
GLOBALIZATION AND POST-ISLAMIC REVOLUTION: A CHANGING IRANIAN WOMAN

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Globalization and its core components like modernization, secularization, democracy etc. have become most debatable issues in the post-Revolution Iran. There has been a significant impact of globalization over the changing socio-religious milieu of contemporary Iranian society. Iranian women's position has also come under its profound influence. In the last three decades, the position of Iranian women has come through different development perspectives. While resisting the Islamization policy of theocratic regime, they demand more shares in the management of the family as well as the society and appeal for revocation of discriminatory laws. Both secular and Islamic feminists categorically oppose patriarchal laws subjugating women, though the means to approach the problem differ. The present research paper will critically look into the question: How the post-Revolution regime has been tackling the problem of global forces emanating from the West? How global trends like modernization and secularization have affected the Iranian women's socio-religious behaviour? The paper will also discuss the emergence and achievements of two different feminist perspectives, namely, secular feminism and Islamic feminism in the Iranian context.

Keywords: globalization, modernization, Islamization, feminism, post-Revolution Iran.

Introduction

The 1979 Islamic revolution marked the end of the secular authority in Iran. The modernization project of Shah was stamped out by the newly formed religious authority and the process of Islamization of State and society was set in motion. Around the time, when Iran was drafting its new theocratic constitution to denounce the influence of decadent Western culture that had infected its body and soul, another multi-faceted process was taking shape on the world stage. It was the process of globalization, a process that would end geographical localizations and would change the world into a single global entity. Iran, like many other Muslim nations, underwent the stage of dilemma and dissent over the issue of globalization. Both the theorists of acceptance and those of rejection received a considerable support from the Iranian civil society. The waves of globalization were so speedy that despite of its religious conservatism, Iran in general perspective could not isolate itself from the effect of globalizing trends like modernization, secularization, democratization and Westernization. After the successful overthrow of Shah's monarchy, Khomeini's Islamic ideology simultaneously advocated globalization of Islam outside the country and indigenization of societal norms and values inside Iran (Mahdi 2003). In between the tussle of two antagonist forces viz Islamization force and globalization force, the post-revolution Iranian woman has come across different levels of development and grievances. The development was in terms of numerous constitutional rights given to women after revolution and grievances were in terms of mal-

functioning of the constitutional rights and constrained role of women in socio-political activities. Nevertheless, religious enthusiasm and religious participation grew among the women after revolution but still 'global flows', like women emancipation generally sought under the banner of feminism, considerably touched Iranian women. The present research paper investigates the following issues: Has globalization created a sense of tension among the Iranian women? How is theocratic government of Iran Islamizing Iranian women and simultaneously taking them to higher levels of progress and development? How the feminist movement of Iran got developed and what has been the approach of authority towards women and women-related issues?

The Western-tinted Globalization in the Iranian Context

Globalization is an umbrella term and generally refers to a process through which different regions of the world become linked at various levels of society through an expanding network of exchanges (of peoples, goods, services, ideas, traditions, etc.) across vast distances. This general definition of globalization is not unequivocal. It has adopted many deviations and interpretations. The general mindset of the Muslim world towards globalization can be discussed in a statement of 'to like a dislike' which implies that Muslims are not in favour of globalization in the Western context but at the same time their dependency on the West in terms of trade, communication and other means of technological development forced them to get involved in the process. The emergence of globalization is believed to have started in the West and much particularly in America after World War II. This has become the sole reason of Muslim hatred towards globalization. Even some of the Western scholars have come up with a similar, if not exactly the same, perception describing globalization and its offshoots, that is the Western production. According to Lukens-Bull, 'globalization' is a cover term for the processes, by which the world capitalist system becomes articulated with local systems, and as such, globalization may affect technology, economy, politics, culture, and religion. He argues that modernization and Westernization are part and parcel of globalization as these processes are integrated (Lukens-Bull 2000). Bill Readings has put globalization as follows: 'Americanization in its current form is a synonym for globalization, a synonym that recognizes that globalization is not a neutral process in which Washington and Dakar participate equally' (Readings 1995). While denoting West as the only source of globalization, Benjamin Barber in his book *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995) describes globalization as a cultural steam roller that converts the world into a global paved parking lot full of McDonald's, Hard Rock Cafes, and MTV-pumping discos (Barber 1995). To most of the Iranian scholars from both the conservative bloc asserting Ayatollah Khomeini's doctrine of *Velayet-i Faqih* and the moderate reformist bloc gathered under the leadership of Rafsanjani, globalization in its entirety was an alien thing to the Iranian culture and society (Aras 2001). Hence, within the efficacious socio-religious context of Iran, globalization was treated to be an opposite process hatched under the shadow of the West entailing to stop the universalistic tendency of Islamic civilization and a well-polished slogan to grab the major economic resources of the Muslim world to strengthen American political monopoly. The cultural, social, political and economic changes that have appeared or are appearing under the banner of globalization indicates that the nations around the world tend to exhibit their social, cultural, and economic affairs in a global scale. Because of incorporated secularization, westernization and Americanization the phenomenon of globalization created a state of

tension in Iran. Giving a similar kind of response as in other Muslim jurisdictions, Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) did not prove to be a welcoming vessel for the various 'global flows' attached with globalization like democracy, secularization, feminism, cultural aggression of the West, *etc.* To sum up, the reason behind this negative approach was Iran's historically conservative socio-religious profile.

