



The Origin of Despotism in the Islamic World from the Perspective of Muhaqqiq Naini

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Abstract

One of the most common causes of the backwardness of Islamic countries compared to other societies is the despotism of some rulers in these countries. Therefore, examining the nature of despotism, its roots, and ways to overcome it has been a serious issue for some Islamic thinkers, such as Muhaqqiq Naini. The aim of this article is to analyze despotism, its roots, and ways to overcome it based on the ideas of Muhaqqiq Naini in his book 'Tanbih al-Ummah wa Tanzih al-Millah.' The analysis is structured according to Thomas Spragens' methodology, which proposes four stages for resolving a crisis: "observing the crisis," "understanding its roots," "envisioning a crisis-free situation," and "identifying solutions to the crisis." One of the most important findings of this research is that, from Naini's perspective, factors such as "public ignorance," "misinterpretation of religion," and "division among people" have led to the despotism of some rulers in Islamic countries. The most effective solutions to overcome this crisis are "public awareness," "correct interpretation of religion," and "unity of speech."

Keywords: Despotism, Religious Despotism, Naini, Islamic World, Backwardness of Muslims

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Introduction

For centuries, the Islamic world has faced numerous issues and challenges, including war, violence, terrorism, despotism, and many others. These factors have not only led to the backwardness of Islamic societies compared to others but have also portrayed Islam as an ineffective religion in the realm of governance. Among these issues, despotism holds significant importance because there is a close connection between despotism and the backwardness of a society. This backwardness encompasses various cultural, political, economic, and other dimensions. Historical experience shows that despotic rulers, both within and outside the Islamic world, have governed not based on public or national interests but on personal and private interests. By suppressing nations and instilling fear in society, they sought to ensure their own prosperity, comfort, and the continuity of their rule. The issue becomes more complex in the Islamic world, as rulers link their despotic approaches to religious foundations, thereby blocking any path for protest or criticism and allowing the despotic ruler to continue their authoritarian rule with ease. This issue has long occupied the minds of Islamic thinkers, and numerous books have been written to address it. In this regard, reactions can be divided into three categories:

1. A group views the most important factor of despotism in the Islamic world as the interference of religion in the political sphere, essentially seeing Islamic governance as the cause, and considers secularism as the solution.

2. The second group consists of religious scholars who not only see no conflict between this form of governance and Islamic tradition but also justify it religiously and contribute to its continuity and consolidation.

3. The third group holds a different intellectual perspective. These are thinkers who, through historical study, see Islam as being in conflict with the phenomenon of despotism and strive to find a way out by emphasizing Islamic tradition and reinterpreting it. The treatise 'Tanbih al-Ummah wa Tanzih al-Millah' by Mirza Mohammad Hossein Naini falls into the third category. The book stands out from other texts because it was written by a jurist who lived in a country caught between despotism and modernity. The main concern of 'Tanbih al-Ummah' is despotism, and the author seeks to uncover its roots in Islam while proposing appropriate solutions based on Quranic verses and hadiths. Although Naini lived in the Shiite world and used Shiite jurisprudence for his arguments, the book has the potential to address this phenomenon beyond Shiism. Therefore, in analyzing the factors of despotism, it briefly examines some contemporary Islamic countries, such as Saudi Arabia. The main question of this article is: What are the causes and factors of despotism in the Islamic world according to the political thought of Ayatollah Naini, and what solutions does he propose to overcome it? The findings of the research show that,

among the numerous factors Naini mentions in 'Tanbih al-Ummah wa Tanzih al-Millah' for the emergence of despotism, he places the greatest emphasis on three factors: 'public ignorance,' 'misinterpretation of religion,' and 'division among the people.' He identifies the solutions as 'public awareness,' 'correct interpretation of religion,' and 'unity of speech.' To prove this hypothesis, the article will utilize the crisis theory put forth by Thomas Spragens. It is worth noting that the research findings are organized according to this theory, which first analyzes the evidence and factors of despotism from Naini's perspective and then explains the solutions to overcome the crisis of despotism in the Islamic world. Before delving into the analysis of the research findings, Spragens' methodology will be explained.

