

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY IRAN: A STUDY OF WESTERN IRAN

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ABSTRACT

Women's rights and political participation of women, especially women of western Iran are partly new issues in the history of Iran; it was only about one century ago that the first debates about women's rights arose in Iran. About one century since beginning the first debates about women's rights in Iran, Iranian women still suffer from discrimination and inequality. Among Iranian women, women of western Iran are the most handicapped and unseen and suffer from duplex discrimination in comparison to women of other parts of Iran. There are two levels of limitations on women's rights in Iran; national level limitations and local level limitations. The national level limitations such as Sharia law and patriarchy apply to every Iranian woman and the local level limitations such as discriminating between Shiite and Sunnite and Persian and non-Persian women are mostly applied to women of western Iran and women who come from non-Persian and non-Shiite ethnics of Iran. It can be said, although Iranian women still suffer from discrimination and inequality between men and women, but since one century strive they have partly succeeded to fill the social and economic gaps that exist between Iranian women and men, although the political status of Iranian women has not enhanced considerably.

KEYWORDS: Contemporary Iran, Iranian Women, Western Iran, Women's Political Participation, Women's Rights

INTRODUCTION

Women's rights and political participation of women are partly new issues in the history of Iran. The beginning of the women's movement and public attention to women's rights in Iran can be traced back to last years of the Qajars' reign. First serious participation of women in political activities in Iran began with their participation in anti-colonial movements such as Tobacco Movement (1891) in the last years of the Qajar's reign. It is more than one century that Iranian women strive to improve the status of women in Iran and adjudication of their ignored rights, but they still suffer from discrimination and inequality. Iran is a multicultural country and different parts of the country are settled by various ethnic groups. Western Iran is a part of the country that enjoys a multicultural status and settled by various ethnic groups such as Azeris, Arabs, Kurds, Lures, Persians, etc. Iranian women from different parts of the country do not enjoy equal status and the status of women in different parts of Iran on the basis of some factors such as religion and ethnicity is different. Women of western Iran, mostly belong to ethnic groups of Iran are among the most handicapped and unseen women of Iran, they suffer of duplex discrimination in comparison to Persian women largely settled in the central part of Iran. Women of western Iran not only suffer from discrimination rather they suffer from inattention to their status and lack of comprehensive and considerable studies about them.

This study follows two main purposes: first; this study attempts to review and analyze the status of women in contemporary Iran with a focus on political participation of women. Second; this study attempts to consider the status of

most disadvantaged and the unseen population of Iranian women who are women of western Iran. This study is divided into three main parts; in the first part status of women from the last years of the Qajars reign until the outbreak of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran is reviewed and analyzed. In the second part status of women since the outbreak of the Islamic revolution is considered and in the third part status of women of western Iran since the outbreak of the 1979 Islamic revolution is reviewed and analyzed. As mentioned previously there is a duplex discrimination against women of western Iran, it means they not only suffer from discrimination that apply against all Iranian women rather they suffer from discriminations which are mostly applied to women of western Iran, hence along with the third part of this study that specifically applies on women of western Iran the first and second parts of the study apply on women of western Iran, too.

Women's Political Participation in Iran before the 1979 Islamic Revolution

Establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran following the fall of the Qajar dynasty in 1925 and the outbreak of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and the establishment of the Islamic Republic have been two landmarks in the contemporary history of Iran which have deeply affected different layers of Iranian society. Status of women in the contemporary Iran has deeply affected by the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty and the outbreak of the Islamic revolution in Iran. According to these two milestones status of women in the contemporary history of Iran can be divided into three periods:

- The last years of the Qajars reign
- The Pahlavi era
- Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic onwards

The Last Years of the Qajar Reign

Iran in the Qajar era was a backward and poor country and left behind modernization and progress. Iranian society in the Qajar era was a highly traditional society in which except in a few cases, women's participation in social activities was limited. Generally, the role of women was limited to housekeeping and only a few women belong to influential families and generally educated abroad had limited social activities. During the Qajar era, most of the women were illiterate and girls had to marry at an early age without any choice. "Behind the closed doors at home, prohibited from everything in life, education, training and social life, women are regarded as mindless, like infants; they are confined to the burdens of household work and childbearing and are considered the slaves and servants of their husbands, wrote Bibi Khanum Astarabadi (1852–1920), an outspoken and prominent Qajar woman"(Sedgh, 2007, [1]). There were many reasons behind poor conditions of women in the Qajar Iran in which three of them were more important:

- **Sharia:** From the Safavid era onwards religious scholars have been very influential in Iran and from the perspective of the majority of religious scholars, women's participation in social activities has no place in the Islamic tradition. Religious scholars believe women's participation in society requires their relationship with men and according to Islamic traditions mixing of non-mahram men and women is considered a sin. Majority of Religious scholars believes that women's physical and mental capabilities are less than men; hence they are not suitable for activities outside of the house. Religious scholars usually refer to *Sunna*— words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and the twelve Imams of Shiites—and a number of *Ahadis*—the words quoted of the

Prophet Muhammad—to demonstrate their statements. As we mentioned earlier religious scholars are very influential in Iranian society and their statements are considered as final by a number of religious people, hence they are very effective on the status of women in Iran.