Shah's Modernization, Women, and Islamic Revolution

The first consequences of globalization in Iran appeared during the reign of Shah Dynasty in the form of Westernization and modernization of Iran, two significant instruments used by the Shah to put Iran on the lines of development and expose its market potential to the outer world. The modernizing reforms of Shah Dynasty paved the way to foreign cultural elements to interact with the local values and traditions of Iran. Raza Shah significantly changed the country through social, political and economic reformation. Imitating neighbouring Turkish model of reformation, Shah's thrifty West-tinted reforms laid down the foundation of a secular state missionary and nurtured a new class of secular-urban middle class. His inclusion of secular trends, an inevitable aspect of globalization, in academic curriculum and judiciary changed the social thought of Iranian youth to a great extent. The harshest decision from the religious point of view was Raza Shah's official ban on *Chador* (Islamic Veil) during a graduate ceremony in 1936. A large number of women refused to go out without a *hijab*, and so they stayed inside their houses until 1941. The ban on religious dress code gave religious group the proof it needed to argue that Shah's slogan of modernization and women emancipation only sought to 'make women naked' and cutoff Iran from its ethical and moral roots. For the first time the unveiling of women at public level was observed in Iran after its conversion at the hands of Islam. The decision of some secularized women leaders to support the ban as a 'progressive' measure caused further alienation between clerics and secular intellectuals about supporting Raza Shah's 'modernization' efforts. In imitation of his father, Mohammad Raza Shah moved on with the same strategy. His framework of reforms generally referred as 'White Revolution' was nothing but a modified version of the previous one. Women were not out of his broader reform policy. Shah introduced some emblematical changes to uplift women's social status and increase their engagement in socio-economic domains outside the household. These changes included granting women the right to vote and allowing them to take part in political activities. Shah announced high positions for women within the government bureaucracy. A new set of family laws was passed to improve the women's legal status within marriage and family. This was the 1967 Family Protection Law which restricted men's power to get divorces, take multiple wives, and obtain child custody. It also increased the minimum age of marriage for girls from 13 to 15. It was a big social overturn in the Iranian religious point of view. Shah's so called 'modernization attempt', which proved less practical and more documental, was really a hot blow to religious sensitivity of Iran. Although the *hijab* (Islamic veil) was never banned outright, but its use in public institutions was discouraged (Abrahamian 2008: 134). While discouraging the usage of *hijab*, Shah's soft mode articulation can be observed in one of his public proclamation, 'My father was determined to fight the *hijab* and to make women remove it by force. Today I do not see this as necessary. The cultural conditions are now right for women to remove their hijabs voluntarily and to give them up gradually' (Pournik 2013: 5). Shah's decisions were declared as anti-Islamic by Ayatollah

Khomeini and created tension in Qom among the leading clergy. The urban class women definitely got some kind of favour from feministic policy of the state but on the large scale it added fuel to shah's opposition.

Shah's unsuccessful attempt to mobilize women's support for his regime under the name of modernism ultimately facilitated the active engagement of religious group led by Ayatollah Khomeini to gain a popular base among the middle- and lower-class Iranian women (Kian 1998: 144–148). To generate a strong enough force against the Shah, religious activists, tapped into the reservoir of religious women who had always supported them but remained secluded in their homes. Using religious themes and rituals glorifying women, especially those revolving around Fatima Zahra and Zaynab al-Kobra as symbols of resistance against unjust rule, the clergy were able to bring these women out of their residential walls and to openly participate in demonstrations against the unjust monarchy. It was because of Women's collective political involvement, including religious as well as secular women, in the movement that Ayatollah Khomeini abjured his earlier stand regarding women and publically endorsed women's political rights. After realizing the significance of women in the political struggle against the Shah, he reinterpreted many women issues which had been discussed by the medieval legal theorist of Shiite jurisprudence and gave them contemporary relevance. Making women to understand the blessings of Islamic state, Ayatollah Khomeini, vigilantly evaluated the philosophy of women empowerment in the light of Islamic guidance, and declared that women's social and political rights would be guaranteed by an Islamic state (Farhi *et al.* 2012: 64–66). Such announcements and also those from a staunch supporter of conservative Islamic state were not less than a miracle for the revolution as it generated revolutionary enthalpy among all women sects, specifically the religious one. The massive outpouring of women, wearing black *chador*, against the shah gave a silent lesson to those younger, secular, unveiled women who were overwhelmed by the modernizing policy of shah to restore to the *chador* (veil), the traditional Islamic dress code of Iran. The restoration of *chador* by this secular group of women was a symbolic defiance of the Shah's Westernized dictatorship and in solidarity with the massive women's participation in Islamic revolution (Azari 1983). In the words of a 1978 Iranian secret police (SAVAK) report:

In recent times a new trend has emerged among the people of Iran. A number of adolescent girls and young women want to wear the chador and hijab. This phenomenon is noticeable in public places and in the streets. There is no doubt that it signifies a new religious trend (SAVAK 1986).

One can conclude that the participation of women in the revolution granted women with a sense of power, self-confidence, greater respect and political influence. The strong infiltration of the Western culture, which was at odds with the Iran's Islamic tradition, along with modernization created a line of dissent among the people of Iran towards state. The cultural, religious, economic, and social discontent accumulated over the years together with the mass participation of Iranian women in street demonstrations culminated in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. As mentioned above, women from every class and ideological persuasion played an important role in the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution and its sequel. They offered unparalleled support to its leaders and sacrificed equally to men without giving any special consideration to their bodily weakness. Throughout the revolution, the women's contribution was so profound that it compelled

revolutionary leaders to admit their role and praise their work publically. Highlighting the vitality of women throughout the revolution, the grand Ayatollah Khomeini says: 'any nation that has women like the Iranian women will surely be victorious' (Paidar 1995).

