



## Conceptology and the Explication of the Quiddity of “Open Society” From the View of Imām ‘Alī (a)

Maryam Nīkū’ī<sup>1\*</sup>; Muḥsin Rafa’ī<sup>2</sup>

1. MA Holder in Ḥadīth Sciences, Faculty of Human Science, Hazrat-e-Masoumeh University, Qom, Iran

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Ḥadīth Sciences, Faculty of Human Science, Hazrat-e-Masoumeh University, Qom, Iran

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### Abstract

God created the human inherently social, and made the continuation of his life and actualization of his talents dependent on the relationship with the society. From the beginning, by understanding this fact, the human tried to seek the proper course of living and perceive the ideal society. Of the most controversial topics propounded in the present era is the expression “open society.” In the study at hand, disregarding the approaches of different thinkers, Alawite knowledge is alluded to, and exploration and conceptology of the open society from the view of Imām ‘Alī (a) is done. The chosen method is descriptive-analytical and the data was gathered using a library method. Conceptology of open society depends on the goal of the society and the people of that society. In monotheistic approach, the most important goal of the society is moving toward the highest kingdom as well as growth. According to the findings of the research, a society is open wherein there is no obstacle, imposed by that very society, to the comprehensive growth of its people. Human societies have two pillars of people and governance. Based on Alawite teachings, governance is a divinely trusted affair which is bestowed upon some individuals by God; if the divinely appointed governance is accepted by the people, then it would be established. Divine governance can be divided into three spheres of governing model, governing rites, and the governor. What is certain is that the quiddity, function, and expectations in these three spheres in an open society are in line with the removal of obstacles as for the growth course and cultivation of humans.

**Keywords:** open society, government, freedom, *Nahj al-balāgha*, Imām ‘Alī (a).

### 1. Introduction

Human is an inherently gregarious creature. His inherent inclination toward a social life has caused him from a far past to seek establishing his idealistic society. Therefore, many philosophical schools of thought have been shaped, and each of these schools – with offering a new definition of the concept of society – has depicted its own specific process for the realization of the idealistic society.

Of the most controversial topics propounded in the present era – which is the concern of some youth in our society – are the expressions and concepts of “open society” and “closed society.” Naturally, youngsters enter into and examine various schools of thought to find an answer for this concern. The theory of open society by Karl Popper has attracted the attention of some societies for a while. Meanwhile, knowledge of Islam as a reference for all aspects of

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\* Corresponding Author, Email: m.nikoui@chmail.ir

human life has done planning and modeling. According to the teachings of Islam, saints of God have the mission of constructing a society based on the right and establishing a unified nation around the axis of monotheism. This is a society in which only the volition of God governs and spiritual values are in progress so that at the end an ambiance can be provided for the comprehensive cultivation and growth of people of the society. One of the authentic sources of Shī'a teachings is the teachings of Imām 'Alī (a). Thus in the present study, the knowledge of *Nahj al-balāgha* and Alawite teachings are referred to. Via a library method as the way of data gathering as well as the descriptive-analytical method as the research method – in addition to providing a definition – the elements and features of an open society are explored conceptually and the following questions are answered:

1. What is the concept of open society from the view of Imām 'Alī (a)?
2. What are the elements of open society regarding the dimension of governance in the view of Imām 'Alī (a)?

The expression of open and closed society was for the first time propounded by the French, Jewish philosopher Henri Bergson (Bergson, 1935: 229). After that, Karl Popper, the English philosopher of Austrian ancestry, published the book "The Open Society and Its Enemies" in 1945. In addition to defining, describing, and providing the elements of open society, he criticized Plato (Popper, 2017: 373), Hegel (Ibid: 683), and Karl Marx (Ibid: 1013), enumerating them as the enemies of the society. After him, works were written based on the approach of previous thinkers in the form of books and articles in this arena, which in some cases provoked criticisms as to the approach of Popper. Regarding this, Muḥammad Akhwān wrote a book in 2006 with the title "Bāznigariyi jama'iyi bāz: Naqd wa barrisiyyi andishihāyi Popper" which was published by Nashr Mursal. In two chapters of the aforesaid book, Akhwān has criticized and analyzed the ideas of Popper. One of the others studies done in this realm is the article "Maḥdūdīyyathāyi rawish shinākhtīyi barnāmiyi pazhūhishīyi Popper darbāriyi jama'iyi bāz" by 'Alī Riḍā Ismā'ilzādi which was published in the periodical of the Literature and Humanities faculty of the University of Tabriz in 2009. With a critical stance, the aforementioned article investigates the limitations of Popper's research process. Some studies have been done concerning this realm, but none of them has explored this concept in the thinking framework of Imām 'Alī (a).

Also, as to the concept of open society in Qur'ān, a study is done with the title of "Jami'iyi bāz wa Basti" (Open and closed society) by Samāni Khālīdī and Faṭīma Firaydūnī in the research center of Bāghir al-'Ulūm. What makes their work different from the work at hand is that, first, the study by Khālīdī and Firaydūnī is based on the qur'ānic knowledge and, second, in their article the relation between the open society and a closed one is discussed with the expression "social mobility." According to the examinations done so far, no solid research has been done as for the concept of open society in *Nahj al-balāgha*.

On the other hand, based on the objectives of Ayatollah Khāmini'ī, formation of an Islamic society is the prerequisite step for the realization of the new Islamic civilization (Khāmini'ī, 2005). In view of that, society formation has always been one of his concerns and the other Muslim thinkers. Meanwhile, open society is one of the imported concepts, which was put forward as a concern of some people in the society from thirty years ago and was formed as one of the elements of the utopia in the mind of the youth. Therefore, exploration and conceptology of the open society, according to Alawite knowledge and teachings, is important.