Methodology

Spragens' methodology is a philosophical approach used in research. The reason for choosing this method in the present article is its process-oriented nature for resolving crises. Spragens outlines a four-stage process for addressing a crisis. The first stage is the precise understanding of the crisis. Spragens refers to the crisis as "disorder" and believes that a political theorist must first observe and understand this disorder in society to theorize a way out of it (Spragens, 2003, p. 52). Therefore, one way to understand the thoughts of a political theorist is to ask what the problem is. According to Spragens, the first question for understanding the thoughts of a political theorist is: "What specific deficiency or disorder are they trying to address?" (ibid., p. 54). Thus, for a political theorist to understand disorders, the first step is to observe them. After this stage, it is necessary for the political thinker to identify the origin of the crisis. Spragens believes that after diagnosing the disordered conditions, the logic of observation dictates that the context of the observation should also be examined. The question to be asked at this stage is: If the situation is disordered (crisis-ridden), what are the reasons for it? (ibid., p. 80). Like a doctor, the theorist has now completed two stages toward resolving the crisis: observing the crisis and diagnosing its causes. Logically, there is still a gap between these two stages and the stage of resolving the crisis, which must be filled with other effective steps in crisis resolution. Just as there is a gap between a doctor's observation and diagnosis of a patient's illness and the patient's recovery. After understanding the origin of the crisis, the next stage is understanding the ideal, crisis-free situation. When a person recognizes disorder in the society they live in, it implies that an orderly and organized society is achievable. When a political theorist envisions an orderly political society, it is because they have observed disorder in the society they live in. If they see the problem of society as "alienation," they must present an image of a society free from alienation

(ibid., p. 119). Once the theorist has observed the crisis, identified its causes, and understood the ideal situation, the next step is to identify ways to overcome the crisis and move toward the ideal situation. Naturally, if the crisis-ridden situation is well-described as an existing reality in a crisis-ridden society, the ways to address it will become clear without the need for specific prescriptions to overcome the crisis. If someone at a crossroads is told that the first path leads to success and the second to destruction, no specific prescription has been issued by the speaker. For example, they have not said, 'Take the path to success' or 'Avoid the path to destruction.' However, if the person accepts this advice and is wise, they will choose the path to success and avoid the path to destruction (ibid., p. 157). Therefore, by describing the real situation, people will naturally seek ways to resolve the crisis, and no specific prescription is needed. In this article, "despotism" is considered a crisis, and an attempt is made to explain this crisis according to the four stages of Spragens' methodology.

Research Background

After conducting a search, the author did not find any independent work that examines "The Origin of Despotism in the Islamic World from the Perspective of Muhaqqiq Naini." Therefore, the present article with the aforementioned title is worthy of reflection and attention.

Concepts

In this section, some of the most important terms in the article, such as despotism and religious despotism, are conceptualized.

Despotism

The term 'despotism' (استبداد) in Arabic derives from the root "ب د د" and means acting alone in any matter, appropriating it for oneself without the participation of others (Tarihi, 1996, vol. 1, p. 162). It is also used to mean standing alone in a task and ignoring the objections of others (Dekhoda, 1998, vol. 2, p. 1788). The author of 'Lisan al-Arab' defines 'despotism in opinion' as acting alone in opinion and disregarding the views of others (Ibn Manzur, n.d., vol. 1, p. 339). In political science, despotism refers to the domination of an individual or group in a system or government, exercising power over people's rights without regard for law or the opinions of subordinates (Kayali, 1990, p. 2) and without fear of accountability (Aghabakhshi & Fashari Rad, 2008, p. 41). Some have also defined it as the appropriation of a nation's rights by an individual or group without fear of interrogation (Kawakibi, 1999, p. 83).