Very soon after religious establishment Imam Khomeini's vision of the female activism after revolution appeared no more different than what classical interpretation of Shari'ah has already provided to all those secular and religious women who participated in the revolution with a hope for a major change. Of course, he was in favour of women empowerment but not in the Western sense, rather his project was totally based on religion. Bringing up Iranian women from the shallow of suppression and exploitation to a world where she could realize her importance, express her aspirations and excel in intellectual endeavors had been his dream. Though being the forefront conservative ideologue, Khomeini encouraged the enhancing role of Iranian women in socio-political activities. It is said that a cleric came to Imam Khomeini after the triumph of the Revolution and asked him to order women to return to their homes and not to go out to their administrative jobs or into the streets, and not to get involved in social issues. The Imam answered that the time had come for women to leave their homes and participate in society as the environment had become purified of all the decay of the Pahlavi's and the perversion spread by Western governments. During and immediately after the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini promised women real freedom, equality and dignity. He often emphasized that, 'as for women, Islam has never been against their freedom. It is, to the contrary, opposed to the idea of woman-as-object and it gives her back her dignity. A woman is man's equal; she and he are both free to choose their lives and their occupations' (Paidar 1995).

Post-Revolution Iran and the Islamization of Women

As a corollary of religiously guided revolution, Iran changed to Islamic Republic of Iran. The decision was supported by 98 per cent of the voting population. The new constitution was drafted and it was established according to the principles of the Quran and the early Islamic community of the time of the Prophet and his followers. Thus Iran, out rightly rejecting the philosophy of democracy and secularism, two most important aspects of globalization, turned to a theocratic state based on the teachings of Islam, wherein the divine commandments shall hold an absolute and unchallenged authority. Apparently the Iranian law became the will of God as revealed in the *Quran*, as it is taught by His prophet and His special emissaries, the imams. Ayatollah Khomeini became the country's first Supreme Leader, which can be considered as the highest-ranking political and religious authority of the state. The religious establishment became very keen about the growing influence of modernization and secularization on the Iranian society especially on women. The new laws ratified immediately after revolution were the means to bring Iran back to its religious character which had got heavily devastated during the Pahlavi regime. The first sign of Islamization of women, an antagonist to Western globalization, was to bring them back to traditional Islamic outlook by publically declaring *hijab* (a moral dress code recommended by Islam) as a divine obligation upon women. It was a clear indication to secular elements that their visible dominance in Iran is over now and for their safe survival they have to abide by the new laws. The new law on dress did not only include the compulsion of the *hijab* on female employees, but also was a clear sign of gender segregation. Realizing the importance of

dress code in the creation of a moral society, a law of Islamic punishment was introduced regarding lashing in case of violation of 'Islamic concepts of decency'. This is reflected by Article 102 of the Constitution: 'women who appear on street and in public without the prescribed hijab will be condemned to 74 strokes of the lash' (Constitution IRI, Article 102). To maintain the state codes of female appearances in public and even in some private arenas, a female vigilante group (*dokhtaraan-e-Zaynab*) was organized under state supervision. The older view about *hijab*, a sign of seclusion, subordination and backwardness was denounced through public speeches and write-up works. The new perception about *hijab* came from the conservative religious preachers, declaring it as a sign of liberty, chastity and honor.

Another profound step towards Islamization of Women was the abolition of the Family Protection Law. Only two weeks after the revolutionary government came to power, the suspension of the Family Protection Law was announced. Instead, family law based on sharia was reinforced. The Family Protection Law, first passed in 1967 and revised by the Shah in 1975, gave women the right to appeal to divorce based on the same rules as men. A special family court was responsible for decisions concerning child custody and alimention. Mother was recognized as a child's legal guardian in case of the father's death. Moreover, polygamy was practically eliminated by setting out specific conditions. Besides, legal marriages to a second wife were hereby only permitted with permission of the first wife. Furthermore, the minimum age of marriage was increased to eighteen for women and twenty-one for men. Also abortion was made legal with the husband's approval. Moreover, unmarried women could have abortions up to the eighth week of pregnancy (Afkhani 2004: 132). After coming into power, Ayatollah Khomeini declared all these constitutional developments made by Shah as anti-Islamic. He issued a new family law based on religious injunctions which implied that men are again able to divorce their wives without the family court decision. Moreover, the child custody was automatically given to men. The theocratic establishment also minimized the legal marriage age of women to thirteen and polygamy was again declared to be legal practice. Yet, a man still needed court concession to marry a second woman and a woman could still appeal the court for a divorce based on her husband's lack of support, abandonment or mistreatment. The consequences of new family were visible in a newly transformed Iranian society. The legitimized over dominance of men in family matters became a genuine apprehension for the both secular and religious women. To preserve Iranian youth from sexual anarchy and moral apathy numerous boundaries separating men and women in society were erected on religious grounds: 'males and females were separated in higher education classes that were once coed, females students were barred from 69 different fields of study, women were banned from some professions such as the judiciary and singing groups, and female students were barred from certain disciplines in the universities, such as engineering and agriculture. A decree dismissed all women judges and barred female students from law schools. Women were forbidden to participate in some sports and not allowed to watch men in sports fields' (Mahdi 1995). The universal Mother's Day, a global trend to promote gender consciousness and respect for mother in particular and woman in general, was replaced with Fatima Zahra's birthday (Prophet Mohammad's daughter) (Mahdi 2004). Making the new law in cognizance with divine doctrines, the clergy based government denounced women's equal status to men at the time of bearing witness. The new verdict reduced women's judgment as evidence in court to half of the man's and similarly the

amount of blood money (*diyat*) for a murdered woman was also set to be half that of a man. Many secular women who were not adjustable with the new system were fired from their jobs, and in turn the active participation of religious women in supportive and 'female' occupations was encouraged. The new policies forced many secular women for migration and many professional secular women were encouraged to retire from their public occupations in order to support male employment (Mahdi 2004).

