

Research Article

**The Semantic Study of Citizenship Rights
in Nahj ul-Balagha**

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Received: 2021/03/06 Revised: 2021/06/10 Accepted: 2021/06/20 Published Online: 2021/09/01

Abstract

“Citizenship rights” is considered as one of the new political concepts, but the background of its present and dominant perception goes back to the last few centuries. This idea has been formulated in the context of the modern western semantic system and denotes the rights that belong to the man due to his social and political identity as the citizen of a political society. However, the relationship of the individual inhabitants in a land as the members of a political society with one another and with the established state as well as their rights is a long-standing issue. In spite of the difference in ontology and anthropology of the modern era – on whose basis the modern idea of citizenship has emerged – considering rights for the members of a society has a record in the teachings of the divine religions, especially Islam. The zenith of this humanistic view (not a human-centered one) can be observed in the way of life of Imam Ali as the desirable Islamic ruler. The present article attempts to make use of the semantic method to shed light, as far as it can, on citizenship rights – as a new concept – in *Nahj ul-Balāgha*. Thus, by pursuing the vocabularies – from the text of *Nahj ul-Balāgha* – which are in the semantic field of this research subject, i.e. citizenship, we investigate the related denotations based on the three well-known concepts of civil rights, political rights and social rights as well as their instances.

Keywords

Imam Ali, citizenship rights, semantics, modern political concepts, *Nahj ul-Balāgha*.

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* Biglari, A. (2021). The Semantic Study of Citizenship Rights in Nahj ul-Balagha. *Journal of Islamic Political Studies*.3(6).pp. 7-36. doi: 10.22081/jips.2021.72939

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Introduction

The term ‘citizenship’ and the rights pertaining to it are new ideas, especially in Persian and Arabic languages. However, if we look at its content as a concept, that is how one belongs to a society and a certain state and the rights originated from this belonging and membership, it is a long-standing concept with a long history in various civilizations. Observing the citizenship rights is considered today as a criterion for assessing the democratic political systems in line with realization of political justice. The new legal systems attempt to identify more instances of citizenship rights to help improve the life of human beings as citizens in various spheres of their life. However, citizenship is a criterion by which the border between insider and outsider is defined in political systems. Thus, this criterion for distinguishing the insider and the outsider determines the citizenship rights in a political and legal system. Basically, in religious thought, especially the Islamic one, all human beings are creatures of One God. Therefore, no one has superiority over others. The ethnic and racial differences that are the bases of formation of new nations and modern states cannot be the criteria for determining the insider and outsider.

No doubt, in discussing the Islamic state and the indices of assessing the citizenship rights, Imam Ali’s government – after the Prophet’s government in Medina – comes to mind as the criterion for the desirable Islamic state. Definitely, one of the sources to be referred for inquiring Imam Ali’s opinions on various issues and concepts is *Nahj ul-Balāgha* as a reservoir of his speeches stated on various occasions. Although the present *Nahj ul-Balāgha* does not include all Imam Ali’s speeches, investigating this existing text of Alawid teachings will be much informative in proportion to the comprehension level of the readers and researchers. Many articles have been written on citizenship rights in *Nahj ul-Balāgha* or on Imam Ali’s view regarding that idea, but there are few investigative book on this

subject. However, as far as the writer of this article has studied, there is no published sample written using the semantic spheres of citizenship regarding the investigation and inquiry of the citizenship rights.

However, in addition to text-oriented research on teachings of *Nahj ul-Balāgha*, considering the social and political context producing that unique text is of great importance in understanding it. The present article has a text-centered methodology and attempts to answer the question of how the citizenship rights have been formulated in *Nahj ul-Balāgha* as the text produced in the context of the Islamic culture and semantic system. Nevertheless, considering the political and social backgrounds of the investigated texts including the letters, commands, and sermons delivered by Imam on various occasions, doubles the importance of that context. Here, it is necessary to have a short discussion on Kufa as Imam's headquarter to consider the background of the subject.

Under Imam Ali, Kufa was one of the "great lands"¹ of Islam, wherein large and small tribes settled. A variety of ethnic and racial groups, including Iranians, Yemenis, people of Arabia (Hijaz), people of Syria, and even Egypt and Rome as well as followers of various religions such as Christianity and Judaism were living in Kufa (Nadem, 1384 SH, pp. 60-78). In today's words, that city was a multi-national city. Indeed, Kufa as Imam Ali's center of caliphate was a highly pluralistic city. Thus, in such a city, difference of interests and views was quite normal. The consequence of such a situation was the issue of citizenship rights. Imam Ali was responsible for administering and governing such a diverse and versatile society. Considering the similarity if this society and many society of the present era, finding out Imam Ali's views and way of life regarding the citizenship rights will be of a much greater importance. Nevertheless, no other information has been

1. Those lands whose legal limits (in jurisprudential terms (*ḥadd tarakhkhuṣ*) were not known.

stated regarding the background except the abovementioned discussion that notes the importance of the political, social and economic background of Kufa in formation of the ideas and concepts posed in *Nahj ul-Balāgha*.

The present article attempts to discuss the close terms from the perspective of the “space of significance” to investigate the citizenship rights in *Nahj ul-Balāgha*. The main assumption is that concepts are vocabulary contents that have gained special semantic denotation in the pass of time. This special semantic denotation is generated in the social context and – more precisely – in the context of culture. Indeed, a word is changed into a concept when it gains a special semantic denotation in a cultural background. Therefore, tracking the “citizenship rights” as a new political concept in the text of *Nahj ul-Balāgha* initially faces some difficulties that make its adjustment problematic. However, we attempt to track the main parameters – not the instances – of citizenship rights in *Nahj ul-Balāgha*.