## 2. Conceptology of open society

Disregarding the philosophical approaches which exist as for the authenticity of individual or

society, what is certain is that a society is composed of individuals as the body which is made out of cells (Ḥusaynī Dashtī, 2006, vol. 2: 613). After the formation of human societies, from a far past, interpretation, explication, prediction, and control of the societies have obsessed the mind of the researchers. Of the cases that in the present era has obsessed the mind of some thinkers is providing a model of an ideal society under the name of open society.

Of the most famous definitions given as to the open society is the definition proposed by Henri Bergson and Karl Popper. Popper sees the realization of an open society dependent on the freedom of the individual and altruism. He introduces a society as open wherein the government and rules are in a way that the freedom of everybody exists along with the freedom of the other individuals. Thus, the most possible amount of freedom can be given to the mankind. He defends the political freedom, free competition, and gradual and part by part social engineering, and opposes historicism and any type of revolutionary and idealistic ideology (Bushrīyya, 2002: 60). Now apart from various philosophers and schools of thought, a definition of the open society is going to be dealt with, according to the ‘Alawī teachings.

Since open society is a relative affair, giving a definition of it is dependent on fact and reliant on the goal which is depicted by its signifier creator initiator. It is closely related to the worldview and definition of the human.

In Islam, human is a creature which is from the highest kingdom and is a heavenly being which is sent to the lowest rank of the universe (material world). All his life is passing a course in order to return to the world of the light. Islam has always been deemed as a social institution. It sees the realization of human goals possible within the public frame. Accordingly, the big goal of the mankind depends on the collective movement of all humans toward being divinely and, in a nutshell, collective growth of the individuals of a society. To grow and improve, one is in need of requirements which generally include security, cultivation, and freedom (Muṭahharī, 2011: 25). This is whereas if any one of these three items were distorted, the passage of humans would be limited by the society, like the seed of a plant which cannot grow in case of the existence of a physical obstacle. In case of having security and appropriate cultivation ambiance, if human’s freedom were removed, his growth would be limited by the society. Hence, with the birth of a closed society, there comes the deterioration of the society and the destruction of mankind’s spiritual life (Ibid: 30). In view of that, in comparison with a closed society, a society can be defined open in which there is no obstacle by the society for the existential growth of the individuals of that very society. The article at hand has been written by means of following the model of the Alawite society and government, the government in which freedom is considered as one of the most important elements. On the other hand, conceptology of the closed society needs an independent study. Probing the closed society is set aside for future, and for the moment just the conceptology of the open society is examined. Moreover, due to the limitation of the present article, the critical review of the open society, which is a matter of importance, is disregarded and is set aside for another article.

### **3. Government in the open society**

Human society is composed of two parts of governance and people. As the society and human government are meaningful in relation to each other – and not separately – due to the limitation of the article, the exploration of the governance part is only dealt with in the present article. In fact, having a religious society without a religious government as well as asking for a religious government without a religious society is not useful and possible. There is an intellectual inherence, like a mutual correlation, between these two issues (Raḥīmpūr Azghadī, 2005: 2).

From the far past, as to the type and form of the governance, thinkers and philosophers have expressed some statements and have provided some classifications. Among them is the classification provided by the Greek philosopher, Plato. He talks about five governing models including aristocracy<sup>1</sup>, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny (Plato, 2019: 548, 480, 478, 487, 485 & 494). In the modern world, two regimes of democracy and tyranny are of the most controversial models. Regarding the content, Islamic government has differences of quiddity with these political regimes.

The main pillars of governing system of Islam originate from revelation, and the legitimacy of the government is reliant on the permission and command of the sublime God. The right of governance inherently and originally belongs to the sublime God. No one or no group has such a right, unless there is a reason to the effect that God has bestowed upon him such a right (Mişbāḥ Yazdī, 2012: 51), with an approval seal by the sublime God. According to the reasons at hand, we believe such a right is given to the prophets and the Pure Imams. Imām 'Alī (a) also does not see Imamate a worldly post, but rather he sees Imam a person selected and appointed by God who has the serious responsibility of leading the Islamic society and securing the Islamic Law as a divine trust (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: letter 5).

This is whereas a tyrannical government lacks the validity and a foundation of legitimacy. Sometimes due to having the power, a tyrannical government rules over the people and sometimes with resorting to inheritance, racial supremacy, or the concept of scepter, it legitimizes itself. On the other hand, people accept and obey this type of governance only because of being ignorant and being fearful of that power. This lack of legitimacy can also be seen in a democratic system because it bases the foundation of legitimacy on the foundation of existence, leaving the issue of government legitimacy unattended and not giving a foundation for the legitimacy of the government. This is whereas the Islamic government, in comparison with the democratic government, has the advantage of having a very clear foundation as for the issue of legitimacy; also, it relies on the vote of people for its existence.

The first element of Islamic government is its legitimacy aspect. The other key element is its public acceptance and the third element is its efficiency. According to the knowledge of Islam, even the most qualified individuals –those who have received the right of governance from the Divine Presence – should also be accepted by the public (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: sermon 3, letter 1), so that they would take the control of governmental affairs (Ibid: sermon 2) and accept the divine trust. In fact, Islamic government sees its existence something borrowed from the people, and deems the will of the general public the condition of establishing the government. Consequently, a Muslim is responsible not only for his own destiny, but also for the destiny of the other Muslims. This is whereas the tyrannical government is an approach of governing the country which is established based on despotism, oppression, and coercion (Ibid: letter 5), and no trace of people's election can be found in it.

