Politics of Ethnic Participation During Khatami's Presidency in Iran (1997-2004)

PARTICIPATION AUX POLITIQUE SUIVANT LES ETHNIQUES DURANT LA PRESIDENCE DE KHATAMI EN IRAN (1997-2004)

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Abstract

Political participation is considered the most effective instrument for preserving citizens' freedom and rights in modern governments. Moreover, Political participation, as one of the aspects of social participation plays undoubtedly a prominent role in decreasing discrimination against minorities in the contemporary democratic societies. The reformist administration which governed Iran for eight years (1997-2004) and was established on (ex) president Khatami's ideas and was headed by him, managed some steps toward promoting democracy in Iran. Beside its nation-wide efforts, the administration had its specific ethnic diversity management which encouraged the ethnic groups' social as well as political participation. Through analysing the data collected by several in-depth interviews with the Iranian elites, this research minds to explore Khatami's administration policies in the field of promoting ethnic groups participation. Collected data emphasizes on relative success of the administration achieving its aims.
Key words: Ethnic group; Participation; Political Party; NGO; Khatami's Administration

Résumé:

La participation politique est considéré comme l'instrument le plus efficace pour préserver la liberté des citoyens et des droits dans les gouvernements modernes. Par ailleurs, la participation politique, comme l'un des aspects de la participation sociale joue indubitablement un rôle important dans la diminution discrimination contre les minorités dans les sociétés démocratiques contemporains. L'administration réformiste qui a présidé à l'Iran pendant huit ans (1997-2004) et a été établie sur des idées (ex) président Khatami et a été dirigée par lui, géré quelques mesures visant à promouvoir la démocratie en Iran. Outre ses efforts à l'échelle nationale, l'administration avait sa gestion spécifique de la diversité ethnique qui a encouragé la participation des groupes ethniques »sociales aussi bien que politiques. En analysant les données recueillies par plusieurs entrevues en profondeur avec les élites iraniennes, cette esprit de recherche à explorer les politiques d'administration Khatami dans le domaine de la promotion de la participation des groupes ethniques. Les données recueillies met l'accent sur le succès relatif de l'administration atteindre ses objectifs.
Mots-clés: Groupe ethnique, Participation; Partis politiques; ONG; Administration Khatami

INTRODUCTION

Most of the countries in the contemporary world challenge with the problem of ethnicity. According to Karimi (1998) there is no considerable ethnic groups just in 14 countries around the world and only 4% of the world's population live in the countries which only one ethnic group are residing in. thus multiplicity and diversity of

ethnic groups in each society due to differences in values and norms is a potential source of threats to unity and social cohesion. Thus every political system attempt to adopt sets of identified and codified politics to face the diversity and its consequences. Inappropriate politics not only fail the political system and the state administration in achieving its goals but also lead and intensify violent ethnic conflicts.

One of the most important aspects in ethnic diversity management is ethnic participation. Failing in adopting a suitable policy to manage and attract ethnic groups' participation may lead to deepen the social gaps and consequently to ethnic conflicts.

Iran as a multiethnic society has had same challenges. Especially after establishment of the modern state (subsequent of the constitutional revolution 1906), each government attempted to deal with the ethnic diversity by its own policies. Ethnic participation became more important and prominent when Khatami was elected as the seventh president in 1997. This article is seeking for those policies which Khatami's administration (1997-2004) put in action to promote ethnic participation. Through several semi-structured interviews with three categories of informants, the article studies those policies and their affects on the relationship between ethnic groups and the government. Accordingly, this work, firstly, pays attention on concepts such as participation, civil society and public sphere. After discussion on the methodology, the paper continues with the politics of the administration on ethnic participation.

1. PARTICIPATION

Hundreds years ago, Aristotle (1993), the Greek philosopher defined "citizen" as a person who has the right of stating his opinions, the right of occupying political and public positions and is able to apply these rights. He believed that the one who does not feel the need of coexisting with other people is not a human, as the distinguishing aspect of human is conscious social life based on collective expediencies.

Individual and group actions which their consequences affect on community and its processes are called social participation. In other word, social participation is that part of people activities which their effects go beyond individual and family spheres and involve other members of the society. Social participation turns individuals in "citizens" and prepares them for living in the public sphere. Political participation, as one of the aspects of social participation, is the most important aspect of living in the public space. Citizens' actions to influence on government's decision making, are called political participation (Rezaii, 1997).

We can divide citizens' activities into two categories of public and private activities, i.e. those activities which are performed inside the family sphere and emotional

relations between relatives are considered as a part of private activities. On the other hand, those activities the effects of which are beyond family sphere and include other members of the society are known as public activities.