Iranian Women and the Struggle between Islamization and Globalization

Historically Iranian society is conservative with respect to the role of women in public spheres. The over-dominant socio-religious milieu of Iran suggests that a woman has not to play an active role in the societal issues and she has to restrain herself to private spheres of life. In spite of traditional dominance, Iranian women are looking for a change. Now it has become an advanced discourse for social scientists to analyze the women's changing position, in terms of her participation in the major social, political and economic activities, in the contemporary Islamized Iran. Historically, Iranian woman has come across different revolutions, starting right from the Tobacco Movement (1891–1892), then going through major political turnovers like Constitutional Movement (1905–1911), Islamic Revolution (1979) and finally reaching a newly emerging Green Movement (2009). All these revolutions have by and large evolutionized the Iranian woman's cognition irrespective of her religious behaviour. Though not equal, but all women have to a certain degree responded to the Iran's changing socio-political structure, that is what many sociological studies pertaining to Iranian women have come up with. The current status of an Iranian woman is almost the same, as it is in other Muslim countries like Arab countries, Egypt and Pakistan. The women folk of Iran have got divided over certain issues after 1979 Islamic revolutions which is also a clear indication of dissent between women and state. These issues are pertaining to global trends like modernization and secularization of the society, equality of men and women, democratic political setup and other female rights. These issues have raised a situation wherein an Iranian woman finds herself involved in struggle between Islamization and global trends.

Post-1979 Iran is generally described as an Islamized and a revolutionary society. For most of the outside observers, Iran is a predominantly traditional society with less women rights. This general understanding regarding Iran is because of its strict enforcement of Shari'ah rulings in limiting the involvement of women in many public spheres. The reality is, however, that the Iranian society is characterized by both traditional and modern tendencies. On the one hand, the reinforcement of the Islamic identity has led to conscious reawakening of traditional values, beliefs and practices among women. Such policies were in favour of religious women for whom the revival of religious values and religious institutions was a primary concern. On the other hand, cognizance of the contemporary importance of industrialization, global marketing, human development and technological progress has persuaded many women to modernize Iran, which is a country free from religious barriers like in West. It has been quiet observatory that since the day of its establishment, the IRI under the guardianship of religious authority started the process of decoupling the Iranian consciousness from the globalizing values like secularization, westernization and feminism by the Pahlavi regime by reversing much of what the Shah had done in terms of integration of Iran into global social forces. The religious authority, using Islamic Shari'ah as a blueprint, has been in total control

over Iranian socio-political milieu in the past two decades. The state has done everything to move Iran society, specifically women away from the universal processes and values in favor of particularistic, religious, and local traditions. The religious authority of Iran claims that its approach represents one of the best global models regarding the position of women and enhancement of their role in socio-political activities of the country. In 1995, the then president of Iran Ali Akbar Rafsanjani publically claimed that women in Iran have the most progressive status in the world. Similar kind of statements came from different officials in the IRI, even females, have uttered similar statements. On 4 July 1999, Zahra Shojaie, the advisor to President Mohammad Khatami on women's affairs 'stressed that Iranian women are considered as a model for other women throughout the globe' (Mahdi 2003). Declaring it a big lie, all such claims have been categorically rejected by the secular feminists of Iran. According to them, the reality is, however, far different from these fairy tales. The movement against the dictatorship of the Pahlavi did not mean the liberation of women at all. Such women hold a general opinion that during the revolution women were only used in revolutionary work but in the development of the constitution of the newly established republic, women had no input which has reflected the clear contrast of religious leadership from revolution and post-revolution phase. For secular feminist intellectuals like, Shadi Sadr, Nazar Ahari, Maharangiz Kar, Shirin Ebadi, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Parvin Ardalan, Sussan Tahmasbi, and Jelveh Javahereh, Islamic Republic treated women as silent recipients of state policies rather than active agents in the construction of a new state. They considered the new system as a patriarchal one, where women are kept out from the decision-making process regarding the new institutions; thus, their needs and concerns are equally ignored at different levels of institution building and state formation (Moghadam 1993). The Islamic Republic viewed women as the 'carriers of traditions' whose existence was threatened by foreign forces of globalization. According to A. A. Mahdi, the religious establishment utilized four concurrent strategies to implement its localization policy in order to safeguard women against globalizing trends:

1. It began to limit the global mobility of meanings associated with women's rights by claiming the idea of women's rights as Western and un-Islamic. Books advocating feminist ideas were either totally banned or partially censored. The Western educated women's access to public media was curtailed. Magazines advocating Western feminist ideas were compelled to discontinue their practices or risk to be banned or censored.

2. The state limited the spatial mobility of women, especially secular women. Women could not be in all places at all the times. Public theaters were separated into male and female sectors. University classes were divided into male and female parts. Buses also were divided into male and female sections.

3. The state limited the interactional mobility of women by limiting and conditioning their interaction with male strangers. Association with men outside marriage and marrying a non-Muslim are forbidden and punishable.