Imām 'Alī (a) believes that the most qualified individuals do not have the right of governing the people if the general public is not happy with them (Ibid: letter 53). When people opposed a matter, Imām tried to illuminate them by giving logical answers and true and convincing reasons. If they did not accept, he never imposed his opinions. He always wanted people to approve his policies and choose their way freely and with complete knowledge ('Alīkhānī, 2000: 207).

With a comprehensive and precise look at the history, inevitably it should be admitted that the quality of electing and swearing oath of allegiance to the Commander of the Faithful (a) has not been seen in any other society in the entire history, an oath swearing which was out of

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1. It is some government established by the philosophers on the earth.

absolute freewill (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: sermon 1) and awareness (Ibid: sermon 136). Explaining a part of the third sermon of *Nahj al-balāgha*, ‘Allama Ja’farī says, “With no allurements and threat, if the general public were asked whom they consider for leadership and ruling, those responsible persons – in case of knowing the meaning of that post and duty and being interested in the humans and humanity – could propound no one except ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (Ja’farī Tabrīzī, 1997, vol. 1: 106). In one of his letters, his Holiness emphasizes this point that he did not go to people for oath swearing and they came to him with persistency and without reluctance, coercion, and greed. *Nahj al-balāgha* reads, “I did not extend my hands towards them so that they might swear the oath of allegiance to me but they themselves extended their hands towards me” (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: letter 54).

Somewhere in the sermon of Shaqshaqīyya, at the time of swearing the oath of allegiance, his Holiness (a) points out that people went to him for swearing the oath of allegiance with much passion and in a great number, “It [the crowd of people] advanced towards me from every side like the mane of the hyena so much so that ... both the ends of my shoulder garment were torn. They collected around me like the herd of sheep and goats” (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: sermon 3). Based on another narration, at the day of oath taking which was Friday, Imām went to the mosque – while a great number of people showed up at the mosque of Medina – and addressed the people with a loud voice, “O people! This (government) is your affair. No one except the one you have made him your commander does not have the right of ruling you. We separated yesterday as I deemed the acceptance of guardianship unpleasant, but you were not pleased with nothing other than my government (Ibn Athīr, 2006, vol. 3: 193; Rāzī, 2000, vol. 1: 459; Ṭabarī, 2008, vol. 4: 435).

In line with this transmission, Imām ‘Alī (a) – in the first meeting and first talk to the people – openly gives the right of governing to the one chosen by the people. By doing so, he acts according to the statement of the revered Prophet. In this narration as it is transmitted by his Holiness, Prophet made him promise that, “O son of Abū Ṭālib! The guardianship of my affair is with you. So if they give you the guardianship happily and peacefully and by common consent they agreed to do so, rise for doing it. But if they differed, leave them and whatever they are obsessed with (Ṭabarī, 1994: 417). This course and process for establishing the government as well as the sayings and lifestyle of his Holiness indicate the necessity of having freedom in choosing the political fate by the people.

After accepting the divine governance by the people, a system would be established based on the right, which seems to have three main parts (after a comprehensive study of Imām’s attitude as for this issue): governing model and system; governor; and rites and rules of government. Since there is a mutual relationship between the government and the society and that none of them is meaningful without the other one, so the parts of the government also have such a relationship with the society.

### 3.1. Model of the government

Form and approach of establishing and administrating Alawite government can be categorized and explained in four parts:

#### 3.1.1 Fluidity of social classes

One of the elements of an open society is social fluidity, namely, a society in which mobility is done easily. There individuals can change their social bases and move to other social bases through using the existing opportunities (Wuthūqī, 1997: 230).

Islamic society was stricken with different harms after the demise of the Prophets (a), in the ruling time of the first three caliphs. This was due to moving away from the genuine teachings of Islam. One of the most harmful cases was the formation of class system in the society which was continued to the beginning of the government of the Commander of the Faithful (a).

To understand the conditions of the society given to Imām, it is enough if one pays a little attention to the sermon of Shaqshaqīyya in which he says, “They should not acquiesce in the gluttony of the oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed” (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: sermon 3). In this sermon, Imām uses the expression “kiṭṭa zālim.” Kiṭṭa literally means a kind of fullness by which one feels stomachache because of eating too much (Farāhīdī, 1989, vol. 5: 275). Contrary to this expression, he uses the expression “saghaba maẓlūm” which means a type of hunger by which one feel stomachache due to extreme hunger (Ibn Manẓūr, 1994, vol. 1: 468). His Holiness uses these two expressions to describe the environment of that time. This shows the extent of social gap which is the result of the ruling of the first three caliphs. At the time of ‘Uthmān’s ruling, a new social system bloomed whose seeds were planted at the time of the second caliph. Following the model of the social system of the Sassanid’s government, ‘Umar began to make offices in his governing time. By those offices, he divided the society into various classes, determined a certain payment for each class, and deemed the tribe of Quraysh their head (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1996, vol. 12: 74; Ibn Athīr, 2006, vol. 2: 502; Ṭabarī, 2008, vol. 3: 613).

In the first sermon after the oath of allegiance, Imām ‘Alī (a) enumerated opposing the social system earnestly as one of the important doings of his governance (Kulaynī, 2008, vol. 2: 245). He seriously opposed the social strata which were institutionalized in the eras of ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān, and annihilated the offices (Ibid, vol. 8: 60).

Of course, opposing this social gap did not mean the destruction of classes and construction of a classless society, because the human is naturally created social (and therefore civil). In *Nahj al-balāgha*, the concept of social base differs from its idiomatic meaning in politics. In the viewpoint of Imām ‘Alī (a), social classes and bases originate from the human’s social need as to the division of work in the society. Based on this, Imām ‘Alī (a) divides the society into seven classes which are, in fact, seven pillars of mankind’s social life. They are the classes of judges, army, particular or general secretaries and officers, tribute payers and tax payers, traders, industrialists, and the poor (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: letter 53).

