Critical Review About The Essence Of Society In The Social Thought Of Contemporary Shiite Quranic Intellectuals

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article **Article history:** Received: 29 October 2023 Received in revised form: 22 November 2023 Accepted: 07 February 2024 Published online: 20 March 2024 **Keywords*:* *Essence, Holy Quran, Muslim thinkers, Society, Social guardianship, Vilayah.*	The fundamental issues of a knowledge are often answered and explained in the philosophy of that knowledge. The question of the essence of the society is also a question that the philosophy of the social sciences is concerned. Throughout history, many scientists have sought to answer this question, but little has been achieved. Muslim scholars have also sought to explain the essence of society by identifying the relevant words in the Holy Qur'an and identifying the characteristics of the words, but this does not seem to be useful either. This article, while explaining and criticizing the definitions of society from the perspective of Qur'anic thinkers, seeks to find out the definition of society from the perspective of the Holy Qur'an. The Holy Qur'an summarizes the common point which leads to the emergence of society in the word of "Wilayah" and mentions a kind of transcendental relationship between individuals based on faith or infidelity and their related actions, referred to in this study as social guardianship. The present article, which has been documented in a descriptive-analytical and inferential way with an inferential interpretation method, argues that in explaining what society is, the Qur'an first considers the essence of society spiritual and not dependent on geography, tribe, race, and language and secondly, according to the Holy Qur'an, society refers to a set of human beings who together have a social guardianship based on vision and actions consistent with faith or disbelief.

1. Introduction

One of the primary issues that has captivated the minds of philosophers in the field of social sciences is the question of "the essence of society." Thus far, there has been no consensus definition for society within the realm of social philosophy. In other words, there exists no simple definition of society that is universally compatible with all theories (Gould and Kolb, 1997, p. 287; Sarookhani, 2001, p. 806). In other words, there is no simple definition of society that is universally compatible with all theories (Edgar and Sajwak, 2009, p. 200).

In contemporary times, particularly within the Shia tradition, scholars have consistently sought to extract responses to scientific and social issues from religious texts, especially the Holy Quran. A prominent figure among these intellectuals within the Shia scholars is the late Allameh Tabatabai, who has opened broad gateways to social issues and the philosophy of sociology in opposition to scholars and researchers. His disciples, each in their own way, have continued the path of their master, evolving along his trajectory and providing valuable services.

Among the myriad issues in the philosophy of social sciences, one of the most central is the nature of society. This is because the elucidation of issues such as the authenticity of society or the individual, the philosophy of social order, the factor of cohesion, and others is contingent upon the essence of society. In some disciplines like theology and religious studies, the essence of society also exerts significant influence. Social jurisprudence stands out as one of the branches or perspectives of jurisprudence that currently receives special attention. The essence of society is one of the most foundational and vital data for social jurisprudence. The essence of society also holds sway in the scientific interpretation of the Quran and its social exegesis.

2. Objectives and Questions

The objective of this research is a critical review of the essence of society in the intellectual discourse of Quranic thinkers, framed by the central question: What is the critical approach of Quranic thinkers to find a definition for the essence of society? The subsidiary questions include:

1. What is the nature of society with an abstract perspective in the thought of Quranic thinkers?
2. What is the nature of society with a perspective on the related terms of society in the thought of Quranic thinkers?
3. If rejecting conventional interpretations, which alternative interpretation replaces them?

3. Background

The most significant background that specifically addresses the issue of the nature of society from a Quranic perspective is an article titled "Society from the Perspective of the Holy Quran" by Dr. Fakhrezare (2014). The author delves into three sections: essence, existence, and composition of society, with the essence part briefly addressing the concept of the community. In the book "Society and History" by Misbah Yazdi (2011), a brief and non-Quranic approach is taken to define society and its nature as a default assumption. Javadi Amoli (2014) also provides a not extensively detailed discussion on the nature of society from the perspective of the Holy Quran in his book "Society." Additionally, Motahhar (1998) examines the nature of society in his book "Society and History."