- **Customs and Traditions:** In the highly traditional society of Iran in Qajar era participation of women in social activities were strongly condemned. In the Qajar era being a good wife and mother was considered desirable roles for a woman in the society. Based on this mindset works are divided into two categories: inside the house and outside the house; women are naturally suited to the domestic affairs of the house and work outside the house and providing livelihood for the family is men's responsibility.
- **Patriarchy:** Patriarchy is deeply rooted in the Iranian society and in the Qajar era severely restricted the activities of women in society. In the patriarchal society of Iran in the Qajar era woman was considered as a part of the property of her father or husband and the duty of a zealous father, brother or husband was to protect her. In such societies, men and women are not equal and women are considered inferior than men, a weak creature that must be protected by men. In such societies, men control the economy of the society and the family and women are dependent on men and have to obey them and for every simple work they need the permission of their father, brother or husband; such conditions turn women to weak, dependent and oppressed creatures.

The above mentioned factors were the main reasons behind poor condition of women in Qajar era, but not the only reasons, there were some other reasons behind poor condition of women in that time such as illiteracy of the majority of women, economic dependency to men, lack of access to political power, etc., but these factors were also products of the three main factors.

Women's participation in the anti-colonial movements, especially in Tobacco Movement (1891) can be considered as the beginning point of women's political participation in Qajar Iran, but the Constitutional Revolution in the late Qajar era (1905-1907) led to the first serious presence of Iranian women in the political arena in the Qajar Iran. The Constitutional Revolution brought women outside of the house and like men; women participated in the revolution and helped to establish a constitutional regime in Iran. "They were nationalists and anti-colonialists; they wanted an independent Iran, free from foreign hegemony. But, in the early twentieth century, they also wanted a constitution, education, and enfranchisement" (Sedgh, op. cit).

Political activities of Iranian women, especially during the Constitutional Revolution and then till the overthrow of the Qajar dynasty could not change the status of Iranian women seriously. Women activists formed Socio-politico organizations to pursue demands of Iranian women, but despite women's role in the success of the Constitutional Revolution they almost failed to gain considerable advantages for women in the constitution as well as the laws enacted after the revolution. As we mentioned earlier main demands of Iranian women in the beginning of the twentieth century were constitution, education, and enfranchisement, but expect constitution that was a common demand of both Iranian men and women they failed to gain the other demands; suffrage granted only to Iranian men, they also failed to gain considerable education facilities for women.

The Pahlavi Era

Reza shah overthrew the Qajar dynasty and established the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran in 1925. Reza Shah believed

that religion and some of Irani-Islamic customs such as Hijab (veiling) were the reason of backwardness of Iran, hence "Reza Shah, the first Pahlavi monarch, promoted a policy of unveiling (*kashf-e hijab*) as part of his modernization campaign. In 1936 a law made wearing *chador* or any head-covering apart from a European hat in public an offense, and women wearing traditional Iranian cover were arrested and their cover was forcefully removed. This outraged the clerical establishment and religious families, who saw the law as a direct assault on an Islamic mandate." (Mir-Hosseini, 2002, [2]). Reza Shah tried to modernize Iran by force, hence unlike common norms of the religious and traditional society of Iran encouraged women to participate in social affairs of society. Reza Shah did not know that pushing women out of the house by force even for the good of them was against women's right. He was a tough dictator and did not believe in democracy, therefore he did not allow men for free political activities, also he did not believe in women's political participation. Reza Shah's understanding of modernization was a shallow understanding, in his thought bringing women outside of the house, granting some facilities to them and forcing them to wear western clothing was considered modernization, but for him women had no required mental and physical capabilities for political participation and high-level managements. Therefore, in Reza Shah's reign social activities of women developed, but the political participation of women did not improve seriously.

Muhammad Reza Shah like his father believed in more participation of women in social activities of society, therefore he encouraged women's participation in social activities of society. It was only in 1963 that Mohammad Reza Shah granted universal adult franchise to Iranian Women, before that suffrage was limited to Iranian men. Muhammad Reza Shah, also took more steps for reviving women's rights; "In 1967 (and 1973), after decades of lobbying by women, moderate family law reforms were introduced. The Family Protection Act modestly improved the position of women within marriage: the right to divorce, previously a husband's prerogative became subject to a family court decision; and polygamous marriages became conditional on the permission of the first wife or the court. The act also slightly expanded women's custody rights, based on the 'child's best interests.'"(Sadr & Hoodfar, 2010, [3]).