The semantic method

In this study, we have used some of the methodical insights of semantics as the analysis method. Semantics consists of some major approaches, including vocabulary semantics, historical semantics, cognitive semantics, and cultural semantics (Pakatchi and Afrashi, 1399 SH, p. 6). Toshihiko Izutsu, the Japanese orientalist, has made use of the method of cultural semantics in the sphere of Quranic and Islamic thought to apply a certain model. He has analyzed the “key words” of the Holy Quran as a coherent text and has made effort to acquire the worldview cognition hidden in it (Izutsu, 2002, p. 4). In the present article, we have attempted to make use of two concepts: “key words” and “semantic fields”.

The key words and signs inside any semantic and semiotic system carry the philosophical values of that system and, based on the semantic

magnetics of those values, create special semantic fields around themselves. From the perspective viewed by Izutsu, the concern of semantics constitutes the history of thoughts (Izutsu, 2002, p. 6). The semantic sphere or field constitutes a general collection of words “organized in a meaningful pattern and shows a system of assumptions and concepts organized and constructed according to the principle of assumptive [and conceptual] organization”. Indeed, the coherent and related words create realms from various and numerous angles that overlap somewhere. Izutsu calls the collection of these relations a “semantic field” or a “semantic sphere” (Izutsu, 2002, p. 25).

Although the “citizenship rights” is a newly-emerged term born following the evolutions leading to the modern era in the semantic culture and system of Europe, the concept of citizenship as a sign denoting the relationship among the individuals belonging to a political society is a long-standing concept. In the religious semantic system in whose context *Nahj ul-Balāgha* was born, we must track the concept of citizenship rights in line with rights that the ruler and the government must observe for their subjects. Therefore, we must initially analyze Imam Ali’s governmental commands and letters to his governors. In the next stage, according to the method and approach of the present writing, we must enumerate the words that refer to the rightful individuals under the command of the government, then pursue them in other texts (other than Imam’s command to his governors). Here, we may find other instances of the rights of the individual subjects of the government. The result may be considered among the citizenship rights in today’s language.

The semantic field of the citizenship rights in *Nahj ul-Balāgha*

1. Vocabulary denoting citizenship

Allamah Muhammad Taqi Ja’fari maintains that Imam Ali’s commands to Malek Ashtar regarding how to treat the subordinate persons apply

to all human beings regardless of their nationality, race, color and social class, etc. Thus, many of the commands addressed to Malek Ashtar as the governor are for observing the rights of all subjects (i.e. citizens) in an equal manner. He maintains that the words *nās*, *ra ʿiyya*, *naẓīr^{im} laka fil-khaq*, *ʿamma*, *kull-umriⁱⁿ*, and *ʾibādullāh* used in 30 sentences all denote the equality of human beings (Jaʿfari, 1369 SH, p. 319). Similarly, we may add the word *ahluhā* or *al-ahl* to the list. Indeed, the people of the land (*ahl al-balad*) also have rights. Some of these rights are considered as instances of citizenship rights, and some others are instances of the newer concept of “right to the city”. Clearly, since Malek Ashtar as the addressee of the commands is the governor of Egypt, Imam’s commands regarding the observance of the subordinate individuals under the state (i.e. citizens) enter words such as *ʿamma*, *ra ʿiyya*, *nās* and the like into the semantic field of the term citizenship.

Among all these words, the word *ra ʿiyya* is mostly close to the term citizenship. Unlike today’s common perception of the concept *ra ʿiyya* – which is based on pastoral metaphor, and people are not considered as citizens, but as a herd under the ruler as a shepherd – the word has a strong relationship with the word *ri ʿāyat*, meaning “wardenship”, in the genuine Islamic semantic system manifested in the Prophet’s and Imams’ speeches. One of the writers believes that this meaning suggests two principles of wise management in line with public welfare and reviving the citizenship rights. In this regard, the main semantic element and parameter of *ri ʿāyat* is the concept of “responsibility”. Thus, *rāʾī* is the person who is responsible and *ra ʿiyya* refers to the subject of responsibility (Jamshidi, 1397 SH, p. 241 and 258). The word *ra ʿiyya* was used 21 times just in the letter to Malek Ashrtar (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, pp. 718-752).

Another word is *ʿamma* used as the complementary concept in the semantic field of citizenship. However, this concept is sometimes used

in opposition to the counter-concept *khāṣṣa*. In this usage, *‘āmma* means the ‘public’. Imam Ali puts forward the discussion of necessity of the public consent and prefers it to the elites’ consent in case there is a contrast between these two. Here, *‘āmma* is in the semantic field of *ra’iyya*, and the *ra’iyya*’s consent (i.e. the citizens’ consent) is obtained through the *‘āmma*’s consent. In the following part of Imam’s command, the three words have been used:

«وَلْيَكُنْ أَحَبَّ الْأُمُورِ إِلَيْكَ أَوْسَطُهَا فِي الْحَقِّ وَأَعْمَمُهَا فِي الْعَدْلِ وَأَجْمَعُهَا لِرِضَى
الرَّعِيَّةِ فَإِنَّ سُخْطَ الْعَامَّةِ يُجْحِفُ بِرِضَى الْخَاصَّةِ وَإِنَّ سُخْطَ الْخَاصَّةِ يُعْتَفَرُ مَعَ رِضَى
الْعَامَّةِ...»

“The way most coveted by you should be that which is the most equitable for the right, the most universal by way of justice, and the most comprehensive with regard to your subjects’ consent. This is because the discontent of the common people sweeps away the consent of the chiefs while the discontent of the chiefs can be disregarded when compared with the consent of the common people.” (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 722).

Nās is another word much used in *Nahj ul-Balāgha* and Imam Ali’s statements. Usually, when Imam Ali addresses his appointed governor in his letters and governmental commands, he refers to the people under his ruling with aforementioned titles including *nās*. The word *nās* is translated as “people”. Imam Ali has used this word 21 times in his command to Malek Ashtar. Thus, when the word *nās* is used as the concept opposite to *wālī* (governor) in this context, it means the citizens. The following sentence in the command clearly shows this:

«أَنَّ النَّاسَ يَنْظُرُونَ مِنْ أُمُورِكَ فِي مِثْلِ مَا كُنْتَ تَنْظُرُ فِيهِ مِنْ أُمُورِ الْوُلَاةِ قَبْلَكَ...»

