people to faith, guiding them, educating them, exercising authority over their worldly and otherworldly affairs, and serving as their imam (Tabatabai, 2008, vol. 4, p. 122). In the Shia view, after the Prophet and the infallible Imams—who were appointed through explicit designation—the matter of government, in the era of occultation, belongs to the Muslims themselves.

However, in any case, the matter of Islamic government after the Prophet and after the occultation of the Imam—as in the present time—is unobjectionably entrusted to the Muslims. From the Book of God one can derive that it is upon the Muslims to appoint a ruler in society, following the practice of the Messenger of God—which is the tradition of imamate, not monarchy or empire—so that he may judge among them, safeguard the rulings, and, in matters other than the fixed rulings, take charge of governing in light of the incidents of time and place through consultation. (Tabatabai, 2008, vol. 4, pp. 124–125)

Furthermore, regarding the particular rulings concerning transient and passing incidents, financial matters, defense, communications, and urban regulations, it is stated: “These are entrusted to the discretion of the governor responsible for the affairs of government ... Thus, it is incumbent upon the governor to consider the welfare of society in all internal and external affairs related to war and peace, finances and non-financial matters, and to decide after consultation with the Muslims” (Tabataba'i, 2008, vol. 4, p. 121). Given that the Quranic addresses are directed to all members of society, that religion is a social reality, and that its implementation is entrusted to the generality of the people, it follows that the administration and management of society

belong equally to the people. Political power arises from the community of people, and in this regard no one has any advantage or superiority over another. The ruler must therefore consult with the people in political matters. For this reason, the path is opened for recourse to social rationality in determining the form and structure of government in every era.

4-6. Relationship between Religion and State

Explaining the relationship between religion and state from Tabatabai's perspective can illuminate other dimensions of this discussion, since he, as a religious scholar, views all phenomena through the lens of religion—particularly where he discusses the role of human beings in government, social government, and religious social government. This topic requires first defining religion according to him. In *al-Mīzān*, Allama Tabatabai defines religion as follows: “Religion is a collection of teachings concerning the Origin and the Return [Resurrection], along with social laws pertaining to acts of worship and transactions, which have reached humanity through revelation and prophethood” (Tabatabai, 1988, vol. 2, p. 405). Elsewhere, he describes the essence of religion as a set of beliefs regarding the creation of the world and humanity, together with a series of practical duties that adapt human life to those beliefs (Tabatabai, 2008, vol. 2, p. 310). Therefore, according to him, in Islam, in addition to teachings concerning the Origin and the Hereafter, social laws have also been taken into account, and through this means, it pursues the guidance and direction of society. Moreover, religion is the best and most excellent method capable of organizing human society and compelling people more than any other method to observe social laws (Tabatabai, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 310). Human beings cannot fully administer society through reason alone. Although human reason, with the help of fellow humans, can manage society by establishing regulations, reason needs the assistance of revelation. The presence of factors such as power and wealth leads to exploitation and domination over others and disrupts the interactive functioning of society. The purpose of the prophets and the coming of divine laws has been to confront these reprehensible factors (Tabatabai, 1988, Vols. 2–4, pp. 92–93). From Allama Tabatabai's perspective, the social methods of the West—established through human reason for the sake of progress, development, and adherence to social laws—are indeed beneficial and useful. However, they alone are insufficient to restrain humanity's rebellious nature and other instincts. Rather, there is a need for a stronger force, namely religion, which performs various social functions:

1) Every religious individual, guided by religion, realizes that their life is not limited to the few transient days of this world, but rather an unlimited and endless life lies ahead—one that is not destroyed by death. The only path to their everlasting felicity is to follow the religious regulations sent through the prophets. A person knows that God has complete encompassing knowledge of their inner and outer being, and that one day they must stand before God to render account for their deeds. Therefore, they do not oppose the divine laws—even in secret—whether individually or socially.

2) Every religious individual knows, according to their religious beliefs, that by performing every religious command, they are obeying their Lord. For this reason, every act of obedience they perform is in fact an act of obedience to their Lord. Thus, every obedience they carry out is, in reality, a voluntary transaction and exchange they have made with their own choice, one that brings about God's pleasure.

Religion has various functions in human social life and cannot be ignored in the public sphere or in political interactions, as we referred to them in detail in the first chapter. The addresses of the Noble Quran concerning acts of worship and non-worshipful matters are directed to the believers, and religion has a social character. God demands the establishment of religion from the people in a general and collective manner. The political affairs of society belong to the people themselves, and the implementation of religious rulings is the duty of the general public. Naturally, the government and political power arise from the will and consent of the people. The selection of the ruler in an Islamic society is entrusted to the Muslims (Rokhshad, 2006, Vol. 4, pp. 410–411). In this way, they can supervise the government and the rulers of society, and it is the duty of the government to:

1) Conduct itself among the people in accordance with the conduct (*sīra*) of the Prophet, and not be a despotic government.