Public activities also consist of two sub-groups: first, the activities related to the quality of handling society and managing the sources and major issues of country, which means politics and government sphere; and second, those group activities which although are performed in the public sphere, but do not relate to political system directly and are called as the sphere of civil society. Of course it should be noted that practically, a definite difference cannot be considered between people's activities because they are often affected by other spheres or they are affecting on other ones. For example, although people decide about the number on their children inside the private sphere of family, but in fact government's implemented policies for population controlling have a determinative role in this matter.

Based on division of human activities spheres, individual and limited goals and wishes are often achievable in the private sphere, group goals and benefits in the sphere of civil society and major goals and group benefits in the politics and government sphere. People act in different spheres on the basis of the priority of their goals. The reality of social life indicates undeniableness of each one of these goals for the interest of other one. In other word, the existence of individual, group and collective interests are some realities of human societies. Here the important matter is that people of the society reach to a level of civilization that go beyond absolute thinking in the sphere of private benefits and give priority to the activities of public sphere which provide group benefits and even follow their private benefits inside the collective interests. In the societies where the members just think about their individual interest, public issues are detained and public possessions are destroyed. People feel far from each other and the feeling of having common destiny is removed. So, social unity which is the reason for surviving a society is collapsed.

1.1 "Political Participation" the Requirement of Democracy

Beside several definitions, democracy is assessed as a type of political governing which is more appropriate than other types of governing and its special aspect is formal declaration of the principal of minority compliance of majority and recognizing freedom and equal rights for people and citizens (Maghsoudi & Khorshidi, 2011).

Whereas for De Benoist (1999) political participation is the essential factor of participatory democracy, a strong public sphere and civil society are foundations of deliberative democracy for Habermas. Benoist (1999) considers democracy not only as a political system that people participate in maximum level but also it is people's

participation that makes democracy. De Benoist (1999) believes that the main concept of democracy is neither the number of participators in elections, nor the number of referring to public votes or parliamentary system; rather it is the principle of participation. He believes democracy means the nation's participation in their destiny. So, in his opinion, the possibility of citizens' participation in public issues by determining rulers and stating their agreement or disagreement with their policies makes a government a democratic one. For Habermas an ideal public sphere can be a bulwark against the systematizing effects of the state and the economy. The public sphere is "where people can discuss matters of mutual concern as peers, and learns about facts, events, and the opinions, interests, and perspectives of others in an atmosphere free of coercion or inequalities that would incline individuals to acquiesce or be silent" (Fleming, 2000). In fact for Habermas just participation in a strong civil society and organised public sphere can limit the power of the state. Also Burdeau (1999), by referring to two types of autonomous freedom and associational freedom, believes that preserving the autonomous based freedom is provided to associational based freedom, as by having political participation people will benefit from political and social rights which are the guarantee of autonomous freedom and participation is the only instrument of opposition with the threats of political power against individual freedoms. Therefore, the main difference between democratic governments with autocratic ones is people's direct participation from various mechanisms in their own collective destiny.

Those governments where people rarely associate in public sphere and it is also artificial participation only for confirming policies and pre-determined rulers, although have the title of democracy but practically do not have its features.

1.2 Effective Factors in Increasing Political Participation

Why some people associate actively in politics but other ones just accept government policies without any activity? What factors are effective in the degree of political participation of people of the society? Why people in some societies are more inclined to political participation but in some other societies they do not like to have political participation? It seems that the answers of these questions can be found in following factors:

A: individual features: More social, self-possessed and extrovert personalities are more inclined to collective participation and following it to political participations. Analyzing skills, the ability of organizing, speaking skills, education and also social position of people are considered as the chances of more political participation. Of course, environmental conditions can strengthen or suppress these individual features (Rash, 2008).

B: Resources and facilities: Any collective political activity needs financial resources in a way that participants can devote their full time to their political group without being worried about financial issues of their life and also they can pay the economic costs of political participation. The resources also consist of the chance of meeting and having relation with influential men and officials for advancing the goals of political participation (Rash, 2008).

C: Obligation: Any collective political activity needs moral and civil obligation of its participants. People should be obliged to an aim, goal, leader or organization. If they cannot have such obligation in any reason, their participation won't continue so long (Rash, 2008).

D: Political sphere: Some political systems have compiled and legal techniques for participation and some others do not have these mechanisms. The possibility and inclination to political participation for the people of societies and political systems where most of political positions are elective, legal gatherings and marches in favor or opposing government policies are acceptable issues, competitive and free party system are established, freedom of speech and media are respected and at last citizens are known officially as the owners of governorship right are very much and the existence of basic and common rules facilitate these participations.

E: Political security: Opposing important political positions or government major policies has a high risk in some societies, in a way that a minor criticism or opposition has the risk of hearing and deprivation. In these societies the fear of end of participation warns people of participation and so, they show less inclination to political participation. Of course, it is possible that some more total governments such as Stalin in former Soviet Union force people by threat and intimidation to imitatively and corroboratively associate in politics.

