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Abstract

The term charisma and its derivatives, which have lately been utilized by political scientists, psychologists, organizational theorists, etc., tamed the original conception of charisma advanced by Max Weber and, in the process, diluted its richness and distinctiveness. In the present study, an attempt is made to bring together all that Weber himself wrote on the subject and systemize that material with the help of writings of modern Sociologists and tries to return to Weber's original concept of charisma.

Although Weber's original ideas were derived from his studies of the prophetic and messianic traditions, no serious attempt has been made to test the applicability of the charismatic typology in the Islamic context. Surprising as it may seem most students of charismatic authority have been unaware of the great wealth of materials found in Islamic history that can profitably lend itself to Weberian analysis. The present study will examine one of the influential personalities in Islamic history, The founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his role in the Iranian Revolution (1979).

Keywords

Charisma, Charismatic Leadership, Revolution, Max Weber, Ayatollah Khomeini, Iranian Revolution.

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Introduction

Charismatic leadership has its roots in the writings of Max Weber (Conger and Kanungo, 1994). The word charisma is derived from the Greek word, *charismata*, meaning “the gift of grace,” or “gifts presented by the gods”. Max Weber adapted the term charisma from the vocabulary of early Christianity, it is used in the two letters of St. Paul – Romans, Chapter 12 and 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12 – in the Christian Bible to describe the Holy Spirit. Max Weber adapted the term charisma to denote one of three types of authority in his classic classification of authority on the basis of claims to legitimacy. He distinguished among (i) traditional authority, whose claim is based on “an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions,” (ii) rational or legal authority, grounded on the belief in the legality of rules and in the right of those holding authoritative positions by virtue of those rules to issue commands, and (iii) charismatic or personal authority, resting on “devotion to the specific sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative pattern or order revealed by him” (Max Weber, 1947).

Max Weber suggested that charisma is a leadership trait that sets one individual apart from others. Further, a charismatic leader is endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities (Max Weber, 1964).

Of these types, it must be emphasized that they are “ideal types” or abstractions and not empirical realities. None of these types of authority is pure and in the empirical situation, they exist as mixed categories. That is to say, there is no purely rational, traditional, or charismatic authority, although it is possible to label a given authority system as predominantly rational, traditional or charismatic (T.K. Oommen, 1972).

Concept of Charisma

Weber defines “charisma” as “*a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader (Weber, 1964, p.358).*”

Weber uses “charisma” in a value-neutral manner. Sociologically we must abstain from value judgments, and treat all leaders on the same level as the men who, according to conventional judgments, are the greatest heroes, prophets and saviors. As individuals, we can commend the motives of those who wish to distinguish on moral or esthetic grounds between men whose mission leads to Heaven and men

whose mission leads to Hell. But as social scientists, we must recognize that the empirical or earthly manifestation of inspired and inspiring leadership is one and the same whether in the service of good or evil (Willner&Willner, 1965).

We therefore can redefine charisma without departing from Weber's intrinsic intention as "a leader's capacity to elicit from a following *deference, devotion, and awe* toward himself as the source of authority. A leader who can have this effect upon a group is charismatic for that group." An analysis of how leaders achieve such an effect, of the means by which and the conditions under which this kind of loyalty is generated and maintained, might give us a better intellectual grasp of charismatic leadership.

Weber used charisma in at least three senses:

- i. In the classic Weberian sense of the supernatural endowment of the leader. The leader has a divine gift that he demonstrates to his followers through miracles, signs or proofs. The obedience of the disciples is contingent upon their belief in the powers of the leader and the latter may lose his 'gift', and with it his following.
- ii. Charisma is used by Weber and others to refer to a sacred or awe-filled property of groups, roles or objects.
- iii. Charisma is used in the popular (and secular) sense to refer to the personal qualities of a leader. The leader is a 'charismatic personality' who attracts a following on the basis of his personal attributes, as opposed to a divine gift. Weber himself uses charisma in this sense in describing charismatic party leaders. In this modern usage charisma is thus secularized as the extraordinary, but not supernatural, talents of the 'magnetic' political personality.