Religious Despotism

Muhaqqiq Naini extensively discusses this term in his book *Tanbih

al-Ummah* and considers this phenomenon to be one of the innovations introduced by Muawiyah. According to him, religious despotism distorts the principles of "freedom" and "equality," which are integral to Islam and its prosperity (Hosseini Rouhani, 2000, p. 407). Therefore, it is necessary to define religious despotism from his perspective. Religious despotism refers to arbitrary interpretations made by religious authorities in the name of religion, which they use to compel an ignorant nation to obey the requirements of their creed. Since this obedience is not based on divine command, it is considered a form of idolatry (Naini, 1999, p. 142). From Naini's perspective, there is a relationship between political despotism and religious despotism. Just as in political governance, obedience to oppressive rulers leads to the enslavement of the nation, submission to the arbitrary dictates of religious leaders—presented as religious obligations—also leads to servitude (Naini, 1999, p. 50). He views religious despotism as a powerful supporter of political despotism and believes that until religious despotism is eradicated, the despotism of rulers cannot be cured (Beheshti, 2000, p. 380). Naini sees the problem of the Islamic world as despotic rule that derived its legitimacy from religion, as some scholars unknowingly provided religious justification for despotism. The solution is to eliminate misinterpretations of religion (Moghimi, 2000, p. 444). Therefore, religious despotism refers to historical figures and movements that used religion to benefit a tyrannical system, emptied religion of its content, and unjustly exploited religion against itself (Mousavi, 1981, p. 87). From this point onward, the process of resolving the crisis of despotism will be analyzed using Spragens' four-stage methodology: observing the crisis, identifying its roots, envisioning a crisis-free situation, and identifying ways to overcome it.

Evidence of Despotism in the Islamic World

In this section, following the first stage of Spragens' methodology, the evidence of rulers' despotism as a crisis in the Islamic world is examined from the perspective of Na'ini, along with its manifestations in the present era. Among the countries where Na'ini observed the crisis of despotism is Iran. He categorizes the manner in which rulers exert dominance and control over society into two types: **Tamlikiyyah (possessive rule)** and **Wilayatiyyah (guardianship rule)** and considers despotism in Iran as the result of **Tamlikiyyah rule** (Na'ini, 1999, p. 8). He describes the despotic state of Iran as follows: *"All the devastation in Iran and the heinous crimes of the ruinous state, which have so thoroughly destroyed the religion, government, and nation, without any regard for limits— all of it stems from this source."* (Ibid., p. 16) The primary roots of despotism in the Islamic world trace back to the Umayyad rule. Na'ini sees Mu'awiya's dominance as the main reason for Islam and

Islamic nations being hindered from progress. He believes that fundamental principles such as people's freedom from rulers' oppression and public participation in national affairs were the key factors behind the expansion and strength of Islam. However, with the rise of the Umayyads, these principles and their associated subcategories—such as public oversight of officials and rulers' accountability to the people—were overturned and transformed into their opposites. This backward trajectory led to stagnation in all aspects of progress (Ibid., pp. 16–17). The prophetic prediction about the Umayyad despotism strengthens this argument. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) foretold the rise of the Umayyads and their adoption of an oppressive approach to governance. He stated: "When the sons of Abi al-As reach thirty men, they will seize *God's wealth as their personal fortune, treat His servants as their slaves, and manipulate His religion as they please.*" (Amini, n.d., vol. 8, p. 482) As the despotic rule of the Umayyads was passed down, the intensity of their tyranny increased. For instance, under Yazid's rule, despotism became more extreme than in previous periods. Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) saw allegiance to Yazid as a disgrace for himself and the Muslims. When a group from Kufa invited him to accept Yazid's rule, he rejected it, declaring: "I will never submit to them like a humiliated person." (Ruhani, 2013, vol. 11, p. 378)

Humiliation occurs when people's free will over their affairs is seized or controlled by an overwhelming power. Naturally, this new condition is a result of severe autocratic dominance over people's will. Even in the modern era, despotism and control over people's free will are evident. A prime example is Saudi Arabia's oppressive policies toward its Shia minority. Shia Muslims in Saudi Arabia are a religious minority. Today, respecting minority rights, such as freedom of expression and belief, is highly emphasized in international treaties, including Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The level at which governments uphold these rights directly correlates with their commitment to democracy. The more they protect minority rights, the more democratic they appear among nations. However, this progressive correlation does not exist in Saudi Arabia's governance of its Shia population (Abbasi, 2010, p. 332). Saudi Shias are deprived of their civil rights and cannot freely think or believe as they choose. They are also unable to select their moral, social, philosophical, political, economic, or religious beliefs without fear, intimidation, or interference from the state or individuals (Makrami, 2015, p. 117). This dire situation stems from the Wahhabi ideology that dominates Saudi Arabia, which enforces a despotic approach (Ahmadi Lafouraki, 2007, p. 18). It is clear that, under such oppressive ideological control, Shia Muslims