F: Political social accepting: Social accepting is the process of transferring political culture to the new generation. Dependent on the type of social sphere where people accept social matters, people inclinations to political participation are different. Those ones who grow in politicians' families are more exposed to political motives such as political discussions, information and news and they are more motivated for activity in comparison to other people. On the other hand, those families that do not have vast social relations grow children who are less inclined to political participation.

1.3 Levels of Political Participation

People have different levels of political participation according to their activities in relation to political regime. The highest level of political participation is occupying a high national or regional political position or becoming candidate for obtaining a political position such as parliamentary representative. Those ones involved in this level of participation are considered as political actives and they are often party leaders or active members of political groups in the society who are professionally

occupied in political activities. They are effective in elections or policy makings whether as pros or as cons and undertake the leadership of a greater group of people of the society. The lowest level of political participation involves participating in family and group political discussions, being interested in political news, reactive and periodical voting and at the most supporting a party in election period. People activities in this level are complexly emulating and although they associate in political issues but their participation s are not active. Of course, there are still some people in undeveloped societies who do not have any political participation even in this low level and they are just exposed one-way to the policies of governmental regime. They pay tax, obey rules and use government economic resources in different ways, but they still do not participate in the process of forming these decisions even at the level of voting. Immigrant tribes in the mountains of Afghanistan are some of these groups.

The most important and common level of participation in democratic regimes is middle level of political participation that includes some activities such as membership in a political party, a NGO or social associations. Even though people's activities in this level do not have any effect on the major political processes of the society directly but NGOs' activities influence on social policy indirectly. For example, a person who is the member of a NGO such as environmentalists association only opposes with those policies of political system which are related to destroying environment and it will lead to changing some policies on this area. Most of people in free society participate in this level and are rarely involved in high level of political participation. Political parties and NGOs are the best way for political participation in democratic society. Parties and Non-governmental organizations prepare appropriate conditions for all of citizens to participate in common issues in public sphere. Whereas political parties tend to get political power and making policy in national level, NGOs act in micro social issues and do not tend entering to political system.

What is NGO? According to United Nation definition, NGO is described "as any private volunteer group of world citizens established on a regional, national, or international level, presents their opinions and professional evaluations, and responds to threatening" (MalkMohammadi & Mirbod, 2005). In an archetypal definition a NGO has the following six attributes: 1. Non-governmental, 2. Non-profit-making, 3. Voluntary, 4. A solid and continuing form, 5. Altruistic, and 6. Philanthropic (Shigetomi, 2002).

Tocqueville supposes just social associations can prevent dictatorship and they cause increasing the level of social consciousness. Religious, professional, cultural, and technique associations tend to routine social activities more than particular events such as elections therefore they make fortunes for citizens to participate in social

issues vastly. In addition NGOs cause to close people together and increasing more solidarity and democratic values in society (Chandhoke, 2004).

In multicultural society that different ethnic groups live together, NGOs facilitate peaceful actions of various groups inside a plural civil society. Each group keep own ethnic or language identity and at the same time learn loyalty to national goals. Political participation in all levels is an important ethnic demand that democratic states should regard that. The article evaluates circumstance of political participation among Iranian ethnic groups. Particularly the researchers are about to examine politics of ethnic participation during Khatami's presidency in Iran (1997-2004).

2. METHODOLOGY

The best way to achieve the objective is the mix method of study which enables the researchers to verify mass and elite's opinions. Regarding the current political situation of the country, fulfilment of a public survey among the mass of ethnic groups was very difficult; so the researchers preferred to collect the data only from the elites. Although there are some differences between elites and mass expression pertaining to ethnic interests but they can be considered rather as a cohesive unit (Lightbody, 1969; Drummond, 1977).

In this paper, selection of the informants was based on the amount of the ethnic groups' conflicts with the central government during the last one hundred years. Accordingly, four ethnic groups' elites were selected as informants. Since Kurds has a long time history of conflicts in compare with the other ethnic groups, so six of the ethnic elites are Kurds, two are Azeris, two are Baluchs and also two are Arabs. Although the emphasis is on the views of ethnic elites, some of the views of the administrative and academic elites are also applied in order to study the subject matter in depth. Therefore, seven informants from administrative elites and three from academic elites were chosen. All of the informants belonging to these two groups are expert on ethnicity and ethnic management and policy making.

Age of all the informants who were selected by purposive sampling is between 40 and 60. With regard to the nature of ethnicity and ethnic studies in Iran and also since governmental positions are held mostly by men, the informants were selected from among men. Six ethnic elites have Ph.D degree; six others have master degree. From the finding, it can be claimed that the education degree of informants has linkage to their positions. All of academic elites and three of administrative elites have Ph.D degree and the rest of the latter group have master degree. The administrative elites were selected among the ministers and governors of ethnic provinces in the previous administrations.