While elements of charismatic authority may be present in all forms of leadership, the predominantly charismatic leader is distinguished from other leaders by his capacity to inspire and sustain loyalty and devotion to him personally, apart from his office or status. He is regarded as possessing supernatural or extraordinary powers given to few to have. Whether in military prowess, religious zeal, therapeutic skill, heroism, or in some other dimension (Willnerand Willner, 1965). Charismatic leader is imbued with a sense of mission, and felt as divinely inspired, which he communicates to their followers. He lives not like other men. Nor does he lead in expected ways by recognized rules. He breaks precedents and creates new ones and so is revolutionary. He seems to flourish in times of disturbance and distress. He emphasizes that he and his followers constitute a congregation (*Gemeinde*); he has no officials assisting him, but rather disciples or confidants, who have no career or

qualifications in the bureaucratic sense and no privileges. Rather they are personally called by their leader based on his preemptory judgment of their own charismatic gifts; they may be as summarily dismissed when he judges that they have failed his trust in them (Max Weber, 1964).

Trice and Beyer (1986) summarized Weber's theory as including five elements: (1) an extraordinarily gifted person, (2) a social crisis or situation of desperation, (3) a set of ideas providing a radical solution to the crisis, (4) a set of followers who are attracted to the exceptional person and come to believe that he or she is directly linked to transcendent powers, and (5) the validation of that person's extraordinary gifts and transcendence by repeated successes. They viewed charisma as a sociological phenomenon that emerged from the interaction of all of these elements, and argued that all of them must be present to some degree for charisma to occur.

The term charisma and its derivatives, introduced into sociology by Max Weber, in his original formulation of "Economy and Society" at the beginning of the 20th century, has lately been utilized by political scientists, psychologists, organizational theorists etc., tamed the original conception of charisma advanced by Weber and, in the process, diluted its richness and distinctiveness. That is why many sociologists argue for a return to Weber's original concept of charisma (Beyer, 1999).

Charisma, Revolution and Social Change

Charisma is crucial to Weber's system of analysis as the basis for the explanation of the social change. Weber's other types of authority (rational-legal and traditional) are stable systems within which it is conceivable that change will take place only at the micro level. The problem for Weber was to account for large-scale (macro level) social change and the concept of charisma provided what Bendix calls "a sociology of innovation" (Reinhard Bendix, 1960). Though a sociology of change was necessary for Weber, it would appear that he was not at ease with it. Not only are two of his three patterns of domination concerned with stable systems but even his discussion of charisma is heavily oriented toward its stabilization and routinization. Despite this orientation, it is obvious from a reading of his work that the problem of change continually concerned Weber. Yet the difficulties in working with his approach to the study of social change become apparent when one examines his writings on charisma in some detail.

Weber stresses in his treatment of charisma is its innovative and even revolutionary character. Charisma, he says, is alien to the world of everyday routine; it calls for new ways of life and thought. Whatever the particular social setting

(religion, politics, and so forth), charismatic leadership rejects old rules and issues a demand for change. It preaches or creates new obligations. It addresses itself to followers or potential followers in the spirit of the saying: "It is written..., but I say unto you..." In contrast and opposition to bureaucratic authority, which respects rational rules, and to traditional authority, which is bound to precedents handed down from the past, charismatic authority, within the sphere of its claims, "repudiates the past, and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force"(Max Weber, 1964).

According to Mohsen Milani (1988), one of the foremost scholars of the Iranian revolution, "Today few other words in the lexicon of social sciences are more ubiquitously and loosely used than the term 'revolution, a reflection of the preparadigmatic stage of the study of revolution". In order to understand the concept of the revolution some of the main definitions are as under:

Theda Skocpol (1979) regards revolution as, "a rapid, basic transformation of a society's state and class structures... accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below. Social revolutions are set apart from other sorts of conflicts and transformation processes above all by the combination of two coincidences ... societal structural change with class upheaval, and the coincidence of political with social transformation."

For Samuel Huntington (1968), revolution is, "a rapid, fundamental and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership and government activity and policies. Revolutions are thus to be distinguished from insurrections, rebellions, revolts, coups, and wars of independence."

According to Zimmerman (1983), "a revolution is the successful overthrow of the prevailing elite(s) by a new elite(s) who after having taken over power (which usually involves the use of considerable violence and the mobilization of masses) fundamentally change the social structure and therewith also the structure of authority."

To Weber, charisma was a revolutionary force, one of the most important revolutionary forces in the social world. Whereas traditional as well as rational authority clearly is inherently conservative, the rise of charismatic leaders may well pose a threat to that system and lead to a dramatic change in the system (Ritzer, 2000).

