

Women of Iran

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Women as Chattel

Blowing hot and cold would be the modern regressive Iran. Iran's notoriety on the global stage can be attributed to its development of nuclear arsenal and its long-standing animosity toward Israel. But much is not said about its human rights violations and regressive policies that veil chauvinistic men from their insecurities through the tactful interpretation of the one religious text they follow word to word. Iran after the revolution of 1979 renamed itself to the Islamic Republic of Iran, adding one word to the entirety of its constitution, 'Islamic' and thereby changing its course of direction toward the 7th century.

The constitution written after the revolution states:

"Through the creation of Islamic social infrastructures, all the elements of humanity that served the multifaceted foreign exploitation shall regain their true identity and human rights. As a part of this process, it is only natural that women should benefit from a particularly large augmentation of their rights, because of the greater oppression that they suffered under the old regime.

The family is the fundamental unit of society and the main center for the growth and edification of

human being. Compatibility with respect to belief and ideal, which provides the primary basis for man's development and growth, is the main consideration in the establishment of a family. It is the duty of the Islamic government to provide the necessary facilities for the attainment of this goal. This view of the family unit delivers woman from being regarded as an object or instrument in the service of promoting consumerism and exploitation. Not only does woman recover thereby her momentous and precious function of motherhood, rearing of ideologically committed human beings, she also assumes a pioneering social role and becomes the fellow struggler of man in all vital areas of life. Given the weighty responsibilities that woman thus assumes, she is accorded in Islam great value and nobility."
(IranChamber.com)

Words like "augmentation" and "nobility" create a mirage of women's empowerment in the new constitution, when their freedom, in reality, is curbed.

National Hijab Day – July 11

In the 21st century, people are celebrating freedom and love, whereas people of the 7th century celebrate chastity. Moral police patrol the streets to make sure 'celebration' goes on as planned and ordained by the 'supreme' leader. The ones who fail to abide by the dictum are slapped with fines, or are literally slapped. In Iran, moral policing especially

affects those at the bottom of the proverbial pyramid who are struggling to make ends meet. It is worthwhile noting that women of Northern Tehran do not face the same lashes as the women of the interiors of Iran. Women of the Urbanised capital city go about with their coloured and spa-drenched hair (Hakakian), without their Rusari (the headscarf worn by women) and Manteau (the long overcoat worn over a dress). It cannot be interpreted as a silent rebellion as much as it is an economic shield from the guardian council.



The Silent Rebellion

It has been proved by these rebellious women that empowerment of women and sharia law need not be exclusive.

The practice of Sigheh or Motaa (Saul) a system of temporary marriage, usually for a few hours where the woman is the sole property of her husband and is obligated to satisfy the sexual needs of her husband with total submission has been used by men to quench their twisted needs. This type of marriage is often viewed by the non-religious population of Iran as legalised prostitution. 'Wife for an hour' entitles the man to his wife's property and it is often used by married men and the woman who loses her property is blamed for being the victim.

Victim blaming is a common practice by the clergy to uphold the law for only half the population.



My Stealthy Freedom campaign, started by an Iranian New Yorker Masih Alinejad, questioned the idea of hijab. The campaign has spread like wildfire among Millennials in Iran and abroad. This campaign somewhat resembles the HeForShe campaign, without with the glitz and glamour of Hollywood.

Such Campaigns initiate the debate among the youth of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Women at Work

Saudi Arabia and Iran are often painted broadly with the same brush. In relative terms, Iran could be viewed as a more advanced society than Saudi Arabia. Women make up 65% of the Iranian student population at colleges and universities, while in Saudi Arabia women are often not allowed to take up higher education. Women can drive cars and even run cab services in Iran while in Saudi Arabia it is illegal.

Women in Iran still have many academic limitations. They are not granted admission into engineering and technology programs. Women are not allowed to take up jobs that are high in demand. "Men only" qualifications for jobs eliminate a large

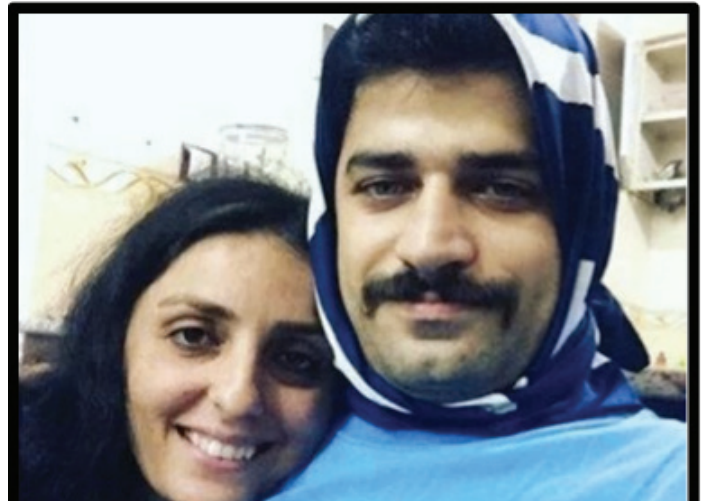
number of opportunities for women, and in fact, only 11% of the workforce is female (Darvishpour) It is believed by religious leaders that financial independence and autonomy gives rise to deviance among women. The rationale often used by the clerics behind such measures is preservation of Iranian culture and not ceding to western cultural invasions.

the human rights topic citing the need to deal with ‘other’ pressing issues. There are now 18 female parliamentarians, which is a meagre 3% (Celizic) of the parliamentary body.

In a country like the Islamic Republic of Iran it would not be wise nor prudent to set optimistic goals for women’s empowerment. Goals have to be realistic, taking into account the dynamics on the ground, recognizing coexistence of the empowerment of women along with the Sharia law. ‘Western ideals’ cannot be used to further the debate. Change has to come from within. In the words of the late Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini “preserving the state is the most important”. If the preservation of the state requires flexing certain Sharia Laws, the Islamic republic could be the epicentre of conservative women’s rights movement.



In 2015 the practice of white marriages was a topic of discussion among the religious elite. This practice of couples living together without vows among the millennials of Iran gave the Islamic clergy an incentive to push for further bans and reforms. The Comprehensive Population and Family Plan was a bill that was passed in the parliament reducing the working hours of women. It enforces the ideology of the supreme leader Ali Khamenei that the primary role of women is to raise children. The plans that have passed through parliament would have to pass through the guardian council as well, to take effect. If these policies go through it would essentially confine the 4 million women of the Iranian workforce to their bedrooms and kitchens.



In the Iranian Parliament, representation of women has not increased even though the number of women in parliament has increased. The women in parliament echo the guardian council or change

Note: All photographs were provided by the author