4. Domestication of women was a policy fit for the localization of female labor and its exploitation in non-wage activities at home. They have put pressures on local practices that limit the abilities of women to participate meaningfully in the social world. The two sets of processes of globalization and localization are tied together dialectically and at the same time work with and against each other. Localization channels the global energy, directs it to the appropriate destination, and customizes it to the formats of the indigenous structures.

Understanding the implications of these laws, the reaction of Iranian women was not uniform. Under the effect of two simultaneous processes – globalization and modernization – the behaviour of Iranian could be broadly understood from two perspectives; Islamic feminist perspective and Secular feminist perspective.

Islamic Feminist Perspective: A Response within the Shari'ah

After the establishment of theocratic government in Iran, the regime manipulates the female issues within the confined framework of Shari'ah and tries to transform them into symbols of the Islamic character of the Iranian state. The state works vigorously to create a uniform image of 'ideal Muslim women'. The religious intellectual elite like Ali Shariati, Matahri and Soroush suggested women of Iran to adopt the character of great ideal Muslim women like Fatima and Zainab through their writings. Although this 'monolithic model' influenced thousands of young Iranian women, living in villages and cities, but still this project failed to realize its objectives. On practical grounds Iran experienced a gradual diversification, which has resulted from the incorporation of traditional and modern elements in the Islamic regime. This situation led to the emergence of the 'Islamic feminism' as an indigenous Islamist women's movement challenging the women policies of the state from within (Kian 2014). It is noteworthy to mention that the distinguishing feature of Islamic feminists of Iran is that they base their rights on a more 'female friendly' interpretation of those divine commandments which are specifically related to female issues. They sought to approach religion in a much pragmatic way, so that Islamic Shari'ah would be able to promote women's status and define gender roles. They demand for the enhancing role of woman in the structure of family and community, and ultimately in the administration and state formation. It is better to put it in words of Gholizadh, an Iranian Islamic feminist, who says 'Islamic feminism is more a social movement than an ideology or social theory which is trying to "fill the social gaps resulting from the semi-traditional and quasi-modern character of Iranian society, by insisting on the independent identity of Muslim women"' (Mahboobeh 2000). Highlighting the importance of Islamic feminism in challenging the patriarchal structure of clerical society, Afsaneh Najambadi frames,

Not only have these openly feminist re-interpretive ventures produced a rapid decentering of the clergy from the domain of interpretation, but by positioning women's needs as grounds for interpretation and women as public commentators of canonical and legal texts they promise that the political democratization currently unfolding in Iran would no longer be a 'manly' preoccupation (Najambadi 2001).

At another place she writes 'it is a reform movement that opens up a dialogue between religious and secular feminists' (Moghadam 2002: 23). Islamic feminist of Iran, as mentioned, demanded a change in the discriminatory nature of the Islamic system in Iran and advocated for legal and social equality with men and they have very sound base for it. They argue that gender inequality is not inherently natural; instead it is socially constructed in time.

However, while demonstrating that 'modern' cause of equality of men and women, Islamic feminists resort to tools within tradition, that is *ijtihad*. Hojjat-ul-Islam Seyyed Mohsen Sa'idzadeh, the proponent of the 'gender equality perspective' is of the view that it is the interpretations deduced from *Qur'an* and hadith by particular jurists in time

that resulted in gender inequalities; therefore, since both *ijtihad* and *taqlid* have rational bases, their findings by all qualified interpreters can be followed. In addition, Islamic feminism in Iran endorses the concept of human rights as a global phenomenon with women's rights being a part of it. Mohsen Kadivar, a prominent Islamic reformist intellectual, claims that 'human rights thinking' is a key component in the reinterpretation of religious rulings. Seeing it as a global phenomenon, he argues that 'to submit to human rights thinking is not to submit to the West, but to submit to rationality and justice' (Kadivar 2006). It is believed that the first 'unconscious' Islamist women movement emerged during the revolution period, when religious women got mobilized in support of the formation of IRI. Active participation in revolution infused a sense of confidence in them and helped them to realize their actual potential. In the aftermath of revolution, Iran saw a 'conscious' Islamist women movement, which was neither in support of Western culture nor was it comfortable with classical 'patriarchal' interpretation of Islam rather it was a dichotomous orientation to necessarily modernize Iranian woman but without adding any Western filth to the religious demeanor. It became a staunch advocate for the improvement in status and condition of Iranian women in post-revolution period. This shift in emphasis required that women engage the religious establishment with 'female-centered interpretations of Islam', becoming innovators in developing an 'Islamic feminist theory of women's oppression and liberation'. They came to argue that true religious practice would not oppress women or make them lesser persons than men; thus, any practices or laws that did so were not Islamic, but accretions which needed to be shed.

Many Muslim women who had participated in the war activities and had cooperated closely with the state came to realize that the ruling clerics' promises of equality at the beginning of the revolution had not come true. A group of intellectual Muslim female activists could see that the policies advocated by the Islamic Republic represented 'patriarchy in Islamic clothing'. They began to emphasize the equalitarian verses of Qur'an and hadiths (statements by prophets and imams) and question the monopoly of interpretation of these texts by male jurisprudents. The Islamist women, skilled or unskilled, educated or uneducated, and old or young begun to show a higher level of awareness to their conditions and to demand more control over the processes of their daily living, their relations with their parents, husbands, children, and men outside of their kin. Islamist women, working in different arenas and with varied voices and tactics, cleverly questioned the prevailing, unequal division of labor, widespread domestic violence, and the organizational and exploitative biases within the Iranian Islamic family. Muslim feminists, while accepting family as a natural shield against unwanted outside influences and as a protective unit generating meaningful religiously sanctioned relationships amongst its members, they particularly focused to the tensions, conflicts, and inequality generally concealed within the relationships within Islamic family. This awareness, and its subsequent activism, is aimed at ameliorating women's social conditions, denouncing violence against women, resisting the state's repressive policies, and opposing discriminatory laws affecting women's lives. During war with Iraq, the role of religious women was much more profound. During the first decade of the revolution, this new Islamic feminist voice was not given any considerable attention. The authorities used the war with Iraq (1980–1988) as justification to stamp down any sort of dissent and active opposition. Soon after the resolution of the war situation and the death of revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, new political alliances emerged which pressed the

