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Iranian Women and the Civil Rights Movement in Iran: Feminism Interacted

By Majid Mohammadi¹

Abstract

After presenting a compendium of the structural and ideological gender inequalities in the Iranian society, mostly in post-revolutionary era, this article provides basic information and analysis about Iranian feminists in the civil rights movement framework. It also reviews the relationship between Iranian feminism on the one hand and democratization process and demand for vindication of civil rights of all Iranian citizens as the main issues of this movement on the other. This review will be done in three parts: the essence of Iranian feminism in post-revolutionary Iran including a sustained critique of Iranian feminism, the interactions of women activists and other activists in this movement, and the impact of Iranian feminism on the Iranian civil rights movement and vice versa.

Keywords: Iranian feminism, shari`ah, reform movement, civil rights

Introduction

Women have been one of the most important social groups in Iranian civil rights movement between 1996 and 2000. Iranian female university students, intellectuals, journalists and political activists have raised the standards of political activism in Iran. Iranian feminists, religious or non-religious, are the noticeable part of these groups of women who formed a substantial portion of the participants within this movement along with male university students, journalists, intellectuals and political activists.

I consider four areas of change to understand the influence of Iranian feminism on the civil rights movement. These are the roots of indigenised ideologies, the sources of the non-violence strategy of the movement, the origins and goals of the civil rights movement, and the reasons of success and failure stories of Iranian feminism in getting its fair share of power in what reformers achieved in Iranian politics during the reform movement.

I will focus on the participation of women in overlapping social movements, i.e. civil rights and women's movements in Iran to fight against traditional and religious sexism found in the lives of women who are subject to some forms of discrimination, abuse, oppression, or exploitation. I will analyze various aspects of Iranian women's participation in intellectual endeavors, social movements, collective action, and protest acts. This article is to answer five questions: is there really a women's movement? What is common among women's movement activists as perceived by Iranian feminists? How do feminist activists define the civil rights movement? What did women demand in this movement? And what are the achievements of women activists in the framework of the

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civil rights movement? The main idea is to show that the feminist movement has been growing up alongside the civil rights movement.

Historical and Social Background

The Iranian women have traditionally been deprived of many of their basic rights and have suffered from both male centered ideologies and male dominance that treat women as irrational, child-like and immature, and from widespread discriminatory policies that affect their lives from birth to death. Women's fight for their civil, constitutional and human rights have been in the core of women's movement in Iran for about a century, from the early twentieth century¹ to the beginning of twenty first century². During the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iranian women participated in massive numbers in street demonstrations and expedited the victory of the Revolution but there were not gender differences and gender expectations in the participation and expectations of women during this great massive social event.

The Islamic revolutionary utopia, shaped and presented in the 1970s, was not ideologically, strategically, and tactically gendered; gender issues were hidden under the guise of Islamic ideology that was the framework of next regime and no one was talking about it beforehand. There was a mass society and a few male revolutionary leaders. Iranian women were not organized as a gender group and their goals were not different from others. Their participation gave them greater influence and power to the extent that religious leaders were persuaded to legitimize limited female participation in social and political processes in post-revolutionary Iran. This participation was limited to loyalists to the high-ranking clerics.

Despite women's massive political participation, women's lot became much worse since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. The changes in state politics, ideology of the state, party politics, socio-economic status of social groups, value systems, and asset distribution did not work for women. By resort to Islamic *shari'ah* and the Iranian traditions, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran successfully implemented a policy of unequal treatment of Iranian women under the law. From 1976 to 1986, women's employment decreased from 11.1 percent to 6.8 percent. Most of the women in public service sector were fired because of their appearance and femaleness. The legal age of marriage for women dropped from sixteen to nine (puberty age according to Islamic law)³ and the rate of female representation in parliament dropped from seven to 1.5 percent⁴. The period did witness one somewhat positive trend: female primary school enrollment went up to about 50 percent of the enrollees⁵, but the quality of the education dropped under the new educational system. Women's representation in books went down dramatically and when women were portrayed in textbooks, it was only in roles of a homemaker or a teacher⁶. At the university level, women's enrollment also increased, but women were limited in fields they were allowed to study; women were excluded from 69 different fields of studies⁷, mostly in agricultural and engineering majors. Education of Iranian women overseas was conditioned to their marriages while women could and still can get the passport with the permission of their fathers, if not married, and husbands.

Confronting the authoritarian and totalitarian readings of Islam, women could not improve their legal situation. In the first decade after the Revolution, women had no organization to represent their causes and goals. Islamic ideology that was used as an

instrument to delegitimize monarchy was used by ruling clerics to execute *shari'ah* (Islamic canonical law) and revived the authoritarian system, this time, in an Islamic guise. Islamic *shari'ah* that was founded in pristine Islam, shaped by *`ulema* during the golden ages of Islamic civilization, and rigidified during the ages of civilizational decline, became the core of clerics' political agenda as the framework of Islamic revivalism. The execution of Islamic *shari'ah* was totally absent in the Islamic insurgents' statements before the victory of the Islamic revolution.

Even gender-sensitive Islamist women activists who attempted to present a different reading of Islam as a world-view and spiritual realm and Islamic laws as changeable through time could not change the direction of institutionalization of gender inequality⁸. The efforts of gender-sensitive Islamist women have been successful in changing the legal culture entwined with what activist women in different political factions have been fighting against. Iran's clerical and Islamist rulers have always been preoccupied with setting limits on the rights and roles of women and have not neglected any measure and initiative to impose gender discrimination under the rubric of executing *shari'ah* or Islamic law⁹.

The Iranian revolutionary leaders did not want to change the traditional male dominated society; even they did not claimed to. Since the Islamic Revolution, girls from early childhood are discouraged or prevented from venturing into fields and activities that are deemed 'masculine', be it in sport, artwork, recreation or education. The policy of enforced *hejāb* (veil) and sexual segregation is used to limit women's access to the state's scarce education and recreation facilities and cultural compounds and to institutionalize their confinement to the limited career and life opportunities available to them. By setting standards of modest dress for women, the Islamic state places its imprimatur on the principle that women are responsible for the moral behavior of men. Spatial segregation is the logical next step to keep moral order.

The same policy follows them into adulthood and facilitates the objective of turning them into second-order citizens of the society. Women who do not believe in the dominant ideology of the state are in a doubled second-order citizenship, something very similar to the status of black female in the United States. The plethora of discriminatory laws against women has created favorable conditions and a suitable environment for widespread abuses and atrocities practiced against women. Women have no effective recourse to the law in case they are abused, beaten or raped.¹⁰ Women are denied many basic opportunities and access to many positions in the religious, economic, political, cultural, judicial, and military arenas.

