CHAPTER 2: GLOBALIZATION AND WOMEN IN IRAN
A- The Position of Women in Contemporary Iran

Women in Iran, today, are struggling to achieve equality in the spheres of employment and political representation. They have made great progress in the educational and health fronts after the Islamic revolution but lag behind in terms of paid work and political participation.

In post-revolution years, the situation of women in Iran, like other groups of society, underwent many changes. This section gives a quick glance at the situation of Iranian women in statistics and figures:

Population

Table 2-1: The Population Combination of Iran during 1956-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>9309760</td>
<td>9644944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>12432921</td>
<td>13355801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>16352396</td>
<td>17356347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>24164049</td>
<td>25280961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>29540329</td>
<td>30515159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>30030698</td>
<td>30994247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>30494482</td>
<td>31473335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>31011437</td>
<td>31952423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>31501807</td>
<td>32431511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>31993352</td>
<td>32913350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>32226049</td>
<td>33314175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>32935956</td>
<td>34055617</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This Table shows the demographic situation of Iran in 47 years. The gender
proportion of the population is 104. This implies that there are 100 females to 104 males.¹

Iran’s total fertility rate dropped by 6.7 between 1980 and 2001, as the result of a highly successful family planning programme. Iran has changed its official position on family planning twice since the 1960s. In 1966, Iran was one of the first countries in the developing world to establish a national family planning programme, and by the mid-1970s, 37 per cent of married women were practicing family planning, with 24 per cent using modern methods.

Soon after the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran replaced the previous regime’s population programme with pro-fertility policies. At the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, the rapid population growth of more than 3 percent a year (one of the highest rates in the world) was seen as a major obstacle to economic reconstruction and development.

At the end of the Iran-Iraq war in the late 1980s, the Iranian government renewed its interest in family planning amidst deteriorating economic conditions. The country’s National Birth Control Policy issued in 1989 had the endorsement of the country’s highest Islamic authorities, and religious leaders joined with health and policy experts in a campaign to persuade the public of the need for family planning through newspaper reports, television spots and Friday prayer speeches. Iran’s family planning program today is considered a model for developing nations and

¹ The gender ratio: The gender ratio at the time of birth is 104 males: 100 females. (This proportion fluctuates between 104 and 106). There are several reasons including: mortality of female infants is higher than male infants. False declaration of birth (false statistics): In some rural areas, some traditional and less developed communities do not declare the birth of their daughters to the registration offices. At present, the developing countries show improvement in this situation due to improvement in women’s status, reduced mortality of babies during childbirth, and decreased mortality of infants. However, this gender ratio (104 males to 100 females) is altered among the adult population and there are a larger number of women than men because of reasons, such as higher accident mortality rate among men than women (interview: Dr. Shahla Kazempour, University Professor and Sociologist at Tehran University).
other Muslim countries. Infant, child and maternal mortality all have declined, and contraceptive use has risen from 37% of married women in 1976 to 73% in 1997.\(^1\)

In response to the growing demand from an increasingly educated population, Iran used the media to help revitalize its family planning programme and promote an awareness about the population growth rate, which was too high and left unchecked, could have negative effects on the national economy and the population's welfare. The level and rate of decline in fertility have surpassed expectations. The official government target in its first Five-Year development plan was to reduce the total fertility rate to 4.0 births per woman by 2011. By 2000 the rate was already down to half the state goal, at 2.0 births per woman.\(^2\)

The growth rate of life expectancy from 1997 to 2003 was 4.3 per cent equally for males and females.\(^3\)

**Education**

The education variable is one of the highly important social indexes in the development evaluation of a country. Education improves public knowledge of society and this increase could influence the political, economic, occupational, health situation of different groups in society.\(^4\)

---


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>84.45</td>
<td>74.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>75.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>85.53</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>76.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>86.07</td>
<td>76.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-2 shows that the education rate of women was 7.3 per cent in 1956 and reached 79.7 per cent in 2003, indicating an enormous increase in the education rate of Iranian women. In 1989, the difference in the education rate of men and women was about 18.9 per cent, which reduced to 9.1 per cent in 2003.

As it can be seen, men have higher education rate; however the 5.3 per cent increase in education among women during 1996 to 2002 compared to the 3.3 per cent increase in men’s education in the same years shows the realization of the government’s goals aimed at lowering the gap of education index between men and women. ¹

Higher Education

A. College/University Students

According to the statistics, in the academic year of 2002-2003, 809,567 students were admitted to the universities and higher education institutes. Of these numbers, 50.99 per cent of students of state universities were female students.  

Table 2-3: Gender Combination of State University Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>369907</td>
<td>63.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>386693</td>
<td>61.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>371263</td>
<td>58.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>379319</td>
<td>55.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>387185</td>
<td>52.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>381505</td>
<td>50.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>396719</td>
<td>49.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>430493</td>
<td>46.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The ratio of female/male students in higher education:
Increase in the trend of girls studying in higher educational institutions and universities, a concern of educational planners, is evident. There are several reasons for this trend, the most important of them are:
- The policy set by the education officials in the Ministry of Education for students’ choice of courses in high schools. Statistics of students in this level of education shows that the number of boys in vocational and technical courses is much higher than girls. Similarly, in the universities and colleges, there are more boys studying in technical and engineering courses than girls. In addition, the largest number of students studying in technical, vocational and ‘science-work’ fields in high schools are boys, while girls make up the largest number of students in purely theoretical courses. As a result, more boys get jobs after completing high school, while more girls compete for higher educational places during nationwide admission examinations than boys.
- The reduction in the number of pregnancies per woman, the increase in the average age of marriage, and the availability of modern equipment for domestic duties traditionally done exclusively by women have given more free time for women to enter higher education (Report of Changes in Women’s Status, pp.78-79).
- The low salaries for jobs requiring academic qualifications discourages boys from going in for higher education and directs them towards technical and vocational fields so they can be in the work market sooner and have suitable incomes.
- There are not enough jobs available for university graduates, therefore, less boys are interested in wasting several years in higher education without any hope of a better income in the future, while girls think about qualification as a social asset which gives them better status in the society, social prestige, and a better choice in marriage partners.
- An increased self-confidence among girls may be another reason for the higher number of girls in higher educations. Some analysts suggest that the segregation of the sexes in the schools improves the self-confidence of girls; however, more independent and comprehensive studies are required to find the reasons contributing to self-confidence among girls, in general. This paper cannot address this issue.
The percentage of female students in the total number of state universities shows a 47.9 per cent increase in the growth rate, from 36.1 per cent in 1997 to 53.5 per cent in 2004. The rapid increase in the number of female students at state universities has exceeded the growth in the number of male students. During 1997 to 2003, the increase in the number of university students was 16.37 per cent for boys and 135.9 per cent for female students.¹

Table 2-4: Gender Combination of State University Students According to Fields of Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Medicine</th>
<th>Humanities</th>
<th>Natural Science</th>
<th>Technical Engineering</th>
<th>Agricultural &amp; Veterinary</th>
<th>Art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Women Total</td>
<td>Women Percent</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Women Total</td>
<td>Women Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>94377</td>
<td>52.06</td>
<td>242989</td>
<td>59.55</td>
<td>81916</td>
<td>43.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>98273</td>
<td>53.57</td>
<td>264793</td>
<td>41.96</td>
<td>89631</td>
<td>45.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>97826</td>
<td>56.30</td>
<td>267844</td>
<td>46.68</td>
<td>92379</td>
<td>49.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>95329</td>
<td>58.23</td>
<td>289336</td>
<td>49.52</td>
<td>86566</td>
<td>54.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>100826</td>
<td>60.99</td>
<td>312854</td>
<td>53.80</td>
<td>91278</td>
<td>56.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>93847</td>
<td>63.53</td>
<td>329684</td>
<td>56.66</td>
<td>97095</td>
<td>59.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>93032</td>
<td>64.99</td>
<td>346545</td>
<td>59.03</td>
<td>100495</td>
<td>62.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>91794</td>
<td>66.85</td>
<td>410792</td>
<td>61.95</td>
<td>121509</td>
<td>64.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The share of females in the whole number of students of state universities has increased during the aforementioned period. The most growth was in the field of agricultural and veterinary sciences with 108.68 per cent and the least was in the field of medicine at 28.04.²

The Islamic Azad University

The proposal for the establishment of the Islamic Azad University was first made by the then Speaker of Parliament, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, in 1982. It was intended to maximize the use of the country's potential in order to expand higher

¹ Report of Changes in Women's Situation ..., op.cit., p.40
education, promote the level of knowledge and literacy in the society, and secure some of the needed experts by the direct participation of people. Driven by the need to meet the increasing demand for training specialized human force, the University is a public, non-state, non-profit institution that does not use the public budget and is mainly financed through students' fees and public donations.¹

The University began its academic activities in 1983 by establishing nine academic branches in the country and admitting 2045 students through a nationwide entrance exam for ten fields of study. Today, with 330 academic branches throughout the country in ten regions and with several overseas branches in Great Britain, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Tajikistan and Tanzania, more than one million students study in the university.² There are 48,616 academics who work with the University on a part-time and full-time basis, from the post-diploma to the Ph.D. programmes.

