

**Review Article**

## THE ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN IRAN

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### ABSTRACT

since cultural macro policies with emphasis on attracting public participation are considered as the main tools for achieving sustainable development, so achieving sustainable political development would seem impossible unless through optimum utilization of women's potential in macro-level management in our country where women constitute half of human capital. The semi active gender gap which sometimes is faded by some political factions and other times reappears in midst of radical extremism, has severely limited the women's participation in decision-making and policy-making positions, in an extent that the tendency of political participation in Iranian women has become very intangible even among educated ones. The fundamental issue of this research is the assessment of needs, obstacles, approaches and theoretical and practical solutions by the use of historical, comparative and critical perspectives in order to establish gender balance in the division of political power. According to classic sociological perspectives, the factors such as age, social class, cultural status and lack of equal relations between the members of society which in fact imbalance the activities of other half as well, are some of the important factors in the clarification of political participation issue. Researchers have attributed the passive state of women in political activities to the following reasons, the heavy price that they have paid so far in exchange for their equality, Lack of legal permits for the equal participation in political affairs and finally the lack of hope in passing of any new legislation to ensure equal rights regardless of gender. At first, author studied the paradigms and Theoretical principles related to this subject, then investigated the History of women's participation, and Iran's special circumstances about active and passive political participation of women, and in the end, presented some strategies to increase women's political power, based on authentic documents and studies.

**Keywords:** Political Development, Women's Political Participation, Equality for Women, Iranian Women Achievements, Gender Balance

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the lack of political participation of the population - especially women- is a sign of a Country's backwardness. According to Alain Peyrefitte, Participation is the act of consultation before a decision-making, in a way that it can be ensure about the possibly of expression of specific opinions, supervision in the decision implementation, and the developments in the results (Nick, 1974). On the other hand, the participation is being actualized through two levels of Mass (participation in election) and elite (membership in the parliament, executive branch and other high positions). Iranian women, who had had an active role in political and social movements since the constitutional Revolution, also played a significant role in the process and victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Although women have always had a strong presence in facing country's conflicts and challenges, they have not yet gained a suitable share in the country's political power structure and currently have minor presence in the decision-making process and positions of power.

In the indicators such as the percentage of parliamentary seats, the conditions of women are far from favorable and their access to power is very limited.

According to reports by the United Nations Office for Human Development, In the Middle East countries, the women's presence in the political arena, is lower than men And the most important reason for this issue is known to be the Extreme traditional and patriarchal attitudes in these communities. Assumption of this study is that if we oblige women to perform their citizenship duties as half of the society, Political

## **Review Article**

participation also would be one of their social responsibilities. In order to achieve sustainable human development in Iranian society, it is essential to resolve those obstacles which are keeping women from achieving equal opportunities in the political participation processes and it is clear that women have a crucial role in removing these barriers.

The central questions of this study are as follows:

What are the causes of most women's indifference towards political activities in Iran? What factors can improve the participation of women in society's central issues and what are the obstacles for full political participation of women? Is the current situation worthy of a country where its women are -in terms of knowledge level- within the standards of Global Human Development?

In this study, which is a qualitative one and is based on the data collected by library research method and the study of national and international documents, an attempt has been made to analyze the subject by using semiotic enquiry data analysis method, reviewing conducted research and studies, Historical study of subject and adapting results to current situation in Iran, and Eventually criticizing the process that has happened so far. The research tools are: Taking notes from books, the Internet, Credible scientific articles, Reliable available statistics, and students' theses.

The Related research about the social and political participation of women in Iran is limited to a few valid researches. One of the researches in this area is the Estimates of a National Plan to survey the women's participation in the country's 28 provincial centers which was commissioned by the Office of Women's Affairs in the Interior Ministry and was conducted by Seyed *et al.*, (2003-2004) in collaboration with the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. This research surveyed the personal, political, cultural, social, and family aspects, as well as the government's characteristics and socio-economic groups. The results emphasized on the legal protection for women's participation, change in social acceptance and providing the necessary awareness for the women. Another study by Mansoor and Afsane (2005) with a focus on factors affecting the participation of rural women and its Impact on development, concluded that the Average percentage of female participation was very low And only 40% of respondents had a high participation. It should be noted that the primary stimulus for this study is the National research project entitled "Challenges, Obstacles and Strategies for Civic Participation of Iranian women» by Late professor Mohamed (2008) which is one of the best researches in recent years.