Informants, moreover, are educated in the political

science, sociology, philosophy, history, management, religion, economic, and communication. All the informants were selected based on their political background. Four of the ethnic elites were parliament members in the past rounds and other informants were academic elites, social activists and journalists. Although there are Iranian ethnic groups' elites abroad, but main focus of the present study is on the elites, as informants, who are residing in Iran. The informants belonging to the ethnic elites are coded as "A", the administrative elites as "B" and the academic experts as "C.

3. POLITICS OF THE ADMINISTRATION ON ETHNIC PARTICIPATION

One of the ethnic groups' demands in any multi-ethnic country is participation in power (Khorshidi, Lee, & Soltani, 2010). As the results of this study, there was a consensus among the informants from all categories that the ethnic groups have sought for participation in power, whether in legislation or executive branches of the government. The demand was not neglected in Khatami's thoughts and policies. According to the expressions of informant A4, during Khatami's first trip to the provinces in the presidential campaign in 1997, he travelled two ethnic regions; Zanjan and Kurdistan. In his public speeches in Kurdistan, Khatami declared, "the Kurds' share is low in the administration of the country." In his later trips to Sistan and Baluchistan provinces on 21 April 1998, during the speeches in the provincial administrative board meeting, after a Baluch parliament member requested the state to employ more Baluch people as administrative managers, Khatami (1998) said:

> Indeed, in giving the responsibilities, the affiliation to specific religion or ethnic is not the criterion. It has two criteria; the person should be able to handle the responsibility and the second, the person should be a trustee. If anybody had these criteria, there is no difference whether she/he is a Shi'a or Sunni, Persian or Baluch or Kurd. We should give him/her the responsibility. However, I believe there are some cultural and subjective hindrances that we must solve all together. There are not only ideological, political and constitutional obstacles, but also the constitution enforces us to remove discriminations. I deeply believe we still have enough capacity to facilitate more participation for the ethnic and religious affiliates.

A: Facilitating the Participation

Collected data based on the informants' statements displays that Khatami's administration policy towards facilitating the ethnic groups' participation had at least three aspects: freedom in electing and to be elected in elections, implementation of the constitution regarding "the councils" and vesting the responsibility and authority to the ethnic groups' elites.

• **Freedom in Electing and to be Elected in Elections**

A review on the events in Iran shows that the reaction of ethnic groups to Khatami's mottos was the huge participation in the elections. At the presidential election, which led to the victory of Khatami on May 23, 1997, more than seventy percent of the population of ethnic regions voted him. This vast participation was a record in these areas. Before the revolution (1979), there was no serious competition on power in these areas because the government was a kingdom and no real democratic election was done. However, after the revolution, due to the revolutionary spirit, the people of Iran had a huge participation in the Referendum in 1979 to change the government from a kingdom to an Islamic Republic and also the referendum on the new Constitution. But these elections had been boycotted by several ethnic elites and movements; thus, the level of participation in these regions was always low. Based on the results published by the Ministry of Interior, in presidential election in 1997, the average of participation in many of the ethnic areas was more than other regions. This huge participation happened in the ethnic areas, which some of the ethnic movements and militant groups had boycotted it, but the people did not obey them at that time and participated in the election, according to Informant B6. In the next rounds of the elections, such as the parliament and the city council elections, the participation was still unbelievable - it was still huge. Because of this circumstance, some of the militant movements, such as Iran's Kurdistan Democratic Party, did not only boycott the elections but also encouraged the people to be more active in participation. There was an interesting issue, the movements which had boycotted the elections for about twenty years, but now, they are encouraging and praising the people's participation.

Besides these events, the administration by some of its ministries defended the candidates' rights against the Guardian Council, which had the right of supervision on the elections and was able to reject the candidates' qualification; hence. Informant B7 and Informant B4, who were two former ministers of the administration, had the same argument and confirmed the argument.

The results of the participation were positive for the ethnic groups' people. Their active representatives were sent to the parliament. During the sixth round of the Islamic Council (Iran's parliament), there were some ethnic groups' representatives, who were requesting the ethnic demands clearly. Informant A11 described Khatami's participation policy as follows:

> The general and strategic policies of Khatami's administration in the field of ethnic groups' participation were the same all around the country. The circumstance for public participation was suitable for the nation, similar like the ethnic groups. But due to the previous limitations and obstacles for the ethnic groups, when Khatami facilitated the environment for participation, the ethnic people felt more freedom and ease than the other parts of the nation. Therefore, the ethnic groups rushed to welcome the elections more actively than the others because they hoped that through the presence of boxes of votes, they might achieve their

demands.