“Verily, people will now watch your dealings as you used to watch the dealings of the rulers before you,...” (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 718).

Indeed, the governor’s duties towards people (*nās*) are considered as the citizens’ rights.

Observing fairness in treating people, i.e. citizens, is clearly understood from the following part:

«أَنْصِفِ اللَّهَ وَ أَنْصِفِ النَّاسَ مِنْ نَفْسِكَ وَ مِنْ خَاصَّةِ أَهْلِكَ وَ مَنْ لَكَ فِيهِ هَوَى مِنْ رَعِيَّتِكَ..»

“Do justice for Allah and do justice towards the people, including you yourself, your associates and those of your subjects for whom you have a liking!” (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 722).

The word *inṣāf* is derived from the root *n-ṣ-f*. The verb *anṣafa* means [someone] did justice and took or gave something fairly. *Inṣāf* means you give the “half” to someone on your part; that is, just as you regard yourself as deserving a right, you should regard the other party as deserving the same share of right. Thus, *inṣāf* means granting a right (Ibn Manzour, 1414 AH, vol. 9, pp. 332-333). In social relations and political and administrative affairs, the words *inṣāf* means equating benefit and loss between oneself and others, protecting “justice”, protecting others’ rights just as one’s rights, and observing the two parties’ rights equally in the judgment position (Delshad Tehrani, 1390 SH, p. 9). Indeed, considering the non-homogeneity of the relationship between the citizens and the government due to its ruling power, the principle of *inṣāf* is applicable for moderating this logical inequality to achieve justice. In the continuation of that part of Imam’s command, the word *ra’iyya* serves as a complementary concept for *nās*, meaning citizens.

2. The three elements of citizenship rights

In a common classification, the citizenship rights are divided into three groups: civil rights, political rights, and social rights. Here, we track this threefold division in Imam Ali’s statements.

2-1. Civil rights

The civil component of citizenship rights consists of those rights

that are essential for individual freedoms such as personal freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of faith and belief, the right to personal property and concluding a contract, and the right to enjoy justice (Marshall, 1950, p. 10). Civil rights include right to human's dignity and his freedom; that is, the citizen must feel he is respected, and this necessitates enjoying basic freedoms such as freedom of belief and expression, freedom of religion, freedom of ownership, etc. Here, by freedom we mean freedom of belief in particular. Indeed, this group of citizenship rights overlaps with the human rights. In Imam Ali's view, human beings, because of the genetic freedom granted to them by God, must not accept servitude to anyone except Him (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 672).

2-1-1. Equality and no discrimination among citizens in enjoying rights

One of the basic rights of the citizens is their equality in rights and, in legal terms, no discrimination. Indeed, features such as religion and denomination, race and ethnicity, and sex must not cause discrimination and depravity of citizens from citizenship rights. In Imam Ali's view, all human beings are creatures and servants of One God. Thus, no one has the right to dominate others (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 672; al-Razi, 1395 AH, p. 335). Indeed, the citizens of the Islamic society are in the semantic field of *ibādullah* (Allah's servants); thus, the initial principle is non-dominance of one man over another man. In a letter to Aswad bin Qutba, the commander of Hulwan army, Imam reminds him if the governor seeks his passions, he may get away from justice. Accordingly, he says, "All the people should be equal in right before you" (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 758). Similarly, in a letter to the officers of his army, he reminds them of this equality: "and that for me all of you should be equal in rights" (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 712). Indeed, this kind of equality is a just equality. Elsewhere, he uses the word *nās* to stress on the equality of citizens: "to us, all men are equal in the matter of right" (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 780).

In this way, Imam's way of treating citizens is founded on just equality. On numerous occasions, including the command to Malek Ashtar, he emphasizes that it is necessary for the ruler to have an egalitarian dealing with citizens: "Allow rights to whomsoever it is due, whether near you or far from you. In this matter, you should be enduring..." (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, pp. 744-745). In one of the final parts in his letter to Malek Ashtar, Imam forbids exclusivism, which states the equality in rights and before the law as well: "Do not appropriate to yourself that in which the people have an equal share!" (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 748). This legal equality originates from the divine law as the equal criterion for all individuals including the rulers and the citizens. In one of his sermons, Imam enumerates acting according to divine law as one of the citizens' right (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 400). According to one of the writers, we may extract three points from Imam's expression. Firstly, decisions must be based on divine laws, not personal taste and opinion. Secondly, acting according to divine laws and prophetic way of life is a definite right for people. Thirdly, all people are equal before law, even if they enjoy fame, wealth and power, like Talha and Zobayr (Jawan Arasta, 1379 SH, p. 191).

However, the basis of this way of treating citizens can be clearly found under one of the statements in Imam's command to Malek Ashtar: "Citizens are of two groups: they are either your religious brethren or your fellowmen in creation" (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 720). Contrary to the views of rulers such as Mo'awiya who considered the public properties as the ruler's, Imam believed that public properties belong to God and are for all members of the nation, i.e. the citizens of the society. Accordingly, he even does not consider religious privileges as reason for enjoying worldly and economic privileges (Majlesi, vol. 32, n.d., pp. 17-18). The important point in this statement uttered by Imam is that religious superiority does not lead to economic

privilege. Similarly, national properties do not belong to government official; rather, they belong to God and are for the nation. This is quite contrary to Mo'awiya's view who would consider public treasury (*beyt ul-māl*) as belonging to the ruler.