### *Factors That Influence The Women's Political Participation*

Several factors have been pointed as the initial requirements for the realization of people's participation in societies. The most notable factors are bilateral political power structure, fundamental freedoms in society, Acceptable level of economic development, And rational exchange of information between various segments of society (Neginian, 1999). But the key factor affecting the participation -and especially women's participation- is the Empowerment. This means that they would gain collective ability to perform certain tasks and it would help the fight against the gender discrimination in society (Shaditalab, 2003). In democratic societies, Political participation among the people with higher education, higher income and better jobs, is higher. Men's participation is higher than women's and urban citizens' participation is higher than rural ones' (Bashirieh, 1997). Andrea Mitchell in his book "women's social movement" says that the emergence of gender inequality is related to others such as economic, political, social and cultural rights inequalities. He believes that gender inequality has also been formed within the mentioned inequalities and has forced women to accept the role of House servant, full-time wife and mother (Abdullahi, 2008).

### *Theoretical Perspectives on Women's Political Participation*

Several theories have been proposed about the participation of people which are either Weberian and emphasize on a system of beliefs and ideas, or Insist on behavioral aspects.

### *Randall Collins' Theory of Gender Stratification*

According to structuralism arguments, Sex-related differences and sex-role stereotypes are the means for the continuation of power differences between men and women. Collins, in a part of his general theory of social conflict has examined the Historical aspect of women's participation and believes that Gender inequalities are historically accepted by men because it enables them to apply domination and power

### **Review Article**

elements in dealing with women and to control the economic, political and ideological resources. In his view, two types of factors are very effective, One, the social organizations that have an impact on the use of force and pressure and the other, unequal status of women and men in the labor market. He criticizes the functionalism perspective on maintaining traditional system of division of labor between women and men and believes that Men have a firm control on the political and ideological resources because of their ability to exercise domination and power in dealing with women.

#### *Feminism and Women's Political Participation*

Feminism is an Approach which examines women's participation in detail, and seriously criticizes the man-centered ideologies. Feminists argue that men's position of power enables them to limit the women's participation in all areas including politics and On the other hand, Laws and policies of political systems, Legal resolutions, and Speeches and statements by political parties are also reinforcing the cultural clichés of traditional division of labor, And ultimately all of these factors are trying to Legitimize the absence of women in the political arena and to portray politics as a masculine profession (Abbott and Wallace, 1997). According to the theories of feminism's liberal wing, Women must adapt to the realities of political life and acquire masculine traits, while existing research states that political equality of women and men in the current world have a more legal aspect than reality. Socialist feminists, while acknowledging the Women's lack of compatible nature with the reality of power in its Common sense, do not present the solution in the change of women's characteristics but in a change in the structure of power and ownership. According to feminist social perspective, change in the political and economic system is the only solution for the liberation of women.

#### *Iranian Woman, From the Constitutional Period to 1979 Islamic Revolution*

From The beginning of Constitutional Revolution, Women were at the heart of this struggle; during the ban on tobacco by the verdict of Ayatollah Mirza Shirazi, even the women inside the shah's personal house broke the water pipes and boycotted the use of Tobacco. Women's participation in protests against tobacco concessions (from the shah to Great Britain) were not limited to women in Tehran, but also happened in other cities like Tabriz and Shiraz. In the late Qajar period, several acts of protest were formed by Iranian women. For example, many women attended the sit-in inside the shrine of Abdul Azim, where the Requests for the formation of a justice house were raised for the first time (Mosaffa, 1996). Women were also the initiators of the boycott on foreign goods. They sought to persuade coffeehouses to shut down their stores in order to reduce the consumption of imported sugar. Women's efforts to establish a national Bank, is another example of their historical stances that worth mentioning, and clearly shows their political and economic understanding.

After the victory of constitutional revolution, one of the first acts of women was the formation of Secret Women's Unions In the first course of parliament. This association was initially a secret, but in the following year announced its public activities In National Assembly and gained some support and some opposition. After all, the parliament's refusal to legitimize this association, did not shake the women's resolve And the semi-secret association continued to pursue its dual objectives of improving literacy rate and cultural promotion of women (Mohtashamipour, 2004). One of the important achievements of Constitutional Revolution was the establishment of girls' schools and the emergence of women's newspapers and magazines. Some obstacles can be seen in every part of women's social activities that we examined. They didn't hold any top position in political parties' central councils of Qajar era including E'tedalion (Moderates) party, Ammiun (Public) party or Tajaddod (modernity) party. Tudeh Party was formed in 1943, two years after the Reza Shah ascendance to the throne. Tudeh was the first party that included women in its ranks gave women a space to maneuver. But in the National Front that was the greatest coalition of the Era In and despite the presence of great figures such as Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh, the issue of women's participation was ignored and Most of the efforts were focused on the nationalization of the petroleum industry.

