



Factors Causing the Development of the Endowment in Safavid Dynasty

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Abstract

The tradition of the endowment is one of the activities having existed in all human societies from past to now. In Iran, this tradition was seen as a belief from ancient civilization. It is developed and flourished in Safavid dynasty so that, in Isfahan (Iran), the endowed estate is found everywhere. The endowment is so important that public, rich people and imperial family participated in this tradition and endowed their properties. This study has aimed to answer this question: what reasons and factors developed the endowment and what is the role of endowment in Safavid time? To do so, library and descriptive-analytic methods were used in this study.

Keywords: *Endowment; Safavid; Endowment Letter; Culture; Civilization*

Introduction

Endowment is the evidence of charity which plays an important role in improving individual and social life in Islamic society. This good tradition which has been inherited by Islamic prophet and Imams (p.b.u.h) has had considerable effects on the culture, civilization, and development in different domains of Islamic societies so that it has revealed different aspects of individual and social life of humans such as religious, social and economic cultures. Therefore, its most important outcomes are to prevent wealth aggregation in a society, create suitable condition to improve the divine value. The endowment is the Islamic prominence and the effectively religious means to compensate the material and spiritual needs and benevolent benefactors following their predecessors left their properties in form of charity, alms, cooperation, enduring good deeds) which are the origins of different services of science, culture, art, welfare, health,... in a society. Many medical clinics, schools, orphanage, scientific institutions and public benefits around the worlds, especially in Iran, have been established through endowment. It is well-known in all divine religions and Islamic religion.

Endowment in Vocabulary and Idiom

The endowment in the dictionary means the maintenance, entailment, and granting something to someone. In other words, the property remains, but its benefit is transferred so that people benefit from it. In idiom, it is defined as entailing the property in which the ownership is transferred from owner to God (Dehkhoda dictionary, endowment word, Amid dictionary, p. 1100).

Background of the Endowment

The endowment is known to have a long history and date back to pre-Islamic time. Some of historians have attributed it to Zoroastrianism in terms of evidences and reasons (Bibliography of endowment, p.107).

But, after Islam, the endowment has become common and conventional among Muslims in the era of the holy prophet, because the holy prophet has endowed properties (Daim al-Islam. Ibn Ḥayyūn. Vol 2. p 341).

For example, the holy prophet has endowed a land to be used by a traveler who does not have enough money during his journey (Ibn-e-Sabeel) (endowment and its social-economic effect, Salimifar.p.55). Also, Jabir ibn Abdollah Ansari has quoted that all the companions with financial capability endowed properties (Awali al-Laali. Ibn Abu-Jomhoor. p.261). Among Imams, Imam Ali (p.b.u.h) has endowed the greatest properties (endowment and its social and economic effects. Salimifar. p.59).

In his book, Ibn Shahr Ashub Mazandarani writes: “ Imam Ali(p.b.u.h), in his life, has built more than hundred wells and aqueducts in Yanbu region and endowed Hajjis¹ with them and constructed masques in Madina, Miqat, Kufa, Basara in Iraq and endowed it(Manaqib Ale Abi Talib., Ibn Shar Ashub. Vol 2. P.123).

Therefore, the endowment so developed among Muslims that an institution was established to administrate it in Umayyad dynasty. Thereafter, a government was responsible for controlling and administrating the endowment office (the endowment and its social and economic effects. pp. 69-70).

Endowment in the Quran

The Quran is the divine book and guide for human. Human is the creature who hates annihilation. The death, in fact, is the means to transfer human to another world for eternal life. Human history shows that even unbelievers do not consider themselves as mortal. Accordingly, human likes to memorize his name in this earthy world. However, one of the greatest works and the best way to memorize one's name, in Islamic culture, is to donate something to charity, especially endowment (in the Quranic word, abnegation,... which people are invited to do).

There is no verse in the Quran in which the endowment word is definitely mentioned. But, there are words in some verses that are rectified with this good tradition, because the endowment is one of the best charity and beneficence and is the only continuing charity which is permanent and its reward will be continue after the death of a benefactor and will remain eternal.

The following verses are among those considered as the evidences of the endowment:

¹ Muslims Who Returned from The Kaaba Pilgrimage

“Do they not know that it is Allāh who accepts repentance from His servants and receives charities and that it is Allāh who is the Accepting of Repentance” (9:104).