in Saudi Arabia cannot fully enjoy their right to 'freedom of belief and religion.' This analysis highlights how despotism remains one of the greatest threats to human societies. Governance based on autocracy prevents both material and spiritual progress and hinders individuals from achieving noble and advanced goals in personal and social life. Thus, eliminating despotism is a logical and reasonable demand. One crucial step toward its removal is recognizing its presence, as political thinkers must first identify the crisis before formulating solutions. Na'ini himself witnessed this crisis firsthand in his society and, in Spragens' terms, had experienced the first stage of crisis resolution. After recognizing the crisis, the next step is understanding its causes, which will be examined next.

Causes of Despotism

The second stage in Spragens' framework for overcoming crises is identifying the roots of the crisis. In this paper, the crisis in question is the despotism analyzed by Na'ini. A political theorist must understand these causes to develop theories for resolving the crisis. According to Na'ini, the most prominent factors behind despotic rule are:

- People's ignorance
- Misinterpretation of religion
- Disunity among the people

People's Ignorance

Ignorance—whether among rulers or the public—harms both. If rulers lack awareness of governance principles, they fail. Likewise, when people remain unaware of their rights and their leaders' responsibilities, they are deprived of their true goals in life. The destructive impact of ignorance is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, particularly in Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 6, which emphasizes the need to verify uncertain news. Acting upon unverified information violates others' rights and leads to regret. Na'ini considers public ignorance of their rights and rulers' obligations to be the main factor sustaining despotism and the source of a nation's misfortunes (Na'ini, 1999, p. 105). He describes the devastating effects of ignorance in shocking terms, asserting that ignorance reduces people to slavery, making them surrender their freedom to others. He writes: "Ignorance compels this beast-like, demon-hearted person—who only appears human—to sacrifice all his strength and resources to reinforce his own enslavement. Instead of uniting with his fellow believers and countrymen to secure their freedom, he becomes complicit in their bloodshed, plunder, and dishonor" (Ibid., p. 107) Na'ini argues that ignorance makes tyrannical rule easier, as the public does not demand their rights and freedoms.

Consequently, despotic governance flourishes.

Misinterpretation of Religion

Another factor enabling religious and political despotism is the misinterpretation of religion, sometimes by religious scholars themselves. The roots of religious despotism date back to Mu'awiya's era. He sought to counter Imam Ali (peace be upon him) by manipulating religious teachings and using some companions' influence to divide the Muslim community. Na'ini warns that religious despotism is even more dangerous than ignorance, as it deceives people under the guise of faith. He defines religious despotism as: "An arbitrary rule disguised as religious governance, imposed upon an ignorant nation that, due to their extreme lack of knowledge, blindly submits to it." (Ibid., p. 108) This misinterpretation of religion enables tyrannical rulers to exploit religious sentiment for personal gain, depriving people of their fundamental rights. In summary, false religious narratives and public ignorance remain key enablers of despotic rule. Addressing these issues is crucial for breaking the cycle of oppression in Muslim societies.

Division Among the Ummah

Undoubtedly, division and discord within the Islamic Ummah have detrimental consequences, including despotism. On the one hand, it prevents the Ummah from achieving shared social and religious goals, and on the other, it entices foreign enemies to infiltrate comprehensively in pursuit of their hostile objectives. The presence of unity and the absence of division within the Islamic Ummah are emphatically stressed in the Holy Qur'an. At the beginning of verse 103 of Surah Aal-e-Imran, Allah commands the Islamic Ummah to hold firmly to the divine rope. One of the life-giving effects of this adherence is the unity and cohesion of the Islamic Ummah, through which they can attain their lofty material and spiritual goals. Conversely, division within the Islamic society leads to numerous challenges. Among the harmful consequences of division is the emergence of tyranny and autocratic rulers. Muhaqqiq Na'ini does not consider this factor as an independent cause of the crisis of despotism, but rather as a consequence of prior factors, arguing that all forms of enslavement ultimately stem from division among the Ummah. In reality, the result of people's ignorance and the misinterpretation of religion—what can be termed religious despotism—is the fragmentation of society (Na'ini, 1999, p. 112). The stronger and more united a society is, the better it can guarantee the public rights of the people, including individual freedoms, religious practices, and national independence. However, division among individuals undermines this guarantee and extends the shadow of despotism over them—an issue that the late Na'ini also emphasized

