

**Sedika Hejazi<sup>1</sup>**

## **The Status of Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

**Allah deputed the Prophet with a sparkling light, a clear argument, an open path and a guiding book. His tribe is the best tribe and his lineal tree the best lineal tree whose branches are in good proportion and fruits hanging (in plenty).**

**You should follow your Prophet, the pure, the chaste, may Allah bless him and his descendants. In him is the example for the follower, and the consolation for the seeker of consolation. The most beloved person before Allah is he who follows His Prophet and who treads in his footsteps.<sup>2</sup>**

As many world thinkers have admitted, Iranian February 1979 revolution made significant changes and developments in global scale. The first ever religious revolution in history of contemporary world sought great aims which for long have been kept away from humans.

---

<sup>1</sup> Director General, Office for Women and Family Affairs, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization

<sup>2</sup> Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 160

Divine religion and faith for God, and implementation of religion in all aspects of life was the particular approach Iranian revolutionary people sought. They looked for a bright truth which had strong criticism toward Communism and Capitalist imperialism. This critical viewpoint, however, brought so much enmity from world imperialists against Iranian nation just because they had rejected to take imperialism for granted.

French distinguished thinker Roger Garaudy says: "Islamic Revolution of Iran provided a new model for evolution of human and society, which is in accordance with spiritual heritage of nations, and that is the reason for animosity of the West."

Analyzing this popular revolution and causes of confrontations against it, Canadian scholar, Robert Colston, says: "To me, as a Western, non-Muslim person, this is a miracle that in the modern world an ideological and divine revolution can successfully happen and move toward establishing justice. This revolution is without any doubt supported by God."

Islamic Revolution of Iranian nation seems to have attracted masses and thinkers who think freely and this attraction has so far remained strong.

Islamic Revolution of Iran led by Ayatollah Khomeini opened new horizons for the oppressed people of the whole world to release the most exalted wishes of mankind and show them new ways different from what is already known in the world. This new way was based on attention to God and divine beliefs; a way which considers dignity and ranking of people not in their wealth and power; a way which defines people's dos and do not's according to their human dignity. And this dignity has its roots neither in capitalism nor in Communism.

Islamic Revolution of Iran had a strong impact on the West of Asia and the world, and its righteous leadership by Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei set the ground for brilliant developments. Paul M. Weyrich, founder of American Free Congress Foundation admits that “Through the victory of Islamic Revolution of Iran, the strategy of Muslim world which had been a defensive one for nearly three centuries, has now transformed to an offensive strategy. Now Islam is spreading across the world; from south to both African coasts, from east to south of Chinese sea and Australia, from north to eastern and western Europe, and from west up to the United States. Compared to other religions, Islam has the highest growth rate in the United States.”

This admittance shows how influential religious thinking introduced by the Islamic Revolution of Iran has been across the world.

But what have been the results of this great religious revolution in Iran?

The impact of the Islamic revolution in Iran at the first stage included all masses of people and subsequently certain classes.

As major supporters and progressive elements of the Islamic Revolution, Iranian women were an invaluable target community for whom the Revolution has done its best in return. Of course, fundamental developments in women's status in post-revolution Iran result from deep divine and humanitarian thoughts of leaders of the revolution which are according to Islamic teachings. A short review of the thoughts of Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei shows the weight they give to dignity and esteem of women.

This attention, thanks to perseverance and pursuits, turned into influential laws in favor of women, which brought them effectively to play roles in society and paved the way for their individual and social achievements.

In order to explain the achievements of Iranian women, it is necessary to have a glance at some viewpoints of Iran's great leaders and to study, through statistics and figures, the impacts of these views in action.

### **Views of the Leaders of the Islamic Revolution on role and status of women in society**

The late leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, whose efforts led to the victory of the Islamic Revolution, thanks to Allah's support and that of people, had a unique thinking and spiritual characteristic.