state to brought about progressive changes in the social and legal policies affecting women. These endeavors became more marked after the presidential election of 1997 when Mohammad Khatami, a progressive modernist, with massive support from women and youth, was elected as the president of Iran (Mahdi 2004).

Some Legal Achievements of Islamic Feminism

After successfully throwing out monarchy from Iran and establishing a religious state, Ayatollah Khomeini, the first supreme leader of Iran, turned towards social reformation of Iran in a broader context and women were not kept out of these reforms. Nevertheless, Khomeini had promised all women of their general freedom but after coming in power he confined his promises within the paradox of religion. His own political doctrine, *Velayet-i-Faqih* had very little to offer to ordinary women of Iran. In order to provide a determinable support to his 'ideological state', Khomeini welcomed a particular group of women to over dominate the rest. This group consisted of religious women and later on the same group turned into well-organized Islamic feminist group. In the early days of the Islamic revolution Khomeini adopted the policy of superseding the monarchy's official and feminist-oriented women's organization with Islamic women's organizations. This political move of Khomeini created the opportunity for Islamic women to become involved in the discourse of post-revolutionary gender ideology. Khomeini knew well about the role of women in stabilizing the newly formed Islamic republic that is why he urged Islamist women to remain mobilized in the socio-political activities of the country. His daughter, Zahra Mostafavi, became one of the leaders of the Women's Society of the Islamic Revolution (WSIR). The main function of WSIR, a state-sponsored women's organization, was to mobilize women and organize them in favor of an 'authentic' Islamic identity for Iranian women and also to engender support for the government itself. While summarizing the growing role of Islamist women in Iran, Louise Halper writes,

high ranking Islamist women, like Fereshteh Hashemi, Zahra Rahnavard, Shahin Tabatabai, all American-educated, also took leadership roles in representing women's voices in the debate over the existence and then the shape of the gender ideology of the Islamic Republic. Fatimah Hashemi, daughter of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, later president of the Islamic Republic, became the head of the Women's Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Women's Solidarity Association of Iran. Azam Taleqani, a founder of WSIR and daughter of Ayatollah Taleqani, who was known for his sympathies with leftist Islamists, was elected to the Majles. Azam Taleqani also founded *Payam-e-Hajar* (Hajar's Message), a woman's newspaper, which was dedicated to promulgating a view of women approved by the leaders of the Islamic Republic (Halper 2005).

Islamist women explored a new version of feminism and contextualized their *modus operandi* within the framework of Shari'ah. They would talk of both rights and responsibilities of women and categorically denounced the feministic view of their secular counterparts, who argued for gender equality regardless of the traditions of the Shari'ah. Though they agreed with that women's primary roles were in the family, they also supported women who would like to work and earn outside the home. Indeed, they became advocates for reinterpretation of legal theories whilst keeping concerns of modernist women in view. They wanted to synchronize religious parameters with the changing social requirements in order to bridge up the gap between; traditional and modern, localized trends and globalized trends. These women would often bolster their stance by cit-

ing Khomeini's women supportive interpretation of Islam. Islamist women argued that the achievement of women's potential would occur in an Islamic society that 'combined equality of opportunity for men and women to develop their talents and capacities and to participate in all aspects of social life, [with] acknowledge [meant of] women's maternal instinct and their essential role within the family' (Halper 2005).

Though not fully, Islamist women were able to manage some major legal achievements. On the account of various authentic sources, Homa Hoodfar has briefly highlighted some of the significant achievements of Islamic feminists in her research work *Can Women Act as Agents of a Democratization of Theocracy in Iran* (Hoodfar and Sadr 2009). She goes as follows: in April 1994, the Majles passed a bill that allowed women to become legal consultants in the Special Family Courts and Administrative Justice Courts; in 1997 President Khatami appointed a woman, Massoumeh Ebtekar, to vice-presidency in charge of environment for the first time in Islamic Republic; in 1997 Khatami appointed Zahra Shoja'i as his consultant on women's issues and later established the Center for Promoting Women's Participation headed by her; in February 1998, two bills passed by the government, one requiring that *Maher* (fixed sum of money promised by a man to his wife in the marriage contract) should be determined to reflect the rate of inflation and the other provided women working full time may work three-quarter of time and have it considered full time, and women working part-time to be protected by law from losing maternity and other benefits; in 1998, four women were appointed as investigative magistrates; in 1999, Zahra Rahnavaard was appointed to the presidency of al-Zahra University as the first woman to hold such a position; on March 8, 2000, International Women's Day was celebrated in Tehran for the first time since 1979. She further writes, 'Among the politically active women, Faizeh Hashimi and Azam Taleqani are particularly important in defending the women's cause in the parliament. Faizeh Hashimi is the founder and the president of the Islamic Countries' Solidarity Sport Council and a member of Islamic Republic's High Council for Women's Sports. In February 1993, she organized the first Islamic Countries' Women Sports Solidarity Games held in Iran. She was elected to the parliament in 1996 and served for one term in the fifth Majles. She appealed to the demands of the young people and worked for easing the restrictions on women's outdoor sports activities which she became successful to a large extent. Moreover, for the first time in the Islamic Republic she appeared in political scene by wearing jeans and a headscarf, not with chador. During the 8th Parliamentary elections of 2007, Reformist and Islamist women each formed coalitions to rally around the push for a 30 per cent quota of female candidates' (Hoodfar and Sadr 2009: 22–24). It was first time seen in the history of Iran that Islamic feminists and secular feminists were working in 'hand to hand' approach for certain common objectives. It was collective effort as writes Homa Hoodfar,