Women have always been looked at as second-tier members of the society and constituents, and rarely appreciated in the prevalent political and social structure in contemporary Iran. This means that women are subject to many restrictions. These restrictions were enacted more sharply since the victory of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In this period, women's rights violation does not only occur in the private sphere of family life but also occurs in public more harshly. Some examples are as follows:

- The inability of women to work, divorce¹¹ or travel¹² or leave the house without the permission of their husbands or fathers or brothers;
- Denial of the right to obtain custody of their children from certain ages if divorced;
- Lowering the age of consent for marriage to 9 immediately after the revolution, and increase to 13 years old after two decades of women's struggles;

- Banning abortion except in some emergency situations;
- Segregation of the sexes and gender apartheid stretched to every aspect of public life and separation of all services for men and women such as public buses, sport activities, educational institutions, and even some hospitals, health care and other medical¹³ facilities;
- A very strict and restrictive set of dress codes including enforcement of obligatory veiling (*hejāb*) and requiring all women to wear dark and concealing uniforms;
- Banning female singers' voices to be broadcast from the radio and television and distributed through CDs and audiocassettes;
- Forbidding women employed by the armed forces from receiving military ranks and reducing their employment status to that of office employees¹⁴;
- Considering young girls of nine years of age (not boys) of criminal responsibility (Article 49, Islamic Punishment Law and Amendment 1 of Article 1210, Iranian Civil Law);
- Present laws give men the right to divorce a woman without her consent. But a woman can seek divorce only if her husband is a drug addict or impotent, which is almost always impossible for her to prove;
- Banning women from participating in the high ranking judiciary and administrative officials¹⁵; and above all
- Equating the public role of women with corrupted morality and lack of chastity

In the framework of Iranian civil law, that was mostly in accordance with *shari'ah* after the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, sustained and invigorated after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, women were not legally equal to men. Therefore, although the social situation of men and women in general improved after the Revolution, their legal situation abated and this was worse for women. base of the increasing political schism in post-revolutionary Iranian society and the rise of the feminist movement in the 1990's.

Iranian Feminism

Iranian women have been continuously experiencing systematic disadvantages, structural inequalities and institutionalized injustice in their male-dominated society for more than two millennia, forms of injustice and exclusivism that constrain their opportunities and life prospects. These structural inequalities have their roots in essentialist philosophy and theology, despotism, authoritarian political culture, tribal and patriarchal social system, a special mode of (Asian) agricultural production based on hard work of digging aqueducts in underground irrigation system (*qanat*) by primitive tools¹⁶ and Islamic *shari'ah*. These factors have interwoven together. It has not been merely individuals' sexist or androcentric motivations, prejudices, beliefs or attitudes that have caused lot of troubles for women. Besides, there have been the institutional and societal forms of sexism and androcentrism that have exerted the most powerful effects on women and men's lives in Iranian society.

The institutional and societal forms of sexism and androcentrism in traditional perspective on women are mostly based on essentialism and less on biologism. Human knowledge in Iranian perspective is mostly based on philosophical insights – revised eclectic Greek philosophy - rather than scientific approach. In this viewpoint, “the evident differences between men and women are due to different external and internal,

physical and spiritual, creational, habitual and sentimental aspects [of femininity and masculinity]”.¹⁷ The essentialist and biologist view see men as “tough, powerful, strong, not easily hurt or damaged, firm, stubborn, resolute, unyielding, and having rational mentality and sentiment proportionate to it, and women as fragile, delicate, easily damaged, and having harsh feeling and powerful sentiment and rationality proportionate to it, as opposed to men.”¹⁸ Based on this view, “this difference has been proven in physiology.”¹⁹ Biologism and essentialism in the Islamicized versions are strengthened by resort to the divine creation: “If you think about these characteristics that God has inscribed in men and women and what is expected in creation of world, you will see that a woman has a broad capacity to bear child, deliver, feed and breed the baby.”²⁰

When the Iranian women’s rights were more violated and their bodies were more problematized after the Revolution by resort to these kinds of essentialism and biologism and consequently by execution of every article of *shari’ah*, especially after the beginning of war between Iran and Iraq (1980-88), female activism began to fight against that trend. The social structure of Iranian society in post-revolutionary era was not totally ready for execution of a legal system that belonged to a tribal society thirteen centuries ago. Iranian women’s political participation, Islamic populism and some social justice policies pursued and executed by the revolutionary governments immediately after the Islamic Revolution helped women to make their case.

Iranian feminism came out of secular and religious resistance against clerical authoritarian and later sultanistic regime when it ran out of mobilization power; then new circles of religious intellectuals who had new reading of Islam came to the scene and presented less discriminatory interpretation of Islamic tradition. Iranian feminists, religious or secular, mostly come from academia and intellectual circles. In this situation, gender and feminist studies were elevated to an academic and scholar level and journals and books on women’s issues flourished. Iranian feminist scholars have concentrated on “woman” as a social category and have understood it as a powerless, disadvantaged and controlled phenomenon defined by men. In a global age, the growth of feminist political movement in other nation-states and the presence of Iranian women NGOs in UN conferences on women have given Iranian feminist concerns an increasingly global perspective,²¹ and rarely global leverage and presence. Issues such as women’s human rights and equality and their expected advantages from economic development have raised questions about how institutionalized discriminations and disadvantages should be understood.

Iranian feminists represent the accumulated grievances and unfulfilled demands of Iranian women. Iranian women in the household framework have been powerless to change their condition in life. They are mostly a silent majority. Most Iranian women incarcerated in the walls of their houses accepting their lot in life without visible question; they have no choice. The plight of women’s movement is the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle and upper class, mostly married and employed women with the background of Shi’ite religious belief. Nevertheless, women’s movement in Iran did not begin by housewives whose very condition of being in modern world can create a sense of emptiness, non-existence, and nothingness. Their agenda was not the political concern of masses of men. The masses of women have been concerned about economic survival and ideological discriminations against women. Iranian feminist had to fight in four different fronts, i.e. family, community, civil society and polity. Gender hierarchy in

Iran manifests itself in state institutions and communities different from the degree to which it shows up in the families or civil society institutions.

Feminism for lots of Iranian activist women has been a liberating thought and ideology insofar as it could theoretically and ideologically open doors to other conceivable ways of representing oneself as something else other than identity engraved on individuals by formal ideology and redefining oneself in relation to sex. Feminism was expected to be an emancipatory ideology for some Iranian women who wanted to escape the harshness and discriminations of Islamic ideology. They have been campaigning against wearing obligatory veils, arranged marriage, spousal abuse, domestic violence, gender division of labor, greater rates of unemployment for women, selling Iranian young girls to rich Arab sheikhs by human dealers in the south of the country, female-circumcision rites in some provinces and judicial activism of hardliners relating prosecution of women. But it has not gone far enough to show that the traditional gender scheme falls short of the suitable way to adapt to the necessities of the transitional era of Iranian society. Iranian society have witnessed an ideal structure brought about by the religious revivalism, nationalism, Islamism and anti-imperialism that their definite performances of meaning were non-negotiable given constraints on Iranian life or the structures of the Iranian life-world. These ideologies are still the ideological background of Iranian feminism.