(ibid, p. 117). Muhaqqiq Na'ini likens a unified society to a fortified fortress and asserts that whenever unity is replaced by division, severe calamities follow, such as the loss of freedom, subjugation to tyranny, and the destruction of national defensive power, i.e., unity (ibid, p. 117). Naturally, whenever tyrannical and oppressive rulers dominate a people and society, they disregard the public will—especially when it opposes their despotic rule. Moreover, they actively suppress any anti-despotic sentiments and severely restrict individual and public freedoms. Some members of society may adopt a defensive stance against these authoritarian policies, while a significant number may outwardly align themselves with such policies. Undoubtedly, in such circumstances, dictatorial rulers find an opportunity to deepen social divisions. They separate the dissatisfied faction from the rest, exploit negative propaganda, and use force and coercion to widen this divide daily. Their strategy is to neutralize the first group, i.e., the opposition, through the second group, which outwardly appears to align with the oppressors. If this approach fails, they themselves resort to force and suppression, silencing or eliminating the opposition and forcing the second group into absolute obedience. This is nothing but the enslavement of individuals, turning the notion of freedom into a mere dream in such a society. Undoubtedly, envisioning such a society—where despotism reigns—is unbearable for a free-spirited individual even before its realization. Human beings have been endowed with freedom since creation, considering it essential for their material and spiritual progress. They do not owe this freedom to anyone; it is not a privilege granted by others that can be revoked at will. Rather, it is a natural right that belongs to all. The deprivation of human freedom by those who did not grant it in the first place is contrary to human nature and justice. In any case, the absence of freedom is a profoundly bitter and unbearable tragedy, both for the person who is unjustly deprived of it and for free individuals who are aware of such oppression. Therefore, both the struggle of the oppressed to regain their freedom and the efforts of freedom-seekers to secure the rights of those trapped under despotic rule have always been noble and desirable.

Those concerned with advocating for people's freedom, after identifying the factors and roots of the crisis of despotism in a society that has deteriorated due to authoritarian and anti-freedom governance, outline the characteristics of a desirable, tyranny-free society. They analyze its defining features and ultimately explain the pathways to transition from a despotic, undesirable society to a free and ideal one. In the following section of this article, the concept of an ideal society will be examined with an emphasis on the thoughts of Muhaqqiq Na'ini.

Depicting the Ideal State

The third stage in Spragens' crisis resolution model is for the political

theorist, after identifying the causes of the crisis, to envision a society free from that crisis. If such a society has previously existed or currently exists elsewhere, it can serve as a model for the ideal society, and the necessary measures should be taken to achieve it. The ideal society envisioned by Muhaqqiq Na'ini is one in which governance is in the hands of the infallible Imams (peace be upon them). The governments of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Medina and Imam Ali (peace be upon him) in Kufa serve as his models for an ideal society. However, in the era of occultation, where direct governance by an infallible Imam is unattainable, the best form of government compared to autocratic monarchies is a constitutional government. Na'ini considers the presence of infallibility in the guardian and ruler of the Islamic society as the guarantee for maintaining *wilayati* rule and preventing its transformation into *maliki* rule (Na'ini, 1993, p. 12). Since this characteristic cannot be realized in the ruler during the era of occultation, he proposes public oversight of the ruler as a substitute (ibid, p. 13), a concept that is justified within the framework of a constitutional government. Na'ini does not merely engage in a theoretical or abstract depiction of an ideal society free from despotism; rather, he moves beyond this stage to actively construct the framework of such a society. In this section, to clarify the ideal state, the structure of the society envisioned by Na'ini is outlined. The necessity of establishing a government is the first essential component of this framework. According to him, disorder and chaos resulting from the absence of government are unacceptable to any nation: "*Know that this notion is universally acknowledged by all nations and unanimously accepted by all rational minds—that the stability of the world's order and the survival of human society depend on governance and leadership, whether it is vested in a single individual or a collective body, and whether it is assumed rightfully, seized by force, inherited, or obtained through election.*" (ibid, p. 6).