Imām created a massive change in the society by removing the gaps among the social classes and returning the social interactions to their proper and main course. With a just system, he made all strata of the society to use the public conveniences. By doing so, he removed the obstacle of social classes from the growth course of the people in the society.

Referring to the history can inform one as to the mobility and movement of individuals as well as the fluidity of social bases in Alawite society. In all societies, certainly, one of the classes in which it is very difficult to move from various bases to the target base is the class of army commanders and governmental officers and administrators. With a glance at the lifestyle of the Prophet and Alawite as well as the exploration of the biography of the officers of his Holiness, it can be found out that the social base and class of persons was not an obstacle to their entrance into the base of officers. Following the Prophet (a) who had appointed Usāma b. Zaid as the commander of the army while he was from a low class, the Commander of the Faithful chose some of this commanders and officers from various classes (Wāqīdī, 1990, vol. 2: 855).

Some of the grandees did not like these acts of Imām (a), which paved the way for many disobediences and clashes made by those grandees against his Holiness (Ibn Hishām, n.d.,

vol. 2: 650). Also in the fabric of the society, it was difficult to accept some individuals from the low class as a ruler; this was to the extent that the people of Kūfa did not accept the leadership of ‘Amāra b. Shahāb who was from the poor class (Ibn Athīr, 2006, vol. 3: 201; Ṭabarī, 2008, vol. 4: 443).

### 3.1.2. *Democracy*<sup>1</sup>

It was said that people in the Alawite society have a key role and the establishment of the divine government relies on the will and wish of the people because the human is created free and, thus, no obstacle should be posed by the society to the realization of the human’s freewill dimension. The role of people in the society can be investigated in three spheres: 1) right of the determination of fate; 2) supervision of people and accountability of government; and 3) clear political mechanisms.

#### 3.1.2.1. *Right of fate determination*

It is narrated by Imām ‘Alī (a), “As the ruler of an Islamic society and state dies, it is on people, by the verdict of Islam and God, to do nothing until they choose a leader (Sulaym b. Qays, 1985, vol. 2: 748). Here is mentioned the expression choosing; that is, choosing the ruler for an Islamic government is introduced as an obligation, an obligation so important for people which has priority over all things. This act of choosing is on all individuals, even on the most qualified ones and even on an infallible Imām who is given the right of governance by God. Where else, his Holiness says, “We have a right. If they give, we take it. If not, we get on the back of camels and sprint even if moving at night lasts long” (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: saying 22).

Some of the scholars believe that Imam ‘Alī (a) said this saying at the day of Saqīfa or those days; some others hold that he said this after the death of ‘Umar at the Council Day, when that group of six got together to choose one from among themselves (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1996, vol. 18: 133). Based on the saying of his Holiness, although the appointment is by God and caliphate is the certain right of Ahl al-Bayt, this will not be imposed on anybody if it lacks the public acceptability. The condition for the execution of this right is the will and choice of people, because no one except the general public has the right to determine their social-political fate. If societies took away this right from the people, they would hinder the real growth of the free human and pave the way for the formation of closed societies.

#### 3.1.2.2. *Supervision of people and accountability of government*

Government in Islam is established through divine appointment and public election, so it is like a divine-public trust which brings responsibility for the ruler. As a result, the ruler of the society should be responsive as for this trust in the presence of God and people. More exactly, government is a right which is bestowed upon some individuals by God and this divine right and trust is given to the rulers for the second time as a trust. In this perspective, rulers are in fact the carriers of the weighty and dual divine-public trust (Muḥsinī, 2005, vol. 1: 17).

In many cases and occasions, Imām ‘Alī (a) has particularly reminded his officers of this divine-public trust. In view of this, in a letter to the officer of Azerbaijan, Ash’ath b. Qays

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1. An Alawite society is not “exclusively” democratic, but rather it is a theocratic and monotheistic society in line with the right affair and, of course, ethics in which people play a key role in establishing and managing it. In this article, the word democracy is not used precisely.

who was appointed by ‘Uthmān and had an erroneous routine, Imām wrote, “What is on you is not your prey, but rather it is a trust on you. Who has appointed you for that job has entrusted you with its guardianship (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: letter 5).

With such an approach for the government, Imām ‘Alī (a) sees the ruler duty-bound to use his capability to the most in order to protect this trust safe, and be finally responsive to the genuine owners of this trust (God and people). His Holiness, in parts of his letter to Mālik, in addition to commanding him to convene question-and-answer meetings with people, mentions the subtleties of such meetings and sees connecting with people very important. He says, “Out of your hours of work, fix a time for the complainants and for those who want to approach you with their grievances. During this time you should do no other work but hear them and pay attention to their complaints and grievances. For this purpose you must arrange public audience for them. During this audience, for the sake of Allah, treat them with kindness, courtesy and respect. Do not let your army and forces be in the audience hall at such times so that those who have grievances against your regime may speak to you freely, unreservedly and without fear” (Ibid: letter 53). Also it is cited in the history that after the governor of Baṣra is reported to make a small mistake by Abulaswad Dualī, Imām ‘Alī (a) warns the governor of Baṣra and makes him responsive and investigated (Ibid: letter 41). This letter shows that the officer has to be responsive before God, his superior, and people. Through creating and maintaining the spirit of responsiveness, first at the level of the government and then the general public, the officer avoids the creation and reinforcement of despotism and tyranny attitude, which is one of the main obstacles to the spiritual growth and freedom.