Iranian activist women have endeavored to find a way to contest and put an end to cultural phenomena such as the patriarchal state, covert rape culture, compulsory dressing, sexual segregation, men's superiority in the family, and gender division of labor. They have tried to explain all such concepts and disadvantages by means of gender relations, and to express patterns of causation in gendered socialization and politicization. These ideas can be found in the writings and reports of women who have been working for journals and magazines like *Payām-e Hājar* (Hājar's Message), *Zanān* (Women) Monthly, *Farzāneh* (Learned) Journal and electronic newsletters such as *Bad Jens* (malicious, disreputable, bad hearted)²², *Zanān-e Iran-e Emrooz* (Iranian Women Today)²³, *Tribune-e Feministi-ye Zanān* (Women's Feminist Tribune)²⁴ and *Zanān-e Iran* (Women in Iran)²⁵. They have also used economic relations, power relations and relations of cathexis to argue that those categories and concepts are constructed by social practice arising within these structures. Iranian feminist use of gender category does not merely describe the life-world of Iranian society as a part of a research program, but it also inscribes it as a covering framework for transformation. When they denounce patriarchy, campaign against authoritarian religious and cultural regimes, and engage in dialogue with different groups, they have to present their view about the ideal world and the role of women in that realm.

What makes Iranian feminism different from other feminisms in the region or Western countries are the dominance of a religious state and the Iranian women campaign against Islamic discriminations inflicted on women. Religious state in Iran has generated at least three new areas of discussion (or game in Ortner's view²⁶) that have relevance for questions of gender and have given Iranian feminism special characteristics. One is the area or game of religious authority that we would call religious patriarchy in which the role of father, brother, husband and son are essentially moral; religious roles emerge via this game. Fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, in this game, not only are constructed as disciplined positions within a hierarchy, made responsible to the state as

“heads of household”, but also are constructed as moral and religious positions made responsible to religious authority as “zealots”. They are accorded tremendous power and authority over the subordinates within their household and communities, i.e. over their daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives and even religious sisters.

The second area or game is that of protection of female purity and virginity by religious state. One of the duties of government in the eyes of religious authoritarians is protection of women’s purity that should be reflected on the honor and status of their families, with the price of violation of their privacy and putting women in the prison of house. The state plays the role of the traditional father or brother in this respect. This special part of religious ideology is enforced by systematic and often quite severe control of women’s body, social and especially sexual behavior and their intimate relationships. The religious government enforces virginity of unmarried girls through the religious decree of “improvement of moral virtues and piety and the fight against all forms of vice”²⁷ and organizing a mobilized force - formal and informal - to execute the relevant regulations. It also enforces a very marked subordination of women by resort to *shari’ah* as the justification.

The third one is the new rite of passage for females, i.e. celebration of reaching to nine years old as a mark of adulthood and hence the necessity of veil and observing religious duty for them. Therefore, the mark of adulthood is transferred from rational maturity or marriage to a special age. This celebration is one of the crucial cultural events that are sponsored by the government, and the leader himself usually attends in these ceremonies.

Iranian feminism works across scientific borders and cuts cross the defined lines of traditional disciplinary configurations. It borrows, incorporates, deliberates, and transforms the methodological approaches as well as the concrete subjects and concerns of the disciplines to explain the foundations and consequences of these three new areas of oppression. Iranian feminist works are also attentive to factors such as ethnicity, class, religion²⁸, ideology²⁹ and sexual orientation that configure the lives of different groups of men and women in four layers of societal institutions i.e. family, community, civil society and state. These works cross local, national, regional, and continental boundaries.

There are some fundamental ideas common in the Iranian feminist thoughts; most of the Iranian feminists consciously or unconsciously have these ideas in their mind, whether they speak about the foundations of their thoughts, consciously hide those thoughts in narratives and fictions or unconsciously use those ideas to make their cases. The first common thought is about universality of feminist movement. Gender categories, in their point of view, are universal and timeless and do not belong to Western societies. The only theoretical alternative, other than existing reading of Iranian-Islamic culture, which is presented to Iranian women by the generations of intellectuals, is the Western model. Having this idea in their mind, Iranian feminists have used ideas and categories that are used in women’s movement in other parts of the world, mainly Western societies. Authoritarians and conservatives have always named women’s agenda “imported”, ignoring the roots of women’s demands and needs.

The second common idea is also descriptive but has had great normative ring. Iranian feminists believe that Iranian women are subordinated; they have always been subordinated in family. They are also subordinated in civil society, political society and

polity, although some of the doors of governmental institutions are slightly opening to them.

The category “woman” (*zan*) is defined as opposed to “man” (*mard*). This opposition is the third common idea among the Iranian feminists. Accepting this opposition as contradiction, it will be believed that every demand and need of women is configured as opposed to men’s needs and demand. The gender game is supposed to be a zero-sum game.

Iranian feminism makes these assumptions: 1) Women can be talked about as merely women; 2) Women are oppressed as women. Men come to be superior to women; 3) Women’s situation can be contrasted to men’s; 4) Women/men relations can be compared to oppressor/oppressed relations. Iranian feminists share these assumptions. Therefore, this is the fifth shared idea: gender can be isolated from other elements of identity that bear on one’s social, economic, and political positions like ethnicity or class.

The sixth shared idea is related to what women are supposed to fight for. Iranian feminists mostly believe that a) every woman ought to want to eliminate those kinds of structural inequalities and discriminations against women because treating women as “others”, or “objects”, rather than selves or citizens or even subjects adversely, affects all women; b) the social context of mothering, i.e. economic dependence of mothers to husbands, must be changed.

Iranian feminists, unlike Connell³⁰, do not describe gender as a reductionist process linking divergent social fields to sexual reproduction. They think this description does not adequately account for all the modes of injustice Iranian women experience. They, like Smith³¹, think that biological ground traps gender in the ideology of procreation, construing women in terms of an essential maternal role mandated by culture and nature. A good version of the ideology of procreation and construing women in terms of an essential maternal role can be found in Mottahari’s books on women’s status in Islamic perspective.³² These books and another book written by Ali Shari’ati, *Fātemeh is Fātemeh*³³ were the bibles of Islamists to mobilize women against the monarchy and the West while justifying the social and legal discrimination against women, because they justify those discriminations in a very nice ways. They use the terms “protection,” “ascendance” and “eminence” for all of the spatial limitations, and “instrument of fighting” for veil instead of limitation and inflicting dress code, depriving women from some kinds of jobs and relationship with others, and violation of their rights. They also exalt doing housewives’ works³⁴, mothering and caring role of women to justify keeping them at home and male domination in Islamic texts.

Iranian feminists, following the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Shulamith Firestone³⁵ have described the conditions of women’s liberation in terms that suggest the identification of woman with her body has been the source of their oppression and hence the source of their liberation lies in sundering that connection. In Iranian feminist point of view, different meanings are attached to having certain characteristics, in different places and at different times and by different individuals, and those differences affect enormously the kinds of lives Iranian women lead or experience. Women’s oppression has been linked to the meanings assigned to having a woman’s body by male oppressors.