#### *Situation of Women in the Reign of Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi*

During the reign of Reza Shah, The most problematic issue for some women was the "unveiling" in January 7, 1936 which forced a large number of them to stay home. In 1933, Government passed a law

### **Review Article**

that forbade veils for teachers and students and in the following year under another ruling generally banned it (McKay, 2001). The establishment of teacher training centers that was started in the end of World War and Qajar period gained pace in time of his rule. The first teacher training center (Daralmoalemat) was established In 1918 In Tehran and when the law for the establishment of university was passed by the National Assembly in 1934, High schools and colleges were placed as subsets of universities. One of the important outcomes of women's education was the consolidation of education culture in society, and especially among women (Drktanian, 2004). But in this period and with this repressive political environment women were still able to demand equal rights. In fact the main obstacles were remained, the lack of civil society and traditional and religious opposition of men. The Reza shah's actions toward changing the social face of women took violent forms and caused social conflicts in dealing with a modernity that was imposed on the ancient customs.

#### *Political Struggles of Women, Before and During the Islamic Revolution of 1979*

In the course of 1979 revolution, Women's participation was being seen from the beginning of the formation of revolutionary movements. Perhaps if we remove the women's role in victory of the revolution, other factors would not seem effective enough; Women were involved in actions such as spreading the revolution news, distribution of revolutionary Announcements, and Participation in demonstrations, street protests, military campaigns, and hidden Movements (Mosaffa, 1996). Islamic Revolution as a major event of the twentieth century laid grounds for Enormous internal and external changes, but the presence of women in this arena, is a phenomenon that should yet to be considered. Women's Revolutionary upsurge and their motivation to enter this arena appears sometimes to be even stronger than men's; because in the calls of revolution women heard the hope for liberation from the double oppression that had been imposed on them in various aspects of society and family for centuries. In recent history of Iran, Great thinkers such as Taleghani, Dr. Shariati, Motahari and Imam Khomeini have paid more attention to this issue than other thinkers (Raouf, 1998).

#### *The Women, After the Revolution and During the War*

After the revolution, Family Protection Act was unfortunately the first law that was recognized by some element as incompatible to sharia law and was repealed. Early after the revolution, even some of the freethinking leaders of the revolution that had everyone's trust, opposed the presence of women in the Revolutionary Council. Despite this, the Activities during the war again connected many women to the political and social system. Some of these forms of connection included: Participation in military mobilization, war support campaigns, moral support, emigration, and dealing with economic problems caused by sanctions. Females' mobilization (Basij e Khaharan: Sisters' Mobilization) was formed in 1979 in order to recruit, organize and train women volunteers Staff support for women were established in 1986. In this period, Women not only participated in support, paramedics and combat activities but also handled the issues related to the families of casualties, wounded soldiers and war veterans. So much have been said about the martyrs of the war, But hardly anyone has heard of the female martyrs. Martyr Foundation has announced that 6420 female martyrs have been killed in the battlefields during the war (1980-1988). The same source announced the number of (battle-caused) disabled women as 710 individuals and the number of women POWs as 71 individuals. In another statistics provided by Jafar Ali Akbari, a council chairman in the martyr Foundation, the total number of martyrs (battlefield casualties) is 230000. Thus, women account for about 3 percent of the martyrs during this 8 years' war (Mohammad Hossein Ghasemi, resistance Booklet, statistics of martyrs and survivors of the Iran-Iraq war, in cooperation with the Department of preservation of relics and values of the Sacred Defense, Qom <http://jahannews.com/vdccsmq4.2bqes8l1aa2.html>). It should be emphasized that these statistics does not include the civilian casualties of the 8-year Iran-Iraq war. Despite the existence of these fierce models, still too few signs can be seen from them. Their related Statistics are not available for everyone; Their Wills does not get published and there is no sign of them in war seminars and celebrations.