For the first time, the wining party the Islamic Iran (Participation Front), belonging to the reformists who were advocates of Khatami, nominated one of the Sunni representatives as the Member of Parliament's chair board. Undoubtedly, he could achieve the position regarding the crucial majority of the party, but due to some pressures from the conservatives outside the parliament, the party preferred to change the nominee.

• **The Councils**

The situation was the same in the election for the city and village councils. According to Articles 7 and 100 of the constitution, for local management of city, village or county, the people should elect their representatives in the councils. These articles of the constitution had not been implemented till Khatami's presidency. The implementation of these articles was one of the most important parts in Khatami's mottos. Less than one year after Khatami won the election and entered the office, he declared his decision to perform the election for the "council of city and village." Nobody could believe it. Within one hundred after the Constitutional Revolution, none of the states dared to implement the articles of the council in the former constitution, even after the Islamic Revolution and the new constitution. The researcher recalls the sphere of uncertainty in the country. Nevertheless, Khatami's decision was a will power; therefore, in February 1998, the election for the council was done. The average participants in the election in the ethnic provinces were more than the other provinces and the average of the country. It was for the first time that the ethnic groups elected their representatives to manage their local affairs. Informant B7, a high level administrative elite, believed that the most important action which Khatami did for the ethnic groups was the implementation of the constitution regarding the articles on "the councils." The informant said:

> "Before Khatami's presidency, the people were never allowed to directly run the cities' affairs. Now, through the city council elections, the people can elect their council members and choose their own City Mayor. The Councils themselves were a huge step over Iran. It means taking cede the authority to the society."

Informant A12, an ethnic elite, believed that Khatami implemented the articles of the constitution regarding the councils because he supposed that it was the only way to solve the problems of ethnic groups' participation in the power. The informant said:

> Khatami believed that by creating and strengthening the councils and ceding the local administrative to these councils and to the ethnic groups, the problems could be solved in the framework of the constitution without provoking sensitivity of community on separation and severance of Iran. By having the activities at the levels of councils in the village, city and province, gradually, capable people were been identified and those people could lead a series of social affairs in their regions. Despite all efforts in showing the negative appearance of the councils by

the conservative groups, the ethnic groups tried to engage all segments of the society in the councils. This example can be seen in some cities in Baluchistan, in spite of having a Shi'a minority in these cities, the Baluch elite attempted to involve the representatives of the Shi'a to participate. The councils could resolve the ethnic issues if there were no contrary efforts from the rival wing in the power.

This point of view was supported by other informants. Informant B2, similar like the previous informant, believed that "the councils" were the most important policies run by Khatami's administration. He stated that the councils were a new capacity created by the government of Khatami for the ethnic groups' participation in power. Despite concerns in some parts of the government, the councils in the provinces played the role of leadership or a system of leadership of people pursuing their rights. The informant pointed out to the positive role of the councils in some cities, where the population was divided between the Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, such as Zahedan. "The council appeared as a symbol of coexistence."

Informant A8, an Arab elite informant, described his experiences of the councils in the Arab regions. He believed that, the experiences of the councils were too worthwhile because for the first time in the modern era, the Arabs felt that their affairs could be managed by their own elites. The informant explained the advantages of the council of Ahvaz, the capital city of Khuzestan province. Based on his explanation, the council could achieve some salient advantages, such as improving the services of municipality and building some cultural houses and aids centres.

Informant A6, a Baluch elite, believed that the councils were the grounds for participation provided by Khatami. He said that, through the activation of civil society and especially the Islamic Councils, Khatami tried to provide the field for entering the ethnic groups' elites into power, and thus, their participation in the affairs.

• **Vesting the Responsibility and Authority to the Ethnic Groups' Elites**

Informant A2 stated that, Khatami's administration pursued meritocracy; therefore, some of the ethnic elites could hold administrative positions. The review on Khatami's speeches and documents displayed that meritocracy was one of the most famous words in Khatami's speeches.

Informant A10, a Kurd elite, explained Khatami's policies in the field. He believed that Khatami's policies had several stages. Training a generation of middle managers was one of Khatami's governmental plans. Appointment of several general directors, province and city governors and their deputies in the first stage and the deputy minister and government spokesman was the next step for the participation of ethnic groups in power. The result of this policy was to train a generation of managers who would gradually climb up the hierarchy.

Informant B6 argued that, there was no restriction

of employing the ethno-linguistic elites in the power positions in Iran. He pointed out to some Shi'a Kurds, who were being appointed as the ministers or officials in other high level positions. Therefore, he believed that the restrictions were only against the ethno-religion elites, such as the Sunni Muslims. He said that, during Khatami's presidency, it had tried to remove many of the obstacles. The governors of provinces had been ordered to employ the Sunni elites in the management positions. For example, before Khatami, there was no Sunni governor in the cities of Kurdistan. In the first period of Khatami's presidency, there were only two governors, and in the second round, there were five of nine cities which had Sunni governors and Shi'a governors, just in the cities where they were the majority in the population. In the second round of his presidency, more than seventy percent of the general directors of Kurdistan were selected from the Sunni elites.