“Wealth and children are [but] adornment of the worldly life. But the enduring good deeds are better to your Lord for reward and better for [one's] hope” (18:46).

“And Allāh increases those who were guided, in guidance, and the enduring good deeds are better to your Lord [825] for reward and better for recourse”(19:76).

Also, there are other Quranic verses related to the endowment and its evidences including Hadid :7, Tawbah:98 , Saba:39, Baqarah: 261, Shura: 23, Taghabun : 17, Kahf:30, Noor: 33, Anbiya: 73 , Insan: 9, Hajj: 32 , Maedah : 2 , Al-Imran: 57, Al-Qasas: 77, Nahl:90.

Endowment in Traditions

In their life, The Islamic prophet and Imams sought to benefit and favor other people and Muslims, taught the good tradition of the endowment to others and encouraged them to endow due to foresight and benefits of Muslims.

The Islamic prophet said :” one who excavates a well to supply water and endows Muslims with it, everyone who uses the water for wuḍū² and prayer , the reward will be given to the excavator. When a person, an animal, a beast and bird use this well, the excavator will receive reward which is equal to release thousand slaves and he will intercede with people to the number of stars in the sky” (Thawāb al-a‘māl, Shaykh Saduq. P.291).

Imam Sadiq³ said:” there are six things from which a believer will benefit after his/her death: 1. the righteous child who asks salvation and forgiveness for a father, 2. the Quran owned by him/her and used by other people, 3. the water well which is excavated by him/her, 4. a tree which is planted by him/her ,5. Water well which is endowed by him/her ,6. A good way and behavior which is left by him/her and followed by others”(Al-Khisal , Shaykh Saduq, vol.1 , p.323. Islamic publishing center).

The holy prophet said:” when a person dies, his/her record of deeds is closed unless there are three things: continuing charity (Sadaqatul-Jariyyah), the science from which others benefit, righteous child who prays for him/her”(Bihar al-Anwar. Vol2. P.22).

Imam Sadiq said:” there are three things whose reward continues after death: the charity which person gives during his/her life will be continue until the resurrection, the charity which is endowed and is not inherited, tradition which is established and is followed during one’s life and after one’s death, and the righteous child who asks for forgiveness for him/her(Bihar al-Anwar. Vol.6.p.293).

When Imam Ali (p.b.u.h) endowed a property for the sake of God, he wrote it in endowment letter as follows :” I endow this property thereby I make secure against the hellfire and the hellfire becomes far from me”(Tafsir-e- Safi. Vol.2. p.104).

Mehran ibn Mohammad narrated: “ I heard that Imam Sadiq(p.b.u.h) said that people mourned for him in seven years (in Hajj days) and he endowed some property for each year, which is spent for the mourning”(Wasa’il al-Shia , Al-Hurr al-Amili. Vol.19. p. 174).

According to these traditions and other traditions, the endowment is interpreted as continuing charity, because it continues and is permanent. In other words, the endowment should be forever not temporary (Sharay’a. Allameh Helli.p.448).

² Is The Islamic Procedure for Cleansing Parts of the Body, A Type of Ritual Purification, or Ablution?

³ The 6th Imam of Shia

Reasons of Development of the Endowment in Safavid Dynasty

Safavid dynasty was in power from 1501 to 1922. There were many factors affecting the development of the endowment. These factors were related to each other so that they led to its development. In fact, the endowment was formed as a immaterial spirit in the society and one of its aspects was to facilitate Safavid government to reach their purposes. Thus, Safavid was the only dynasty which depended on this good tradition. Most of endowed properties related to the government were recorded in this period, which were the reason to develop the endowment including:

1. The Presence of Religious Scholars in Safavid Court

The presence of religious scholars, especially those from Jabal Amel region in governmental system was a positive aspect of administrating the country and Safavid monarchs allowed them to interfere in administrating the country. The presence of thoughtful religious scholars in governmental positions led to development and growth of the country and the endowment can be among these factors because presence of religious scholars in the main governmental positions changed the kind and use of endowed properties. These religious scholars encouraged the imperial family, state and martial grandee, even the rich and germane to imperial family, to endow properties so that this tradition became a culture and competition. Therefore, if we look at Isfahan province (Iran), we find the endowment everywhere (endowment of immortal heritage, Minorsky, No:85, p. 58). From thousand years ago to Safavid time, these religious scholars could guide religious thought of people and taught them a religious spirit and decrees to preserve the religion. They were the most effective people who considerably changed the Islamic society when entering the governmental domains because their most important role was to clarify Islam and guide people. They were in a position, on the one hand, to enjoin upon people what is right and prohibit them from what is wrong and make lawful for them what is good and forbid them from what is evil (7:157) and to relieve them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them (7:157), on the other hand. Consequently, they clarified the position of Shiite religion by meticulously explaining and implementing religious commandments including the endowment in Safavid time. According to these analysis, the endowment has paved the way to fulfil the purposes of religion and religious Sharia of Islam. If the religion is considered as a plan to promote human aspects and establish the responsible society, the endowment is part of this plan to reach the purposes (the endowment, eternal saving. Ayatollahi, Nashr-e-Mafakher-e-Tehran, pp. 79-81).

2. Management of Endowments

Another reason of developing the endowment in Safavid time was management of endowments. Thus, in this time, independent organization to control and administer the endowment office was under control of those with religious and ministerial position. This person was called the minster of endowment. By controlling the endowments, this minster attempted to reduce the excessive costs and expenditures, to control its use and effect on the society and to fulfil the purpose of benefactor (Imperial conquests, Amin Heravi, second book, p.1). For example, in Tazkera-al-mulook, it has been written about the quality of administering the endowment affairs: “ the ministry job is to determine the Sharia decrees, managers of the endowment, trustees and servants of holy shrines, schools, mosques, and ministers of endowment offices “ (Tazkera-al-Mulook, chapter 2. Section 1).

3. Religious Instructions and Teachings

Religious instructions are another factor of developing the endowment. When Islam was established in Arabia, the holy prophet as a good model in personal, social and political aspects and Imams were the first benefactors who inherited this divine tradition. The companions, the successors, and benefactors in other periods performed this good tradition due to divine reward and obedience to the prophet and Imams so that they benefited from its blessing to remove the problems of Islamic society and help the poor people. Thus, these religious instructions based on Quranic verses and hadiths

led people to intend the commandment which was forgotten and improved in Safavid time because Safavid family following religious scholars propagated the culture of the endowment among people so that it did not related to the rich people and other people participated in this good tradition on the basis of their financial condition. For example, in Isfahan, Kashan, Yazd (Iran), imperial family, even public, granted endowed properties to places such as masques, schools, caravansaries (history of endowment of Isfahan, Abdolhussein Sepanta. p.399). In other words, it should be said that the endowment is a good tradition whose effective evidences are entrepreneur of a society because the donations of benefactors to establish and use schools in underprivileged regions and charitable hospitals were done through endowment centers and material and immaterial support of the poor people is the clear evidences of charitable activities in Islamic countries and governments. In Safavid time, this good tradition was done by the different people of the society (from governmental monarchs to public and commonalty(encyclopedia, Ayatollah Bojnordi. Pp. 411-413).

4. Exemption from Tax

Another factor of developing the endowment is exemption from tax in Safavid time. When the endowment significantly developed in Safavid time, governmental monarchs performed different plans including exemption from tax to encourage people to do this good tradition because taxes paid by different people, by this plan, caused properties to be in governmental treasury (sometimes there was no property). Therefore, the government borrowed these endowment centers and solve the problem of the country and gradually repaid the property to the centers. The endowment culture and exemption from tax, on the one hand, caused people to be comfort and Safavid not to have any problem in economy and governmental costs, on the other hand. In other words, it was considered as bilateral use. Thus, in some period of their administration, endowed estates were exempted from tax. For example, in a document obtained in 1541, it has been written:” following the decree of exemption from tax for endowed properties of estates of Hazrat Masumeh holy shrine , trustees or those have duties in holy shrines were exempted from tax”(Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation. John Foran. p.128. Resa cultural service institution). For example, it can be said that Tahmasp ,ruler, was the first one who issued the governmental decrees of exempting endowed estates from tax (Kholas al-Tavarikh. Pp. 1017-19).