In the academic year of 2002-2003, 864,190 were students at Islamic Azad University. It is interesting that 50.99 per cent of students of state universities and 50.3 per cent of Islamic Azad University students were female students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>362872</td>
<td>59.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>396062</td>
<td>60.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>368795</td>
<td>55.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>389588</td>
<td>53.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>438640</td>
<td>52.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>416571</td>
<td>51.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>428755</td>
<td>49.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>486616</td>
<td>50.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of female students in the total number of Azad universities shows a 21.8 per cent increase in the growth rate, from 40.8 per cent in 1997 to 49.7 per cent in 2004. The rapid increase in the number of female students at state universities has exceeded the growth in the number of male students during 1997 to 2003. The increase in the number of university students was 34.1 per cent for boys and 92.2 per cent for female students.¹ The most number of female students study in B.A programmes, both in state universities and Open (Azad) universities.

**Occupation**

Studying the percentage of women in the total workforce of Iran between 1956 and 1991 shows that in 1956, 9.6 per cent of employees were women. This figure increased to 13.2 and 13.7 per cent in 1966 and 1976, respectively. In 1986, this figure dramatically reduced to 8.8 per cent but rose slightly to 9.3 per cent in 1991.

Studies show that in 1993, 25.6 per cent of government employees in the civil services were women. The highest rate of female employment was in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health with 42.1 and 41.3 per cent, respectively, while only 1.6 per cent of employees in other ministries and state organizations were women.²

The state of women’s employment in Iran shows that in spite of a significant increase in the total number of literate women as well as women with high educational levels, their share of the employment market has not increased substantially between 1956 and 2003.

¹ Report of Changes in Women’s Situation ..., op.cit., p.42

35
Table 2-6: The Rate of Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>59.22</td>
<td>9.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>60.83</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>61.86</td>
<td>11.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>62.09</td>
<td>11.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>61.82</td>
<td>11.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>62.40</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>62.80</td>
<td>10.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 2-6, the total employment rate of women and men in the years under study reduced, and women employees have a slight share in the total figures. Low employment rates and lower income make Iranian women vulnerable to economic depression and stagnation. Nowadays, universal or global economic competition motivates countries to adopt measures to continue their survival and catch up with the necessities of this competition. Empowerment of the economic state of a country needs the participation of the whole population in the economic sphere and activities. Therefore, empowerment of females and promotion of their economic power, as half of the population, is very important and essential. Women cooperatives are an instrument through which women can represent their abilities in the economic field.

Women’s Cooperatives

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution and from the very beginning of executing the plan of job creation for the unemployed, women’s cooperatives started

---

their activities. Before establishing the Ministry of Cooperation up to 1990, in sum, there were 65277 women gathered in 5507 cooperatives and since 1991 (when the Cooperative Act and establishment of the Ministry of Cooperation was approved), up to the end of March 1999, there were 1084685 women members out of the total 9627278 actual members of cooperatives across the country (11.4 per cent).

During 1991 to 2002, the rate of women's membership of the cooperatives has been showing significant growth.

Table 2-7: Number of Women's Cooperatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1793</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During 1997 to 2003, the rate of growth in women cooperatives was 187.3 per cent; in other words, the number of women cooperatives in the period that was the subject of study was doubled. It should be noted that women cooperatives are those establishments where more than 50 per cent of members are female. ¹ These women's cooperatives work in area of production and service.

Political Participation

Participation is the basis of political life and in a democracy it is the right of all citizens to be able to participate in politics. Therefore, "the necessity of participation of women as half of the citizens of a society from development viewpoint is for the reason that it facilitates achieving actual and more durable development, because

¹ Report of Changes in Women's Situation ..., op.cit., p.58.
today, development is impossible without participation of all the people, and democracy is impossible without recognizing the equal rights of women."\(^1\)

Granting equal voting rights and accepting the presence of women in politics are prerequisites of women’s participation in political activities. In this section, we take a brief look at the progression in the presence of Iranian women in politics.

Table 2-8: Relative Distribution of Women Elected to the National Parliament during the Pahlavi Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-8 shows the changes in the presence of women members of parliament in the National Parliament of Iran before the Islamic revolution. It showed an increase from 1963 to 1975.

Table 2-9: Relative Distribution of Women Elected at the Senate during the Pahlavi Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that in the Iranian Senate in the period between 1963, when women were allowed seats, and the Islamic Revolution, the number of women members always fluctuated between 3.3 and 5 per cent.

Table 2-10: Relative Distribution of Female Candidates and Females Elected at Islamic Legislative Assembly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th></th>
<th>Elected</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First (1979)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second (1983)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third (1987)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth (1991)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth (1995)</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth (1999)</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh (2003)</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>9.89</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-10 shows the progression of female candidates in the first session of the Islamic Legislative Assembly until the seventh session (1979-2003). The number of women candidates and elected women members of parliament (MPs) shows an increase during these years; however, the percentage of women among candidates is greater than the percentage of women MPs. It shows that more women are interested in political posts but they do not have support among voters, which could mean that voters lack confidence in women MPs.

Islamic Councils of Cities and Villages

Councils are one of the efficient tools of political participation in today's world and perform some of the duties of the central government in dealing with local and regional problems of different countries.

According to the law of 'Organization, duties and election of Islamic Councils' (passed in May 1996 by the Islamic Legislative Assembly), Councils known as Islamic Councils of villages, towns, cities and districts were created for the fast progress of social, economic, and civil projects.

On March 9, 1999, the election of Councils was held in Iran for the first time.
Table 2-11: Gender Combination of Members of Islamic Councils of City and Village

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Gender combination of members of Islamic Councils of city and village</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First (1999)</td>
<td></td>
<td>162649</td>
<td>99.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second (2003)</td>
<td></td>
<td>152974</td>
<td>98.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-12: Gender Combination of Candidates to be Elected to Islamic Councils of City and Village

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Gender combination of candidates to be elected to Islamic Councils of city and village</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First (1999)</td>
<td></td>
<td>328862</td>
<td>97.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second (2000)</td>
<td></td>
<td>213091</td>
<td>97.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As observed in the Tables, the number of candidates for Islamic city and village Councils elections has decreased; and also, their political participation as members of the mentioned councils has increased. The rate of growth in per cent of female members of the Islamic Council of cities and villages during 1997 to 2003 has been 79.76 per cent. The percentage of participants in the elections is another factor of political participation of women. Regarding these statistics, the number of women who participated in the sixth presidency election was 6884031 (43.99 per cent).1

B-Role of Iranian Women in Contemporary Social-Political Changes

Pre-Islamic Era

The status of women has varied in different civilizations. Although women have been working hard along with men to improve and contribute to the flourishing of civilizations, historical documents and evidence show that no real attention has been paid to the actual situation and position of women. In some civilizations, such as ancient Iran, women enjoyed a better status than in other civilizations. For example, in the ancient civilizations of Assyrians and Mesopotamia, when a girl reached puberty and it was time for marriage, she was taken to the bazaar and was offered for sale. In Egypt, when the Nile water dried, a girl would be adorned with ornaments and sent to the Nile to be drowned, in the belief that this would cause an increase in water.¹

A review of the situation of woman in ancient Iranian civilization will be of some help. Iran was one of the centres of civilization in the ancient era. Based on the existing data, the carving in inscriptions and the text of religious treatises, it can be concluded that the situation of women in Iran was better than that of contemporary women in other parts of the world. While in ancient Greece (the centre of science and politics) women were not even considered as citizens and when Arabs buried their infant girls alive, in Iran the daughters of Khosro Parviz, Azarmidokht and Pourandokht, reigned. At the time of absolute barbarity in north Europe, Iranian Muslim women such as Reyhaneh², daughter of the great scientist, Kharazmi, learned astronomy and taught science. As a general principle, it could be said that fluctuations of the legal position and the situation of women in each period depended on the requirements of the time and the type of social relationships that existed. For example, the value of degrees and the roles played by women in the society were

dependent on the freedoms they possessed in different social positions. That is, the
ingredients and the situation of women in pre-historical times, in ancient and post-Islam
Iran and today were always part of the attitudes characterizing an era. Women's
status during Achaemenians was based on the justice and the popular concepts of
their time. In the first decree of Cyrus the Great, gender justice has been emphasized.
Cyrus gave particular attention to the position and character of women as the rearers
of future generations. During Cyrus' time, pregnant women were exempted from
working and according to his order, pregnant women were given a monthly payment
until the birth of their infants. According to the writings left from the Ashkanid
period, women were considered as gifts for establishing peace among groups of
people and nations and a marriage would bring about a link for unity.

Islamic Period

With the advent of Islam, Iranians converted to Islam; the Iranian women
accepted the new religion like men and converted too. Although theoretically, Islam
lays down the most comprehensive orders regarding the role of women, particularly
their participation (the life of Prophet Mohammad is clear evidence of this), in the
lapse of time, the different centers of power did not provide an opportunity for the
changes in practice. Therefore, the Iranian Muslim woman remained in her
traditional role except in a few legal subjects (such as inheritance, Right of select
husband). Thus some fourteen centuries ago, Islam recognized women's legal and
economic independence as existing and remaining separate from that of their fathers,
husbands, and sons. Islamic marriage was conceived as a matter of contract between
consenting partners (Koran 4: 4:24), and one that stipulated a specific price, Meher,
payable to the bride before consummation of her marriage. Women must be

---

1 when the name of Iran was Touran. Azarmidokht and Pourandokht were two queens of Iran before
Islam in the Sassanian period; Reyhaneh lived in the eleventh century after the birth of Jesus.
2 Mosaffa, op.cit., pp.101-102
3 Ibid., p117.
maintained in the style to which they have been accustomed (2:238, 4:34) and paid for suckling their babies (2:233).