The main goal of Iranian feminists is women’s liberation. They want to fight till a majority of men, as well as a majority of women, accept the absolute equality of the

sexes, accept sharing of childcare and all other forms of work, accept limitation of sexual behavior out of marriage for men and tolerate other forces other than males who are loyal to formal ideology of the state, as being plain common sense and the ordinary basis of civilized life. Rival schools of thought within Iranian feminism debate the universality of patriarchy, the usefulness of psychoanalysis, the role of religion in transitional periods, the impact of capitalism and the significance of men's sexual violence.

Table 1 Different Female Groups Engaged in Iranian Feminist Movement and Their Characteristics

Active Groups	Female University Students	Intellectual Women	White Collar Women
Analytical Frame-Work(s)	Class Analysis/ State Analysis	Political Pluralism	Functionalism
Main Agenda	Systematic Disadvantages in Work Place and Society	Sexism and Androcentrism, Civil Rights	Social Rights
Gender Defined as	Interrelated Set of Social Structures	Culturally Engineered Meaning	Base for Species Survival
Goals	Social Justice, Equal Share of Power for Women	Vindication of Women's civil and Human Rights	Equal Payment for Equal work, Equal Share of Employment, Equal Legal Position for Women

The main Iranian feminists' argument is about institutionalized inequality and oppression. They think that men's settled ways of thinking have to be disrupted. However, different groups of women have different thoughts, approaches and analytical explanation about their situation and agenda (see Table 1).

There are some flaws in Iranian feminist perspectives and some flaws in studies mostly done and incited by Iranian feminists. Iranian women are quite diverse in their religious beliefs (Muslim including Shi'ite and Sunni and Bahaii with different readings, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Christian, and atheist), their ethnicity (Kurd, Balooch, Turkman, Fars, Armenian, Asyrian, Turk, Lur and Arab), their color (black-white³⁶), ideology (Islamist, liberal, nationalist, populist, pragmatist), and social class. In most studies about Iranian women, they have been put in one monolithic category that takes away their diversity, and feeds prejudices; even legal and academic studies³⁷ do not usually consider this diversity. The process and history of institutionalization of gender are relatively neglected. Historical and social aspects of gender discrimination are not often considered and discussed. The other flaw is neglect of the dilemmas and strategic conflicts in sexual politics that are the foundations of a gender theory. These dilemmas and conflicts are rarely considered in under-funded research and isolated policy-making in the area of gender issues³⁸.

There are groups in Iranian feminist camp that do not welcome men's involvement in this kind of study and activism. This behavior is based on the categorization of "woman" as opposed to "man". There is also almost no public discussion about the strategies of feminist movement; even the literature that women's activists have produced does not reflect strategic thinking on feminist movement. Iranian feminists are so engaged in praxis that do not have enough time or concern about thinking on strategies and policies of the movement. The configuration of feminists' involvement in social activities does not open the doors for further thinking and elaborating the policies and strategies of this movement. There is not even a system and network of information gathering and monitoring the violations of women's rights in Iran.

Iranian feminists have not set forth questions about construction of the forms of inequalities, kinds of identities and subject positions within the framework of cultural, ideological or discursive formation of Iranian society. The interactions between kinship/marriage/sexual/inheritance patterns that are linked together are not mostly taken into account in feminist report of women's situation in Iran. These patterns are associated not only with complex forms of stratification, but also with the foundations of state's legitimacy.

Iranian feminist are paying so much attention to universal dominance of men vis-à-vis women, difference between men and women rather than on relations and networks. They are focused only on the empirical work upon the lives and experiences of women in their research, and have ignored other structures of social asymmetry other than gender³⁹. Studies about masculinity are completely forgotten in the gender studies in Iran and have no role in the literature presented by feminists about the other sex.

There are no systematic analyses of the patterns of women's participation in the civil rights movement of 1997-2000. The main question about participation is why women cannot participate more; what is not discussed are about how they can participate more and what are the main obstacles of women's participation.

Iranian feminists mostly isolate gender from other elements of human identity such as ethnicity and class, along with the parallel attempt to isolate sexism from other forms of oppression such as classism, ideologism, Shi'ism and mono-ethnocentricism. Due to the evident role of ideologized religion in shaping Iranian society after the Islamic Revolution, they do not isolate gender from religion⁴⁰ and are aware of ideologized religion as the most important form of oppression.

In spite of the growth of feminist political movements in Iran and its universalistic approach, this has not given feminists concerns about a global presence. Iran's isolation from other part of the world, including developing and Islamic world, after the Revolution still has its influence on feminist movement to make themselves apart from the world. The government pressure on dissidents not to be in contact with non-Iranians⁴¹ has an important role in this cultural and political isolation. Iranian feminists are not actually engaged in the global discourse about women's rights, although global discourse based on human rights has had enormous effect on their agenda making.

Iranian feminist conceptions of moral, religious and ideological discourse at times justify the exclusion of some people from particular dialogues that run counter to the ideal of free and open discussion. Every group in Iran engages itself to the difficult

question of who may participate in different dialogues and may share the power, and puts limitation on participation in dialogues based on political backgrounds and ideologies.

Although Iranian women writers have a big stake of publishing novels since the Revolution^{42 43}, they have not created suitable language to facilitate the presentation of their thoughts, experiences and feelings to a larger body of audience. The number of novels published by women and the number of copies sold are not comparable to what men have published and circulated. This is also true about the number of movies directed, TV series made or plays brought to the scene by women.

Feminism Interacted

While feminism may seem by definition to be dedicated to dismantling sex oppression and sexual segregation rather than any other form of oppression and segregation, the powerful emergence of Iranian women's movements since 1996 is linked historically and conceptually to civil and constitutional rights activities⁴⁴. Now it is very hard to differentiate feminists and female civil rights activists in the country. Though Iranian feminism shares concerns with other internal liberation movements, i.e. university students and intellectuals, what distinguishes it is its central focus on religious sexism. Iranian civil rights movement activists are a composition of three different circles of activist students, intellectuals and women who all are non-violent political activists and their circles overlap by one another.

During the 1990s, demands for social reform increased and some development from below started taking shape. The attitude of the young generation regarding pre-marital relations and divorce changed; the rate of divorce started to increase from about eight divorces out of 100 marriages in 1988 to 12 divorces out of one hundred marriages in 1996. Increasingly young women were demanding equal decision rights with their husbands in family affairs. In employment, women were still not at the level they were prior to the revolution (13 percent) but got very close at 12 percent. Women made up more than 50 percent of university students, although the authoritarian camp began campaigning for a cap on the percentage of women in the universities⁴⁵. Access to informal media has also had an impact on the attitude of the younger generation. In this period, religious women put a lot of pressure on the government to change some of the women's legal problems in the area of family⁴⁶.