During the Pahlavi era, a number of positive steps were taken to revive women's rights, but these steps could only remove a few obstacles on women's rights due to two factors:

- Only some barriers on women's rights in Iran are related to the actions of the established regime. The majorities of the obstacles are longstanding and rooted in the heart of Iranian society and change the political system does not help much to solve them.
- Patriarchal and autocratic nature of the Pahlavi dynasty

Although the Pahlavi regime was a quasi-modernist regime and pro-modernism, but the regime itself was an authoritarian and patriarchal regime. Mohammad Reza Shah, like his father did not believe in women's abilities and equality between men and women, for him women were inferior to men, therefore he did not take significant steps to develop women's political participation. Father and son both were the patriarchs of the nation of Iran, hence blocked political development in Iran. The point is how we can expect a patriarch strives for political participation of women while that is the nature of a patriarch to limit women.

An important point to be noted is that only a few of the barriers that exist on women's rights in Iran are the subject of occasional conditions otherwise the majority of obstacles are longstanding barriers to women's rights and rooted in the heart of Iranian society and change the political system does not help much to solve them. Status of women during the

Pahlavi era significantly improved in comparison to Qajar era, because the Pahlavi dynasty had more commitment to modernism, but this development also had its limitations. As we mentioned earlier only some limitations on women's rights in Iranian society are products of established regime, hence the majority of the barriers is rooted in the heart of Iranian society, therefore those limitations on women's rights existed in Qajar era were existed in the Pahlavi era with less intensity.

The three main obstacles on women's rights in the Qajar era—Sharia, Customs and traditions and patriarchy—existed in the Pahlvi era, too. The Shah's modernization efforts, and in this case women's rights provoked anger of religious scholars, because they regarded the actions of the Shah, especially granting suffrage to women as unIslamic; modernization programs of the Shah were one of the main reasons that resulted in insurgency of religious scholars against him and the outbreak of Islamic revolution in Iran. Women in the Pahlavi era like women in the Qajar era were challenged by patriarchy, sharia and traditions. The Shah's modernization programs opened the gate for a small population of women to have a chance to participate in social and political activities of the society, but a large population of women bound by traditions, religious beliefs and unequal opportunities compared to men could not free themselves from the limitations. In the Pahlavi era, although good works done for girls' education and women's employment outside the home, but big gap between men and women's rights in all fields remained.

Women's Political Participation in Iran Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution

By the outbreak of Islamic revolution in 1979, deep changes occurred in Iranian society and women as a part of the society severely affected by the revolution. By the outbreak of the Islamic revolution status of Iranian women in some aspects set back to the pre-Pahlavi's era. The status of women in Iranian society since the outbreak of Islamic revolution has had many ups and downs. The Islamic Revolution and the establishment of an Islamic regime in Iran resulted in the loss of many of the achievements of women during the Pahlavi era. Sharia law adopted as the source of legislation in Iran, consequently limitations on women's rights in Sharia law was imposed on Iranian women. For instance, Hijab (veiling) became compulsory for Iranian women and singing in public was banned for women.

Leaving behind the first years of the Islamic Revolution and subsiding revolutionary atmosphere a few restrictions on women removed, and a number of steps were taken to revive women's rights. Status of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, partly related to quality of balance of power between religious conservative and the reformist factions; based on which faction, reformists or conservatives are in power, women's status improves or worsens. For instance, during the administration of president Khatami and control of the reformists on sixth assembly of Islamic republic of Iran some positive steps were taken to revive women's rights, but after the defeat of the reformists in the subsequent parliamentary and presidential elections when the conservatives took control of the legislature and the executive some of concessions gained by women during the reformist period were lost.

Barriers that exist over the development of women's rights in the Islamic Republic, especially in the heart of the society are not very different than the Qajar and the Pahlavi periods; we cannot state conditions of Iranian society in Qajar, Pahlavi and Islamic republic periods are same, but many of the obstacles that existed in the Qajar and the Pahlavi periods are still existing in the Islamic republic. For instance, Sharia and patriarchy still severely limit women's rights in Iranian society.

Political participation of women in the Islamic republic of Iran can be analyzed at two levels; national and local levels. In this section we will analyze the political participation of women in the Islamic republic in the national level and in the next section—political participation of women in western Iran—we will analyze the political participation of women at the local level.