Like all political theories, those relating to Islamist women have had difficulties in standing the test of time. Although Islam does provide a space for women, it has been as difficult for Muslim women, as for their western counterparts, to obtain and maintain their rights.¹

**Women during the Qajar Era (1775-1925)**

There is not much information on the collective movements of women and their role in the social-political changes until the Qajar period (1775-1925) and the few cases recorded in history books are mostly on the role of women in supporting soldiers in their wars with enemies. As an example, in the long-drawn-out Iran and Ottoman wars of the Safavid period, the Azerbaijani women donned armour and entered the battle field and when the Ottoman troops attacked the city, women who had not left the city poured boiling water on invaders.

Therefore, since more historical evidence and documents are available from the Qajar period, we will start from that time. The initiation of women’s collective movement should be divided into two periods: In the first period, due to the political and special dissatisfaction of society caused by the government’s weakness against foreign colonialists and the internal dictatorship government of Iran, women joined social movements as followers of men, with the latter’s encouragement and approval. In this way, they (women) played an effective role and supported men’s goals. During this period, women did not have any particular demands (examples are the Tobacco and Constitution movements, discussed later in the paper).

In the second period, women started separate activities to address their own special issues, showing the changes towards progress. This reveals more knowledge of women of their social status and their potential to act as an effective social group. However, this second movement, unlike the former one, did not benefit from the approval and full cooperation of men. Their opponents showed enmity, and sometimes, posed problems in the path of women's progress. The main cause of those objections was the belief that a women's movement was an innovation in traditional ideas and in fact, society was not prepared to accept such a big leap, such as accepting schools for girls, publishing journals etc. In following sections of this dissertation, some examples of those movements are described in more detail.

The first national movement in contemporary Iran was initiated after Iran’s defeat in its wars against Russia. The self-motivated movement of the people of Tehran was directed towards defending Muslim Georgian women who were the victims of the interpretation of one of the articles in the Torkamanchay treaty (1828) by the dictatorial Russian ambassador in Iran. The ambassador was insisting on separating those women from their husbands and children and sending them to Georgia after making them convert to their religion again. This act was taken by Muslims as an invasion of the national and religious norms and values of Iranians and thus resulted in extensive protests by the people. The women of Tehran showed much enthusiasm and passion during the protests and in the demonstration before the Russian Embassy. They did not give up until the last minutes, when protesters stormed the embassy and massacred its occupants, including the ambassador.

In another demonstration, which was held by the people of Tehran to support Amir Kabir (a prominent reformist chancellor in mid-1850), women actively participated. In general, women’s serious presence in contemporary Iranian movements started at the time of the Constitution Revolution. This process generated a continuous and long-term movement by its intrinsic and inner characteristics, the results of which continued for years year after. These movements were realized in three classes of women’s activities:
1. Establishment of women's associations and organizations
2. Publishing journals/gazettes
3. Establishment of girls' schools

The Qajar era was the period of initiation of collective movements and activities of women. During that time, the society witnessed the active presence of women in the Tobacco Issue and constitutional movements. Based on this fact, one may say that the peak of women’s presence in public movements goes back to the Qajar period.

However, the most genuine mutual understanding in a united movement could be found in the Tobacco movement.

**Tobacco Movement (1890-1892)**

In 1890, that is, during the reign of Nasreddin Shah Qajar, a contract was signed by Major Talbot, known as the Reggie contract. This contract gave Talbot an exclusive right on tobacco trading across the country and Talbot undertook to pay 15,000 lire and pay one-fourth of the profit to the Iranian government. When Haj Mirza Hassan Shirazi (a prominent Shia jurisprudent) announced his opposition and passed a fatwa (religious order) on the illegitimacy of such trade and thus, religiously, pronounced it a taboo to use tobacco while the contract was in force, a significant revolutionary passion and spirit took over the whole country, particularly the women. All Iranians supported the fatwa. The passion was not restricted to a special group of people or a class, but the entire Iranian nation. The evidence shows the coordinated role of women and men against the Reggie contract and even the pioneering status of women in this movement.

---

Morgan Shuster writes on the women's presence: "In Tehran, it was a saying that whenever women rebel or protest against the council of ministers or the government, the status of the council or government will be so hard and difficult." And ultimately, Nasreddin Shah officially abolished the Reggie treaty in 1892.

**Constitutional Revolution (1905)**

The Constitutional movement was the fruit of efforts and self-sacrifice of many people who had prepared the ground before its occurrence and for years after, tried to realize the ideals of constitution. In fact, this movement opened the path for other protests. Punishing tradesmen in Tehran by beating them, an act ordered by Alaodolleh, the then ruler of Tehran because of high price of cube sugar, insulting the clergymen and famous religious people and punishing them by Zafarolsaltaneh, the ruler of Kerman, the insult of Monsieur Neuse, the Belgian customs officer in Tehran (who wore the uniforms of clergymen and priests), the familiarity of people with western intellectual ideas were some of the incidents leading to the Constitutional movement.

One may say that the real awakening of women started during the Constitutional movement. Among the events that took place, which reveal the role of women in the Constitutional movement?

The evidence and sources, including local and foreign historians, all believe that women had an active presence in the Constitution movement and even encouraged men. Those women never withdrew from giving life and property and participated in the movement as much as they could until 1906 when the Constitution movement tasted victory and the constitution charter was signed. Based on the charter, the king

---

was a figurehead and would not rule and the National Parliament had to be established when people elected the parliament members.

Despite all their efforts and self-sacrifice, women had no share in the constitutional advantages and achievements. The bourgeois democratic revolution that aimed to allow a fundamental economic and political change in the society was defeated and the situation of women did not change at all. However, the result is important in that it increased the awareness of women and awakened them, motivating them to take on new challenges. Lack of access to legal rights did not act as a factor to prevent women from entering into the next movements and women started activities for more basic rights, such as teaching and education. In the next periods, women's acts were more self-motivating. Their activities in the post-Constitution movement were the same methods chosen by men:

1. to establish associations
2. to publish newspapers and journals
3. to establish schools

Establishment of Schools

The right to an education has been a major demand of the Iranian women's movement from its formative days in the mid-nineteenth century. Women activists considered access to education a vital means to overcoming social barriers. Before waiting for the support of government and looking for the legal contributions, Iranian women started organizing themselves and used creative methods to establish and run schools for women, health and medical centers and houses for raising unattended and orphan children.

---

2 Mehranjiz Kaar, *Political Participation of Women, the Barriers and Possibilities*, Roshangaran Publication & Women's Studies, Tehran, 2000, p.110.
3 Shahidian, *op. cit.*, p.38.
In 1913, the *Shokoufeh* journal was printed for women. It published the list of sixty-three schools for girls in Tehran and announced that one-seventh of students in Tehran were girls.

It should be noted that those schools maintained regular communication with women's associations. The transformation of Iranian education to a modern school system began with the vote of the parliament in 1926 to devote one half of one percent of land revenues for public elementary education.

**Publication of Women's Journals and Newspaper**

Since the Constitution revolution, newspapers have been the most important information tools and the means by which, women, like other groups of the society, discussed their views and goals. During the first parliament, where women's activities were limited, they could publish their demands and opinions in the Constitution newspapers; however, after taking over Tehran, the political, social, cultural interests of women expanded and publishing newspapers and journals became a necessity. The modern, pioneering women stepped into journalism despite their limited facilities. From the second course of National Parliament and during Reza Shah's monarchy, seven journals and newspapers for women were published in Iran, each of them marking a long step towards change in the social status of Iranian women.

These journals were:

1. *Danesh* (Knowledge)
2. *Shokoufeh* (Blossom)
3. *Zaban Zanan* (Women's Tongue)

---

4. *Nameh Banovan* (Women's Letter)
5. *Alam Nesvan* (Women's Universe)
7. *Jamiat Nesvan Vatankhah Iran* (Patriotic Women’s League of Iran)

**Women’s Organizations and Associations**

The overthrow of Mohammad Ali Shah (1909) and the re-establishment of the parliamentary system in Iran provided a historical opportunity for the political and social activists to work on renovation and modernization of the Iranian society. They tried to organize national will and demands through establishing political parties and using people’s force and power in the direction of political modernization. The women’s movements were not exclusionist. The liberal and moderate women gained experiences from the activities of ‘Etehadieh Gheybi Nesvan’ and ‘Committee Nesvan’ (Secret union of women and women committee) to organize and achieve progress in the social goals of Iranian women and encourage women to have their own organizations. As the historical records give information, since 1909, there has been an increasing trend to establish associations for organizing women’s participation and letting them into the social life of Iran and realizing their rights. The radical and moderate women raised the subject of the necessity of establishing women associations in the gatherings and meetings held in Tehran and exchanged views on this.¹

The important women’s organizations and associations in this period include:

2. *Anjoman Hemmat Khavatin* (Ladies’ Efforts Association).