Distinguished Russian thinker, Valentine Primakov, describes him in this way: "Ayatollah Khomeini changed cultural concept of leadership in a society, demolished the wall of fear, and guided people toward their pure divine nature. Islamic Revolution is marked with the name of 'Khomeini' all over the world; as he was the one who turned the revolution of Iranians into a great global event. Like prophets, his presence represented religion, politics, revolution, God and people, and their firm connection with a thoughtful human. He reminded the definition of his own revolution and those of divine prophets. He revived religious worldview, revitalized light of faith and made the greatest epic of devotion in contemporary era. His famous slogan of "Neither East, Nor West" brought about establishment and independence for the Islamic state, while superpowers could do nothing against it. "

Henry Kissinger, Jewish strategist and advisor to the then president of the United States in 1970s, describes Imam Khomeini and the role of his mentality and spiritual leadership in this way: "Ayatollah Khomeini caused a serious planning crisis for the West. His thundering decisions left no time for thinking or planning for politicians or thinkers. No one could predict his next decision; he spoke and acted based on norms and

criteria unknown to the world; as if he was inspired from somewhere else. Ayatollah Khomeini's opposition against West was based on divine teachings. Even in his enmity toward West, he was sincere. ”

The important point in these quotes is their emphasis on Imam Khomeini's uncommon divine viewpoints; the views based on which he stood against oppressors of the world from east to west, and as admitted by those pro or against him, had a deep impact on the world.

### **What are the viewpoints of Imam Khomeini regarding women?**

In one of his constant remarks to clarify his divine path for masses, Imam Khomeini asserts: “The role of women in the world enjoys some specific features. Righteousness or corruption of a society results from that of its women. Woman is the single being who can hand over to the society individuals from whose blessings a society, rather societies, can prosper and attain resistance and exalted human values; or it can be the vice versa.”<sup>3</sup>

He also pays high attention to the role of women in upbringing noble humans: “Women play a significant role in the society. Woman is the sign of realization of the ideals of human beings. It is woman who brings us great men and women. A man can ascend when he is brought up by a noble woman.”<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to the ignorant who regarded women as an axis of evil, Imam Khomeini strongly notified the masses that women are sources of blessings for their societies, and mentioned to the Iranian women's endeavors during the Islamic Revolution, as an example: “Woman is the source of all blessings. You and I have witnessed what women did in this movement. History has witnessed what women have been living in this

---

<sup>3</sup> April 14, 1982

<sup>4</sup> May 17, 1979

world, and what woman is. History is far away; we have ourselves seen that what women Islam has trained; women who upraised in the very recent age... Those women who had enjoyed an Islamic upbringing devoted their bloods, offered martyrs, took to the streets, and brought about the victory of the movement. We owe our movement to women. Men followed women in taking to the streets. These were women who encouraged men. Women were in the front lines. Woman is such a being who can break down a satanic power.”<sup>5</sup>

As a thinker and social reformer, Imam Khomeini describes his wishes for excellence of women as an influential class in the society: “We hope that all women wake up from the ignorance and hypnosis imposed on them by looters, and shoulder to shoulder help deceived ones to raise them to their high status. We hope that women in other Islamic countries learn from the miraculous developments experienced by Iranian women in great Islamic Revolution and try to improve their societies and guide their nations to freedom and independence. May God offer His blessing and mercy to eminent women of dear Islam and Iran.”<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt that Iranian Muslim women owe many of their valuable achievements to high thoughts of their late leader. The leader who admired women as mothers, wives and active participants in society and believed that “role of women in society is more important than men; because besides being an active class in all aspects, women do also bring active members for the society. I see developments among women are more than those among men.”

He approves divine movement of women in one of his public speeches: “Women, in our era, proved that they are shoulder to shoulder with men in their endeavors, rather they precede men. We are honored that our

---

<sup>5</sup> May 16, 1979

<sup>6</sup> April 23, 1981

women, young or old and from all walks of life, are present at cultural, economic and military arenas along with or even further than men, and put their efforts into prospering Islam and achieving Quranic goals... Whenever I see respectable women who are determined in their goals and are prepared to bear all sufferings, even martyrdom, I get assured that this way leads to victory. Women are leaders of our movement.”