It is generally acknowledged that the contemporary revival of Weber's concept of charismatic authority was prompted by its utility in explaining the revolutionary movements of the first half of the twentieth century. The more recent applications of the concept to the study of leadership in the emerging non-Western states, constituted yet another revival, testifying to the analytical power of Weber's conceptual scheme. In the recent past, Weber's conceptual scheme has been applied

to most of the leaders of the charismatic movements like Benito Mussolini's role in Italian history. More challenging are the assertions about the significance of Hitler's charismatic appeal in explaining the Nazi era in Germany. A common description emphasizes his "magnetic" impact on immediate cohorts, while others concentrate on his speaking style, with its mythological evocations, as a clue to his mass mobilizing potential. Also, the most publicized example is V. I. Lenin, his political ideas, his fanatical devotion to his purpose, and his ability to engender either avid devotion or antagonism from colleagues. The charismatic label was especially popular in descriptions of those who led upsurges against colonial rule in the post-World War II era - Kwame Nkrumah, Gamal Abdel Nasser etc. The charismatic formula has been commonly used in analyzing the popular appeal and public attention of several leaders. Most notable are the discussions about Martin Luther King, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Mohandas K. Gandhi.

Although Weber's original ideas were derived from his studies of the prophetic and messianic traditions, no serious attempt was made to test the applicability of the charismatic typology in the Islamic context. Surprising as it may seem most students of charismatic authority have been unaware of the great wealth of materials found in Islamic history that can profitably lend itself to Weberian analysis. The present study will examine one of the influential personalities in Islamic history, The founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his role in the Iranian Revolution (1979).

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989)

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's prophetic mein, the manner of his rise to power, the overwhelming commemoration of his death, and the edifice of a shrine which was erected over his graveyard leave little doubt that his leadership warrants the attribution, "charismatic." (Ahmad Ashraf, 1990). Ayatollah Khomeini popularly known as "Imam Khomeini", a personality who led the greatest revolution in contemporary history, will always prove to be interesting and instructive for those residing outside Iran.

Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini was born on Wednesday, 24 September 1902 in the small town of Khomein, located near the city of Qom, some sixty miles south of Tehran. His ancestors were descendants of the Imam Mousa al-Kazim, the 7th Imam of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Ayatollah Khomeini's grandfather Seyed Ahmad, settled in Khomein sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century. He was the child of a family with a long tradition of Islamic Scholarship. The father of Ruhollah Khomeini, Seyed Moustafa, had his religious education in Esfahan, Samarra and Najaf. In March 1903, Ruhollah's father was murdered by friends of a man who was sentenced to

death by SeyedMoustafa, when Ruhollah was just 5 months old. He was raised by his mother and aunt until they both died in 1917. Ruhollah started to study the Quran at the age of 6. In 1920 he went to Arak and commenced his study under the leadership of Ayatollah Abdul Karim Haeri-Yazdi. In 1921 he followed the Ayatollah to the city of Qom and studied Islamic law (*sharia*), Jurisprudence (*fiqh*), poetry and philosophy (*Irfan*). Because of his interest in philosophy and mysticism, Khomeini sought the guidance of Mirza Ali Akbar Yazdi, a scholar of philosophy and mysticism. After his death in 1924, Khomeini went on to study philosophy and mysticism with the help of other teachers and Sufi mystics. Ruhollah Khomeini became a lecturer at Najaf and Qom seminaries in political philosophy, Islamic history and ethics. He produced numerous writings on Islamic philosophy, law and ethics. By that time he was a leading scholar in Shi'a Islam. Although he was not known in the political scene at that moment, he was focusing on the importance of Islam in the practical social and political issues of society. In that time, 1942, he wrote the *Kashfal-Asrar* (Revealing of Secrets). This book would play a major role in the coming of the Iranian revolution, because of its detailed interpretation of the Quran concerning practical and social issues of a Muslim society. In 1945, Khomeini became the title of *Hojjat al-Islam*, the high in the rank of Shi'a cleric in Iran under the Ayatollahs.

In 1963 Khomeini became a *Marja-e-taqlid* (source of emulation) the highest position in Shi'ite clergy and thus marked the overt expression of charismatic leadership, also begins the political carrier of Ayatollah Khomeini. In January 1963, the Shah announced the "White Revolution", a six-point program of reform calling for land reform, nationalization of the forests, the sale of state-owned enterprises to private interests, electoral changes to enfranchise women and allowing non-Muslims to hold office, profit-sharing in industry, and a literacy campaign in the nation's schools. Some of these initiatives were regarded as dangerous, Westernizing trends by traditionalists, especially by the powerful and privileged Shi'a scholars. Ayatollah Khomeini summoned a meeting of the other senior *marjas* of Qom and persuaded them to decree a boycott of the referendum on the White Revolution. On 22 January 1963 Khomeini issued a strongly worded declaration denouncing the Shah and his plans. Two days later the Shah took an armored column to Qom, and delivered a speech harshly attacking the scholars as a class.