Iranian feminist are actively involved in a social movement; this movement emerged out of a populist mass movement, i.e. the Islamic Revolution that instead of fulfilling their demands made the discriminations and inequalities worse for women. The regime could not close the whole society after the end of Iran-Iraq war and the hibernated demands came out of every corner of the society, even the religious base of the government. This movement was founded on cultural, political and social grievances and puts together people from different class, ethnic, religious and ideological backgrounds who have one thing in common: toleration of others. They all have concerns about dignity of human beings, rule of law, rotation of elites, free flow of information, civil society, and civil, constitutional and human rights. This movement has no leader or a small group of leaders, and when some of the activists are killed or jailed others come to the scene. They do the same job of categorizing and transferring the grievances and demands of majority of the people and organizing the youth and disenfranchised. Women's movement has been a part of the civil rights movement since 1996 because the

latter is a non-violent movement fighting for vindication of Iranians' civil and constitutional rights irrespective of their religion, ethnicity, ideology, class, gender and social status. They both fight against cultural, social and political discriminations. The common ground of these two movements is emphasis on civil society institutions as a way of organizing individuals to pursue their demands in polity.

Women played a central role in years after 1996 in the reform movement that then led to domination of the reformists in the Iranian parliament, municipalities and presidential office. How did Iranian women come to participate in the civil rights movement and identify with its issues and goals since 1996? This participation and identification has five dimensions: the networks of relationships, a kind of division of labor in politics, the amount of energy consumed on the non-governmental organizations that are not supported by any institutions outside Iran, women's pressure for more participation, and the role of ideological and ethnic oppressions on gender oppression. Numerous studies have established the importance of interpersonal networks for successful movement mobilization⁴⁷. These links and ties are mediated through preexisting community institutions and organizations. Universities, independent media and public and private offices are mediators or social locations of interpersonal networks for mobilization of Iranian women in the civil rights movement. Women have a considerable number in these three kinds of institutions: more than 50 percent in university students⁴⁸, about 20-30 percent in independent media (my guess) and about 30 percent in governmental sector.⁴⁹ Women's share of employment was 12 percent in 1996.⁵⁰ Unemployment rate for college-educated women increased from 4.7 percent to 22 percent in the period of 1997-2002. The unemployment rate for the female population was 20 percent in 2001.⁵¹ They function as bridges in work-based, education-based and entertainment/information-based networks.

Activist women have been mostly concentrating on criticizing social policies of the Islamic political regime, while their male counterparts have been concentrating on cultural, political and economic issues and policies. Therefore, the reform movement in its heydays was not trapped in the areas of politics and economy. Activist women have been engaged in NGOs more than men. Iranian women have operated as bridge leaders who through frame bridging, amplification, extension and transformation initiated ties between the civil rights movement and the communities and families, between the public life of the movement and the private spheres of adherents and political constituents, and between pre-figurative strategies aimed at individual identity and consciousness and political strategies aimed at organizational tactics designed to challenge relationship with the state and political parties and organizations. Although there were significant gender differences in the recruitment process of male and female participants in the student organizations and independent media boards and committees, the women's pressure for more participation has led to accepting them in any organization, board and committee, and even in the groups of decision-makers.

During the reform movement, Iranian feminists saw gender as an exclusionary construct that shapes the substance, development, sustenance and outcome of the civil rights movement. As far as Iran's civil rights activists were not dichotomized as leaders or followers, activist women did not have to discuss the leadership issue from a gender perspective. This characteristic postponed the suppression of the movement in the short time; there was no concentrated leadership to be gotten rid of in a short period of time.

The oppression machine of Iranian authoritarians and totalitarians had difficulty with locating a special group of Iranian activists as the hardcore of this movement.

Participation of Iranian feminists in civil rights movement opened some windows to the women's activism in Iran. The pressure of external forces like foreign states or international organizations could not open these windows; only the pressure of internal forces, mostly women could make through the challenges. The internal pressures worked mostly through non-governmental channels. Due to their gender, Iranian women were often channeled away from formal governmental positions and confined to the informal level of leadership. The obstacles in front of civil rights movement have shown Iranian women that ideological and ethnic oppressions are influenced by and influence gender oppression.

Women's activism after the suppression of Marxist and non-religious women's movement in the 1980s and before the beginning of civil rights movement was isolated, unorganized, and mostly dependent to governmental institutions, and had a limited perspective. Women who participated in the civil rights movement felt their power to organize themselves, build their own independent institutions, use their own power to lobby and claim their share in social power. They understood to negotiate based on their resources and power in elections and other political campaigns. They also began to study the foundations of civil society and democracy. The curriculum of women's study has gone further from the family framework of 1980s and extended to polity and civil society. The historicity of gender that is to be explored at all levels of analysis is still ignored in Iranian women studies. Another neglected area is the relation of bodies to the society through social structures, personalities and politics. Comparative studies about similarities and differences between Iranian women's movement and women's movement in societies with the similar social and political situation are in the early stages of development. Causal and structural analysis of institutionalized discriminations and disadvantages is not on the agenda due to day-to-day challenges.

Scholars and intellectuals have begun to criticize Iranian feminism. This can help activist women to engage in public debates about the goals and issues of women's movement. Before the beginning of the civil rights movement, there was a silence about feminist ideology and the movement based on it in mainstream media. Iranian feminism is then criticized by different groups and by resort to different ideas and concerns.

These criticisms are founded on different concerns and subjects. Some of the reformers believed "men are equally oppressed" and excluded from leadership and public initiative by rentier and clientalist state, despotic government, and authoritarian political culture like women. In their point of view, social system based on kinship relationship, long history of "patron-subject" relationship between the state and individuals, politicization of judiciary and judicial activism of the authoritarians, pusillanimous representatives, and troglodyte religious leaders work equally against men and women. They rejected this idea that "men in general are advantaged by current social structure" and think of it as a myth. These reformers saw men and women as subjects constructed by and subject to the cultural and historical discourses within which they must operate. They accept that there are some little gender differences, but they are ignorable compared to other differences based on class, kinship, ideology and power;

The denial of intentional subject and denial of agency that in other societies "misreads and works against the intellectual and political interests of women, minorities,

postcolonial and other subaltern subjects.”⁵² This denial includes men who are not true believers in the Islamic ideology of the Iranian state since the Revolution of 1979. The reformers inside the government in their inner circles criticized Iranian feminists for focusing on issues that are not central for the movement. In their belief, the activist women were concentrating on ideals that cannot be pursued in the preliminary stages of the movement, putting gender discrimination at the center while it is not the main cause of all grievances, and bringing the most challenging ideas to the scene, while the less challenging problems have not been solved.

The feminists’ answer to these criticisms from the male reformers was that every women’s problem in Iranian society is challenging because it has something to do with *shari’ah* and traditional laws; women demand more participation and rights that makes authoritarian government upset; gender discrimination is as important as other kinds of discrimination. They criticized male dominated society that powerful conservatives from opposing factions want to keep it in the same way.