Addressing nations and states, Imam Khomeini frankly mentions that: “If women who are the sources for producing noble humans are taken from nations, they will be doomed to deterioration and defeat.”

And it is this genuine, divine view that introduces the goals as well as the way to achieve them to the Iranian Muslim women, and considers their status as leaders of the society and sources for prosperity or corruption of a nation; a status that neither of Eastern or Western advocates of women’s rights have ever considered or stepped toward it.

Exalted viewpoints of the late leader of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini, were inspiring for the legislative and executive authorities to adopt laws and policies to elevate women's status in the society and to facilitate their social, cultural and political participation. Thus, Iranian Muslim women have attained higher education; have been elected as members of parliament; ministers; and advisors to ministers while observing their modesty and hijab – as a divine order – and also playing their noble role as wives and mothers.

### **The viewpoints of the incumbent Supreme Leader**

After the demise of the founder of Islamic Revolution of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, incumbent Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has faithfully pursued the same transcendent goals. By his helpful guides and teachings, he has always been supporting women in their efforts to achieve their own as well as society's prosperity.

The Supreme Leader believes: “The Islamic Republic has managed to reach a peak. It has managed to educate scholarly and intellectual women who are experts in the subtlest and the most sensitive issues of a society.”<sup>7</sup>

In one of his speech on the status of women, the Supreme Leader asserts: “Women are exclusively endowed by the Almighty with such strong points as deep faith, composure, which stems from their reliance on Allah, and chastity, which gives them an aura of holiness. With such noble qualities, they are able to play a unique role in society. No man can play such a role. As standing mountains of faith as well as sources of passion and emotions, women provide those in need of caress and affection with their patience and passion. Humans can be raised in such a blessed embrace. If women with such qualities were not in the world, humanity would not have a real meaning. This is what petrified Western materialistic mind is not able to digest. Those who have not benefited from religion and spirituality are not able to understand and appreciate such grandeur. Those who think the main features of women are their ornaments and makeup and who want women to be a plaything in the hands of men are not able to understand the real identity of women from the viewpoint of Islam.”

Ayatollah Khamenei pays much attention to the role of women in family and states: “Spiritual values emanate from families, in which women play a pivotal role, and are spread to the entire society.”<sup>8</sup>

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution as such describes the Islamic viewpoints in this regard: “Islam has a very clear view regarding the family and woman's status in the family. There is a narration by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) which says, 'Women are the masters of their

---

<sup>7</sup> May 22, 2011

<sup>8</sup> June 15, 2005



homes.' The status of women in the family has been specified in the sayings of our infallible Imams (A.S.). 'A woman is a flower; not a servant of the home.' Islam tells men, 'The best of you are those who treat their wives best.' These are the views of Islam, and there are many such quotes in Islam. However, realization of the Islamic teachings on family is not possible through these narrations alone; rather it requires legal and practical guarantees, and it is necessary to take measures in this concern."<sup>9</sup>

He strongly criticizes the West for its negative viewpoint regarding women and its struggle to spread it: "In the Western culture, if a woman is determined to be a distinguish figure in the society, she has no choice but to make use of her sexual appeal. Even in formal meetings women should dress in a way to appear pleasing to their beneficiaries - namely, men... I believe this is the greatest blow; the biggest insult and the greatest injustice imposed to women. Unfortunately, today there is a cultural norm in the Western societies according to which women are considered as givers and men as takers. Other societies followed the West and made efforts on its path. And this norm has now been established in the world. If somebody says something that goes against this norm, they create uproar against him. For example, if in a society women are prohibited from wearing make-up in public places, they will create uproar. But there will be no uproar in the world if the opposite is done - that is to say, if immodesty is promoted among women in a society. When a society promotes modesty and discourages make-up among women, dominant propaganda industry of the world creates uproar about it. This shows that there is a culture, a policy, a strategy that has been followed for many years in order to consolidate this wrong and insulting position for women. And unfortunately this has already happened.