Khomeini spent more than 14 years in exile, mostly in the holy Shi'a city of Najaf, Iraq. Initially, he was sent to Turkey on 4 November 1964, at that time the King of Turkey had good diplomatic relations with the Shah of Iran. Later in October 1965, he was allowed to move to Najaf, Iraq. After that, he went to Neauphle-le-

Château, suburb of Paris, France on a tourist visa, apparently not seeking political asylum, where he stayed for four months. In the meantime, however, Khomeini was careful not to publicize his ideas for clerical rule outside of his Islamic network of opposition to the Shah which he worked to build and strengthen over the next decade. In Iran, a number of actions of the shah including his repression of opponents began to build opposition to his regime.

Khomeini had refused to return to Iran until the Shah left. On 17 January 1979, the Shah did leave the country ostensibly “on vacation”, never to return. Two weeks later, on Thursday, 1 February 1979, Khomeini returned in triumph to Iran.

Ayatollah Khomeini was the main driving force behind the 1979 Iranian Revolution which saw the overthrow of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran. Following the revolution and a national referendum, Khomeini became the country’s Supreme Leader—a position created in the constitution as the highest-ranking political and religious authority of the nation—until his death. Khomeini was a *Marja-e-taqlid* (“source of emulation”, also known as a Grand Ayatollah) in Twelver Shi’a Islam, but is most famous for his political role.

Iran before 1979 Revolution: The Pahlavi Rule in Iran

The founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, Reza Khan Pahlavi was a commander of the Iranian Cossack division who staged a successful coup on February 21, 1925, and subsequently became the prime Minister, he succeeded a dethroning Shah Ahmad the last king of the Qajar dynasty. Reza Khan became the king of Iran in 1925, Reza Khan’s dream was of a secular state, he perceived religion as retrogressive and the ulama as backward-looking obstacles to progress. He identified national strength with modernization and industrialization. As mentioned earlier than Iran has always remained under the threat of foreign powers, during the World War Second, Germany invaded Russia and Britain and Russia moved into Iran, to grab the control of oil resources in Iran. Reza Shah had tried to develop trade relations with Germany which annoyed Britain and Russia and they forced Reza Shah in 1941 to abdicate in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi then aged twenty, who after his father ruled Iran till 1979, his reign was also to be marked by modernization, centralization and secular nationalism.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi desired to modernize his country Iran and introduced several reforms, Iran was officially converted from a medieval Islamic state to a modern constitutional monarchy, by the granting of the constitution in 1906. The far-reaching program of westernization, modernization and centralization of the administration on which Reza Shah embarked, involved a major upheaval of the traditional social order, and the abolition and modification of many traditional Islamic institutions. Reza Shah

Pahlavi laid the foundation of missionary schools and the modern judiciary system by abolishing the *Maktabas* and gave a big blow to *Shari'a* (Islamic Law). He suppressed political parties, trade unions and the press the *Majlis* was reduced to the status of a rubber stamp. Khomeini was the first Iranian cleric to try to refute the outspoken advocacy of secularism in the 1960s. There was the heavy influence of western countries on Iran, Reza Shah Pahlavi introduced and improved the western ways of life with the help of his cronies. Shah initiated what is known as the "White Revolution" in Iran to bring about radical socio-economic change. Mohammad Reza expanded his army men with the financial aid of the USA, as a result, the military budget rose up in 1961 Iran reached a turning point. There was an economic, social, religious and political crisis resulting from the monarchial rule. People migrated from rural to urban areas, and as a result, unemployment rose and business declined because of the rise in oil prices, it was in less demand inflation rose up. There were extensive demonstrations in Iranian cities in the spring of nineteen hundred sixty-three, under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini; hundreds were killed, Khomeini was arrested then in 1964, he was sent into exile to Iraq, because he most vehemently opposed the extension of westernized, secular state control and foreign influence. Khomeini spent more than 14 years in exile.