2-1-2. Right to life and dignity

On numerous occasions, Imam Ali stressed on preserving the individuals' respect and their right to living. He addressed Malek Ashtar as Egypt's governor and prohibited him from shedding bloods unlawfully (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 748). Similarly, in Imam Ali's way of life, there is a delicate point in his advice to his sons regarding their dealing with Ibn Moljam, Imam's murderer. Besides, the equality of the caliph with an ordinary citizen is emphasized (Ibn Abil-Hadid, vol. 17, 1421 AH, p. 6).

Preserving the citizens' dignity in various levels is one of the duties of the government and the citizens' rights. Thus, Imam orders the necessity of the ruler's keeping the citizens' secrets and his avoiding the dispraisers and revealers (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 722). In line with protecting the citizens' dignity, the right to immunity from spying is an instance of the citizenship rights. According to the abovementioned part of Imam Ali's command, we may infer this right. Indeed, hiding people's faults is among the government's duties and is considered as one of the citizens' rights. Today, considering the spread of the government's powers and complication of relations in human societies, the right to immunity from spying has found various instances. Investigating letters, revealing phone calls, revealing telegraphic communications, and eavesdropping threaten the individuals' private security and reveal their family secrets (Jawan Arasta, 1379 SH, p. 210).

Protecting citizens' dignity is not restricted to Muslims. Rather, the minorities in the Islamic society also enjoy such rights. Imam ordered

his agents, especially army commanders, to protect the honor and rights of the religious minorities and treat them justly (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 760; Ibn Abil-Hadid, vol. 17, 1421 AH, p. 113; Ibn Sho'ba Harrani, vol. 1, n.d., p. 176).

In letter no. 19 to the governor of Fars, Omar bin Abi Salama Arhabi, Imam admonished him in regard with treating the *ahl dhimma* (non-Muslims living under the Islamic government) and cautioned him not to treat them with cruelty, violence, contempt, and advised him to behave moderately in a manner between rigor and tenderness (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 628). In this way, the virtuous aspect of citizenship along with truthfulness is quite clear here. Nevertheless, their right to living, dignity and security is clearly considered by Imam. Under the letter no. 19 in *Nahj ul-Balāgha*, Ibn Abil-Hadid maintains that *ahl dhimma* pay *jizya* merely to be equal with Muslims in respecting their blood and property (Ibn Abil-Hadid, vol. 17, 1421 AH, p. 113).

In Imam Ali's view, the criterion in this group of citizenship rights is humanity. In letter no. 53 to Malek Ashtar, Imam writes, "Habituate your heart to mercy for the subjects..., since they are of two kinds". Elsewhere, he also says, "whosoever harasses a *dimmi* person is like the one who harasses me" (Ibn Abil-Hadid, vol. 17, 1421 AH, p. 113). In Imam's command to his agents on getting *jizya*, he stresses on observing humane aspects in taking taxes (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, pp. 714-716; Ibn Abil-Hadid, vol. 17, 1421 AH, p. 16). According to Ibn Abil-Hadid, "In Othman's time, the ruler would demand the taxes of lands before selling the fruits and in advance... Imam Ali prevented Ziyad bin Abihe from doing this practice" (Ibn Abil-Hadid, vol. 8, 1425 AH, p. 290; quoted from Gol-Mohammadi, 1396 SH, p. 107).

The right to security along with its various types falls under the right to living and dignity. Imam Ali considers establishing security as one of the basic functions of any state, which must be established for all citizens. Thus, in sermon no. 40, which is an argumentation against *Khawārij* regarding the necessity of government, he considers

establishing order and security as one of the essential functions of the government regardless of its being good or evil (sermon 40). In another sermon during his caliphate, he enumerates establishing security for the oppressed and the underdog among the duties and goals of the Islamic state (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 302). In sermon no. 192, known as *Qāsi'ā*, Imam states that the reason for fighting with the three groups of *māriqān*, *nākithīn* and *qāsiṭīn* is their rebellion, transgression and corruption leading to disorder and insecurity in the society. Thus, in order to establish security, Imam waged wars against those groups (al-Razi, 1395 AH, pp. 289-290).

2-1-3. The right to just judgment

The existence of an independent and just judicial system is among the citizens' rights. Imam addressed Malek and enumerated conditions for choosing judges, the result of which is protecting the citizens' rights and not oppressing them: "For the settlement of disputes among people select him who is the most distinguished of your subjects in your view... such people are few" (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 733). The universality of this right for all citizens of the Islamic society, including Muslims and *ahl dhimma* can be observed in many occasions. In the story of Imam's shield seized by the Jewish man, after the man refrained from returning the shield when they referred to the judge, the judge Shorayh issued a verdict in favor of the Jewish man due to lack of evidences on the part of Imam. This shows the abovementioned fact (Ibn Muhammad Thaqafi, 1373 SH, p. 60). On another occasion, in a letter to Muhammad bin Abu Bakr, as the governor of Egypt, Imam wrote, regarding a Muslim man fornicating a Christian woman (Gol-Mohammadi, 1396 SH, p. 109), Imam addressed the *ahl dhimma* and exonerated himself from the possible transgressions of his army (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 760). Thus, the troops of truth have no right to

transgress people's properties, even though they may be among the *ahl dhimma* and non-Muslims. In Imam Ali's view, the Muslim and non-Muslim citizens are equal and the latter must not be oppressed (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 714). Accordingly, Imam reproached his governor in Fars for mistreating the Zoroastrians (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 628).

2-2. The Political rights

Marshall maintains that the political element is the right to participate in exerting political power as a member of a community, crystalized in the form of political authority or as the selector of the members of such a community (Marshall, 1950, pp. 10-11). Indeed, political rights deal with adjusting the relationship between the citizens and the political society. Although political freedoms are an initial part of political rights, it includes a spectrum of rights from the right to political participation to its zenith, which is the right to political opposition. Thus, its essential element is the right to enjoy citizenship positions; that is a citizen must be able to obtain – based on his deserts – the public positions of citizenship freely and in an equal opportunity.