The situation was the same in Sistan and Baluchistan provinces. Informant B2 argued that, despite some prohibitions and pressures from the Shi'a power centres, Khatami's administration tried to participate the Sunni elites in the power. However, due to the pressures, it could not appoint any Sunni Muslims in the central and nationwide positions, such as at the minister level. However, in the provinces where the Sunni population reside, the advantages were satisfactory to the Sunni community. The informant also pointed out to the situation in Sistan and Baluchistan as the evidence of his argument. He said that, when Khatami arranged his cabinet and appointed the new governor for the province, there were no city governor and no director general from the Sunni Baluchs; however, there were a few Sunni Baluchs at the low level management in some cities of the province. The informant referred to the statistics tables. He continued, in the first year of Khatami's term, the Baluch managers in Zahedan rose up from five to twenty five percent of the managers or in the city of Khash with the majority of Sunni Baluchs and the number rose up from thirty three to fifty percent of the total. The situation was the same in other cities of the province. At the province level, there were some advantages. In the beginning, there was no Sunni among the general directors, and within Khatami's presidency, there was active presence in the province administrative board because of their considerable number.

Despite Informant B6's argument, which mentioned that the prohibitions were against the Sunni Muslims in this field, Informant A8 believed that the Arab Shi'as were also prohibited from achieving the management positions. He said that, for the first time and during Khatami's term, an Arab was been appointed as the deputy of province governor and also sixteen Arabs were been assigned as the general directors in the Khuzestan province.

The above arguments were also supported by other informants. For example, Informant A1 believed that,

Khatami's administration policies in that field were the appointment for the tenure of some positions among those Iranian people, who had not been appointed these positions at any place. The informant continued that, in fact, this action was to remove some previous narrow mindedness. Informant B3 believed that, despite the structural limitations of the administration and facing the resistance from the rival wing as well as the Shi'a powerful centres, Khatami did some salient measures: i.e. appointing a Kurdish elite as the spokesman of the administration, increasing the number of Sunni authorities in the local managements and etc. The informant stated that, these measures could change the spaces in the ethnic provinces in favour of the ethnic groups. They also caused to moderate the demands of the ethnic demands. "The elites of the ethnic groups now achieve some tribunes to express their demands," the informant asserted.

The review of the collected data from the informants' experiences showed that, despite these actions and policies towards the ethnic groups, their elites were not satisfied completely by these changes and they expected more actions. For example, Informant A3 argued that, those tactics and actions were based on the tenure of some regional management to the ethnic groups' elites while there was the possibility for more general policies. However, the administrative elites believed that the administration did its best towards the ethnic groups and because of the ethnic groups' rights; the administration bore considerable pressures to do these actions. It seems that the ethnic elites did not consider these pressures. All administrative elite informants believed that Khatami and his Cabinet did all possible choices. As Informant B7 said, even the interior and intelligence ministries defended the ethnic rights against other parts of the government. There was a considerable point of view in the statements of the informants, especially the administrative and academic elites. They believed that, due to the design of political system of the Islamic Republic, the president was faced with limitations and bans to do all his policies. The argument had a better meaning if it regarded Khatami's confrontation with many limitations because of the contradicting views on a lot of issues. Informant C1, an academic elite, believed that Khatami did not have all means for changes but he could create a suitable sphere for them.

At the end of this section, there was a valuable quote from Khatami's speech in the first assembly of the province governors in his presidency. Less than six months of his presidency, Khatami declared:

> We must use our indigenous and ethnic human forces and allow them to have their attitude to their origin at a reasonable level. No ethnic groups should be scorned by assuming that they are not eligible to handle the managements and affairs. Otherwise, we cannot expect them to keep their national unity… so we should use as many as possible the ethnic groups' human resources in the managements (1998).

B: Establishment of Political and Civic Institutions

In the previous section, the informants explained the administration's policies for entering the ethnic groups into the process of participation in power. Even though this effort was positive and desirable for the ethnic groups, this kind of participation might be interpreted as "mass participation." It appeared that mass participation could not realize Khatami's ideas on civil society. According to Masaoodnia (2005), Khatami's achievement in power in Iran and his discourse on civil society proved the necessity of mass participation replacement by organized participation. He continued:

> The most important tool for achieving the purpose was the formation of civil institutions to play the role as the interface between the state and the nation. Thus, once there were civil institutions, life was possible in Iran (p.122).

It should be recalled that in Khatami's point of view, there was no difference among the Iranians. One of his most famous mottos was "Iran for all Iranians." Therefore, when he decided to improve and develop the institution building in Iran, naturally, the ethnic groups were included in the plan.