#### **Women, from the Postwar Era Until Today**

##### *Women's Situation in Reconstruction Period*

### **Review Article**

Although the initial cultural changes in society took place during this period, But at that time there were no women in the cabinet or any governmental administration positions. In that period, because of society's crises caused by the war, those values that saw the presence of women in social situations as unsuitable, were still dominant. At that time, the only event related to women's cause was the Approval for the establishment of the Office of Women's Affairs in 1991. Accordingly the first woman who was given a position as the Presidential Adviser on Women's Affairs was Shahla Habibi. Women's efforts slowly led the authorities to the conclusion that women's Political-social behaviors should not be ignored, and that good governance is impossible without addressing the women's concerns. The Attention of Active Parties of the time was also gradually being drawn to the role of women in politics and their rights, and on this basis, a very limited recruitment of women into the parties started, although they were drawn from the men's close relatives. However, women's input and Income were not so impressive and Gender perspective was still dominant. Women's desire on a share of high offices in that period led to a more specific direction of their demands.

#### *Women's Situation in the Reform Period*

There were 38 associations that were active in Iran before the reform, but on the time of Mohammad Khatami presidency from 1997 to 2005, association and political parties increased steadily. Although the growth of the parties led to stronger role of women but because of the patriarchy's dominance in society they failed to gain equal status with men. In this period, for the first time a woman entered the Cabinet, and by the order of Khatami, Masume Ebtekar became the head of Environmental Protection organization and held that position for 8 years. "Ebtekar" have said that "Khatami was trying to break the barrier; Qom was opposed to this, so Mr. Abtahi went there and explained". In 1998, Presidential Administration Office of Women's Affairs changed its name to "The Center for Women's Participation" Zahra Shojaei became the head of this Center as an advisor to the president. This renaming and the change in position and function of the Office from advisory to the Deputy was a significant action at that time. A separate budget was allocated to the Center, and in 2002, all government agencies were required to allocate a percentage of their budget to the women's participation. During Mohammad Khatami presidency the women's demands were followed more seriously and perhaps for the first time the change of laws and perspectives were discussed. The most important program of The Center for Women's Participation, in its first year of formation, was the increasing of women's participation. Zahra Shojaei, referring to the implementation of the village and city councils, had said: "considering the policies of the new government, it is the best opportunity for women to acquire executive positions". At the end of Khatami's presidency Zahra Shojaei announced 63% improvement in women's management. The growth of females' share in universities and other higher education institutions is also one of the achievements of Mohammad Khatami's government. In the period, despite quantitative increase, the quality of women's participation did not change too much, and Legal and perspective barriers still remained in place. Women did not succeed to acquire any ministry position; despite his early promises, Khatami ended all debates and discussions by calling the presence of women in macro-level management, a risk.

#### *Situation of Women in the Ninth Government*

Conservative Ninth government began with a different approach to the issue of women. Right after its beginning, most female executives were replaced by males and very soon the Change of titles in governmental centers for women to the traditional ones was performed with a particular perspective. The "Center for Women's Participation" in the Presidential Office changed name to "Center for Women and Families". The Programs for female heads of households were also changed title. Time and schedule prohibitions for women employment were introduced by this government as the women's reduced working hours' bill which was discussed at meetings of government's Sub-Commission on Social Affairs and was adopted after some refinement. This policy was based on this perspective that Women must not stay in the workplace longer than a specified time. Introducing the working women's teleworking on Thursdays and part-time employment of women in the 8-year period of this government was based on a belief that women should work inside the house, so if women are employed for any reason, the hours they spent outside the house should be reduced to a minimum. This policy was implemented while developed

### **Review Article**

societies emphasized on the division of household and children related tasks between the male and female or the creation of cheap and high quality kindergarten to resolve these challenges. Other blatant gender discrimination during this period was the gender-rationing of general exam applicants. It went so far that in the university entrance examination of 2012, 36 universities did not accept female students and female lost the permit and opportunity to pursue 77 academic fields (Shahindokht Molaverdi, women do not have management experience, where this experience should be started? Interview with Khabar online, May 2013). Women's Studies were one of the academic fields that were removed from some universities. These actions were born from a certain perspective toward women. The perspective that sees woman as accused and believes that presence women in society, corrupts, stimulates and distracts men, and reduces their efficiency. However, given the dramatic socio-economic changes in women's cause and level of demands, forcing women back to private sphere seems unlikely. During the elections of parliamentary administrative board Concurrent with the government of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Men in parliament rejected women candidates Based on this analysis that "a woman should not sit on the board, because then we are forced to constantly look at her". From what was said it seems that Patriarchal political culture in Iran has increased in this period.