On numerous occasions, Imam Ali considers the relationship between the government and the citizens based on their dignity and respect. In this regard, he would severely prevent his governors from violent and forceful treatment towards citizens, and would want them to prepare the necessary ground for people and citizens to state their problems (Sharif Razi, 136 SH, p. 720; al-Razi, 1395 AH, p. 427). This necessitates the freedom of belief and expression and guarantees the society's health and reformation of the state's affairs. Thus, he wants the citizens to mention their formative critiques of him and his government without any fear and worry (al-Razi, 1395 AH, p. 334). This is a universal demand including all citizens without distinguishing them in their status, position, etc. In effect, Imam considers this as a right for the citizens of the Islamic state.

2-2-1. The right to self-determination and the semantic field of allegiance

The right to self-determination as the foundation of political participation is considered as the most fundamental political right of a citizen. In the semantic system of the pre-Islamic Arabs, there was not the present meaning of the right to self-determination at least in individual level, and the Arabs would enjoy autonomy in the form of one tribe. However, in that era of tribal mechanisms, the allegiance contract had – somehow – the function of political participation, and showed the individuals' consent of the tribe's head. *Bey'at* (literally "allegiance") is derived from the root *bā'a* and as a cognate of *bey'* (literally "buying") refers to some form of contract and transaction. Paying allegiance is shaking hands [with someone] in accepting a transaction and following someone (Farahidi, vol. 2, 1409 AH, p. 265). Thus, allegiance is a kind of transaction between the head of a nation or community and the individual member of that community. This has been emphasized in the semantic system of Islam and the Quran as well. Imam Ali was the only caliph who took power with the public allegiance of citizens and elites of the society. He regarded the government as the people's right; thus, he would say, "In this affair of yours, no one has any right except the one whom you have been ordered [to follow]" (Majlesi, vol. 32, p. 8). Similarly, he said, "The greatest obligation set by Allah is the ruler's right on the subjects and the subjects' right on the ruler" (al-Razi, 1395 AH, p. 333). Imam considered the legitimacy of the government by trusting the people's consent, putting this criterion on the mechanism of free allegiance. He would say, "It is obligatory for the Muslims after their imam died or murdered... to choose for themselves an imam who is virtuous, knowledgeable, pious and aware of judgment and Sunnah" (Majlesi, vol. 32, p. 144).

Thus, in many of Imam's statements, especially his argumentations with his opponents, he has adduced public's favor and the citizen's

allegiance.¹ Somewhere in sermon 3 of *Nahj ul-Balāgha*, known as *shiqshiqiya*, which includes Imam Ali's confabulation about Saqifa incident, he says that he had accepted the caliphate and governance over the society because of ample instances of the citizens (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 48). Basically, in Imam's view, although government is his divine right, its acceptance is contingent upon the citizens' public consent. In numerous statements of his sermons and letters, Imam considers the political legitimacy of his government and the citizens' consent as dependent on their allegiance (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 602). In a letter to Talha and Zobayr, who rioted against him after paying allegiance, Imam explicitly adduced this fact (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 752). In sermon no. 172 of *Nahj ul-Balāgha*, Imam has specially referred to this point in complaint from *Nākithīn* (Talha, Zobayr and 'Ayesha) (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, pp. 406-408).

After the death of the second caliph and formation of the six-membered council, Imam Ali noted some statements (found in wisdom 22 of *Nahj ul-Balāgha*) to point out, in addition to proclaiming his desert for caliphate, people's role in choosing the ruler. "Verily, we have a right that we will take if we are given." (Ibn Abil-Hadid, 1337 SH, vol. 6, p. 167; quoted from Rabbani Khah, 1396 SH, p. 100). This view and way of life of Imam was unlike the way of life of the previous caliphs, especially Abu Bakr, who took allegiance of all people even if forcefully. Only for Imam Ali's caliphate was the allegiance taken freely. According to what the historical sources have transmitted, just a few persons, including Sa'd Abi Waqqas and Abdullah bin Omar, did not pay him allegiance. However, Imam did not deprive them from their social rights (Rabbani Khah, 1396 SH, p. 10).

Today, the highest degree of observing the right to self-determination

1. See *Nahj ul-Balāgha*, sermons 2, 3, 6, 30, 32, 54, 136, 138, 162, 173, 174, 176, 205, 229; letters 6, 52, 62; wisdoms 22, 27, 29 quoted from Rabbani Khah, 1396 SH, p. 97.

is crystalized in the political participation. In the dominant liberal readings, political participation is considered a type of arbitrary action on the part of the citizens aiming at choosing the public policies and management of the society's affairs or choosing political leaders in various administrative or local levels. As said before, the initial mechanism for political participation in the semantic system of Arabs was allegiance. However, the next mechanisms for supervising the political power can be found in Islamic doctrines of 'advice' and 'consultation'. In this regard, Imam Ali says, "It is an obligatory right of Allah over the people that they should advise each other to the best of their ability and co-operate with each other for the establishment of truth among them" (al-Razi, 1395 AH, p. 334). Thus, 'advising' and 'good cooperation' are two mechanisms for political participation. It is quite clear that in today's governments, in view of the structural complexities of the state, the affairs such as advice and consultation require special and modern mechanisms. So, one of the consequences of this right is the citizens' participation in reformation of the society. Of course, this issue enters the semantic field of 'duty' – in addition to the semantic field of 'right' – in relation to enjoining good and forbidding evil. Thus, the virtuous model of citizenship exists here.