There was an interesting point in the experiences of the informants, and the point showed how much Khatami's administration was successful in realizing his ideas. All the informants praised the administration's effort in terms of building the political and civic institutions, which was relatively successful. The statements of the informants displayed that this dimension of the administration's actions contained less critics than the other dimensions. In this field, Informant A11 believed that in the macro environment of the state, positive developments took place and created the space for participation and establishment of civil institutions. Informant B3 argued that, the aspiration of the ethnic people for organized participation as well as the building of political and civic institutions were due to the evolutions in security issues in the ethnic areas based on Khatami's idea, which brought calm and security to the regions. "The situation naturally facilitated the political, social and economic activities".

A review on the informants' statements showed that the results of the administration's efforts in the field of institution building can be divided into certain categories: NGOs and political parties.

• NGOs

Informant B4, an elite in the most top-level authority in administration, asserted that in the Ministry of Interior, one of the most important agenda for the deputy of social affairs was the supports of the NGOs. "As we saw equality in all parts of the Iranian people, so the agenda was pursued in the ethnic areas as it was in the central part." The result of the activities was a huge numbers of the NGOs in the ethnic provinces.

The argument was supported by another similar level of elite. Informant B7 stated that the support and encouragement of the NGOs establishment in all cities were one of the administration's agenda. As a result, the unity of social action, NGOs was created widely in the country and especially in the ethnic areas. Indeed, the agenda of the administration was meaningful for the ethnic groups more than the others in the country. Before Khatami's term, as repeatedly said by the informants, security with regard to the ethnic areas did not allow them to perform social acts systematically. Now, there is an administration in Tehran which does not only prohibit them but also encourage them to create their NGOs. In addition, the people's reaction was widely embracing the evolutions. As evident on this argument, Informant B6 stated that, just in Kurdistan, the NGOs' activists had over a thousand registrations, which had a wide variety of children's rights, environmental and scientific research to those who pursued the ethnic groups' demands. The statement of this administrative informant was supported by the other ethnic elite informants. A Kurdish elite informant A3 said:

> Development of civil institutions and NGOs among the people was very impressive. In Kurdistan, during this period, nearly two hundred organizations were active. These NGOs provided the ground for ethnic participation.

Informant A10, another Kurdish elite, argued that during Khatami's term in the office, the statistics on civil society organizations and the press had grown substantially. However, according to the statements of the informants, the Kurdish people were more politicized and interested in participating. The situation was similar in other ethnic areas but at lower levels. Informant A8, an Arab, expressed that because of the open space for cultural activities of ethnic groups, several NGOs in various areas involving the youth, women and environment were established by the Arabs. Informant A12, a Baluch elite, confirmed the above statements and described the evolution among the Baluchs. He said that, in the ethnic groups' areas, in Baluchistan and at the centre of the country, many associations in the fields of cultural, social, literary and so forth were formed and organized by a large number of the ethnic people especially the young members.

There was an important point in the statement of Informant A12 on the activities of the ethnic groups in the centre of the country. He said that, in Tehran, some ethnic associations with the support of the administration were formed. These institutions had their relations and communications with the local associations in the ethnic provinces. The main association was "the house for ethnic groups" in Tehran. Informant A11, a Kurdish representative in the house, explained the activities of the house. "The result of these activities was the dialogue among different ethnic groups and different sides in power".

Besides building the house for the ethnic groups, the ethnic groups also built their own houses for the Kurds, the Arabs, the Azeris and the Baluchs in Tehran, which were established by some elites of the cultural, political and social ethnic groups. These houses handled the ethnic groups' activities in the centre and played relatively a successful role in establishing a dialogue between the ethnic groups and the centre. Informant A11, the founder of "Cultural Institute of Kurdistan," explained his experiences:

> During the ministry of Dr. Mohajerani (the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance), I could take the license of the Kurdistan Cultural Institute of the Ministry. Khatami even supported the Institute and personally prevented the shut downing of it, when it faced serious problems.

Besides the Kurdish house, the house for the Arabs and the Baluchs were also established in Tehran. However, as Informant A4 said, despite all the efforts, they could not build the cultural house for Azerbaijan.

Most of the administration's supports of these activities were done by certain offices, such as the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the Ministry of Interior and the National Organization for youth. However, other ministries, such as the Education Ministry and the Higher Education Ministry, also did their positive impacts. In terms of supports, most of the informants believed that the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance had the most prominent impact and role. For example, Informant C3 stated that, the most important measure of the administration was issuing the license for cultural activities. It can be clearly claimed that the door to the Ministry of Culture during that period on the ethnic groups and their activities was more open and the process of obtaining licenses for civil activities was also shorter. Furthermore, Informant A12 believed that the ministry had the most efforts in supporting the NGOs. According to the media and newspapers, in 2002, a special centre called the "Centre for Empowerment of Civil Society Organizations" was created by the Ministry of Interior. Informant B6, an administrative elite, argued that the National Organization for Youth had a salient function in empowering and giving treasury aids to the NGOs.