The other actions of this government was the Removal of ministerial and governors' advisers on women's issues, with the aim of women's exclusion from the public sphere. The position of Ministerial advisor was removed, and demoted from Ministerial office to social deputy office. Ahmadinejad's policy on the employment of women was self-conflicted. For example, in 2010 he said: "What's wrong with having a woman governor? We have 30 provinces; it is Okay to have two, or three provinces with female governors." And at the utter disbelief of every one, for the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in the tenth government three female candidates were presented for ministerial positions; the only one that was accepted by parliament was Marzieh Vahid dastjerdi, but Ultimately the President could not tolerate the presence of one woman in the cabinet, and she left the government.

#### *Situation of Women, in the Current Moderate Government*

In some periods, Women of parliament have been active in the legislation of laws for the benefit of women, and proposed bills in line with women's rights, but they have had insignificant presence whenever the negotiations were focused on more important broader issues. Even increased number of women in the sixth and seventh parliaments did not change this process and even now Parliament's environment is still patriarchal. In The Judiciary, the issue is different. Despite some legal facilities there are significant Sharia constraints to women's participation in high levels of management in judicial system because judicial tasks have a direct correlation with the fiqh (Islamic) law. According to reports on Gender Gap by the World Economic Forum, in 2012, from total 135 countries Iran was ranked 127, and this unfortunately means that there are only 8 countries (among studied ones) which have higher Inequality of Opportunities, Resources and income between women and men. This report is one of the most reliable reports that have been published since 2006 about the inequalities between men and women in the world and its main indicators include: Economic, education, political empowerment and hygiene indicators. According to the World Economic Forum report on women's participation in political and power structures, there is 3% women presence in parliament and 9% in ministerial positions and in last 50 years ,women never held the head of state position. According to this report among countries that are weak in terms of political empowerment of women, Iran is the only country that has not taken an effective step to address these inequalities; this is while political empowerment of women is very important in the process of development and numerous cultural and legal strategies have been suggested to improve it. One of these strategies is the Positive discrimination policies that bound parliaments to allocate a certain percentage of seats to women. This policy is even active in our least developed neighboring country, Afghanistan (Parastu, 2012).

Although the issue of gender justice was considered and implemented in Iran's fourth development plan by the government of Mohammad Khatami, but conservative Seventh parliament removed it from this plan, this happened while Governments shall formulate development plans in such a way that remove the embedded inequalities.

### **Review Article**

During his election campaign, Rohani, Iran's current president has given many promises to increase social and political participation of women and improve their status in the society.

### **CONCLUSION**

While there is no Gender inequality in electoral laws of Parliament and the Bylaws resulted from constitution, and women's right to vote or be voted is recognized, Women communities have not yet witnessed any major Change in the problems of Female-headed households, socially-damaged Women, and victims of violence. Regardless of fundamentalist, reformist or moderate governments, Women's rights are not a subject to be pursued in just a specific governmental attitude. In a Statement by the Executive policy Director of UN Women agency in fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the roadmap of the women's status in politics is accurately depicted in 2014. According to designed guidelines, in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, It is decreed that by 2015 Over 30 percent of the national parliaments' seats should be allocated to women; while in our country, despite massive inputs of women in universities and Surpassing men in some fields, we still can see the delegation of second and third class political and social roles to women, and continued existence of The glass roof, the barrier for women to achieve high positions (Andishe Club, 2010). Given the importance of gender equality in increasing women's political participation and its slow process up until now it is necessary to form Independent committees of professors and experts in the social sciences In cooperation with the Office of Women's and family Affairs to monitor the work of Representatives, Ministers, Other women's affaires administrators in order to analyze the major deterrents in the success of these institutions. With every change of government, we can see the entry of women into the political arena and various administrative positions that are either related to the specific perspectives of ruling party or are personally related to influential men. In some cases these women -willingly or unwillingly- have blocked the path to women's rights and country's development, Because of their traditional perspective, or the lack of sufficient updated scientific competence necessary for their jobs. On the other hand, among social and political women activists, there are individuals, who have little knowledge of academic researches, and their work solely relies on their experience in the field and lacks any scientific or theoretical background, and obviously produces little output. Occasionally When some of these people gain access to top management positions, they forget the ideals of gender equality and cannot tolerate the presence of more educated or qualified women in the system and that is Because of their historical frustrations of female gender or their Personal or marital failings. There are So many capable and intellectual women who have independently entered the institutions, associations, and active parties and have tried to engage in scientific and documented research, but have been derailed by this shortsightedness. To tackle this issue, it seems necessary to conduct a structured Review and reexamination of all Members of associations and organizations especially in high offices and administrative positions, in terms of scientific competence and ability.

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### Review Article

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**Review Article**

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