2-2-2. The right to supervise and criticize, and the semantic field of advice and consultation

On numerous occasions, Imam Ali demands citizens' participation in right and truthful saying and just consultation: "Do not abstain from saying a truth or pointing out a matter of justice..." (al-Razi, 1395 AH, p. 335). With this expression, he opens for citizens the door of freedom of expression and belief as well as the door of criticism and auditing the rulers. Indeed, Imam's prohibition of refraining from telling the truth and just consultation necessitates acknowledgement of the right to

consultation and criticism. In an order to Malek, Imam respected those who invite people to truth, asking Malek to respect them (Aklawi, 2005, p. 110). No doubt, to fulfill this citizenship right, it is necessary for citizens not to have any fear in expressing the truth and their consultation or criticism. Addressing one of his governors, thus, Imam said, “Untie the knot of fear from those who have feared with fair and justice, God’s willing” (Aklawi, 2005, p. 141). In a letter, he has explicitly considered the citizens’ giving consultation to the ruler as their right (al-Razi, 1395 AH, p. 334).

It is true that the ruler’s consultation with citizens causes him to avoid despotism, but it necessitates preparation of conditions including the citizens’ access to information. In this regard, Imam considers this as one of the citizens’ rights, and introduces the government as having the duty, except in military secrets, to observe this right of the citizens (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 712).

2-2-3. The right to objection and political opposition

The citizenship rights means that all citizens, whether they are opponents of the state or its proponents, be able to enjoy three groups of citizenship rights. During his caliphate, Imam Ali faced with three groups of opponents. The most stubborn group was that of *Khawārij* who were freely active in Kufa and enjoyed citizenship rights before Nahrawān battle. On one occasion, when Imam was giving speech and some of *Khawārij* objected to him by calling out *lā ḥukm illā li-llāh* (= There is no judgment except for Allah), Imam said, “True words by which a false idea is meant”. He then reminded them of their main citizenship rights and told them, “I do not deprive you of the public properties and the public treasury as long as you do not deprive us. Besides, we do not launch an attack against you. This means that the opponents and the objectors to Imam Ali’s government are quite safe and secure in Imam Ali’s way of life” (al-Tabari, 2008, vol. 5, p. 73; Ibn Athir,

2007, vol. 3, p. 335; al-Nowayri, 2017, vol. 20, p. 165; quoted from Ahmadiyan Ahmadabadi and Akhawan, 1439 AH, p. 12).

Thus, Imam Ali would tolerate even the *Khawārij* – who were cruel, short-minded, stubborn men with corrupted and dangerous ideas – as long as they did not committed crimes and did not disturb peace and security. He would let them free in expressing their ideas. Instead of imposing his own beliefs on them, he would attempt to guide them by enlightening, not by using force. In sermons no. 121, 122, 125, 127, 177, we may clearly find this fact. According to Morteza Motahhari, “Amir al-Mo’menin treated *Khawārij* with the highest degree of freedom and democracy... he did not imprison them or lash them, and even did not cut their share of public treasury... they were free everywhere to express their beliefs, and Imam and his companions would treat them with free belief. This much of freedom, thereby a government treats its opponents with so much democracy, may be unprecedented in the world” (Motahhari, 1390 SH, p. 123). The intellectual and political opponents of Imam and his government would enjoy all social and political rights as long as they did not breach the laws and transgress the people’s rights (Moghniya, vol. 1, p. 252; quoted from Delshad Tehrani, 1397 SH, p. 207).

After fighting with *Khawārij*, Imam issued three key commands. Firstly, any group that yielded their arms would be safe. Secondly, any group that lacked organization to re-gather them must not be assaulted. Thirdly, they must not be excommunicated. In his book entitled *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, in entry no. 12440 regarding a question posed by some of Imam’s companions about infidelity of *Khawārij*, Mirza Nouri has written, “He was asked about those who would fight them among the people of Qibla (i.e. *Khawārij*) as whether they are infidels or not. He answered, ‘they are infidels regarding the laws and the blessings, an infidelity not similar to the infidelity of those who rejected prophethood and did not acknowledge Islam; otherwise, it

would not be lawful for us to marry them or eat what they slaughter or their inheritance” (al-Nouri al-Tabarsi, vol. 11, 1368 SH, p. 66). Indeed, Imam Ali prevents excommunication. There is a discussion in the Islamic jurisprudence called *muḥāriba*, dealing with the question of whether a *muḥārib* (literary, “fighter”) is a citizen or not. A *muḥārib* is someone who takes arms against the Islamic state, whether he is a Muslim or polytheist (‘Ayāshī), and causes fear and panic among people, leading to insecurity (Moballeg, 1439 AH, p. 50). In one of his sermons entitled *Qāṣ‘a*, Imam says in this regard:

“Beware! Surely Allah has commanded me to fight those who riot, or who break the pledge, or create trouble on the earth. As regards pledge-breakers, I have fought them; as regards deviators from truth, I have waged holy war against them; and as regards those who have gone out of the faith, I have put them in (serious) disgrace... Only a small portion of the rebels has remained. If Allah allows me one more chance over them I will annihilate them except a few remnants that may remain scattered in the suburb of the cities.” (al-Razi, 1395 AH, pp. 299-300).

It is quite clear that *Nākithīn*, the companions of Camel (*Jamal* Battle), were the clearest fighters (*muḥāribīn*) in Imam’s time. They declared and waged a war against Imam and Imam defeated them. After entering Basra, they incited rebellion and schism among people, breached their pledge to Imam’s governor, Othman bin Honayf, and started corruption on earth. Regarding them, Imam said, “These two have ignored my rights and did injustice to me. They both have broken allegiance to me, and roused people against me.” (al-Razi, 1395 AH, p. 195). Imam maintains that their disturbing actions caused his followers and agents to disperse (al-Razi, 1395 AH, p. 336).