¹ *Khosrow Panah, op. cit., p.147.*
The Qajar period marked the onset of Iranian women's consciousness. Women showed an active presence in the political and social movements of that time but had no share of the achievements. Despite this, they did not give up trying. The most important cores of activities of women in that time were: to establish schools, publish journals and form women organizations. Those efforts led to an increase in the knowledge and ability of women in next generations in as it founded a continuous and long-term history in the Iranian women's movement. After the fall of the Qajar and rise of Pahlavi dynasty, the continuity of women's activities were very evident.

The Pahlavi era is divided into two periods: that of the first Pahlavi (Reza Shah) and that of the second Pahlavi (Mohammad Reza Shah).

**First Pahlavi Period (1925-1940)**

When Reza Shah came to power, the modernization process took a faster pace. Reza Shah modelled his macro politics on European modernism, although in a superficial form. In fact, he was a semi-modernist, not a real modernist.

From the very beginning, Reza Shah and his semi-modernist followers believed that:

1. Using any types of veils and head covers is a source of insult.
2. Those veils were the signs of backwardness of the Iranians.

On January 7, 1936, the veil uncovering of Iranian women was stated officially, along with ceremonies, but force was also used. The governmental rule spread across the country and the 'freedom' of Iranian women was celebrated. From that time, using a veil, head cover or any hair cover, except European hats, was prohibited. Those who stood against this law were arrested, sentenced, imprisoned and were attacked by the police forces who would tear away the veils in public and punish the women. Many women above the age of 40 years kept themselves hidden in their houses.
The Pahlavi period, especially of Reza Shah was the age of the public and naked confrontation of modernism and traditionalism concerning women and their rights. The law of uncovering the veil led to the confrontation of clergymen and people with the government of Reza Shah.

In his book on the modernization approach, John Forran analyses the political and economic issues of women. In Forran’s opinion, “In this period, women started stepping into education and work market territories and their number increased every day.” In 1940, 450 girls (and 645 boys) graduated from high school and found desirable and good jobs. On the other end of social structure, that is, the labour class, about 80,000 women were working in industries and unknown numbers in offices and shops. Their wages were low and much less than men. They worked long hours in unsuitable conditions, particularly in carpet weaving and textile crafts.

In family law, women were under pressure and even in the big cities the policy of ‘veil uncovering’ of 1936 was criticized. It was said this law had made traditional and elderly women imprison themselves in their houses. Nevertheless, young women took long steps to participate in public life, independently, without any law developed for this. Women had no right to vote and the women’s movements, compared to 1915 to 1925, lacked the self-motivation and liveliness of those days. Thus, one may say that although much progress was earned in social life, that progress was in special areas only and compared to men in the similar class conditions, women depended more on luck and fortune. Women continued their activities in the educational system, at all levels, and their numbers were increasing.

However, in legislation for women, the legislators of the Reza Shah period continued the same path as Qajar did; that is, they ratified principles where sexuality was intensively observed, the patriarchal system being the essence.

---

2 Ibid., p. 402.
In any event, it seems that there were three important barriers on the path of political-social participation of women during Reza Shah, namely:

1. Lack of a civil society
2. Absence of necessary laws
3. Presence of non-contemporary traditionalist culture

Guity Neshat says that although the policies of Reza Shah helped a small group of Iranian women, they failed to gain the support of most women. This was because the policies did not match the realities and needs of Iranian society on that time.

Second Pahlavi Era (1940-1979)

The situation of Iranian women in today’s world has been affected by the conditions and events which have existed for Iranian women in the course of history.

No particular changes occurred in the political situation of Iranian women during the Second Pahlavi period to the beginning of the 1960s, although, due to some freedoms in the society after September 1941 (when Reza Shah was overthrown), naturally, women, too, could organize themselves by using the small opportunities available in the country.

In 1962, at the time of Mohammad Reza Shah, the Prime Minister Dr Ali Amini, introduced a bill to the parliament which abolished the condition of being a male to vote or to get elected to the Provincial Councils. The bill also allowed elected members of Councils to take an oath on their own religious books rather than exclusively on the Koran. The bill indirectly enabled women and members of all religious minorities to vote or to get elected. This bill provoked the powerful Shia

---

1 Naji Rad, op.cit, pp.243-245.
2 Neshat, op.cit., p.28.
clergy of Iran to co-ordinate mass protests in Tehran and other provinces against the bill, forcing the Shah’s government to withdraw the bill temporarily. In early 1963, the Shah staged a political move known as the Revolution of the Shah and the People in which a referendum was called on a six-article bill. One of the articles gave women the right to vote and the right to be elected to the parliament. The bill became law and a new chapter started in the history of Iranian women.

In 1964, the parliament amended the Election Law passed in 1950. One the amendments abolished Clause 1 of Article 10 which categorized women in the same as group of minors and the insane, depriving them of voting. The other amendment was the abolishment of the second clause 2 of Article 13 in which women were not allowed to be elected. Thus Iranian women got the right to elect and be elected as parliament members.

After voting rights were granted to women, economic prosperity, the development of women’s education and the ratification of family protection law, women found more opportunity to step into the social arena. Nonetheless, Mohammad Reza Shah banned independent women associations and only allowed pro-government women’s organizations. It created obstacles for women to be self-motivated activists with the interests of people in minds rather than turning into government’s propaganda machine. As only independent women’s organizations could express the demands of women and interact with women in the society, such organizations of women in the society could bring forward women’s demands, interests, and rights which had been denied through centuries and organize women to improve their lives.

Therefore, from 1962, based on the Shah’s command and from 1964, by approving the single article, the Act of 1964 became law. Iranian women gained the right to vote; however, the only change which was made by giving this voting right was that politics was not legally a completely masculine territory and women were privileged by entering into the area which was a male territory before. The Shah,
himself, called this command ‘Women’s Freedom’ and proudly declared. “Thanks God the last social shame of our country is removed and this chain of insult and slavery which was a burden on the neck of half of population is now taken away and torn.” In fact, however, the chain of slavery remained tight around the neck of the whole nation and was never removed by such shows of lenience.

Years after obtaining voting rights, a number of women were elected as parliament members and some of them reached higher ranks, such as ministerial positions. As an example, in 1974, a total of 125 women were acting as parliament members, deputy ministers and directors general, were members of bar associations and chairpersons of city and village associations.

It should be noted that there were 6 women deputies and 2 women senators in the twenty-first term of parliament, 16 women deputies and 4 women senators in the twenty-third and 20 women deputies and 4 women senators in the twenty-fourth one.1

Of course, as it was stated before, the presence of this group was entirely symbolic and this does not mean true participation of Iranian women in politics and public life. These women could not be considered as speakers and representatives of Iranian women.

In any event, the symbolic presence of women in parliament and ratification of laws and bills containing voting and election rights of women is evaluated as a highly positive step, since it collapsed the ‘patriarch’ totem and destroyed the old and worn out values and norms in the mindsets of people. The presence of women in society and their participation in political-economic activities were institutionalized and realized in the society in symbolic form.

In 1967, the Family Protection Law was approved. According to many feminists, this was a big jump forward. This Act was amended in 1974, abolishing the family articles in Iranian civil law and subordinating them. This law gave women the right to ask for divorce, take custody of their children and some other rights. In addition, this law restricted polygamy. Although this law had positive aspects, the Pahlavi regime's propaganda claimed more than its true function; for, in the best conditions, only a part of urban women could benefit from its advantages, while a more fundamental change in women's situation required a range of cultural activities which the Pahlavi's patriarch system neither could do so, nor showed any interest to do so.

During the second Pahlavi's government, economic growth took place due to the increase in the price of oil, and the Iranian society witnessed changes which naturally included women as well. Statistics show the social status of Iranian women in the last years of the Pahlavi regime. In 1979, two million Iranian women were in the work market and 187,928 had registered in the university and specialized fields; there were 1666 female managers and 1803 university professors.

These rapid, accelerated changes left undesirable effects in the cultural identity of society and was a factor that contributed to people suffering from an identity crisis in the contradiction between modernization on one hand and religious and traditional culture on the other. The process of this identity crisis led to rejecting the claims of modernization and returning to religion and tradition. In 1978-1979, this trend was manifested in the form of returning to tradition and religion and finding shelter in Islamic mottos and codes. For Iranian women, restoration of the chador and hijab was one of the ways they responded to their identity crisis. In political fields, women

---

1. The Iranian Family Protection Law contained a total of 23 articles and, though it did not concentrate exclusively on divorce, its most significant reforms pertained to the curtailment of men's unilateral prerogatives regarding divorce and polygyny. (for more information see this book, Asghar Fathi, Women and the Family in Iran, Leiden, Brill, 1985, pp 116-118)
participated in the political, social and cultural demonstrations and activities and according to the record of history, they took up the flag of the Islamic movement against the Pahlavi regime.

Regarding women's participation in the Islamic Revolution, Nasrin Hakami writes:

'Iranian women actively participated in the anti-Pahlavi Regime movements (both movements with religious aspects and those with non-religious aspects). Many of them were arrested, put in jail, tortured or even executed. During the revolution, the Iranian women played an important role; besides the intellectual and educated women who fought for cultural and political reasons, the traditional and religious women believed in the revolution and Islamic duty and jointly fought alongside men to reach the goal.