### 3.1.2.3 Clear political mechanisms

Importance was attached to the right of people by Imām ‘Alī (a) to supervise the performance of officials. In addition to bounding himself to clarify things, he also firmly asked his officers to share their decisions and doings with people explicitly and clearly. According to the research, his Holiness based his work on clarification and saw it as one of the certain rights of people. He deemed clarification as one of the essential strategies to oppose the plausible corruption.

In a letter which he wrote to the border guards of Islamic states, Imām ‘Alī (a) has enumerated the mutual governor-people rights explicitly. One of the rights that Imām enumerates is clarification in ruling. He says, “My duty towards you is that, except the secrets of war, I do not keep anything pertaining to the affairs of the State hidden from you. Barring religious questions in all other matters concerning your welfare, I should take you in my confidence and seek your advice, and I should guard your interests and rights to the best of my ability” (Ibid: letter 50).

Certainly keeping the secrets from the companions and friends is some expression of distrust toward them, which in many cases causes pessimism or various interpretations for each occasion. However, when the chief of people informs them completely, emotional bonds would be firmer and suspicion and pessimism would be less. Nevertheless, there are cases for which there is no other option except concealment of secrets, like war affairs. Two reasons can be provided for this: first, if Imām made war dependent on consulting with people, perhaps most of them would not take part in the battle and war affair would never be organized (Baḥrānī, 2012, vol. 5: 215). Second, if the enemy was informed of the war mechanism and plans, then the plan of operation would have practically become futile.

However after the war, his Holiness explained the happenings to the general public. One of his doings was to share with the people of different states their own fate via sending them

letters. For example, in a letter, his Holiness explains the incidents of Şaffayn war (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: letter 58), and mentions the goals of the enemy and the results of those goals concisely.

In various societies, sometimes the ruler of the society does things whose philosophy is not obvious to the general public, causing suspicion among people and gradually separating people from the government. Therefore, Imām ‘Alī (a), in his letter to Mālik, evidently says that if the general public is suspicious of you to be oppressive, share your reason with them clearly and by doing this, do away with their suspicion (Ibid: letter 53). This is because even if the ruler and officers are aware of the act’s rightness, they should not ignore people. It is necessary for them to provide the society with the reasons of their acts and not to leave people nonplussed. By this, people’s minds achieve serenity and their suspicion is done away. It is obvious that if these ambiguous ways are closed to people in a society like Levant, they do not follow the ruler. Accordingly, in the political system of Imām, “Işhār” (clarification) is deemed as one of the firm elements and is the base of people’s governance. Thus, as Imām believes in people’s governance, he sees clarification their right. He sees the lack of this policy a cause for people’s deviance because the lack of clarity in affairs causes people to misunderstand and naively grasp the affairs about which they are dominant and of which they are part.

### 3.1.3. Freedom

Freedom is a concept with a wide usage which includes many aspects of the society like cultural, social, and political aspects. One of the main and key elements of closed society is political and social freedom. In the view of Imām ‘Alī (a), all humans have the inherent right of freedom (Dilshād Tihirānī, 2014: 102). The most important instances of freedom are freedom of belief, freedom of speech, and freedom of formation and activities of parties and groups.

#### 3.1.3.1. Freedom of thinking and belief

There is only one thought dominant in some societies, and the environment moves toward a direction wherein one feels less contradiction, as a result of which his critical faculty becomes inactive. This is whereas in the Islamic society, what is dominant is the opposite of this because the most important ideal of the Islamic society is the growth and cultivation of humans. And the main element and requirement for the realization of this goal is the existence of a free intellectual ambiance in the society and the actualization of the freewill and selection faculty within the individuals. To select properly, activation of one’s critical faculty is vitally necessary. In order to make thinking arise, the necessity of asking questions comes forward. The lifestyle of Imām ‘Alī (a) was also based on this fact that he encouraged people to ask questions so that, in this way, he could make their critical faculty arise, leading them to make proper choices. For example, in the sermon 189 of *Nahj al-balāgha*, he says, “O people! Ask me before you miss me, because certainly I am acquainted with the passages of the sky more than the passages of the earth, before that mischief springs upon its feet which would trample even the nose string, crush and annoy the people, destroy the wits of the people, and leave them wondrous (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: sermon 189).

In order to understand this part of Imām’s sermon better, it is necessary to mention that Imām ‘Alī (a) has divided faith into three types: first, true faith which is fixed in the hearts due to reason and certainty; second, that kind of faith which is made via polemical reason; and

third, faith which is only made based on imitation and a high opinion of the past generations (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1996, vol. 5: 274). Due to this, he wills his child that if you doubt the creed of your ancestors and a question arises, search and explore it yourself (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: letter 31). By this, he holds that the passage for the realization of true faith within the individuals is reason and certainty which is made out of research and questioning.

Therefore, in the governing system of Imām 'Alī (a), it was tried to remove the limiting factors from the course of thinking and lead the general ambiance of the society toward freethinking.

In the government of Imām 'Alī (a), the rights of other religions and denominations were observed completely and they held their rites freely. Moreover, the rights of polytheists were also observed fully, and they were under the protection of the government.

The governor of Imām (a) in Fars and Bahrain used force violently against some of groups which were under his ruling and were from Magians (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1996, vol. 9: 240). As to this, Imām (a) writes, "Farmers of the provinces under you complain of your harshness, arrogance, and cruelty. I deliberated over their complaint and found that if, on account of their paganism, they do not deserve any favorable treatment of extra privileges, they do not deserve to be treated cruelly and harshly either" (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: letter 19).