They jointly organized training sessions for lobbyists and potential female candidates. For the first time in the IRI, an action platform for promoting women's rights was formally announced. The platform included a) the promotion of rights of women in all spheres and support for their central role in the family; b) the promotion of access for women to economic and social opportunities; c) the removal of discriminatory laws against women; d) the institutionalization of gender-sensitive development and planning; and e) the allocation of decision-making positions to women at the national level. The platform cited the high rate of unemployment for female graduates and women in general, and favored increasing resources for health and economic needs of

older women, reducing the length of family court proceedings, improving and expanding affordable sport facilities for women, and improving and expanding women's national institutions. For the first time, these long-standing issues were addressed in a coherent policy package (Hoodfar and Sadr 2009).

From the above discussion, it is quite apparent that Islamic feminists of Iran have gained a considerable reputation across the social and political spectrum, especially in media and politics, and have forced Islamist authority to come up with new strategies and women-oriented policies. Through their activities and intellectual write-ups they have been able to convince the Islamic clerics that gender does make a difference in the formation of public policy, especially as it relates to women's well-being vis-a-vis men.

Secular Feminist Perspective: A Challenge to Establishment

The origin of secular feminism in Iran goes back to Shah's reign. These were the women who appreciated Shah's decision to secularize the Iranian society from top to bottom. The best ever thing they received from the Shah was implementing ban on *Chador* and approving free movement of women. Since the time of revolution the religious leaders of Iran were cautious about its potential threat. Soon after the religious establishment the group's organizational tendency was put under extreme pressure and was left almost breathless. This type of feminism was officially abandoned throughout country because of its Western tinted objectives. Moreover, this group has certain aspects which are against the government's will in Islamic republic of Iran. Many scholars believe that such a harsh response to secular feminism from a state like Iran, based on theological paradigms, was a natural outcome. While describing the nature of rift between a theological state and secular feminism, Abdee Kalantari writes, 'In a political theology that divides the political sphere into good and evil and sees the west as enemy (evil), feminism as a modern western movement is a threat to the whole existence of this theology' (Essay 2013).

Secular feminists of Iran are no way different from other feminist organizations working in Western countries in their approach. They also base their rationale for women's rights on a human rights discourse to enable and empower the individual in a secular democracy to create a civil society. It is said that this group made dominant public appearance when Khomeini announced compulsory *hijab* on the eve of March 8th, International Women's Day, an occasion which normally would pass without much notice. This announcement led to spontaneous demonstrations, the largest in the history of women's movements in Iran and surprised the religious leaders. In 1980, a decree came from the regime declaring veiling mandatory for women in public institutions. Many secular women could not comply with the strict codes and they lost their employment. In order to resist the government's rules ordering women to confine their physical and social activities, the secular women have creatively devised strategies for peeling off the layers of physical and ideological covers imposed on them. Secular feminists of Iran work through small-scale Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and try to develop some analyses of women's collective interests and their oppression in private as well as public life. The main areas of their interest about which they mostly write are equal rights as well as body, sexuality, power, homosexuality, violence, pornography and so forth. The regime declared most of their demands invalid and to be a threat to the socio-religious fabric of Iran; a cause of social disequilibrium and sexual anarchy in a religious state like Iran. In retaliation the regime's approach was very harsh and it banned publication of all those writings with any similar content. As the print media was constrained, secular feminist ideology started to approach people through internet. They opened many feminist websites, blogs and virtual networks to

represent their group and they keep working despite the filtering of the government. Social websites like <http://www.irwomen.com>, <http://www.meydaan.com>, <http://www.feministschool.com>, are some prominent ones. It has been found that middle class urban women are these activists' most common audiences, since the rural women's access to the internet is limited. The limited access to audience alongside with other factors including censorship and attacks of the fundamentalist government and even the traditions of a religious based society has put this group at a challenging position. As Ahmadi has rightly argued that 'secular feminism faces two barriers in its way: first is the framework of an Islamic republic where fundamentalists hold absolute power over certain state institutions and the other is an "inside force", a "from within" perspective which has been needed to alter the dominant fundamentalist discourse' (Ahmadi 2006).