The women's participation in demonstrations, while they were carrying infants, was an interesting scene. The women of each region made committees and programmed their movements via these committees. These programmes included support and contribution to the refugees to making explosives (cocktail molotovs) to destroy tanks. The great share of women in this social movement has no precedent in the Iranian history. One may say that this part of history, separation of women and man's role was completely forgotten and the class differences and social surfaces were not believed more or less. All women from each social and/or cultural group joined the revolution'.

Without doubt, women's participation in the victory of the Islamic Revolution is undeniable, for the Iranian Islamic movement was successful in the light of the support of various groups of society, particularly women. In this movement, Muslim women followed the path of genuine role models for Islamic women, such as Hazrat Fatemeh Zahra and Hazrat Zeinab Kobra. They broke the barriers of centuries of

---

1 Nasrin Hakami, 'Change in the Social Role of Women during Iranian Modernization', *Scientific Political Journal, 2nd and, 6th and 7th*, 1995, p.35.
deprivation from social activities and found their way to the public arena to such an extent that one might say that without the participation of Iranian women, the victory of the Islamic Revolution was impossible.¹

Undoubtedly, women’s participation in the process of the Islamic Revolution in massive numbers is now a part of their political culture. Their activities during the revolution was the beginning of their revolutionary movements. Millions of Iranian women from different groups stepped into the public and outside world, including women who had very little political experience. The practical experiences of women could be expressed in following forms:²

1. Distribution of news and notices
2. Performing humanitarian acts and helping those in need (helping the injured and hiding activists)
3. Participation in demonstrations
4. Helping to make barriers for police forces
5. Participation in armed fights and taking arms
6. Activity in secret movements
7. Participation in political sessions, lectures and historical hearing of political movements.

The result of these activities was an awareness that was improved by revolutionary acts and Islam was the most essential motif of this participation. In the path of revolution, there has been a time when women’s presence took a totally religious jurisprudential form and they even entered into the stage to perform their religious duty. During the revolution, women who never thought it their religious duty to take part in society actively participated in the movement. Even though they were potential powers in the impenetrable walls of their homes, they would never

¹ Akram Ghadimi, Woman, Participation and Development, Social World Publication, Tehran, 2001, p.75
have easily been attracted into the social scene. This commitment to duty lessened the subordination of women and men did not prevent them from taking part in the movement because they did not think it contrary to their own beliefs.¹

**Political-social Status of Women after the Islamic Revolution**

There is no doubt about the extensive and brave participation of women in the Islamic Revolution in Iran and their role in overthrowing the Shah’s regime and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Millions of Iranian women from all backgrounds and classes actively participated in the revolution, both those who were already active in social activities and those who were avoiding social activities due to their religious beliefs. The spectrum of the activities of revolutionary women was wide, including distributing news, participation in meetings, military acts (armed struggle), underground activities and speeches.

**The Critical Time in the Beginning of the Revolution:**

However, in this atmosphere, there was a faction who believed that the role of women is limited to family affairs and believed that women should not enter politics. As a result, in the early years after the Revolution, there was a ‘critical period’ of restrictions on women’s employment. Some of these restrictive policies were:

- Encouraging women to retire earlier after receiving compensation
- Encouraging women to be engaged only in marginal affairs and activities
- Making women employees work half-time
- Refraining from assigning managerial jobs to women
- Closing public nursery schools²

³ Mosaffa, op.cit, p.127
**War Time**

During the 8 years of the Iran-Iraq War, women gained valuable experiences due to their participation in various social activities such as:

1. Participation in the military and social mobilizations
2. Participation in the War Logistics Centres (financial and spiritual contribution)
3. Encouraging men to volunteer to join armed forces in war fronts
4. Migration from war-stricken regions and experiencing living in other social environments.

As a result of the experiences of war, many women engaged in the political system. (Fatemi, 162) War was an experience that attached many women to the political system. As an example, great forces of volunteer women were used for needs in different areas (cooking, tailoring, etc). Participation in the revolution by any process and imposed war helped to strengthen woman’s power inside the home.¹

**Construction Period**

This period started after the war and lasted for 8 years during the presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. In the early 1980s, women experienced an almost compulsory stay at home. However, due to the strong women’s presence in the revolution and their role in supporting the war affairs over 8 years, women did not tolerate staying at home, and by playing political roles, they prepared the ground for their presence in the public arena. It was in such conditions that the Council of Cultural Revolution started making polices for women’s employment. In August 1992, the Council introduced a new charter defining the role of women at home and in public. While this charter stressed the significance of motherhood in raising the next generation and house management, its second article highlighted the view that

¹ Ibid.
social justice and perfect society requires women’s employment in cultural, social, economic and administrative jobs. Articles 4 and 5 of the charter lists the jobs suitable for women but it excludes some jobs such as judiciary and fire-extinguishing forces as unfit for women due to the ideological, cultural and social values for ladies. ¹

However, in the mid-1990s, several factors opened new horizons for a higher women’s presence in social-economical and political affairs. These factors were:

- The government wanted to reduce the size of the government-owned departments and staff by increasing the role of civil institutes
- The issue of globalization
- Influence of international relations and cultural, scientific, academic and intellectual exchanges between various societies in the world
- Improvement and expansion of education from which women benefited immensely
- The policy of employing women set by the August 1992 Charter of the Islamic Revolutionary Cultural Council of Iran.

Gradually, as the space opened for Iranian women, women increased their demands about issues concerning women such as equal salary with men for the same work, right to divorce, and the right to stand for higher political posts like the presidency. Increased protests of women, larger participation of women in politics and the publicity for women’s complaints in journals and modern mass media such as the Internet and radio and TV channels broadcast from outside Iran, made the government establish state centres for discussing and working on women’s issues and through these centres, creating consultative posts and women’s affairs departments in all three segments of the state (government, judiciary and parliament), such as presidential advisor on women’s affairs, and the women’s affairs department in the Ministry of the Interior.

¹ Mosaffa, op.cit., pp.139-140
Period of Reforms

During the presidential election of May 23, 1997, another era was opened in the history of Iran, particularly regarding women. This period was called the period of reforms, starting with the presidency of Seyed Mohammad Khatami.

The combined effects of several factors were responsible for the beginning of a new era for women during the period of reforms.

1. Increase in education and attaining higher education.
2. Close relationship with international environment and women of other countries through direct communication:
   - Journals and newspapers
   - Internet and satellite facilities
   - Active international organizations in Iran (such as UN representatives in Iran, UNESCO, UNISEF).
3. Discussion about religious decrees (Islamic jurisprudential), laws, and religious issues regarding women affairs in the universities and women's interest in these discussions.
4. Seminars and national and international conferences and congresses on women's issues.
5. An open atmosphere created during the period of reforms which provided an opportunity for various thinkers to have free discussion and dialogues.
6. Progressive opinion of some Shia scholars about women's rights such as the right to custody of children, equal share in inheritance, equal compensation money (dieh), a woman's right to choose her husband, women's right to divorce, women's right to become judges, women's right to stand for presidency, etc.
7. Women's determination in demanding their equal human rights.
8. International pressures from outside and concerns in the inside.
The Forms of Participation and Roles Played by Women in the Islamic Revolution

1. Demonstrations and Riots

Undoubtedly, for a foreign observer, the most significant and surprising aspect of the Islamic Revolution could be the expansive presence of women in anti-governmental demonstrations. Women who might have never come out of their houses or participate in public actions, stepped into the government. There were women who had rarely left home. In another words, women who participated in the demonstrations were not only from all classes of the society, but also some were those who were kept silent or in isolation before the revolution. Participation of young and active women, whether political or traditional, in the massive demonstrations against the Shah in 1978 shows a new knowledge among women, making them understand that their roles in life were not restricted to sitting at home and doing household chores. They chose to appear in the streets and demonstrations, along with men, and thought of it as their duty as Muslim women. Therefore, as the oppositions and street demonstrations started, their belief was strong. They felt they had to participate in the public movement against the Shah and voice their demands forcefully, even if it would lead to being killed. In addition to demonstrations, female labourers and workers took part in riots like men. One of the main factors in the progress of the massive movement, which led to the final paralysis of the Pahlavi regime were riots and leaving the work and workplace. These actions halted the bureaucracy system of the government and production system. Participation of women in demonstrations was very expansive and included all organizations, governmental and private factories and departments.
Hijab (Veiling)

When the Islamic Revolution started, or even some time before, the hijab worn by women had become one of the most political issues and symbols against the Pahlavi regime, its values, polices and models for women.

The Main Aspects of the Participation of Women in the Political Process of the Islamic Republic of Iran

In its preface, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran has recalled the extensive and active women's participation in all stages of the great battle towards achieving the Islamic Revolution and this is evidence of the large collaboration of men and women from all social scales and religious groups. Women, in particular, showed an active and vast presence in all stages of the great Jihad.