The relation of Islam and Muslims with the other groups is of various types; what is just said is that kind of relation as for the people who pay tribute. As it can be found from the words of the Commander of the Faithful, his Holiness always protected the materialistic and spiritual interests of various groups with different beliefs and thoughts, and supervised this issue precisely and, if needed, intervened solemnly.

### 3.1.3.2. Freedom of speech

Expression of opinions about various issues is one of the natural doings of nations, whether it is the approval of the decisions of the governing body or the denial of those decisions and, therefore, opposition and criticism. Some narrations read that Imām 'Alī (a) said on the pulpit, "If a seat is arranged for me to speak wherein there are the followers of different religions, among the people of Torah, I judge with their Torah; among the people of Bible, I judge with their Bible; and among the follower of Qur'ān, I judge with their Qur'ān. And there is no verse in the Book of Allah which is revealed in the valley or mountain unless I know when it is revealed and about whom it is revealed." When Imām (a) said this, one of those sitting before the pulpit of his Holiness said, "O God! What a big lie and claim." These words reached his Holiness like this (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1996, vol. 6: 136), but he never took away the freedom of speech from the people in the society, and always emphasized such freedom.

In his governing time, his Holiness explicitly emphasized the expansion of speech freedom and has said to Mālik, "Do not address me in the manner despots are addressed. Do not evade me as the people of passion are (to be) evaded, do not meet me with flattery and do not think that I shall take it ill if a true thing is said to me, because the person who feels disgusted when truth is said to him or a just matter is placed before him would find it more difficult to act upon them" (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: sermon 216).

The Commander of the Faithful always heard the criticisms, complaints, and issues of people with tolerance, and he insistently tried to make the people of the society express their problems and criticisms freely. His Holiness emphatically warned his officers of this point. In a letter to Mālik, Imām 'Alī (a) advises him like this, "Keep such people with you as your companions in your informal company as well as in official gatherings in audience. They are those who can always speak out the bitter truth to you and unreservedly and without fear of

your status, can refuse to assist you or associate with you in the deeds which Allah does not like His good creatures to commit.” (Ibid: letter 53).

According to the history, some famous figures of Hijāz such as Sa’d b. Abī Waqqāṣ, the conquer of Persia, Abdullāh b. ‘Umar b. Khaṭṭab, Usāma b. Zayd, Ḥassān b. Thābit, the poet, and so on – who did not swear allegiance to Imām ‘Alī (a) – were freely active in the society (Ibn Kathīr, 1987, vol. 7: 221-226; Ṭabarī, 2008, vol. 4: 430). Imām ‘Alī (a) never deprived them of their speech freedom and social freedom which resulted in the complaints of some individuals like Mālik Ashtar. Imām himself guaranteed those for his own companions (Balādhārī, 2018, vol. 2: 207; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1996, vol. 4: 8-9). Of course, the ideal freedom of Islam has limitations in all arenas, the limitations which have been determined. The most important limitation is that freedom should not interfere with the foundations of Islam, and in this particular case atheistic thoughts should not disturb the intellectual security of the people in the society.

### 3.1.3.3. Freedom of formation and activities of parties and groups

In probing the active parties of Alawite society, we come to Kharijites as the most active party within the Islamic state which opposed the Islamic government of that time. They were free to express their opinions everywhere; Imām and his companions faced their beliefs and argued with them. Kharijites were explicitly active; they recruited members and organized, planned, and held meetings. Sometimes some of their doings were very offensive and menacing. They attributed blasphemy to Imām (a) and publicly expressed their harsh and explicit objection (Balādhārī, 2018, vol. 2: 338 & 355). Sometimes they did not let him give a lecture, and interrupted his lecture with some words or slogans (Ibid: 352-353). Sometimes even they showed harsher behaviors and disrupted the prayer of Imām with reciting the Qur’ān loudly (Thaqafī, 1974, vol. 2: 738). However, none of these acts caused Imām to deal with them violently, arrest and imprison them, or cut off their pays from the public treasury. As for dealing with the Kharijites, his Holiness held that as long as they do not shed blood, steal possessions, and deface someone, they should be left alone (Ibn Kathīr, 1987, vol. 7: 284). In a stance, he said, “If they remain quiet, we remain quiet. If they begin to speak, we also begin to speak. As long as they do nothing wrong, we do not bother them (Balādhārī, 2018, vol. 2: 361). His Holiness always tried to guide them with compassion. This behavior of Imām continued until they used swords against the Islamic government. With this doing of Kharijites, the approach of Imām also changed toward them, and inevitably an approach using the force was begun. As for the Kharijites, he advises his companions by saying “Do not fight the Kharijites after me, because one who seeks right but does not find it is not like one who seeks wrong and finds it (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: sermon 61). This approach of Imām toward the Kharijites shows that in the Alawite government, the opinion of individuals is respected. Of course, this does not mean that every belief should be expressed in the society with no limitation and condition, dragging the society into distress, agitation, and bloodsheds. As for freedom which is propounded by John Stuart Mill and the other aficionados of freedom, this vital issue is not taken into account that freedom should not be used for the violation of others’ freedom. If a corrupted belief is made with a right intention, it cannot be persecuted as long as it does not deny the fixed and illuminating principles of truth, does not involve prejudice and obstinacy, and has no harm to the society. This is because if the believer sees himself right – even if he is wrong and strayed – he cannot be killed and be deprived of his right for living simply due to having a corrupted belief (Ja’farī Tabrīzī, 1997, vol. 7: 269)

### 3.1.4. Mechanism of successor determination

The process of selection of leader and ruler has already been described. Selection of successor also undergoes the same process. The leader of the society is appointed by God; after the divine appointment and approval, he would take the leadership of the Islamic society if he is accepted by the general public of the society. This is whereas the process of successor determination in the tyrannical government is based on irrational methods like hereditary, and in the democratic government it is by and large based on the vote of people. In a part of Shaqshaqīyya sermon, Imām ‘Alī (a) says, “I watched the plundering of my inheritance” (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: sermon 3). Here the question arises that why the caliphate is interpreted as “inheritance.” To answer this question, it is necessary to give the meaning of hereditary leadership plainly. It is very improper and denounced if the hereditability means the government – without any true and firm foundation – is transferred to another person only based on the tribe, like many tyrannical systems.