In addition to providing a rational justification for the establishment of government, he also presents scriptural evidence, asserting that the *Shari'ah* never permits "disorder in the system" or "foreign domination over the nation." The existence of government prevents both of these scenarios (ibid, p. 7). Therefore, the establishment of government is a prerequisite for maintaining societal order, and as such, it becomes obligatory and necessary. After justifying the need for governance, Na'ini outlines the essential elements of his ideal government. According to Na'ini, since direct access to an infallible ruler (peace be upon him) is not possible at present, and since the responsibilities of governance should not be neglected due to the necessities of reason and *Shari'ah*, a non-infallible individual can assume leadership. Thus, he introduces elements and institutions for a non-infallible government, such as *the ruler and*

governance, the judiciary, and the National Consultative Assembly. Regarding the judiciary, he writes: "There is no doubt or dispute about the establishment of the judiciary and issuing of religious verdicts by the jurist during the era of occultation. Likewise, judicial functions such as collecting claims from the convicted, imprisoning debtors who evade payment, and overseeing certain public affairs fall within the authority of the jurist. Thus, it is definitively established that people must refer to the jurist for religious verdicts and dispute resolution, along with its associated responsibilities." (Feirahi, 2003, p. 217).

He also considers the National Consultative Assembly and the drafting of a constitution as other fundamental elements of the ideal government, which is the constitutional government. In fact, he views these as pillars of the Islamic political system:

"The ultimate goal, within the scope of human capability, that can fulfill these requirements and establish an organized and official system—substituting for divine infallibility even under usurpation and oppression—is dependent on two things: the drafting of a constitution and the formation of a National Consultative Assembly." (Na'ini, undated, pp. 13–14).

Some scholars, in explaining the obligations and responsibilities of parliamentary representatives to safeguard people's rights and prevent despotism, have stated that legislators must be experts in politics and law, remain free from greed and personal motives, and be sincerely devoted to the religion, government, and Islamic homeland (Heidari Behnouyeh, 2007, p. 114). The elements that Na'ini introduces for an ideal society and government are fundamentally aimed at addressing his primary concern: liberating the people and society from despotic rule. Based on the preceding discussions, he first describes the ideal government—the governance of the infallible Imams (peace be upon them), particularly the prophetic and Alawite governments. Since these governments are inaccessible in the era of occultation, he seeks to conceptualize an alternative ideal government that is feasible in the current era, which he calls *constitutional government*. To shield this government from the perils of autocratic rule, such as the violation of people's material and spiritual rights, he defines essential elements to prevent these harms and ensure the protection and guarantee of individual and social rights as much as possible. Therefore, he assigns specific functions to each of these elements to achieve his goal of establishing and maintaining a constitutional government. However, detailing the functions of these elements is beyond the scope of this article, and those interested in exploring this topic further may refer to the relevant sources.

Strategies for Overcoming the Crisis of Despotism

The fourth stage in Spragens' crisis resolution model is identifying ways to

escape the crisis. After outlining the ideal state, logic dictates that strategies for overcoming despotism—which naturally lead to the formation of the ideal society—should be pursued. In the following section of this article, three key aspects of exiting the state of despotism (crisis) and transitioning to the ideal state are analyzed from the perspective of the late Na'ini.