The massive political participation of women in this movement could be analysed from the following perspectives:

1. to participate in the process of the Islamic Revolution
2. to participate in the routine elections
3. to participate in Basij (mobilization) activities
4. to participate in demonstrations and gatherings
5. to participate in groups, associations and organizations
6. to establish NGOs

In addition, women's participation at the elite level could be named as follows:

1. participation in the Islamic Legislative Assembly (Majlis) as parliament members
2. participation in political and decision-making political organizations as well as occupation in the national and international administrative services
The initiation of the collective movement of women goes back to the Qajar period. Despite the vast participation of women in the Tobacco and Constitutional movements, no changes occurred in their status and they were deprived of the fruits of the Constitution. Despite the lack of access to civil rights, they did not stop progressing and took part in activities to gain more basic rights such as education. They tried to establish schools, publish journals and establish women’s associations to appear as a visible presence in the society. These activities were effective in improving their knowledge and making them able. Perhaps it could be said that the results of the Constitutional movement played an important role in improving women’s knowledge for their further campaigns.

During the Islamic Revolution, women showed a vast participation in the scene. With no doubt, all revolutions, and the Islamic Revolution too, manifested the presence of women in social and public activities; however, in most revolutionary societies, due to the patrimonial view of the society, women were pushed away from scene. The Islamic Revolution was started with the motto of women’s presence but the structure was not prepared to accept them because the dominant attitude was based on gender basis and thus, women’s participation diminished to the minimum.

During the critical period of the beginning of the revolution, despite the active role of women in the victory, the conditions for participation in the public scene became difficult for them. Women tolerated high pressures both during and initial period of revolution, but they never left the scene. In subsequent periods, whether it was war, construction or reforms, they continued their role in society and now, they have shown an active presence in higher education.

---

1 Mosaffa, op.cit., p.380.
Information on most revolutionary countries shows that women have taken long strides towards participation in society, being part of the work force and higher education. The importance of economic development in post-revolution countries shows that ignoring the work force of women is an irrational attitude. At the same time, war conditions, which are mostly experienced by revolutionary countries, show the important role of women in the work force.¹

C: Women's NGOs in Iran

In today's world, one of the successful tools in attracting the awareness and voluntary participation of women is to create popular organizations or NGOs. The increase in the political participation of women in the light of global attention to development is one of the main concerns of governments and based on this, women's organizations have been receiving the attention and support of governments as one of the successful means of development.

In an overall development, participation does not mean just voting. Women's participation should provide women the opportunity to have free dialogue and active participation in civil activities. In addition, women should be able to make decisions in the areas that affect their lives. Women's participation, if taken seriously, increases the efficiency of development plans. However at present, the level of women's participation in socio-political affairs is relatively low, and to improve their level of participation would require a tremendous amount of cultural activities and planning.

Other issues which should be considered are public restrictions against women entering social activities, family restrictions, lack of suitable social conditions for working, the ever-growing tendency to treat women like sex objects (the sexist views among the public, including officials as well as ordinary people), and prejudice against women's capabilities. In general, the dominant culture of the society reduces the effective presence and participation of women. Although, considering the concept of participation in development has spread in the developing countries to some extent, neither officials nor the public has a proper understanding of women's participation in socio-political affairs. One of the tools which are used successfully by democratic countries is the popular organizations or NGOs.
In ideal organizations and associations, all members have the right to effective participation and they practice how to be responsible and play a constructive role in the organization. Although members have different motives, talents and abilities, in an actual collective movement, any person plays a role to the extent of his/her ability, potential and sense of responsibility. In this manner, one of the roles of organizations is to educate people to participate and cooperate in shouldering responsibilities to reduce the government’s roles. In such organizations, women become confident in their abilities. In other words, these organizations prepare women to undertake greater responsibilities. In some countries, several barriers are in the path of the willing and active presence of women in the political and social fields. Since male chauvinist culture is the most important barrier, women’s organizations have a responsibility in altering the culture of people to bring about a positive attitude toward women’s role in the society.

Self-motivated organizations of women could attract women and improve their political-social knowledge, accumulate their needs and opinions, organize them and improve their self-confidence by providing them with better education, information, consultation...as a great contribution in providing a suitable background for the positive evolution of women’s status and their knowledge of their rights and the effects of their willing and active presence in the social, political and economic fields in the growth and development of the country.

Today, scholars and researchers of politics, economics, and sociology, believe that achieving sustained national development and growth will not be possible unless there is organized participation of different groups of people. To this end, due to being voluntary and independent, NGOs have been successful in attracting people and making changes quickly and easily with minimal expense. Therefore, governments try to benefit from the pool of talents, potential and capabilities in NGOs to achieve their development goals. However, this requires making facilities available and establishing productive systems, and making the NGOs reliable and trustworthy partners.
Obviously, one of the most essential tools in achieving development is to have participation which correlates with responsibility, and lessens the government’s authority in certain matters. This will not be possible except through organized groups where women’s share in the process of participation could not be denied.

**Definition of NGO**

The most precise definition of an NGO depends on the following characteristics:

1- Organization
2- Privately organized (i.e. non-governmental)
3- Autonomous and independent
4- Voluntary
5- Non-Political

It should be noted that the variety of women’s NGO in Iran could not be defined by one specific term; nevertheless, the women’s NGOs are organizations which are held voluntarily, with the same goals, and without any attachment to the government, and in non-beneficiary or public forms with organized structures. The NGOs may work on charity issues, social services, legal activities, bio-environmental issues, religious missionary work, development and employment, health, etc. Nevertheless, in addition to the above-mentioned definition, there are other definitions. As an example, the Women Participation Affairs Centre has been established to benefit from the capabilities and potential of other NGOs for improving women’s situation in society. Their Articles of Association for the establishment of this organization contain issues for both women and men. This has been included as one of the women’s NGOs.

For a long time, Iranian women have been interested in working in voluntary activities, due to limitations on their participation in a range of other things on the
one hand and their own cultural and moral sensitivities on the other hand. Participation in voluntary groups was seen as being a safe path for active women because the patriarchal system showed minimum resistance to it. Before Islam, contributory groups were the central core of voluntary networks. They were available in rural areas and some of them could even be found in villages. Participation in these groups was temporary, and their functions were mainly social, such as carrying out charity work, and maintaining values concomitant with living in natural surroundings.

After Islam, the religious Islamic missionaries, affected by their local culture, made up the dominant voluntary activities, and the central core of charities were formed by the religious missionaries. Those activities have been the most sustainable and durable participation activities. However, participation was popular and temporary. The functions of social missions for charitable works with a religious approach has arisen from religious codes and beliefs. Charities were the most traditional forms of organized participation, and the most sustainable organization forms in terms of financing and providing manpower. The financial resources of charities were the direct contributions from people, and their approach was based on social spirituality. During the Constitutional revolution, educational associations were formed, and the central core of NGOs became modern. The organizational structure of educational associations were elitist and relied on the financial resources of wealthy women.

The structure of participation in these associations was vertical, and their function and the change in social structure had educational approaches. Their values were based on the demands produced by civil life. The ways in which women could participate during this period were very limited, since they had no opportunity to appear in the social arena; therefore, they held semi-secret meetings. One might say that women were the most effective factors in the demonstrations and in collecting financial aid for the Constitutionalists and some of these women fought dressed in men's costumes and were killed in the Constitutional battles. The associations
played a significant role in establishing several schools for girls, and women's clubs, and in helping women to step into the fields of journalism or teaching.

The participation of people in the revolution and the popular movement were the origins of popular organizations during the Islamic Revolution. After some time, those organizations were transformed into governmental institutes. The financial and manpower resources of those organizations were the people, that is, unreliable contributions and the participation of the masses. The function of these organizations was to change social structures with a revolutionary approach and values based on the feeling of fulfilling a revolutionary duty. During the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988), ideological societies were formed. The central cores of these societies were popular groups that were then improved to become parties or cultural organizations.

Modern NGOs were formed during the construction period (1989-1997) by semi-governmental technocratic elites, influenced by the decentralized movements. Their organizational structures were integrated. Their leadership was technocratic and based on financial contributions from the government, or sometimes from foreign sources. The method of participation in modern NGOs is based on development rights. The function of these organizations is to change social structures with a developmental approach and the values are based on the right to develop. The expansion of traditional and modern women's NGOs has been accompanied by a significant quantitative and qualitative increase in the educational level of girls in the society.

In addition, in the history of the activities of NGOs, the role and effects of the Fourth International Conference of Women in Beijing could not be left untold, for this conference was a peak point in the expansion of NGOs at national and international levels. Those effects are still influential in the activities of Iranian NGOs. During the reforms (1997-2005), the NGOs developed and extended in the civil society. During this period, the modern NGOs, affected by the global civil society, were held by the pluralist social activists. The characteristics are the
integrated and horizontal organizational structure, specialized manpower, and financial resources provided by the government and foreign contributions. The functions of NGOs were to affect the social structure with a civil approach, with the values are based on citizenship and the right to develop.

It should be said that from the mid 1990s, the number of NGOs and their role has increased, particularly in the case of women’s and youth NGOs. On the one hand, the open social and cultural atmosphere developed since 1997, and on the other hand, globalization, being affected by the cultural, mental and scientific interactions in the world, and also the unprecedented growth in education for women of different social classes, were among the factors that accelerated and facilitated the growth and development of NGOs.