4. Methodology

This article employs a documentary method in the data collection phase, utilizing library resources to gather the necessary information. It adopts a descriptive-analytical approach and employs the method of interpretive reasoning in the field of writing. In the interpretive reasoning method, a form of thematic interpretation, the subject is presented to the Quran, and questions regarding it are posed to the Quran. The Quran's response is then presented coherently and

argumentatively after classification. To confirm the researcher's findings, documents from commentaries can be presented as supporting evidence, and adherence to this approach is observed in this article.

5. Findings

To answer the main question of this research, the concept of society from the perspective of Quranic thinkers must first be elucidated. In their thought, society is defined based on two approaches. The first approach involves abstract definitions, while the second approach relies on definitions using related terms. In the first approach, a commonality is abstracted from society as an external entity, providing a definition of society. Motahhari sees commonality in culture, Misbah Yazdi sees it in governance, and Javadi Amoli sees it in governance, geography, purpose, and culture as indicators of the concept of society. However, Tabatabai regards abstract definitions as rejected from the perspective of the Holy Quran.

The second approach in explaining society in the thought of Shia Quranic thinkers involves the use of corresponding terms. Tabatabai and Motahhari meticulously examine the term "Ummah," while Misbah and Javadi delve into more related terms. While these Quranic terms can be considered synonymous with the general definitions of society in sociology, none of them significantly contribute to explaining the essence of society. Firstly, there is no reason to assume these terms are adaptable to society. Secondly, these terms do not express shared commonality capable of solving the issue of the nature of society.

The Quran, after rejecting criteria such as nationality, geography, language, etc., provides a precise indicator for explaining society based on collective guardianship. Tabatabai emphasizes this point under the 71st verse of Surah Al-Tawbah. He states that the verse considers men and women with faith as a unified entity due to their faith, and despite their dispersion and differences, they form a single society. In the present writing, the concept of guardianship is not an individual's connection with the leader of society or the upper authorities; rather, it is a social dimension or collective guardianship, meaning the connection among individuals.

Social guardianship (Velayat) is a positive legislative guardianship that speaks of the existence of a spiritual force among individuals in society. This force acts as a unifier bond among members of society, whether they be believers or disbelievers (Al-Tawbah (9): '71 Al-Anfal:(10) 73). They move forward in unity, seeking a common goal, embracing a common thought and belief, and separating themselves from other fronts and opposing poles. This is what the Quran refers to as Velayat (guardianship) (Khamenei, 2013: 522). Social guardianship is an interpersonal relationship in society arising from kindness and resulting in the domination of individuals over each other. This type of loyalty in the Quran is based on insight and actions proportionate to that insight. There are two Social collective guardianships among humans: the first is the collective guardianship of believers, and the second is the collective guardianship of non-believers. Social guardianship of believers is formed based on faith and actions in accordance with that faith, while the guardianship of non-believers is based on atheism and actions in line with their beliefs. To place individuals in a society, there needs to be a common criterion among them. This criterion, in addition to being real, must also be a factor of cohesion among individuals. The Quran recognizes this factor as social collective guardianship. According to collective guardianship, society is defined as a collection of individuals who have collective guardianship based on motivating factors (faith and disbelief) and actions in line with it.

6. Conclusion

The nature of society is one of the fundamental issues in the philosophy of social sciences, with significant implications for the philosophy of social sciences and sociology. Quranic thinkers have adopted two important approaches to find

the essence of society: the first is the abstract approach, where they abstract shared elements from societies mentioned in the Holy Quran and use them to define the concept of society. In rejecting this approach, Allameh Tabatabai, using Quranic verses, argues against ethnocentrism, geography, and other criteria, opposing the laws of creation. On the other hand, the emphasis on these elements in defining society contradicts other Quranic verses.

The second approach involves using corresponding terms in the Quran. In rejecting this claim, it should be noted that, firstly, there is no reason to assume that these terms are adaptable to society, and secondly, these terms do not express shared commonality that can solve the issue of the nature of society.

According to the teachings of the Holy Quran, the shared element shaping society is collective guardianship. Collective guardianship is a form of positive legislative guardianship that represents the relationship and bond among individuals based on motivating beliefs and actions in accordance with those beliefs, arising from mutual love and resulting in individuals' dominance over each other and mutual obedience.

From the perspective of the Holy Quran, society is referred to as a collection of individuals who have collective guardianship over each other based on motivating beliefs and actions in line with faith or disbelief.

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