The second group of *muḥāribīn*, i.e. *qāṣītīn*, consisted of the followers of Mo‘awiya. Mo‘awiya indeed disobeyed Imam’s commands and claimed blood vengeance of Othman. Imam rejected all his claims in a

letter (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 88, 614, 688). Finally, he declared war against Imam. Even after the Şiffīn battle, Mo'awiya would dispatch individuals for robbery and making the lands under Imam's government insecure. In sermon no. 25, Imam refers to this story (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, pp. 76-78). These measures taken by Mo'awiya clearly show that he was a *muḥārib*. However, *Māriqān* or *Khawārij* are the main instances of *muḥāribīn*. By corrupting the earth and murdering some of the righteous companions of Imam, including Abdullah bin Khabab, they disturbed the security of the society. But, what was Imam's method and his view on facing with those *muāribīn*? In his view, fighting with them was an obligation from the perspective of 'enjoining good and forbidding evil'. Thus, not combating those groups would mean giving up a religious obligation, leading to infidelity. According to one of the writers, Imam's confrontation with them was in steps, wherein all stages of enjoining good and forbidding evil would be observed. These steps included necessity of preventing anyone who corrupts and oppresses, necessity of commitment to allegiance and returning of those who had breached their allegiance, and necessity of defending the borders and lands for all Muslims (Moballegh, 1439 AH, pp. 51-54).

2-3. The social rights

The social rights include a wide range of rights such as right to work, right to strike, right to receive education, social insurance and welfare rights. With the expansion of citizenship rights and complication of communities and social relations, the instances of social rights are more extensive than the two other groups of citizenship rights. A part of economic rights of the citizens is defined under the social rights. Accordingly, some call this group the 'socioeconomic rights'. According to Marshall's classification, the social element includes a broad range of rights from economic welfare and minimum security to enjoying high social indices appropriate for any society (Marshall, 1950, pp. 10-11).

2-3-1. Right to welfare

In the sermon no. 40, in an argumentation with *Khawārij* who would negate the necessity of government, Imam states the functions of the government and implicitly states the minimum citizenship rights:

“The fact is that there is no escape for people from ruler, good or bad. The faithful persons perform (good) acts in his rule while the unfaithful enjoys (worldly) benefits in it. During the rule, Allah would carry everything to its end. Through the ruler, tax is collected, enemy is fought, roadways are protected and the right of the weak is taken from the strong till the virtuous enjoys peace and becomes free from [the oppression of] the wicked” (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, pp. 104-106).

And in another version, he says, “As for good government, the pious man performs good acts in it, while in a bad government the wicked person enjoys till his time is over and death overtakes him” (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, pp. 104-106).

Here, we assume that in any government, even the infidels are considered citizen and must enjoy the benefits of the state’s essential functions. A famous story pertains to a disabled Christian old man who lived in a pathetic situation. When Imam Ali was informed of his situation, he ordered his agents to provide his needs from the public treasury. This is, in today’s language, an instance of social security (al-Hurr al-Ameli, vol. 15, 1372 SH, p. 66).

In the last part of one of his sermons, Imam deals with the discussion of the mutual rights of the people and the government. He maintains that one of the citizens’ rights that the government must observe and fulfill is the ‘just division of *fay*^{o1}: “As for your right

1. *Fay*’ means those properties of the enemies that have been possessed by Muslims without any war or any trouble.

over me, that is to counsel you, to pay you your dues of *fay* ‘fully’” (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 98). In the phrase *towfīr fay ikum*, the word *towfīr* comes from the root *wafr* which means ‘ample properties’; and the word *towfīr* means to pay someone’s property or right completely (Ibn Mnazour, vol. 5, pp. 287-288). Here, *fay* refers to the public treasury. In today’s words, we may call this right ‘the right to enjoy the national wealth’.

Imam considers the society’s welfare as a tool for ordering and organizing the citizens’ affairs. In his view, adding to the citizens’ properties is among the duties of the government. According to Imam’s command, all inhabitants and citizens of Kufa must possess houses and have secure access to the water of Furat (Ahmadiyan Ahmadabadi and Akhawan, 1439 AH, p. 13). From the viewpoint of the Alawid policy, preparing the citizens’ welfare is an introduction for their spiritual transcendence. Thus, since achieving the individual and social perfections is among the goals of the Islamic politics, economic welfare as a midpoint goal is necessary. Allamah Muhammad Taqī Ja‘fari maintains that the phrases *istiṣlāh ahlihā* and *imārat bilādihā* refer to the fact that all individuals and groups consisting the society must achieve what can be called a deserving life, and all cities and people’s residences must be improved and reclaimed (Ja‘fari, 1369 SH, p. 419).

2-3-2. The right to education and training

The right to education and training is another citizenship right that the states have duty to prepare the ground for it. Today, this right is considered among the third generation of rights (i.e. cultural rights) and falls under the category of social rights in the present article. In this regard, Imam Ali says, “As for your right over me... to teach you that you may not remain ignorant and instruct you in behaviorism that you may act upon” (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 98). As said before, observing

citizens' rights is much dependent on their awareness of these rights and the ways to achieve them, which is called the right to 'access information'. Thus, educating and training citizens is among the main duties of the government and among the citizens' rights.

2-3-3. The right to social justice

Social justice is one of the ideals of human beings. Basically, a large part of identifying the citizenship rights has been in line with the realization of this ideal. Here, by 'the right to social justice', we mean the just distribution of public resources. Thus, we may reduce it to 'the right to enjoy public wealth'. This right is obtained through the just distribution of a large amount of the society's wealth that lacks any certain owner and all citizens share its ownership. In Islamic terms, these resources are called *beyt al-māl* (i.e. public treasury).

Imam Ali mentions modifying wealth and securing the economic justice as one of his main reasons for accepting the government. This is what for which God has taken the scholars' promise not to be indifferent towards the oppressors' gluttony and the hunger of the oppressed. "If there had been no pledge of Allah with the learned to the effect that they should not acquiesce in the gluttony of the oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed I would have cast the rope of Caliphate on its own shoulders" (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 48). Accordingly, Imam pays special attention to the deprived and the lower classes of society and admonishes – with motivating phrases – to observe their rights: "Consider God in regard with the orphans!" (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 708); and "consider God in regard with the lower classes!" (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 740). Defending the weak people is the reason for legitimacy of the government (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p.48).