**Classification of NGOs**

There are various classifications of NGOs in Iran. According to Sussan Tahmasebi, “Iranian NGOs can be classified into two groups:
- **A- Modern NGOs**
- **B- Traditional community-based organizations (CBOs)”**

**Modern NGOS**

Modern NGOs in Iran have been formed as a response to global trends, as well as growing national interest. Iran’s increasingly active participation in global events sponsored by the UN, in which Iran’s government has had an active role, has significantly contributed to the development of the modern NGO sector.
Traditional Community-Based Organizations (CBOS)

The traditional community-based organizations of Iran, with their strong roots in the community and long history of activities, can be characterized as Iran's true NGOs. The ideological basis for the existence of these organizations is rooted in the Iranian and Islamic tradition of charity work. These organizations hold great promise as potential partners in development efforts.

There are also other means of classifying NGOs:

A. Women's NGOs in Terms of their Range of Activities and Level of Operations

a. local organizations and associations
b. provincial NGOs
c. national NGOs
d. international NGOs

B. Structure of Women's NGOs in the Islamic Republic of Iran

The structure and process of women NGOs formation in Iran and their activities can be divided into three classes:

a. Women NGOs with traditional structure with activities in local level
b. Women NGOs with semi traditional and half-modern with national range of activities
c. Women NGOs with modern structure and national and international activities

---

1 Susan Tahmasebi, *Women's NGOs as Agents of Change in Iran*, In Middle Eastern Women on theMove : Openings for and the Constraints on Women's Political participation in the Middle East, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Middle East Project, 2003, pp121-123.

The dominant form of the women NGOs in Iran is the semi-traditional half-modern, which is passing from traditional to modernism. However, there are other NGOs with a modern structure that could not work like their counterparts in the world due to lack of knowledge and international experiences and absence of the culture of cooperation and information exchange.1

With respect to the classification mentioned above, numerous charity and women’s NGOs are run in traditional form; however, the dominant form of women’s NGOs in Iran is semi-traditional-semi-modern, or, in other words, it is changing from traditional towards modern. A number of these organizations are working in the field of social services. In addition, a few women’s NGOs benefit from having a modern structure.2

C. Women’s NGOs in Terms of Type of Activities:

A subjective and up-to-date division of women’s NGOs has been devised using the model of John Hopkins, with a few changes applicable to the present NGOs for women. This is the most detailed research which has been presented by researchers in social science for defining the third section, as being outside government and market. Based on this, the subject of activities of the mentioned NGOs is divided into twelve parts:

a. Cultural and recreational activities (including mass media, communication, figurative arts, dramatic arts, historical association, literature, human sciences, sports, social clubs and other activities)

b Education and research

c Health and treatment (rehabilitation, mental health and disorders, public health, first aid

1 Soheila Baba Moradi, Woman NGOs since yesterday Till Today, Ava, Center of Affairs for Women’s Participation, No. 7, 2005, p 22.

2 Mahbobeh Abbagolizade, Why Women’s Attach to NGOs?, Ava, Center of Affairs for Women’s Participation, No. 4, 2004, p.38.
Effective Factors in the Development of Women's NGOs in Iran

There are various factors that affect the growth and expansion of NGOs as well as their abilities and functions in different countries. However, it is obvious that the growth and expansion of NGOs need suitable structural conditions. Among these are the political structures, law and bureaucracy. The growth of the organizations requires a suitable political atmosphere, particularly in the relationship of the government to the NGOs. In addition, it is necessary to have a suitable law for obtaining any permits for registration and activities of NGOs, and to have predictable and rational supervision by the government on the process of growth and expansion, which improves freedom, establishes and maintains associations, and accepts pluralism, and to achieve stability of society and an improving popular society. It should be mentioned that in the participating political systems, the bureaucratic structures define themselves in a form that subsequently enable the

---

NGOs to be considered as supplementary to the governmental sector, as a colleague of the governmental sector.¹

In the recent decade, two factors could be considered as particularly effective in the growth and expansion of NGOs:

1. *The fourth Conference of Women, Beijing 1995:*

The fourth International Conference of Women recognized for the first time an official identity for the NGOs, in the framework of communication between governments and NGOs. It provided suitable grounds for a powerful presence of NGOs through governmental organizations. In any event, preparation for, and participation in the conference, gave new life to the women's NGOs and gradually defined grounds for identifying the NGOs as new actors in Iran.

2. *Suitable political and social atmosphere after 1997:*

Plans were made that led to the establishment of an open atmosphere for political and social activities on one hand, and encouraged women and men to participate in administrating the country on the other hand. The women's approach to activity in NGOs caused an increase in the number of NGOs. There were 55 in 1996, and the number reached 470 in 2004.²

**Challenges and Horizons Facing Women's NGOs**

The indisputable fact is that the number of NGOs for women has increased significantly. The variety of activities, and the roles and functions of such organizations have been growing. Therefore, in the near future, they may have good prospects. Nevertheless, these organizations are still facing problems and restrictions, which if solved, could facilitate and speed up the organizations' activities. These issues include the vagueness of goals and organizational duties, elitism, poor

---

facilities and inadequate development of financial and human resources, lack of control and continuous evaluation, weakness in communication skills, disregarding the NGOs ethics, and providing insufficient information for people and governmental agencies.

A helpful, understanding attitude of the government to NGOs is among the factors that facilitates and accelerates the growth of NGOs. Therefore, one may not ignore the role of the government in improving and creating NGOs.

A peak in the growth and development of NGOs can be observed after the following:

Approval of Article 182 and clause D of Article 158 of the Third Plan of Development, the project for improving NGOs, approved by the policy-making council, priorities for national development, improvement of civil organizations, membership of NGOs in six specialized work groups form the 18 specialized groups and planning and development councils of provinces (women and youth, cleaner environment, social control, water, agriculture, natural resources, employment, investment, health work and social security), approval of executive by-laws of clause B, note 7 of the Budget Act for 2003 and 2004 (plan 30228 in execution of Article 158), clauses Z and H of Article 2 of the mentioned by-law concerning improving NGOs for women, plan to teach 150 women teachers for NGOs at the Women’s Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior with the support of Women Participation Affairs, executive by-laws for the establishment and activities of NGOs and approving articles 5, 30, 37, 49, 52, 95, 97, 98, 100, 101, 110, 111, 112, 119, 126 and 130 of the Fourth Development Plan.

In addition, the efforts of NGOs in establishing education centers and ensuring the capability of improvement, using the experiences of other NGOs in other countries, taking specialized courses, gaining consultation rank at the UN, the establishment of provincial communication networks by women’s NGOs, cooperation in preparation and development of activities reports for the international
services, including ICPD+5 and ICPD+10, preparing reports on women's situation based on the Beijing Charter by the NGOs network and independent groups, publishing books and specialized NGO publications such as AVA women's magazine, Saba Newsletter, volunteers, etc. These are all evidence of a clear horizon ahead of the NGOs, particularly women's NGOs in Iran.  

1 United Nations International Conference Population and Development + 5
D: Globalization and Women in Iran

As both Harvey and McGrew have noted, globalization as a universal phenomenon, gives rise to opposite forces of particularism and localization. While promoting universal values, standards and processes, globalization provokes particularistic reactions along the lines of nationality, ethnicity and religious faith, particularly against western cultural influences. While the globalization process has been regarded as rational, the reaction has been more emotional and often based on traditional sources of authority and legitimacy, as occurred when the global forces affecting the Iranian society during the Pahlavi period (1925-78) antagonized the traditional forces and structures, thus leading to the overthrow of that regime. Even after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the global influences have come to problematize the traditional structure of family and gender relations advocated by the Islamic Republic. They have put pressure on local practices which limit the ability of women to participate meaningfully in the social world.

Many studies of globalization have stressed the point that Globalization paradoxically gives rise to opposite forces: particularism and localization on the one hand, and universalism on the other. That is, although it promotes universal values, standards and processes, it also causes reactions that are divided along national, religious and ethnic lines. These reactions are often oriented against Western cultural domination. Thus, although the process of Globalization by itself is a rational one, reactions to it are often irrational or emotional. The Iranian example here is an apt one – global forces affecting Iranian society during the Pahlavi period (1925-78) antagonized traditional forces and structures, directly leading to the revolution that overthrew that regime. In present day Iran too, global influences complicate and disrupt traditional family structures and gender relations advocated by the Islamic republic. Hence, globalization does not always work as a universalizing force.
In the context of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), there is a gap between official estimates of Women’s status, and lived reality. While government reports and spokesmen stress that Iranian women be considered models for other women around the world, the reality is that there are many other countries where women have more economic and legal rights. In fact, the IRI has attempted to delink Iran from various global forces, and this has had a negative impact on Iranian women. This religiously motivated de-globalization has led to a process of nativization that limits both the life chances and the social choices available to Iranian women. For instance, women’s clothing, employment avenues, education and lifestyle are dictated by the clerical establishment.¹

However, forces of globalization have not left Iranian women untouched. Political changes and technological developments around the world have left their mark on social groups, particularly civil rights and women’s groups. The reemergence of women’s activism can be observed among both religious and secular Iranian women. It is the opinion of Ali Akbar Mahdi that Iranian women realize that there is a need to have access to the technological, scientific and communication skills of the globalizing world, and that a totalizing religious ideology hampers this access.² Thus, they have started demanding access to global resources, although with certain conditions attached: that this process takes place at their pace, and that it takes place in tune with their local needs and concerns. Thus, Iranian women have started making the connection between their status and global forces of patriarchy and inequality. They are now challenging the universality and the validity of religious codes that deal with women’s issues.