Reformist-led Sixth Parliament, elected in 2000, passed many Iranian feminists’ drafts that were directed to vindicate women’s rights and their status, all of them vetoed by the Guardian Council who represents the interests and concerns of traditionalist and authoritarian clerics. As an example, Iranian feminists hailed a bill giving divorced mothers the same custody rights over boys as girls, passed by the Sixth Parliament. This bill was a small step forward in removing existing discriminations against women. Iranian feminist have been trying to modify discriminatory laws, using the opinions of the more enlightened Islamic scholars. If approved by the Guardian Council, a conservative body that vets legislation, the bill would have granted women custody of both boys and girls until they reach seven (instead of two for boys), in cases the court would decide on which parent has custody. Although some prominent religious scholars gave the bill their support, the Guardian Council rejected it. The council, dominated by orthodox and authoritarian Shi’ite clerics, has in the past vetoed parliament’s more progressive rulings on the grounds they were un-Islamic and unconstitutional. The council appointed by Khamenei added “against the decrees of the leader”, “confronting the routines of appointed bodies” and “directed toward the weakness of the appointed bodies” to the list of reasons for rejecting progressive bills, while these excuses could not legally lead to rejection of a bill. Approval of these kinds of bills could be a great victory for Iranian feminists, if happened. We cannot forget that family law-including child custody-is only a small part of huge problems Iranian women are facing.

New Islamic and secular feminists have joint forces because their shared experience has closed up the gap between religious women who have a plural and democratic reading of Islam and supported the Islamic system in its establishing years, and secular women who opposed it. The ideas of civil society and civil rights for believers and non-believers are mostly methods for vindicating their rights, although authoritarian camp presents these ideas as imported and hence useless or dangerous ones.

The civil rights movement has helped women’s movement to articulate a special political vision that is responsive to political opportunities and perspectives of Iranian society. Institutional, societal and civilizational forms of sexism and androcentrism that have exerted the most powerful effects on women and men’s lives have been reinterpreted in the framework of this political vision.

The Civil Rights Movement Colored by Feminism

Iranian women have had lot of achievements after the beginning of the civil rights movement of the 1990s. Muslim Iranian women from different political factions and with different political agendas are reinterpreting Islamic ideology to offer a female-friendly reading of theology and *shari'ah*. Their discourse has emphasized weaknesses in the male domination ideology. The women's issues gained a new significance and the politicians could no longer ignore them.

Although Islamic *shari'ah* does not explicitly prevent women from being as leader of prayers, women have not traditionally and officially able to follow other women in their prayers. The employment of women as leaders of congregation prayers and the head of other women during prayers held at schools constitutes a major development. Iranian reformists introduce the change in religious practices as a victory for women's movements in Iran where women challenge the traditional male privileges in politics and in the clergy.

These are some of the developments in reform movement colored by feminist ideas and concerns. From a media perspective, hundreds of books about women's and feminist issues are published including radical feminist books and biographies. Before the beginning of the movement, hundreds of books were in the black list of the Ministry of Culture, because the censorship office readers considered those works as corruptive and immoral. The re-interpretation movement has now lot of voices in public sphere. The reformist groups who are questioning *shari'ah* and its compatibility with the everyday life of the Iranians try to present new and different readings of Islam and *shari'ah*.

The Muslims have never criticized practices of historical Islam. Nor any Muslim community has provided a safe environment where such re-thinking and reconstructing of Islamic believes and practices can be experimented. Historically all such movements have either been crushed or resulted in new religions with similar level of intolerance and unadjustability compared to others such as Ismaili and Bahai. Iranian religious intellectuals whose ideas are the ideological hard core of the reform movement, have been re-reading Islamic doctrines and commands by resort to epistemological theories, and their ideas have been expanding even to seminaries and traditional circles of mullahs. The magazines like *Kian* (published by male reformers) and *Zanan* (published by female reformers) have systematically criticized the legal code and formal interpretations of Islam and *shari'ah*. The judiciary closed *Kian* in 2001. *Zanan* writers have always argued that gender equality may be considered as Islamic; in their view, religious literature is misread and misappropriated by misogynist interest oriented male authority.

From a legal perspective, Iran's Expediency Council approved a law to increase the age at which girls can legally get married to 13 from nine and for boys to 15 from 14⁵³. Iran's Expediency Council ruling says girls below the age of 13 and boys younger than 15 need their parents' permission and the approval of a righteous court to marry.

From a political perspective, a total of 297 women were elected to city and some 484 women to rural councils in municipality councils elections held in 1999. In 56 cities, women topped the list of elected councilors in terms of votes received, and in another 58, they came second. All governments before the Khatami administration refused to hold municipality councils elections while the law concerning the election passed in 1980. During the first two years of Khatami administration, nearly 1000 women rose to executive positions or retained their executive posts. Three women were appointed as the

President's advisors, 16 women as advisors to ministers, 105 women as Directors General or Deputy Directors in two thirds of ministries, and one woman has been appointed Vice President and another as the Deputy Minister of Guidance and Islamic Culture. Debate about the absence of women in top-level posts has always been part of the female MPs' agenda.⁵⁴

From an economic perspective, the Iranian cabinet decided that the minimum wage for female state employee would be the same as that for male state employee⁵⁵. Although private sector does not usually follow these policies, this decision will increase the demand of women who work in the private sector for more equality-directed policies⁵⁶.

From a social perspective, the number of women's NGO had a growth of 320 percent between 1997- 2000. In the same period, the number of women's professional training centers increased from 41 to 206.⁵⁷ Women have been successful in changing some of the unfair family laws by lobbying through their few representatives in the parliament. However, the promised equality of the revolutionary era only went so far as the limited perspective and reading of *shari'ah* allowed. In spite of rigid Islamic and ideological dress requirements for women, especially for women related to clerics and high-ranking officials and women in governmental offices, some female reformist MPs refused to be shrouded in *chador* and school girls were given the option of wearing Islamic regime dress in several colors in 2000.

In spite of institutionalized oppression, women's NGOs have been active to change the conditions. Sometimes the official policies on women have wavered where restrictions were located on the fault-lines. Women NGOs' pressure on government has pushed it to re-adjust some discriminatory decisions like abrogation of the pre-revolutionary Family Protection Act. The level of gender discrimination and segregation enforced completely vary with the locale, women's political power in the region and whether women's voice can be heard in those realms of restrictions.⁵⁸

Rarely are Iranian women given credit for their successes in the West including their candidacies in municipality, parliamentary and presidential elections based on their courage in demanding an end to discriminatory treatment in the 1980s and 1990s. During the elections in 1990s, Iranian women voted en masse for candidates with the most liberal views on women, young people and children issues. Discussions about women's participation in party politics and occupying governmental positions as an alternative to mass participation in demonstrations confirming governmental policies came to the scene before the election of the Fifth Parliament (*Majles*). During the national municipal elections in 1998, a considerable number of women, in small villages as well as big cities, stood for election - many successfully. Moreover, like many Middle Eastern countries, women's education levels are rising at a much faster rate than men's. The rate of literacy for women has always been increasing in the 1980s and 1990s.

These developments can be explained in three different ways. Firstly, the reformers needed the vote of women and by responding to --and rarely fulfilling their demands--they actually increased the vote to reformers. Secondly, women between 1997 and 2000 had a clear voice in politics and could lobby for their causes in any decision-making. Thirdly, women's NGO and their representatives in the parliament and municipality councils pursued their objectives in the process of decision-making. They

had also some members in the high-ranking political factions that helped them to negotiate and mobilize their resources along other groups.