Khomeini in exile in Najaf, send messages to the people of Iran through audio tapes and gave a series of lectures on Islamic government which was published as *Hokumat Islmai: Velayat-e-Fiqh*, which argued that monarchy was an illegitimate form of the role and the govt. should be responsible for clergy. The 1960s and '70s saw the growth of reformist movements among both clergy and religious laity under the leadership of Dr. Ali Shariati, a social scientist and reformist and the students of Ayatollah Khomeini who opposed Reza Shah Pahalavi's rule. In 1978 there were riots in Qum following an attack on Khomeini in a government-controlled newspaper. Thereafter a cycle of riots emerged and thousands got killed. By that time a huge movement had built up under the leadership of Khomeini to overthrow Reza Shah Pahlavi's government and finally on 16th January, 1979, Mohammad Reza Shah left Tehran forever.

On February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Tehran in a chartered Air France Boeing 747. The welcoming crowd of several million Iranians was so large he was forced to take a helicopter after the car he was being transported in from the airport was overwhelmed by an enthusiastic welcoming crowd. Khomeini was now not only the undisputed leader of the revolution, but he had also become what some called a "semi-divine" figure, greeted as he descended from his airplane with cries of 'Khomeini, O Imam, we salute you, peace be upon you. 'Crowds were

now known to chant “Islam, Islam, Khomeini, We Will Follow You,” and even “Khomeini for King. Judging by events in the latter half of the twentieth century, it appears that some fundamental changes had occurred both in Iran, and in terms of what role of the Shi’a jurist should play in the political sphere.

As Khomeini’s movement gained momentum soldiers began to defect to his side, and Khomeini declared jihad on soldiers who did not surrender. On 11 February, as the revolt spread and armories were taken over, the military declared neutrality and the Bakhtiar regime collapsed. On 30 March 1979, and 31 March 1979, a referendum to replace the monarchy with the Islamic Republic passed with 98% voting in favor of the replacement. In November 1979, the new constitution of the Islamic Republic was adopted by a national referendum. Khomeini himself became instituted as the Supreme Leader (supreme jurist ruler), and officially became known as the “Leader of the Revolution”.

Ayatollah Khomeini’s incorruptible, uncompromising and sincere character, the manner of his rise to power, the overwhelming welcome by the millions of people on his return to Iran after fifteen years of exile, likewise the commemoration of his death by millions of people and his grave which has been identified as a sacred shrine (*Haram-i-Mutahhar*), has received millions of pilgrims. This mass support necessarily elicits awe, devotion and reverence which provide in Ayatollah Khomeini a charismatic leader.

The attributions of Ayatollah Khomeini’s charisma and his extraordinary personal qualities, and heroic status are strongly rooted in the cultural and historical context of Iranian society. The charismatic appeal of Ayatollah Khomeini has deep roots in the Iranian sense of national identity based on Shi’ism and *Irfan*. Both Shi’ism and *Irfan* had a great influence on Khomeini in developing his leadership and charismatic traits.

Ayatollah Khomeini was endowed with multiple charismatic traits that could easily appeal to the hearts and minds of his followers like the auspicious day of his birth, the orphanhood, the title of *Sayyid*, and the title of the “*Imam*”, the position exclusively reserved in the Iranian Shi’ite community for the twelve infallible Imams.

The charismatic dimension of Ayatollah Khomeini’s leadership rests on the dialectical growth of a unique relationship between him and his followers as Charisma is not just the special qualities of the leader nor the recognition of that leader by a group of his followers. Rather, it is the relationship between the two – leader and followers – influenced by the qualities of the leader and the attitude of the followers. Khomeini possesses exceptional qualities which include a simple way of life, refusal to compromise, austerity, consistency, sincere, transcendental vision and ideology,

an ability to inspire and build confidence, the expression of revolutionary ideals, rhetorical ability, powerful aura and asceticism. The followers also see in Khomeini a charismatic leader which can be seen in their unquestioning acceptance, trust, belief, affection, obedience, and emotional involvement in his mission as Khomeini gave to the masses a sense of personal integrity, collective identity, historical rootedness, and feelings of pride and superiority.

Conclusion

Ayatollah Khomeini was the main driving force behind the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The revolution and Khomeini are two inseparable phenomena. Ayatollah Khomeini with no material resources, without the construction of a political party, and without the support of a single foreign power has established himself as the undisputed leader of a major revolutionary movement that bring the downfall of 2500 years of monarchy and also succeeded in creating a new Islamic order with a new value system, new identity, new social system and to some extent new institutional arrangements, all of which had the purpose of fortifying Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini's charismatic leadership was undoubtedly a major factor in the success of the 1979 revolution in Iran. Therefore, it sustains and demonstrates the validity of the related hypothesis that Ayatollah Khomeini's charismatic leadership was a potent force in the Iranian Revolution and subsequent social change.

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