¹ Despite the institutionalized problems faced by women, there is no doubt, based on sheer statistics, that more Iranian women today than ever before are accessing the benefits of education and professional careers. During 1999, women constituted almost half of medical students and more than half the students entering university. Based on official statistics, Ali Akbar Mahdi estimates that between 1976 and 1995 the literacy rate among urban women increased by as much as 160%, while for men this increase was lesser at 120%. This indicates that women, more than men, were able to take advantage of expanding educational opportunities after the Islamic Revolution.

One aspect of the struggle by Iranian women against nativization is formation of NGOs. This is a direct response to the state’s insistence on centralizing tendencies for power and control. The formation of NGOs, believes Ali Akbar Mahdi, is a form of decentralization and diversification of women’s participation in society.\(^1\) Since women are a crucial segment of Iranian civil society, and since globalization reduces the role of national governments and demands more active participation from civil society, it is only natural that women have gained from this process of globalization. This new energy and creativity with which Iranian women have responded to globalization is a sign of the changing times.

The role that women’s NGOs play in facilitating women’s participation in social and political spheres is one that is acknowledged even by the clerical elite. In 1999 the then President Khatami called for the establishment of more civil and non-governmental organizations for the benefit of Iranian women. This by itself is an indication of the official recognition of the role played by women’s NGOs in Iran.

**Women NGOs and Globalization**

The effects and impact of globalization differs in different societies, developing countries, cities and villages, and with respect to men and women. Among these, the effects of globalization have more depth and complexity in the case of women. If a positive view is taken, globalization has given a chance to women to overcome the lack of attention they faced during development and to use the chance for making themselves more able. Globalization is the threshold of the inevitable, serious and active arrival of women on the social scene marked by their historical absence. Globalization has the characteristics of increase in knowledge, information and expansion of communications beyond the geography of the global village, as

\(^1\) *Ibid.*
McLuhan\textsuperscript{1} stated and in this village with all the illumination of science and knowledge, women could not be taken as a marginal social group. Therefore, it seems that globalization enables women to expand their potential and provides means for their presence in the society. The presence of women along with men, particularly in the political decision-making of the world, will play a major role. The social movement of women is one of the examples of new social movements with determining and vast effects both in the society and in the sociological theoretical views in a way that its manifestation could be seen in the essential changes of viewpoints, redefinition of benefits and reconstruction of social relations. It should be noted that the social movement of women as a global act is itself the effect of causes such as industrialization of societies and development of industrial, service and information jobs with no need for high physical power, lowering the rate of pregnancy and subsequently, an increase in the free time of women, change in lifestyle, increase in knowledge, identification and development of human rights and efforts to realize human rights of women that, according to the characteristics of information societies, encourage special lifestyles, and expands feminist thoughts in the whole globe, leading to preparation of grounds for the movement of women in other societies. Despite the mentioned points on the effects of global acts of women on the social movements of women in different societies, the characteristics of these movements take local shape based on the cultural, social and political conditions of each society. Opportunities such as the presence of women in economic and business activities, increase in employment rate of women, lowered poverty, lowered birth rate, global division of work and new opportunities resulting from it, development of information and communication technology, expansion of attention to women's rights and expansion of NGOs along with threats such as expansion of unofficial and user occupations, lack of job security, low wages, low food security, increase in marriage age, lowered role of women in education, expansion of consumption

\textsuperscript{1} Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) was a Canadian educator, philosopher, and scholar—a professor of English literature, a literary critic, and a communications theorist. McLuhan's work is viewed as one of the cornerstones of the study of media theory. McLuhan is known for coining the expressions "the medium is the message" and the "global village".
culture, expansion of women’s trafficking and exports and global sex trade are the main challenges faced by women in the whole world.

**Women NGOs and Globalization in Iran**

There is organized activity among contemporary Iranian women that aims at improvement of women’s situation. This organized movement, like in other developing countries, is mainly among women elites and academic groups. Of course, along with this movement, according to some scholars, is a functionalist and title-free movement that without attributing the concept of feminism to its work, continues its activities and functions and even without any knowledge of feminist thoughts and schools in seeking changes in the lifestyle of women to democratize it and improve the status of women as human beings. The manifestation of such a movement could be seen in the fading away of sexual division of work in the family, participation of women in decision-making and their social activities. The main realization of the women’s movement could be seen in the women’s NGOs in Iran. The activities of women in these organizations cause improvement in political participation motifs, increase in women’s knowledge, cooperation attitude and mutual trust. However, it should be said that the women’s NGOs which are influenced by governmental policies are not able to convey the demands of the population of women; on the other hand, due to government ignoring the activities of these organizations and the broadness of the range of authority of Iranian governments along with low presence of civil society, the women’s NGOs have not been able to affect the decision-making of the government. In addition, due to the financial dependence on the government, lack of sufficient information to show themselves to the women’s society and to be introduced to the whole society and world, the women NGOs have not been able to be effective in national decision-making. The women’s movement of Iran, detached from the globalization process, is involved in value and philosophy problems and thus has failed to be effective in the globalization process in the same scale as the women’s movement in the west. In the internal level too, due to the institutional dependence of this movement to the
government and poor unofficial interaction networks, lack of protesting reactions, possessing a single philosophical identity and ideological framework, and without the grounds of an abstractive and value-based attitude, have not allowed the women NGOs of Iran to have any effective role in the process of decision-making on women's affairs or decision-making in the political system in general. The activities of NGOs and as result, the success of the social movement of Iranian women will be realized only when the authority of the government is lowered in favour of civil society and the existence of these organizations is taken seriously by the government. The social movement of women in Iran shall provide necessary sources and possibilities through communication networks and unofficial interaction if the movement wants to succeed and become known as a true movement able to exchange information, ideas and meaningful systems in order to form a collective identity and common ideology. The women's movement of Iran shall develop networks of expanded interactions with different groups and organizations in order to bring other identities into the movement. For the success of social movements of Iranian women, strengthening and improving civil society and independence from the government are the most important priorities. The women's movement of Iran shall use actions and activities of protest, such as holding conferences and meetings and publishing journals and books, if it wants to realize its goals. The necessity of such actions is to have financial independence and improvement of civil society as the most important priorities. Therefore, the women's movement, if it can attain such a background, will be able to act as a main and effective element on the decision-making of the government.¹

Globalization, as an overall and effective phenomena during the past decades have brought along many social changes for women through making openings in the traditional order of the society and has given opportunities to the women in Iranian society to experience changes in different arenas. Women who were usually in the

margin of social and political systems and whose roles in different arenas were ignored have increased their demands by the effects of globalization and today, women expect higher positions and status.

Women’s formations have a hard path ahead. On one hand, working on the existing nature of formation and illuminating people’s minds and the authorities’ view of the formations and on the other hand, undertaking cultural work to change attitudes and beliefs of women. Therefore, the women NGOs laid down a series of fundamental and original actions as their top priority: The women NGOs: 1. Have roles in socialization of women by accepting them. That is, help women to step into political culture and form their attitudes towards political goals. The most important ground of NGOs in helping society relate to the acceptability of women is to make changes in the beliefs related to the political culture of women. Another factor of social acceptability of women is to educate them. One of the functions of NGOs is to offer education in different fields. In addition to official teachings of people, women experience team work and participating management through trusting each other in the NGOs. This helps in improving women’s abilities in management systems and prepares them to play a more effective role in the society. Through making women able and absorbing them, these organizations both increase social participation of women and improve their capabilities to become ready for work... These achievements could play a major role in the mutual understanding, communication and sociability of women. The two latter issues require the NGOs to become stronger and to gain the recognition of the government in both the political and ruling system in their approach to transfer and convey women’s demands to the government. On the other hand, this could occur in other ways, through the media and publications. By using the media, the NGOs can introduce themselves and their functions and broadcast news of women and other NGOs of women to the society and improve the ability to extract a system that has the capacity to facilitate physical and spiritual sources of both local society and the international environment for better meeting of demands. In this path, the government shall provide grounds for more presence of women’s NGOs on women’s participation affairs and by showing
special concern regarding women's issues. In a general expression on the organizations: the women organizations which are formed from the grassroots are able to receive more trusts. On the other hand, in close relationships with people, more members will be able to become aware of the problems and difficulties of each other. In such organizations, since there is planning, a message, goal and organization and it is known that regulation governs the work done, the chaos and confusion faced by some groups and associations will not be the case. On the other hand, these groups improve the self-confidence of members and make them aware of their powers and talents. By enhancing the political, social, and general information, these organizations help women to gain a better understanding of their environment, position and character as human beings. On the other hand, the role of international organizations, particularly the UN in supporting these NGOs, gives a particular impetus to those organizations to continue working. The international contributions to these organizations are examples of such support. The international conferences held in connection with the role of these associations in developmental societies and if possible, their attaining the consultative rank in the UN adds to the importance and role of these organizations in absorbing women, improving their public knowledge and increasing their political participation.¹