Public Awareness

Knowledge is one of the fundamental elements of human existence, without which the essence of humanity—distinguishing humans from non-human creatures—remains undeveloped. The Holy Qur'an calls upon humans to acquire knowledge in various aspects of life and explicitly differentiates between the value of the knowledgeable and the ignorant (Zumar: 9). One of the critical functions of public awareness in the social and political spheres is resisting despotic governments. The more people are aware of their social rights, the more wisely they act in selecting rulers and governments, choosing them based on the realization and respect of their social rights. Na'ini considers public awareness the most important and primary factor in overcoming despotism and curing it, just as he views ignorance as the principal cause of despotism. Ignorance manifests in two forms: simple ignorance and compound ignorance. Na'ini does not propose a single approach to eliminating both types of ignorance; rather, he presents different strategies for addressing each. He believes that combating simple ignorance requires a suitable approach, considering the necessary conditions. The remedy for ignorance lies in explaining the reality of despotism, clarifying its alternative—constitutionalism—and educating the people about the types of governments, their effects, and their differences. The prerequisite for this path is to convey information gently, without aggression, safeguard people's minds from doubts and misconceptions, and avoid creating aversion through improper behavior (Na'ini, 1999, p. 120). Referring to verse 125 of Surah al-Nahl, Na'ini asserts that a person striving to combat public ignorance in the fight against despotism must first possess sufficient knowledge and a clear understanding of their mission. This is because enlightening people and dispelling their ignorance serve to invite them toward freedom and monotheism, freeing them from blind obedience to oppressors. This mission is part of the responsibilities of prophets and divine leaders. Thus, those undertaking this critical task must follow the example of the Infallibles (A) in this endeavor. He explicitly states: "The true essence of inviting people to freedom and breaking the shackles of servitude to oppressors, as affirmed by Qur'anic verses and hadiths, is a call to monotheism and one of the duties and responsibilities of prophets and divine leaders (A). Therefore, anyone who steps into this domain—whether a journalist, a preacher, or anyone else—must act in

accordance with that sacred tradition, adopt the Qur'anic directive as their guideline, strive to eliminate ignorance, refine public knowledge, and purify society's morals. They must also avoid slander, as it is always rooted in ulterior motives" (Ibid, pp. 120–121). Na'ini describes the battle against compound ignorance as particularly difficult because, in his view, certain factors within the ignoramus make dispelling their ignorance challenging. Such a person is stubborn, rigid in their false beliefs, and firmly entrenched in them. Therefore, clarifying their misconceptions and eliminating their misguided thoughts is difficult. However, Na'ini does not abandon such individuals to their ignorance; rather, he believes that actions such as "accompanying them," "adopting a tolerant approach," and "eliminating dualities" provide hope for eradicating ignorance (Ibid, p. 125). In contemporary times, awareness is a vital necessity for the Muslim world. Naturally, the more leaders and the general public in the Islamic world have up-to-date and comprehensive knowledge of their life goals, the means of achieving them, and the obstacles in their path, the more they will progress in various aspects of life.

Correct Interpretation of Religion

Religious despotism arises from two factors: the misinterpretation of religion by rulers on one hand and the public's ignorance of their true intentions on the other. This form of despotism is more dangerous than political despotism. The reason for its greater danger lies in the self-serving desires of individuals who, under the guise of religious authority, compel ignorant and uninformed people to obey them (Ibid, p. 108). One of the most effective ways to legitimize despotic demands in the eyes of the people is for corrupt scholars, in positions of power, to present them as religious obligations, thereby coercing the public into compliance. Naturally, the solution to religious despotism lies in the correct interpretation of religion by pious and devout scholars and jurists, which simultaneously exposes the deceit of tyrannical rulers and clarifies the principles of proper governance for the people. Na'ini believes that the only safeguard against the formation and continuation of such despotism is the presence of piety and justice in the religious ruler (Ibid, p. 125). This requirement is also explicitly stated in various narrations: "Among the jurists, the one who safeguards his soul, preserves his religion, opposes his desires, and obeys the command of his Lord—the common people may follow him. However, this does not apply to all Shi'a jurists; rather, only some meet these criteria. If a jurist indulges in immoral and corrupt behavior like the wicked among the general populace, do not accept anything from him, and show him no reverence..." (Tabarsi, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 458). This narration sets a criterion for following a jurist, making adherence to them conditional upon meeting these requirements.

If the condition ceases to exist, then following them is no longer obligatory. According to the above narration, a jurist is worthy of being followed only if they possess qualities such as piety, safeguarding their religion, resisting their desires, and obedience to their Lord. The narration also indicates that only a small number of jurists meet these criteria, and people are obligated to follow only such jurists. However, other jurists, who lack these standards and use religion as a cover for their personal and despotic ambitions, must not be followed or obeyed. Thus, the solution to religious despotism consists of two elements—one related to the ruler and the other to the people. The ruler must embody the aforementioned criteria, while the people must recognize these criteria and seek them in individuals. This means that for people to apply these standards to individuals, they must have the necessary awareness to do so.