---

<sup>9</sup> May 22, 2011

As a result, you see that in the West they are gradually voicing their opposition to hijab in an open way. They say that hijab is the symbol of a religious movement and that they do not want religious symbols to be promoted in their secular societies. These are the excuses they present for this opposition. I believe what they claim is a lie. It is not a matter of religion or secularism. The reality is that the fundamental strategy of the West is women's exposure and corruption, and hijab works against this strategy. Even if hijab was not motivated by religious faith, they would oppose it. This is the main problem.”<sup>10</sup>

Mentioning to the major role of women in improving this troublesome trend of the hegemonic system, Ayatollah Khamenei says: “Today, one of the most important responsibilities that you, as eminent women, should shoulder is to delineate and highlight the role of women through an Islamic approach. The greatest service to human and Islamic societies is to help women develop their human characteristics. This movement should be launched. Of course, it has already started, but it should be strengthened. It should become widespread. This movement will definitely achieve victory. This is one of the essential things that should be done... It is a hundred years that the West has been trying to impose its culture and lifestyle on women in Muslim communities by relying on its money, power, weapons and diplomacy. Efforts have been made over the past one hundred years to isolate Muslim women from their identity. All instruments of power and propagation have been employed to achieve this goal. Money, propaganda, weapons, different deluding material incentives, using sexual instinct – they have employed all these things to isolate Muslim women from their Islamic identity. Today, making efforts to restore the noble identity of Muslim women is the

---

<sup>10</sup> May 22, 2011

greatest service that you can render to the Islamic *Ummah*, Islamic Awakening and Islamic dignity.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Structures related to women in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

There is no doubt that viewpoint of high ranking leaders of a country set the plan for developments in that society. Therefore, according to the progressive and elevated viewpoints of the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran, from the beginning of the Islamic Revolution up to now, many fundamental changes have happened in the structures related to women under the executive branch.

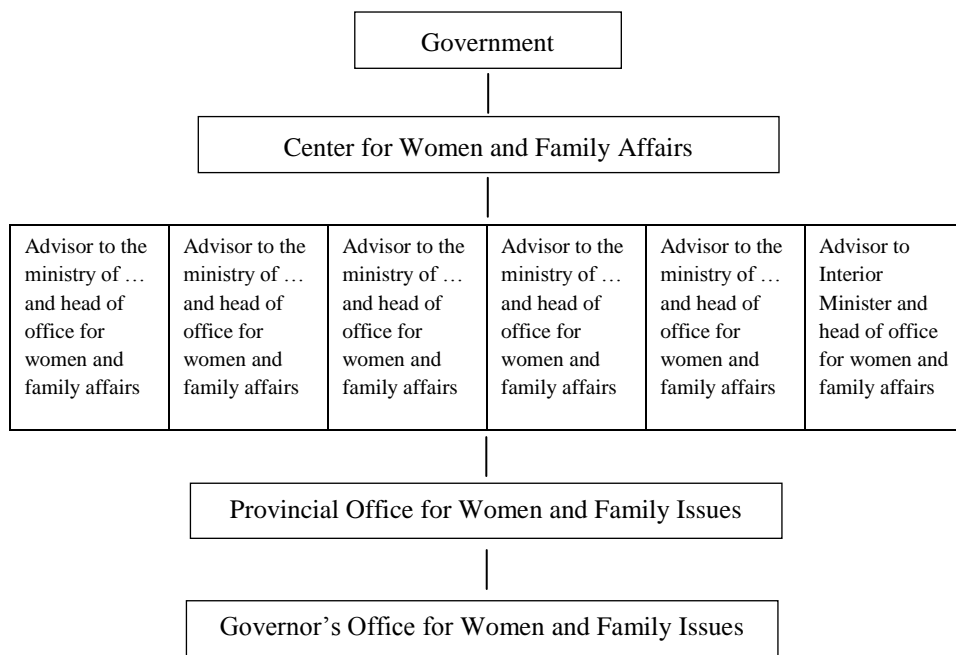
Currently, Iran has a flexible structure in government in terms of recruiting women. This network structure within the government is aimed at facilitating policy making, legislation and planning on women and family affairs. It also allocates specific budget for improvement and development of capabilities of women in Iran.