In the opinion of Islam, caliphate is a divine and spiritual legacy which is transferred from the Prophet (a) to his infallible successors, and not a personal and materialistic inheritance with the outward form of a government. There also are interpretations similar to this in the verses of Qur’ān wherein “Zakariyā” asks God for a child to be “his heir” and the “heir of the posterity of Jacob” (so that he could well protect the legacy of prophethood and the leadership of people). Qur’ān continues, “So give me an heir as from Thyself” (Qur’ān 19:5-6). In fact, this legacy belongs to the entire nation, but it is given to Imām and the successor of the Prophet (s) (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1996, vol. 1: 317-335).

### 3.2. Rules of the government

Rules are a set of instructions which, in the social dimension, determines the mechanisms of mankind’s social life. Based on the divine teachings, the goal of society formation and government establishment is the growth and cultivation of humans and that freedom is one of the necessities for the growth of humans. Therefore, rules and instructions should be based on the divine teachings and provide the essential dimension of human societies, i.e. freedom. Referring to Alawite teachings, one can find out that the Alawite government is also based on the divine rules and instructions. Imām ‘Alī (a) always emphasized the divine limits in his entire lifetime. According to the history, when ‘Abdurrahmān b. ‘Awf asked Imām ‘Alī (a), “Do you act based on the Qur’ān, the tradition of the Messenger of God, and the tradition of the first two caliphs?” His Holiness said, “I act according to the Qur’ān, the tradition of the Messenger (s), and my own scholarly investigation” (Balādhārī, 2018, vol. 5: 508).

What is certain is that the open society is different from the other societies regarding the rules and instructions. Referring to the revelation, Prophetic tradition, and Alawite teachings, these differences are more obvious. The manifestations of these rules in the Alawite government are dealt with in the other parts of the present article.

### 3.3. Features of the ruler

The dominant trend has a great effect on the management of the society. With pondering over the realm of the *Nahj al-balāgha*, rule of law and free thought can be derived as the main features of the ruler of an open society.

### 3.3.1. Rule of law

In the tyrannical government, there are no rules or traditions to limit the behavior of the ruler; every rule and tradition can be violated by the unlimited power of the ruler. This is whereas in the Islamic system, the opposite of this is utterly dominant. In the Islamic system, limitation of the ruler through the rules is a factor which reduces and minimizes the possible, improper limitations and obstacles created by the ruler for the people.

In the entire time of his Imamate, Imām ‘Alī (a) acted on nothing except the divine rules and instructions. The best evidence to this is the illegitimate request of Ṭalḥa and Zubayr from Imām to lead based on the tradition of the first two caliphs and the decisive answer of his Holiness to them to lead based on the execution of the divine rules (Dunbulī Khu’rī, n.d.: 65).

In his governing time, his Holiness persistently sought to execute the rules, and no gap was there between his talks and acts. Imām ‘Alī (a) did not exempt not only his army commanders but also his children and even himself from the execution of rules.

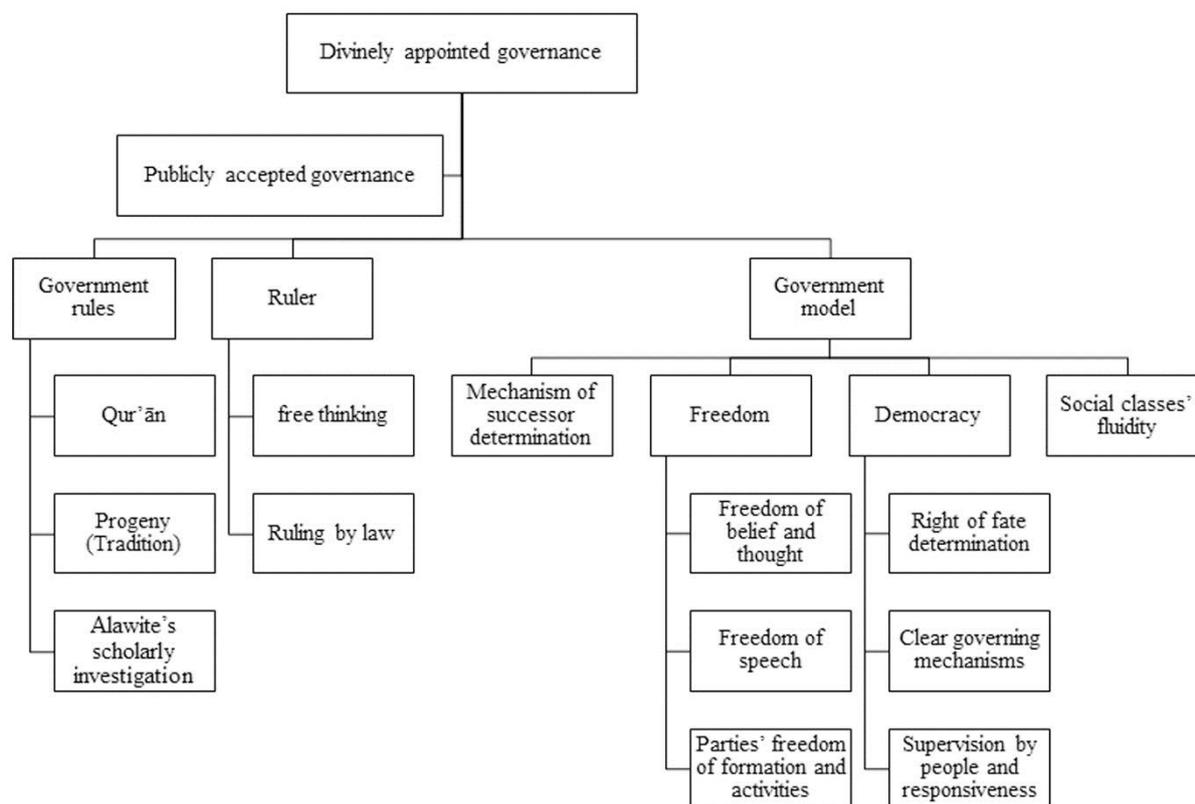
It is said in a narration that one of the daughters of his Holiness had borrowed a necklace from the public treasury. In addition to reprimanding the treasurer, his Holiness ordered his daughter to return it immediately, and said, “If it had not been in the form of borrowing, you would have been the first woman from Banī Hāshim whose hand is cut due to the crime of theft” (Ḥurr ‘Amilī, 1994, vol. 26: 521). In a trial as a claimant of armor, he sat next to a Christian who denied the possession of that armor by his Holiness, but due to not having any evidence for his claim, the judge gave the judgment to the Christian. However, the Christian man knew himself better to whom the armor belonged. After taking some steps, he had twinge of conscious; so he returned and said, “This way of governance and behavior is not of typical human behaviors, but rather it is of the governance of the prophets.” He confessed that the armor belonged to Imām ‘Alī (a), and before long he became a Muslim (Bayhaqī, 2004, vol. 10: 230; Ibn Athīr, 2006, vol. 3: 401; Ibn Kathīr, 1987, vol. 8: 4-5). The aforesaid incidents are just a small part of narrations indicating the high extent of ruling by law.