5. Political and Economic Stability

Another factor caused the development of the endowment is the political and economic stability which was seen during Safavid dynasty because economic business of people and fullness of governmental treasury from business of people and commercial relation with some countries caused Safavid monarchs to strengthen the belief principles of the Shiite religion and economic bases of the government(Tarikh-i. Jahanara. Pp.107-111). However, long-time stability caused political stability and economic growth of this government and paved the way for development the endowment. According to this political and economic stability from relative welfare, opportunities for cultural development such as art and architecture occurred. Due to recognizing the Shiite religion as the religion of the government, the endowments were done to develop and propagate the Shiite religion, strengthen and develop this religion and Safavid government.

6. Acquisition of Divine Reward

It is another factor of developing the endowment. Human was not created purposeless and will die one day. Thus, if those believing in the grave and the resurrection day and observing religious believes try to leave charities from which they benefit in that world, the endowment of the properties is the best charity. Therefore, they act on the basis of evidences of some Quranic verses including :” Wealth and children are [but] adornment of the worldly life .But the enduring good deeds are better to your Lord[792] for reward and better for [one's] hope”(18:46). Accordingly, rich and charitable people left continuing charity for that world (Jawaher- al –Akhbar. Vol.1, p. 126). However, there are different ways to reach divine reward, one of which is the endowment. For instance, people, in past, were not able to build a bathroom in their house thus benefactors built public bathroom to obtain divine reward and nearness to God (endowment letter of Rabe Rashidi. Fazlollah Hamedani. P 24)

7. Performance of Monarchs and Modeling on Them

This is another factor causing the development of the endowment. Monarchs in Safavid time had a commitment on their religion and people by using the instructions of religious scholars under two titles (duty and responsibility). Imam Ali (p.b.u.h) considered the Islamic commandments as the duty of human and said: "direct toward God by performing your divine duties which are mentioned for you" (Nahj al-Balagha. P. 347). Therefore, they following the religious scholars knew divine right as obligatory (like other divine duties) by virtue of divine commandment. Thus, monarchs performed the endowment to improve divine rites and spent their properties in this way. For example, Ismail II as Islamic monarch in Iran was pioneer in the endowment. Additional to performing religious and Islamic principles, he tried to be a pattern for other people (Tarikh e Soltani. Hussein Astarabadi. Vol 1. p.24 and left many endowed properties in Isfahan (Qesaso al-Khaqani, Shamlo. Vol 1. P.186). Of course, authors believe that this tradition in Safavid time caused the development of Islamic civilization because effects of this tradition established by religious scholars led structure and performance of the endowment to affect the performance of monarchs and to have direct influence on scientific, educational, medical, economic and cultural organizations. As a result, schools, mosques, clinics, hospitals, libraries, caravansaries, bathhouses, excavation of wells and channels, bridge building are evident examples of that time, indicating that Safavid monarchs left them by obeying their predecessors (Safavid from emergence to decline. Rasool Jafarian. Cultural center. P. 119).

8. Reward to Special People

It is one of the factors developing the endowment. In different verses of the Quran, God has mentioned reward and punishment with different titles and words. But, what is focused in this discussion is the reward which is given to believers by God due to their belief and good and charitable acts. So, it is agreed that if a person does good and charitable acts, he/she is deserving of reward. This reward was, in Safavid time, given to special people by monarchs in different ways. For example, the great religious scholar (Ezodin Abdollah ibn Hussein Shoshtari) who lived in Mashahd (Iran) immigrated to Isfahan by reward given by Abbas the Great to work for the government; as a result, Abbas the Great built a school with special characteristics and named it Ezodin and appointed him as trustee of the school (**Tarikh-e Alamaray-e Abbasi. Vol 2, p. 86**).

9. Narcissism

It is another factor developing the endowment in Safavid time. It is the religious teaching and scientific support of acceptance and act which, in Islam, is called self-love because the love, perfection and tendency to bliss and happiness cause the acceptance and obedience to religious commandments. Now, if a person does not love him/herself, he/she does not think to his/her goodness and is not secure against loss and evils. Thus God, in the Quran, teaches us to want goodness during prayer for this world and that word as follows: "Our Lord, give us in this world [that which is] good and in the Hereafter [that which is] good and protect us from the punishment of the Fire." (2:201). However, it can be said that the endowment is a goodness that God gives human to leave, because people tried to immortalize their name by construction of a building and performing charitable act such as building bridge and school. For example, Imam Werdibi-Beg (the benefactor of Imamyeh school in Shiraz (Iran) wrote in the endowment letter: "in short-time, a school with rooms and high arches and other needed things has been built" (quarterly of transactions of Islamic history. No. 15, p. 48). In other words, by looking at Safavid time when was the flourishing of the endowment, we become familiar with material and immaterial effects of the endowment in Islamic and non-Islamic countries. This fact shows that the endowment is inherent, and the Islamic culture is stemmed from self-love and humanism, is found in nature of human and introduces problems of a society so that people with their properties vulnerably take action to satisfy people's needs. In the Quran, it is mentioned: "Never will you attain the good [reward] [138] until you spend [in the way of Allāh] from that which you love." (3:92).