Unity of the People

Division among the people has been considered one of the most significant factors leading to despotism. Logically, its opposite—unity among the people—is one of the ways to escape from despotism. In addition to individual rights, people have collective rights, which can only be realized within society. These rights can be achieved when there is unity among the people. When individuals are united, they can reach their common goals more efficiently and effectively because, through unity, each person plays their role in creating that shared goal and right. However, if division prevails instead of unity, selfishness and excessive personal gain take precedence over social interests. In such situations, despotic rulers exploit this division to implement their own objectives, as they face no serious obstacle to their arbitrary policies and desires. Naturally, they find it easier to govern such a divided society since one of the most effective barriers against despotic rule is the unity of the people. However, in a society dominated by despotism, this barrier is absent. The late Na'ini saw the remedy for the dire consequences of social division in social unity. He believed that the cohesion of the nation ensures the preservation of people's freedom, safeguards public rights from usurpation, and prevents malevolent forces from violating the material and spiritual interests of the people. He explicitly stated the benefits of public unity: *"Not only does unity preserve individual freedoms, protect national rights from usurpation, and prevent aggressors from violating them, but it also ensures the preservation of all elements of honor, religious and national values, and the independence of the nation. It prevents them from falling into even greater misery than that of the Israelites. This is why the sacred Sharia has emphasized maintaining unity and eliminating the causes of division and discord. One of the explicitly stated wisdoms behind the institution of Friday and congregational prayers—where Muslims gather in worship five times a day*

and become aware of each other's conditions—is precisely to preserve unity, as stated in transmitted reports." (Na'ini, 1999, p. 132) The methods proposed for escaping despotism are not independent and parallel but rather interrelated. "Public awareness" is not entirely separate from "people's unity"; rather, one of the key factors in achieving social unity is the people's knowledge of their rights and the duties of officials in society. That is, people must unite around common principles and rights based on awareness and, under the shadow of unity, demand the realization of their rights from their rulers. Moreover, highlighting the social benefits of unity—especially by explaining these benefits—can serve as motivation for individuals in society to enhance their understanding of their rights, their roles, and their position.

Conclusion

This paper sought to address the crisis of despotism in the Islamic world by drawing on the thought of the late Na'ini. To achieve this, it first outlined the methodology used, which was based on Thomas Spragens' framework. According to this approach, resolving a crisis requires four stages: *observing the crisis, identifying its roots and causes, envisioning a desirable, crisis-free state, and outlining ways to escape the crisis*. It appears that in his book *Tanzih al-Ummah wa Tanzih al-Millah*, the late Na'ini viewed despotism as a crisis. Following Spragens' methodology, the process of overcoming despotism—what Na'ini termed *the remedy for despotism*—can be outlined in four stages:

1) Observing the crisis of despotism: Na'ini personally witnessed this issue in his political and social life.

2) Identifying the roots of despotism: According to Na'ini, the primary causes of despotism are *the ignorance of the people, the misinterpretation of religion, and division among the people*.

3) Envisioning an ideal, despotism-free society: Na'ini initially presents his ideal society as the society of the Infallibles (*Ma'sūmīn*), particularly that of the Prophet and Imam Ali (peace be upon them), where under the governance of Infallible rulers, no oppression or denial of rights occurs. In this society, people have the freedom to pursue their individual and collective rights and goals. However, in the era of occultation (*ghayba*), Na'ini sees *constitutional governance under the supervision of just jurists* as the only suitable alternative to the rule of the Infallibles. He emphasizes the attribute of *justice* in rulers because, to some extent, this trait compensates for the lack of infallibility, which inherently prevents despotism. A religious ruler, equipped with the virtue of justice, must take steps to uphold the material and spiritual rights of the people.

4) Outlining ways to escape despotism: Na'ini proposes a solution for each of the factors that contribute to despotism. Thus, the remedy for public

ignorance is *awareness*, the solution to misinterpretation of religion is *correct interpretation*, and the way out of division is *fostering unity among the people*.

In today's era, Islamic nations need unity and solidarity more than ever to achieve their goals. Certainly, they cannot navigate this complex path alone. The four-stage process for overcoming despotism is now more crucial for the Islamic world than at any other time.

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