The complete control of government by hardline Islamists, after 2005 presidential elections, dampened women's open activism and banned many women NGOs. The secular feminist movement could have been also marginalized as a group of urban middle class ladies who could not be regarded as speaking for all women in Iran if secular feminists would not have managed to launch an internet campaign named 'One Million Signatures for the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws' on August 27, 2006. Initially aimed at collecting one million signatures in support of changing discriminatory laws against women, the campaign became a serious concern for the government when the organized women of this campaign considered that its demands conform to Islamic principles. Though the concept was simple but it proved to be a revolutionary, melding education, consciousness-raising and peaceful protest. The women associated with this campaign and armed with petitions would visit all those places where other women would gather: schools, hair salons, doctors' offices and private homes. Every woman was asked to sign. They would also distribute leaflets explaining how Iran's interpretation of Islamic law denies women full rights. It was explained how Iran's divorce law makes it easy for men, and incredibly difficult for women, to leave a marriage, and how custody laws favour divorced fathers more as compared to divorced woman. The 'one million campaign' strived hard and released all efforts to create a 'dialogue' ground among citizens and educate them about their rights and to make women to become sensitive to their status under the law and in society. As Pilcher and Whelehan argue 'we can consider the main success of these groups in inspiring many women to turn to feminism and that is the same success that Iranian secular feminists try to reach. They hope to involve women, not all of whom were actively involved in feminism, but all caught up in the debates of the time and seized by the urge to fight for their equal rights in law and make the process of one woman's coming out of false consciousness into enlightenment, possible' (cited in Mouri 2010).

What have They Gained by Now?

During the last three decades, instead of iron-hand regimes, secular and modern women in Iran have acquired an extraordinary self-awareness which differentiates them from women in neighbouring countries. They have been organizing small and large demonstrations to defend their rights and voice their protest against *hijab* both before and after the establishment of the Islamic Republic. They have been wearing their headscarves in a way that does not hide their hair. Tight coats, non-traditional clothes, like western jeans, high-heeled shoes and glamorous make-up are the other ways of openly dissenting with mandatory veiling. Mehrdad Darvishpour writes about the progressive position of secular feminism as, 'Besides organizing countless conferences and gatherings,

they have also successfully articulated the importance of a social movement and its central concern through various publications and magazines. The focus of a large number of books and magazines, which have been published in this period, is basically the issue of women's rights' (Darvishpour 2006). In the sphere of art, cinema and literature, Iran has witnessed a shift from socialist realism to a feminist discourse, which is a clear symbol of growing feministic ideology. The publication of many secular feminist magazines, significant presence of numerous internet sites, and the unceasing activities of women thinkers, writers, directors, editors-in-chief, publishers, lawyers, and other political and social activists, as well as hundreds of women's organizations inside and outside Iran, all attest to the undeniable existence of a vigorous secular feminist movement in Iran. In the future, this movement is expected to continue to craft a feminist discourse on the theoretical level and engage at a practical level on social issues (*Ibid.*).

Green Movement: A Collective Response

Green Movement appeared on the political scene of Iran in June 2009 immediately after presidential election results were officially announced (Sundquist 2013). Under the leadership of Mir Hussain Mousavi, the former prime minister of Iran, the movement entered the phase of organized opposition to the state apparatus. Since the day of its inception, Green Movement successfully mobilized three important components of the society, namely: labor unions, women's rights and students. A big majority of the Iranian women went to protests and supported the Green Movement and its women leader, Zahra Rahnavard, one of the prominent Islamic feminist. Thousands of young women, from different backgrounds and ideologies, see the leaders of Green Movement as a group of brave people who challenged fundamentalist ideology of Islamist regime (Sevda Zenjanli 2010). Green Movement provided an opportunity to women from all ideologies to realize that demand for equality and self-determination need not be divided along ideological lines, such as secularism versus religion. Green Movement freely borrowed from the heterogeneous fabric of Iran's rich Islamic, pre-Islamic, national and secular heritage and discourses. Victoria Tahmasebi-Birgani has rightly put forth

Green movement witnessed a conscious collective approach distinguishing women efforts in Green movement from the previous women's movements in Iran since is women from every ideological camp and cultural lifestyle come together around specific issues. Through years of struggle, Iranian women have learned how to build alliances across difference – a truly democratic practice. And their broad coalitions are aimed at transcending, but not erasing, class, religion, ideology, age, ethnicity and so on (Tahmasebi-Birgani 2012).

One of the best examples to present here would be Zahra Rahnavard, who basically was a staunch supporter of Khomeini's ideology during revolution, but now being the leader of Green Movement, she has started to support common concerns of secular feminists. She published an article in which she criticized the current Iranian laws which permit men to have multiple wives and make divorce so difficult for women, such as the inequality in the amounts of 'diyat' (the money which is paid to the victim's family when a person is murdered) which is much less for women than men, and the inequality of the ages of criminal responsibility under laws, which is 14 years old for boys and 8 for girls. All of these points have been criticized by Iranian feminists before, but had rarely been mentioned by a famous political figure like Rahnavard. It is to end that, indeed,

Green Movement reflects the democratic aspirations coexisting alongside more traditional forms of social organizations, behaviors and practices.

Conclusion

The literature that has been compiled on post-Revolution Iranian women so far, has sought to show that Iranian women are not mere passive recipients of the effects of social change. They are rather active agents of social transformation and many times builders of movements, too. History reveals the fact that how courageously Iranian women participated in mass revolution of 1979 and again during the time of war with Iraq. After the creation of the state based on strict principles of Shari'ah, scope for Iranian women was confined and any practical women organization demanding a 'free Iran' was effectively quashed. In spite of all these obstacles, today women are the most dynamic group in Iranian opposition politics. Global values like modernization, secularism and feminism have played an important role in shaping the new Iranian women. On the one hand, Islamist women are discernible by their dress, the Islamic hijab. These would prefer to veil but at the same time they oppose to second-class citizenship status of women. They demand a friendly reinterpretation of Shari'ah rulings pertaining to women which according to them has been centuries back interpreted in a man dominated society. On the other hand, anti-theocratic women are likewise discernible by their dress, which is Western, and by their liberal or left-wing political views.

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