In highest level of the executive branch, the President has a specific advisor on women and family affairs who is a member of the cabinet, as well. This special advisor to president on women and family affairs also heads a center with the same name in order to plan, contribute and pave the way for implementation of legislations on women and family issues. In order to maintain a comprehensive observation and management of women and family affairs, all ministries and organizations are supposed to have an office dedicated to this issue and the head of this office is also considered as the advisor on women and family affairs to the minister. Moreover, in order to develop the plans across the country, provincial bodies also benefit from offices on women and family affairs.

---

<sup>11</sup> July 11, 2012

## **President**



In addition, women have had active participation in legislative branch from the very beginning of the first parliament after the revolution; not only did they turn out at polls, but also were they active as candidates.

During nine terms of parliamentary elections after the revolution, 78 women have won parliamentary seats. Another positive step was formation of Women and Family Fraction within the parliament in order to better pursue demands of Iranian women in legislative branch.

During nine terms of parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran, significant rulings have been done to support rights of women and reinforce family structure. Here are a few of many of them in short:

- Security for Women and Headless Children Law
- Part-time Employment for Women Law

- Law offering Custody of minor kids and interdicted children to their mother
- Concerted System or Payment for Government Employees (bonuses for marriage and having children) Law
- Law on Promotion of Breastfeeding by Mothers and Support for breastfeeding Mothers
- Embryo Donation to Infertile Couples Law
- Anti-Human Trafficking Law (with emphasis on women and children)
- Law for Reformation of Fashion and Dress Codes (in order to maintain and strengthen Islamic-Iranian culture and identity of men and women)
- Law to support rights and duties of women in domestic and international areas (Charter of Rights and Duties of Women in Islamic Republic of Iran)
- Equality of Blood Money of Men and Women in Insurance Law
- Family Support Law

And counting...

It is noteworthy that all rulings on women and family issues ratified by parliament are collected within a published book.

From its foundation, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has also pursued establishment of facilitators to contribute to more active, fruitful and equal participation of women in different fields. In this regard and following influential presence of women in early years of revolution and formation of Islamic Republic, Sociocultural Council of Women was established in second decade of Islamic Republic by the order of Ayatollah Khamenei. This council which works under the

Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, the highest cultural policy making of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is the first cultural policy making council on women issues. Advisor to president on women affairs, female parliament members, advisors to ministers on women affairs and scholars are members to this council.

As policy maker in women issues, Sociocultural Council of Women has so far set policies which have mostly been ratified by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution.

The most important policies regarding women approved by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution include:

- Women Employment Policies in Islamic Republic of Iran
- Sociocultural Policies on Women Sport
- Principles of Women Affairs Research Policies
- Cultural and Promotional Policies for Women Day
- Policies on Improving Leisure Time of Girls and Women
- Women International Affairs Policies
- Charter of Rights and Duties of Women in Islamic Republic of Iran
- Principles of Executive Methods for Promoting Hijab and Chastity Culture
- Policies on Establishment, Strengthening and Excellence of Family in Islamic State
- Policies on Improvement of Women Participation in Higher Education

Post-revolution developments have also led to an increase in role of women in Judiciary branch as well. In this regard and according to

Article 163 of the Constitution, which grants judiciary positions such as Consultants to Court of Administrative Justice, Specific Civil Courts or alike to both men and women according only to qualification, women employees of judiciary branch can also be judges as we can currently see more than 500 female judges working in courts across Iran.

Women can also work as lawyers or legal advisors in courts.

Some of other significant steps taken by the Judiciary in regard to improve the situation of women include:

- Establishment of specialized courts to respond family-related affairs
- Presence of family counselors and experienced psychologists in family courts to help resolution of family disputes peacefully before court hearings
- Establishment of legal support courts for women and children across the country
- Presence of legal guide and assistance units in courts
- Establishment of courts and public prosecutor's offices specified for children