4-3-2. Paying attention to the rights of the guilds

In a detailed part of his command to Malek Ashtar, Imam identifies

various guilds and groups of the society as the ‘castes’, mentioning the rights of each. In legal terms, this precise identification is the zenith of his precision in discerning the instances of citizenship rights. As Allamah Muhammad Taqi Ja’fari has stated, the word *tabaqa* (meaning ‘caste’ or ‘class’) in Imam Ali’s words does not mean its common sense in sociology. Rather, it means the institutions, organizations, guilds and various social groups (Ja’fari, 1369 SH, p. 401). In the early part of the aforementioned phrase, Imam has mentioned the classes and guilds as the types of the subjects, i.e. the citizens:

«وَأَعْلَمُ أَنَّ الرِّعِيَّةَ طَبَقَاتٌ لَا يَصْلُحُ بَعْضُهَا إِلَّا بِبَعْضٍ، وَلَا غِنَى بِبَعْضِهَا عَنْ بَعْضٍ: فَمِنْهَا جُنُودُ اللَّهِ، مِنْهَا كُتَّابُ الْعَامَّةِ وَالْخَاصَّةِ، وَمِنْهَا قُضَاةُ الْعَدْلِ، وَمِنْهَا عَمَالُ الْأَنْصَافِ وَالرَّفِيقِ، وَمِنْهَا أَهْلُ الْجَزِيَّةِ وَالْخَرَاجِ مِنْ أَهْلِ الذِّمَّةِ وَمُسْلِمَةِ النَّاسِ.»

“Know that the people consist of classes who prosper only with the help of one another, and they are not independent of one another. Among them are the army of Allah, then the secretarial workers of the common people and the chiefs, then the dispensers of justice, then those engaged in law and order, then the payers of head tax (*jizya*) and land tax (*kharāj*) from the unbelievers under protection and the common Muslims” (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 726).

Some of the *ra’iyya* (the citizens) are the payers of *jizya* and *kharāj*. Thus, they are all liable to Imam’s command.

One of the important points in the citizens’ economic rights is using the tax for those who pay the tax. In this regard, Imam says:

«وَتَفَقَّدَ أَمْرَ الْخَرَاجِ بِمَا يَصْلُحُ أَهْلَهُ فَإِنَّ فِي صَلَاحِهِ وَصَلَاحِهِمْ صَلَاحاً لِمَنْ سِوَاهُمْ وَ لَا صَلَاحَ لِمَنْ سِوَاهُمْ إِلَّا بِهِمْ لِأَنَّ النَّاسَ كُلَّهُمْ عِيَالٌ عَلَى الْخَرَاجِ وَ أَهْلِهِ.»

“See to the revenue (*kharāj* or land tax) affairs in such a way that those engaged in it remain prosperous because in their prosperity lies the prosperity of all others. The others cannot prosper without them, because all people are dependent on revenue and its payers” (Sharif Razi, 1386 SH, p. 734).

Imam uses the word *ahl* for stating the relationship between the tax-payers and their financial rights.

No doubt, a more investigation in Imam Ali's statements and way of life can reveal many of the citizenship rights, especially the social and economic rights. In this article, we have just attempted to delineate a general scheme of these rights in *Nahj ul-Balāgha*.

Conclusion

Citizenship is one of the collective identities of the human beings referring to the aspect of his membership in a political society. This membership causes an individual to enjoy some rights. In older societies before formation of the modern states, an individual ruler has always been – instead of the government institution – one of the parties of the relationship between the ruler and the subjects. Thus, in the pre-modern semantic system, we must search for the components of the semantic field of vocabulary denoting the relationship between the rulers and the subjects (*ru'āyā*). In the Islamic thought, the relationship of the individual people and the whole society with the government and the ruler has always been an important issue. Therefore, discussing the mutual rights and duties of the two parties in this relationship has a long history, which is discussed under the title of “The mutual relationship of the people and the government/ state”. No doubt, in one end of this relationship, i.e. the people, some of these rights and duties can be called – in today's term – the citizenship rights and duties. Considering the genetic of the modern state and complexity of the structure of the state and – accordingly – its duties and functions, the instances of the citizenship concept has had some narrowness and expansion. Anyway, the way the citizenship concept has emerged in a semantic system considering its related terms and signs can be effective in the previously mentioned narrowness and expansion.

Here, it is necessary to note two points: firstly, that the two parties,

in the right/ obligation relationship, are not equal. That is, there is no homogeneous relationship. Indeed, the rights and duties of the government are different in essence from those of the people. Secondly, some of the affairs defined in the religious classic semantic system of 'obligation' or 'duty', like having the charge of administrative and political affairs, supervising the ruler, etc., find their meaning today and in the new semantic system in the sphere of 'right', especially the citizenship rights. Its prominent instance can be considered in the principle of 'enjoining good and forbidding evil', which is considered as a duty and even religiously incumbent upon all Muslims in the religious semantic system. The translation of the mechanism of this religious obligation in the contemporary semantic system is a part of the political and social rights of the citizenship. This point – apart from the ontological and anthropological difference of the modern era and the former age – is suggestive of the virtuous aspect of citizenship in the Islamic semantic system existent both at the time of emergence of the main Islamic texts and in the contemporary era.

In the religious semantic system based on which *Nahj ul-Balāgha* has been created, the concept of citizenship rights must be tracked in line with the rights that the government and the ruler must observe for their people. Thus, according to the method and approach of the present article, the words referring to the rightful individual subject to the commands of the state have been analyzed in Imam Ali's commands and letters written to his governors. In this analysis, the semantic fields of concepts such as *nās*, *ra'yyat*, *'amma*, *'ibādullāh*, and *ahl* were considered. According to this analysis, the rights related to the above words referred to instances of the rights of the individual subjects of the government. The result can be considered, in today's terms, among the citizenship rights. In the present article, the findings were classified – according to Marshall's components of citizenship – into three types of rights: civil, political and social.

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