### 3.3.2. Free thinking

To Islam, the human is a two-dimensional creature comprising of two selves: animalistic self and human self. The human will not be liberated from the external lords as long as he is not liberated from the animalistic self and the internal lords. One who himself is not free can never bring real freedom to the others. Accordingly, the free thinking and spiritual freedom of the leader of a society is a necessary requisite for the attainment of social freedom by the other humans. In fact, social freedom is the freedom of the human from the bondage of other people. However, the spiritual freedom is the freedom of the human from the bondage of his own self (Muṭahharī, 2011: 30). Thus, one of the main features of the leader of a society is free thinking.

The Commander of the Faithful wills his child, “Be warned that you do not make yourself a slave of anybody. Allah has created you a freeman (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 2013: letter 31).

God created the human free and this freedom is an indispensable part of him. It cannot be exchanged with anything else, whether in individual dimension or social dimension. There might be weak and incapable rulers who lose their freedom due to delusive issues. The colonizers in the world also abuse this soft spot and enslave them and, as a result, the people of those countries.



What was already propounded as to the Islamic government in the open society is shown in a general outline in the above graph.

#### 4. Conclusion

1. Exploration of the concept of open society depends on the goals and people of the society. According to the worldview of Islam, the main goal of the human is growing and moving toward the highest kingdom. To grow and perfect, the human is in need of some requirements which generally include security, cultivation, and freedom. That said, an open society means a society in which there are no obstacles by the society to the growth and perfection of the people of that very society regarding all of the existential dimensions.
2. Generally, societies of mankind can be divided into two groups of people and governance. In the teachings of Imām ‘Alī (a), governance is introduced as a divine trust which is bestowed upon some individuals by God. If the mentioned governance is accepted by the general public, then it would be founded.
3. In the given division, divine governance is divided into three spheres of governing model, governing rites, and the governor. Each of these spheres has a certain function in the open society.
4. The ideal governing model in the open society is in a way that, first, social mobility is done within such a society easily and that society has social fluidity. In this society, social classes are valid simply for dividing the social duties and, the classes are not obstacles to the growth of people in the individual as well as social dimensions. Second, democracy dominates it and people determine their own political-social fate. Thus, there would be no obstacle to the realization of humans' freewill. On the other hand, the existence of clear political mechanisms, monitor of the governance, and responsiveness

of the government hinder any possible tyranny by the governors. Third, there exist the political freedoms at the level of freedoms of speech and belief and freedom of the party activities in the open society which do away with any type of obstacle as for the peaceful thoughts, beliefs, and activities. Fourth, the mechanism of successor determination in this society is based on divine appointment and public election.

5. Rules as a set of instructions determine the mechanisms of mankind's life. In the view of Imām 'Alī (a), the open society is certainly different from the other societies regarding the rules and instructions. Since the goal of Imām 'Alī (a) from the formation of government and society is the growth and cultivation of humans and that freedom is one of the necessities for human growth, the rules and instructions of Imām 'Alī (a) also provide the freedom dimension of the societies. Referring to the Alawite teachings, one finds out that the Alawite government is based on divine rules and instructions, which shelter the necessary aspect of freedom in the human societies.
6. Behavior of the ruler has a deep impact on the society management. Pondering over the Alawite teachings, key features of free thinking and rule by law can be enumerated as the main traits of the ruler of an open society. In the Islamic government, limitation of the ruler by law is a factor which minimizes the probable, substantive, and improper obstacles. Moreover, the free thinking and spiritual freedom of society leader is a necessary requisite for the attainment of social freedoms by the other humans.

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