Another institution building according to some informants, such as A10, was the fraction into the parliament. Informant A10 said that, during the sixth round of the parliament, where the reformists had the huge majority, the Kurdish members had built the Kurdish fraction. "The representatives formed the fraction of the Kurds in the parliament who believed in the ethnic demands."

• **Political Party**

Some of the informants pointed out to another dimension of the administration's measures i.e. that was to facilitate systematic participation of the ethnic groups. These informants, mostly administrative elites, believed that Khatami's thoughts and measurement of the administration facilitated for the ethnic groups' activities in the framework of national parties; while before this period, there was no remarkable membership of the ethnic groups in the nationwide parties.

Informant B4, a member in the Cabinet of Khatami, asserted that even he agreed on the establishment of the parties in the ethnic provinces if they did not want to increase the gap between the nation. He further expressed, during the time, the provincial and city governors were ordered to support the civil and political activities.

Another top-level administrative elite rejected the necessity of the ethnic party and expressed, during Khatami's term, the political parties were given special position, strengthened and helped by the administration. Informant B3 confirmed the argument and said that (during the period), the national parties were active in these areas and most of them were established offices. Because the Kurds were more political than the other ethnics, even the partisan activities in the province were more joyful than other central provinces. Regular meetings were also held between the representatives of political parties and the local authorities. Moreover, measures were taken for the establishment of ethnic parties. Informant B2 described his experiences on the Baluchs in the political parties' activities. He said, during Khatami's term, the reformist parties welcomed the Baluchs' membership and the Baluchs were cooperating with these parties. As mentioned by Informant B3, there were some efforts from the ethnic groups to establish their own parties. Despite rejecting this issue by several authorities in different branches of the government, at least one ethnic party from the Arabs could gain the license. Informant A8 explained the advantages of this ethnic party. At least one of the parliament members and all of the representatives in the council of Ahvaz City in the second round were candidates from this Arab party. It is worthy to mention that Khatami's administration had some measures to develop and strengthen the political parties in Iran. For the first time, the administration subsidized the parties and helped to create "the house for political parties," which had a salient role in strengthening the political parties (The Public Relations of the M.o.I, 2005).

Finally, Informant B7 believed that, the ethnic groups' activities in the national parties strengthened the national unity and reduced discrimination against the ethnic groups.

CONCLUSION

In addition to principal advantages of political participation in the framework of a democratic government in preventing political power from corruption, it also accelerates human evolution in the path of socialization, improves the feeling of political profitability, decreases the feeling of alienation from power centres, increases attention to collective issues

and results in the formation of active and aware citizens who show more serious interest to governmental issues. If people and particularly ethnic groups know that there are some chances for effective participation in decision makings, undoubtedly they will believe that participation is valuable and will associate actively and considerer collective decision making as an obligation (Held, 1987).

On the other hand, if ethnic groups feel that they do not have any basic role or if they do not have true representatives, surly they will believe that their viewpoints and priorities are rarely considered important and they do not have an equal weight in comparison to the viewpoints of others in a correct and just process, so probably they won't have a good reason for associating in the processes of decision making which affect their life and they won't accept these decisions to be legal. Moreover, social and especially political participation change selfish individuals into regular, legal, united and patriot citizens who respect others' beliefs and have self-respect.

Based on the above argument, the article was searching for those policies and procedures held by Khatami's administration (1997-2004) to facilitate Iranian ethnic groups' participation. The data collected through several deep and semi structure interviews with the elites of three categories (ethnic groups, the administration, and academic), presented that the administration' efforts were in two areas: facilitating the participation, establishment of political and civic Institutions. On the first area, the administration's politics were concentrated on defending of the ethnic groups' rights for "freedom in electing and to be elected" in elections. The administration also organized the election for the Councils of cities and villages for the first time after the Islamic Revolution. The Councils were important scene for the ethnic groups to apply their wishes and interests. Beside these actions, the administration planed to more participation of the ethnic groups by vesting the responsibility and authority to their elites. In addition, regarding the reformist administration policies, it facilitated establishment of political and civic institutions. Through this policy, many NGOs were established by ethnic groups in their area of interests. Also, some of the parties which were active in national sphere set up their branches in the ethnic regions. These branches gradually became the more active branches of the parties specially reformists.

The informants' experiences state that the administration policies were successful in facilitating the ethnic groups' participation. The policies could increase the ethnic groups' involvement in the national debates and affairs. Collected data and official documents show that the increase of participation led to decrease in ethnic conflicts.

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