2) Implement the religious rulings in society.

3) Safeguard the interests of the people in all circumstances.

4) Consult with the people in public affairs, governmental matters, and the administration of society (Tabatabai, 1988, Vol. 4, pp. 124–125).¹

Allama Tabatabai employs two designations, social government and religious social government, to articulate his claim (Tabatabai, 1988, p. 14).

1. In this discussion, we have benefited from the following source: Yazdani Moghadam, A. R. (2009). Religious democracy in light of Allama Tabatabai's theory of constructed perceptions. *Hukūmat-i Islāmī*, (51), p. 133.

The Islamic ruler and the people are obligated to follow the conduct of the Prophet in implementing the rulings of Islam; therefore, religion plays a role in society and in directing the state and government.

In his view, human reason can affect the evolution and progress of humanity in terms of planning and political management. He praises the advancements of the West in administering society by drawing on their historical and social experience, but he does not consider them sufficient (*ibid.*, p. 14). For this reason, if he criticizes democracy in certain respects, it is due to its incompleteness as a desirable political method when detached from religion. This is because, according to him, religion plays a role in sovereignty through society. According to him, human beings carry out their perfective movement in the realm of existence through knowledge and thought, and they exercise control over the external world by means of the constructed knowledge. Through the faculty of perception and thought, human beings establish a connection with everything. The necessity and need inherent in human beings—arising from their creation and natural constitution—direct them toward social life so that all participants in it may benefit. In a correct communicative interaction, free from the domination of power and wealth, their perfective movement accelerates. However, in cases where this collective interaction in the public domain is threatened by systemic domination, religions, through the sending of prophets, confront arrogance and force, and guide society toward a healthy social life in which human progress occurs in relation to society.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to examine and elucidate Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai's perspective on the form and structure of government. Since he is one of the prominent exegetes of the Quran and a leading philosopher in the Islamic world, his viewpoint can be theoretically and practically enlightening and guiding for Islamic governments in the era of occultation. Based on the present research, Allama Tabatabai directly discusses the form and structure of government to a limited extent. However, drawing on his discussions and the foundations of his thought, one can determine the structure and form of government in an Islamic society, as outlined in the following results:

- 1) Constructed perceptions refer to that portion of human perceptions and thoughts which change in accordance with environmental circumstances and external factors, thereby admitting relativity and instability. The political affair

and the state are constructs that arise from the constructive human mind. In other words, both their reality and their essence are constructed. The political affair and the state are not pre-human realities; rather, their values—whether fixed or variable—are produced by the human mind's constructive faculty. In this way, over the course of time and on the page of history, they advance through trial and error and undergo reconstruction. As a result, the state does not possess a fixed and eternal form; consequently, its form and structure also change in accordance with historical circumstances and human needs.

2) In his analysis of social sovereignty, social life is based on an implicit and practical contract grounded in the common benefit and expediency of all, founded upon social justice. Social and political power emerges from the individuals of the people and belongs to all of them. Since social ownership and political power are the right of the people, their exercise must also be in accordance with the view of the general public. Any form and structure of government that can involve a greater number of the true owners of political power in exercising this right is more desirable. Therefore, dialogue and social agreement regarding all matters related to political life—including the structure of government administration (which belongs to the members of society)—is a necessary matter.

3) According to the theory of interactive realism, humans can attain reality partially, but this requires social dialogue. Human apprehension of reality is partial and approximate; what a person perceives from the external world results from the interaction between external factors and their own perceptual faculties. Therefore, what appears in the mind is not merely a simple reflection of the external world in our minds. The human perceptual apparatus—along with environmental factors, social traditions, culture, education, and media influence—plays a role in shaping understanding and perception. Consequently, social dialogue and the interaction of ideas hold a special place in comprehending, apprehending, and discovering truth. Individual thinking alone is not sufficient to arrive at truth. These discussions leave no room in the domain of politics for a fixed conception of the form and structure of government.

4) The addressees of the Quranic verses concerning the implementation of Islamic rulings are the general body of Muslims. Consequently, religion is a social reality, and God requires the execution of Islamic rulings to be carried out by the community of people. Therefore, in the practical sphere, the approach that receives attention is one based on consultation, dialogue, and consultation of Muslims. It is evident that this principle also extends to

the form and structure of government. From Tabatabai's perspective, the addressees of the Quranic verses regarding the form and structure of government are the members of society.

5) Allama rejects democracy in its Western form, repudiating the employment and exploitation of others as practiced in civilized governments. However, he holds that the administration of society is up to the community of Muslims through consultation. This is compatible with democracy or popular sovereignty, albeit one that should constitute an Islamic community with social unity which should be concerned with implementing the religion. Here, it has not been claimed that he explicitly suggests a democratic system for administrating the Islamic society; rather, his ideas roughly imply some kind of religious democracy during the Imam's occultation, in which the administration of the Islamic government is entrusted to Muslims.

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