10. Humanism

It is another factor developing the endowment among people in Safavid time. Humanism is defined as loving people. In other words, every human having human value is deserving of being loved. Thus, the foundation of all divine religions are based on love and affection. This commandment valuing this moral virtue considers all humans as brothers and sisters with each other because it knows that all humans are equal and the criterion of excellency is divine piety, as mentioned in the Quran: “he most noble of you in the sight of Allāh is the most righteous of you” (49: 13). Therefore, humanism creates affinity with each other. Imam Hassan Asgari⁴ said that “serving people and benefiting them along with believing God are the criteria of human’s virtue:” there are two things that nothing is superior to them: believing in God and benefiting people” (Tuhaf al-Uqul. Vol 2. P.489). However, in Safavid time, those believing in religious principles had this attribute and performed public-benefit acts such as endowment. These people performed acts benefiting all people. Therefore, the endowment is considered as the continuing charity used by next generation. According to endowment letters in Safavid time, the endowed properties such as public drinking place, caravansaries, reservoir, ... built by benefactors were found abundantly in that period (*Travelogue of Tavernier. Jean Baptist. P 38*).

11. Attention to Social and Political Role and Divine Values of The Endowment

It is another factor causing the development of the endowment. It has an important role in causing endowed properties in Safavid time. Benefactors, in this period, consisting of rich people of the society performed public – benefit acts in social, cultural and welfare fields in terms of their wealth and the effect of religious teachings that all of their wealth is the blessing of God. They believed that if God has the merciful and compassionate attributes, they can have these attributes. They were pioneers in this charitable work and helped the poor people by endowing properties and estates such as mosques, bathhouses, bridges... so that they reduced the life problems and difficulties of the poor people. They played an important role in their time by spending their properties in social, cultural and religious issues and divine values. In social dimension, these endowments have many effects and advantages for the poor people. By looking at Safavid time, we saw many buildings such as mosques, schools, clinics which were easily used by the poor people (research quarterly of Islamic history. No 25. p. 101). In addition, it is effective in political dimension. For example, the opponents of Shiite religion such as Salafi prevent this religion by their nonsense thoughts and ungenerous attacks. To revive and improve this culture of Imams, there must be property to be used in illumination and support of this religion.

Also, divine values and institutionalization of rites in religious culture such as building a mosque, school, holding special ceremonies such as *Tasu’a* and Ashura⁵ are developed in Islamic society. Thus, to improve this issue, the endowment is the best and effective option done by benefactors.

However, religious ceremonies and mourning in Safavid time are due to endowments. For example, in the endowment letter of one endowed estate, it has been written that the yearly income was spent on religious ceremonies including: “in days and nights of the first ten days of Muharram and Arbāeen day and night... And the income from endowed properties was allocated to it...” (Research quarterly of Islamic history. 4th year. No: 15. P. 48).

⁴ The 11th Imam Of Shia

⁵ The Ninth and Tenth of Muharram. *Tasu’a* Is Preparation For War; And Husayn Ibn Ali and His Companions Were Besieged By The Enemy (As Part Of The Battle Of Karbala). Ashura Marks the Day on Which the Battle of Karbala Took Place, Resulting in the Martyrdom of Husayn Ibn Ali, The Grandson of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad and a Member of the Household of Muhammad

Conclusion

Therefore, after establishment of their government, Safavid government propagated Shiite culture in Iran to revive divine rites, developed the Shiite thought and protected divine rites by long time plans and different endowments and improved the endowment tradition. By developing and using this good act, they institutionalized divine culture and beliefs of 12 Imams so that their name has not yet been forgotten after several centuries and immaterial and material effects of these endowed properties are memorable.

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