There have been lot of public and private institutions run totally by women, yet they have had to defer to the decision-making authority of the exclusively male-leadership group. The reformist male activists and leaders had the last say, but they needed women's vote, and responded to women's demand as far as they did not contradict to hard-core of Islamic ideology. In this framework, a lot of women's demands have come to the front, because they did not necessarily contradict with *shari'ah*.

In spite of the mentioned developments, there was still a big gap between men and women⁵⁹. Iranian women fought for more choices and less pressure on women to stay out of public and public policies. They wanted to be in high-ranking administrative, legislative and judicial positions; in 2000, 97 percent of high-ranking positions have been in the hands of men.⁶⁰ They wanted to put an end to discriminations in work places and schools; they wanted to stop more sexual segregations; they asked for more dignity in family and society; they needed more legal protection against domestic violence, rape and other forms of violence⁶¹ against women; and they wanted to stop brutal punishment against women like stoning and amputation. Iranian women have been successful to transfer those demands to reformer's agenda.

Iran's civil rights movement groups whose solidarity does not emerge from shared cultural and/or ethnic experience emphasize on plural identities. The source of their solidarity comes from experiencing an authoritarian and autocratic political regime. Women's ideas on plurality have been echoed in the ways civil rights activists deal with different subjects and obstacles. Therefore, women's identity has been not limiting and problematic, and differences based upon class and gender is considered.

Iranian feminism and civil rights movement do not have their theoretical root in Islamic tradition; they both have got their ideas and models of struggle from the West and have entwined with ideologies that have most affinity with them i.e. socialism and pluralism. Women have colored this movement with their high rate of participation in elections and NGOs. The low presence of women in polity and low achievement of the movement have the same reason: deep roots of patrimonialism in Iranian political culture and underdevelopment of social and economic institutions.

Iranian women wanted to see five fundamental developments in the framework of the civil rights movement. The expected changes were the end of any legal discrimination against women, equal share in the high-ranking official positions of the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of power, higher employment rate for women as compared to the status quo, public support for women who are discriminated against and mistreated and the end of censorship on artworks and printed materials that show or explain the Iranian women's situation.

Conclusion

Iranian women played a central role in the reform movement of 1997-2000 whose goal was to liberate the society from mono-lifestyle and monolithic thinking that ruling clerics have inflicted on it. Women in this movement, as opposed to the Islamic Revolution of 1979, played their role as women, not as a part of an unshaped mass manipulated by charismatic and traditional leaders. They knew what they want and began to think about how they can achieve their goals.

Achievements of this movement for women are more opportunities available for education of women and their work due to special programs for part-time employment that have been put in place especially for women with younger children. The modest dress regulations for women were also relaxed. Despite the repression, women still have some access to higher education, and some have been able to take on low-level and a few have been able to take high-level governmental positions. Iranian religious leaders lifted a ban on women leading prayers and they are able to lead congregations of women worshippers. Iranian women still demand more opportunities and access to key jobs and positions.

An intermediate layer of leadership that is critical to the micro-mobilization of women in a social movement was missing in Iran's civil rights movement of 1997-2000. This layer could provide a bridge between the potential female leaders and those already predisposed to movement activity and between the existing social movement organizations (mostly civil society institutions) and potential adherents and constituents.

Many areas in Iranian social processes are simultaneously changing over time. This multiplicity of areas of social processes has multiple effects. On the one hand, it establishes the limits on any single one of those processes. On the other hand, the sheer multiplicity of processes provides a sense of alternatives, a sense that there are other ways of changing the way of life, even if those alternatives are not immediately available or not subjectively desirable. The optimistic side of the story is that these processes exist and always prevent closure.

Iranian women who are struggling against sanctioned violation of women's rights need to work on five items: engagement in national, regional and global dialogues, intellectual and political support, micro-mobilization, institutionalization of their concerns and deeds, and development of strategies of change,

¹Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (NY: Columbia Univ. Press. 1996); Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Feminism in an Islamic Republic: Years of Hardship, Years of Growth" in *Gender, Islam and Social Change*, ed. By Yvonne Y Haddad & John Esposito, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998; Guiti Nashat, & Lois Beck (ed.), *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic* (IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (Praeger Pub. 1982); Valentine M. Moghadam, "Gender and Revolutionary Transformation: Iran 1979 and East Central Europe 1989," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 3. (Jun1995)

²Valentine M. Moghadam, "Gender and Revolutionary Transformation: Iran 1979 and East Central Europe 1989," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 3. (Jun1995)

³Abbasi, M.J., Mehryar, A., Jones, G., and McDonald, P., "Revolution, war, and modernization: Population policy and fertility change in Iran," *Journal of Population Research*, 19(1) (2002): 25-46.

⁴*Kārnāmeḥ-ye Dowreh-ye Avval-e Majles-e Showrā-e Eslāmi (Parliamentary Report, First Term)*, (Tehran: Ravābet-e 'Omoumi-ye Majles-e Showrā-e Eslāmi, 1985)

⁵www1.worldbank.org/sp/childlabor/MENAfiles/Chang.pdf (accessed 5 February 2007).

⁶From the names in the middle school textbooks, 97.8 percent in history, 91.1 percent in theology, 88.1 percent in Persian language and 75.8 percent in social science belong to men. From the pictures of the textbooks, 58.6 percent are males' pictures in females' textbook for professional training and 95.8 percent are males' pictures in males' textbook for professional training (*Jahan-e Islam Daily*, 21 November 1998).

⁷Valentine M. Moghadam, "A Tale of Two Countries: State, Society, and Gender Politics in Iran and Afghanistan," *The Muslim World* 94 (4),(2004): 449-467.

⁸Azadeh Kian, "Women and Politics in Post-Islamist Iran: The Gender Conscious Drive to Change," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1. (May 1997): 75-96.

⁹Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, (ed.) *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, (Syracuse Univ. Press. 1994); Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997).

¹⁰Sam Geese, Banafsheh, "Why Are Wives Abused," *Khordād Daily*, 27 December 1998.

¹¹Women have the right to divorce in some situations; regulations promulgated in 1984 substantially broadened the grounds on which a woman may seek a divorce. However, a husband is not required to cite a reason for divorcing his wife. Iranian courts have taken a long time to approve a divorce request from women who were abused/tortured by their husbands. In 1986, the Government issued a 12-point "contract" to serve as a model for marriage and divorce, which limits the privileges accorded to men by custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law. The model contract that is published in all marriage registration and can be signed by both sides also recognizes a divorced woman's right to a share in the property that couples acquire during their marriage and to increased alimony rights plus right to select residence and work outside home. Women who remarry are forced to give up custody of children from earlier marriages to the child's father. The law allows for granting of custody of minor children to the mother in certain divorce cases in which the father is proven unfit to care for the child.

¹²A married woman must obtain the written consent of her husband before she may apply for passport and travel outside the country. A single woman should obtain her father's written consent for passport application.

¹³The law passed by the Fifth Parliament provides for segregation of the sexes in medical care.

¹⁴Hossein Mehrpour, *Current Issues on Women's Rights from the viewpoint of Domestic Law, Islamic Jurisprudence Principles and International Criteria* (Tehran: Ettela'at Publication. 2000), 38.

¹⁵In 2001, only 2.98 percent of women had administrative positions in Iran. From all female employees, only 17 percent have occupied administrative positions in the country (Women's Participation Center located in Presidential Office, emrooz.com, accessed 29 December 2002).

¹⁶In provinces near the Caspian sea, where there is no scarcity of water, the family and social structure is totally different from other part of the country.

¹⁷Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Hosseini-e Tehrani, *The Rarity Article (Resāleh ye Badi'eh)* (Mashhad: 'Alāmeḥ ye Tabātabā'i Publication, 1997), 34

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 38.

²⁰Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Hosseini-e Tehrani, *The Marriage Article (Resāleh ye Nekāhieh)*, (Mashhad: 'Alāmeḥ ye Tabātabā'i Publication. 1994), 35.

²¹Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Implementing the Beijing Platform (Gender, Culture and Politics in the Middle East)* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997)

²²badjens.com

²³zanan.iran-emrooz.net

²⁴iftribune.com

²⁵womeniniran.net

²⁶Sherry B. Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Bacon Press. 1996), 12-16.

²⁷This is considered as one of the pillars of Shi'ite faith.

²⁸Haleh Afshar, *Islam and Feminisms : An Iranian Case-Study* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. 1998);

Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (London: Zed Books Ltd. 1999)

²⁹Hammed Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Emerging Voices in the Women's Movement*, (Oxford: Greenwood Press Shahidian, 2002); Shahin Gerami, *Women and Fundamentalism: Islam and Christianity* (Garland Publishing., 1996).

³⁰R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987)

³¹Steven G. Smith, *Gender Thinking* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

³²Mortezā Motahhari, *The Islamic Modest Dress* (Abjad Book Designers & Producers, 1988); *Nezām-e Hoqouq-eh Zan Dar Eslām (The System of Women's Rights in Islam)* (Qum: Sadra Publication 1978).

³³*Fātemeh Fātemeh Ast*, trans. by Laleh Bakhtiar (Tehran: Shari'ati Foundation and Hamdami Publishers, 1980).

³⁴This is the position of all members of the conservative and authoritarian camp: roozonline.com/archives/2007/02/002026.php (accessed 4 February 2007)

³⁵Most of the de Beauvoir's works are popular among Iranian feminists.

³⁶Race is not an important issue for Iranian society as ideology, class, religion and ethnicity.

³⁷Mehrangiz Kar, *Legal Structure of Family System in Iran* (Tehran: Rowshangarān & Women Study Publishing, 1999); Shirin Ebadi, *History and Documentation of Human Rights in Iran* (Persian Studies Series, No. 18, Bibliotheca Persica, 1999).

³⁸A rare example of considering women's strategies is Mehrangiz Kar's article on the development of this issue in post-revolutionary Iran: "Women's Strategies in Iran from the 1979 Revolution to 1999," in Jane Bayes & Nayereh Tohidi (ed.), *Globalization, Gender, and Religion : The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts* (NY: Pelgrave, 2001).

³⁹Michelle Rosaldo first made these points in her reflections on feminism in the late 1970's: "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross Cultural Understanding," *signs* 5(3) (Spring 1980): 389-417.

⁴⁰Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999)

⁴¹In 27 January 2007, three activist women were arrested in the airport when they were boarding on a plane to go to India for presenting in an educational press workshop:

news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2007/01/056880.php (accessed 4 February 2007)

⁴²To name a few, Fahimeh Rahimi, Shahrnosh Parsipur, Simin Daneshvar, Fereshteh Sari, Ghazaleh Alizadeh, Shiva Arastouii, and Fattaneh Haj Seyyed Javadi.

⁴³This is also true about female novelists who live abroad. To name a few, Azar Nafisi, Firoozeh Dumas, and Tara Bahrampour

⁴⁴The emergence of women's movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States is also linked historically and conceptually to abolitionist and civil rights activities: Elizabeth, V. Spellman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Beacon Press, 1988), 11.

⁴⁵roozonline.com/archives/2007/01/001911.php (accessed 4 February 2007)

⁴⁶Some instances of such legal changes are: 1) the Family Planning Act, which is also a response to the rapid pace of population growth in the first decade after the Islamic Revolution; 2) formation of family guidance and assistance units attached to special family courts, 3) placing a marriage contract in the marriage certificates, giving this opportunity to men to share some of their powers in family with their wives regarding divorce, residence, and other responsibilities, rights and obligations, and 4) amendment to the custody law according to which the mother may, under certain conditions, demand the right of custody of the children of divorced parents and actually receive the right. It is hard to claim that government did much to revise those articles and notes of existing laws.

⁴⁷Edward J. Walsh, and Rex H. Warland, "Social Movement Involvement in the Wake of a Nuclear Accident: Activists and Free Riders in the Three Mile Island Area," *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983):764-8; Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Free Press, 1984); Doug McAdam, "Specifying the Relationship between Social Ties and Activism," *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (1993):640-67; Roger V.Gould, "collective Action and Network Structure," *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993):182-96; Belinda Robnett, "African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization," *American Journal of Sociology* 101(1996):1661-93

⁴⁸Sixty two percent of freshman students accepted in Iranian universities in 2001 were women (*Entekhab Daily*, 6 April 2002). This majority has not changed in 2000s.

⁴⁹Zhaleh Shadi Talab, *Development and Iranian Women Challenges* (Tehran, Qatreh, 2002), 170

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 156.

⁵¹bbc.co.uk/Persian, 30 December 2002.

⁵²Ortner, *Making Gender*, 8

⁵³*Nourouz Daily*, 22 June 2002.

⁵⁴This debate reached a climax in June 2002, when the parliamentary Women's Faction asked Minister of Science, Research, and Technology, Mustafa Moein, why he had not given any managerial posts to women. This same issue caused controversy in June 2001, when women sought positions in President Khatami's second cabinet and in the lawyer members of Guardians Council. See "RFE/RL Iran Report," 29 June 2001.

⁵⁵According to an 16 October 2002 state television broadcast.

⁵⁶Valentine Moghadam, "Women, Work, and Ideology in the Islamic Republic," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2. (May1988), pp. 221-243

⁵⁷*Women's Newsletter (Nāmeḥ ye Zan)*, No. 2-3, 2002.

⁵⁸Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* (St. Martins Press, 1996); Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse Univ. Press, 1992).

⁵⁹The Gender-related development index of United Nations Development Program's "Human Development Report of 2002" compares female-male life expectancy at birth (69.8-68.0), literacy rate (69.3-83.2), and estimated earned income (\$2,524-\$9,088) in Iran. Women hold only 3.4 percent of the seats in parliament, and women make up 9.4 percent of ministerial-level officials in government.

⁶⁰Shadi Talab, *Development and Iranian Women Challenges*, 167

⁶¹The police and doctors do not take violence against women seriously and do not report the cases. No safe shelter or hotline has been provided for women who are the victims of violence. There is also no project designed to fight against domestic violence, spouse abuse and suicide.