Women's rights in general and political participation of women in particular at the national level in the Islamic Republic of Iran face many obstacles, including:

- Undemocratic regime
- Religious obstacles
- Customs and traditions
- Patriarchy
- Lack of political and economic powers of women
- Lack of coherent, independent and influential women' organizations in Iran

The Islamic regime that currently rules in Iran is another patriarchal regime such as its ancestors, the Pahlavi and the Qajar dynasties. The small group that control real political power in Iran does not believe in political development and real democracy, hence political participation in Iran is a difficult task not only for women even for men. In the Islamic Republic only groups loyal to the regime are allowed to share in political power and fair and democratic elections are not held. In the Islamic republic women are not allowed to tenure, many key positions such as the presidency and the supreme leadership of the regime. Women's share in the power structure of the Islamic Republic is very limited and the majority of posts are reserved for men. Since the establishment of the Islamic republic, only one woman—Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi as health minister in the cabinet of president Ahmadinejad—has served as minister in various cabinets of the Islamic Republic and now there is not any woman minister in the cabinet of president Rouhani as current president of Iran. Status of women in the Majlis(Parliament of Iran) is not much better than the cabinet; "the number of seats gained by women in Iran's parliament has never gone beyond 14 and women's share of seats in the current parliament is only 9 out of 288." ([4], نمودار و جدول تعداد نمایندگان زن در ۹ دوره).

Sharia law and the influence of religious scholars in the Iranian society and power structure of the Islamic republic is one of the main obstacles that hinder women's political participation in the Iranian society; religious scholars emphasis on the role of women as wives and mothers and encourage them to stay at home. For conservative clergies, political participation of women has no place in society and for moderate clergies being a good wife and mother is the primary role of women and political and social activities of women is allowed if they can perform their primary role properly. For example, we can find the prevalence of this view among political and religious authorities of the Islamic Republic in Ayatollah Khamenei's—the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic—recent speech about women on 19/04/2014; "The issue of women's employment is not among the main issues. Of course, we are not at all opposed to women's employment. I myself am not at all opposed to their employment and their management as long as it does not clash with these main issues (being a good wife and mother)"(Supreme Leader's Speech in Meeting with Outstanding Women, [5]). Since the majority of Iranians are religious and for a minority of them fatwas of high-rank clergies is

obligatory, hence religious scholars can influence women's rights seriously. Besides influence of religious scholars, Sharia law via various ways blocks political participation of women in Iranian society. Sharia law prohibits mixing women with non-mahram men in society; hence the Islamic Republic authorities by this pretext have excluded women from many of social and political activities, especially employment opportunities. According to Sharia many of social and political activities that are allowed for men are not allowed for women, because according to Sunnah, women have excluded from some social and political activities as well as some careers. For a number of hardliners who rule in Iran if cannot be found any evidence indicative of recognition a career or activity for women in Islamic traditions that career or activity is not allowed for women, hence Sharia law strongly limits the possibility of women's participation in political and social activities of society.

Iranian society is still behind of modernization and lots of traditional beliefs about women remain in the society; for a large number of Iranian men and a number of Iranian women, political participation of women is not a recognized action, for them women do not possess required capabilities for participation in political affairs. This undesirable culture among Iranians combines with patriarchy that is rooted in the heart of Iranian society. Patriarchy is a strong social force in Iranian society, although in recent years, attitudes towards women's political participation have been modified, but patriarchy, especially in villages, small towns and among ethnic minorities of Iran is still influential. There is no doubt that patriarchy is a deterrent force that strongly limits political participation of Iranian women; for a large number of Iranian men their women are a part of their property and they have authority to control them. Women's participation in social and political affairs of society can improve awareness of women about their abilities and rights, also can encourage them to fight for their rights and consequently increases women's self-respect, confidence and independence and this is a wakeup call for the Patriarchal society of Iran, hence there are still a number of Iranian men who do their best to prevent it to happen.

As a result of a historical process, Iranian women compared with Iranian man are in inferior political and economic positions; according to the report of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, March 2014 "Iran has the lowest female representation in the labor forces and the lowest estimated female income in the region (Middle East)" (Report of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, March 2014, [6]). Unequal relationship between men and women in Iran still exists since the outbreak of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Most of Iranian women are still financially dependent on men, so they are easily controlled by their husbands, fathers and brothers. Financial dependency of women to men let men to control women and highly affect their political activities. In a large number of Iranian families political and social activities of women without permission of their fathers or husbands is not possible, even in some of these families, women cannot use their right to vote by their own will and their right to vote is subject to the permission of their husbands or fathers. Iranian women's social and economic situation in recent years has made some progress. The rate of women's employment has increased significantly in government offices and the number of female students at Iranian universities has surpassed boys, hence women have been able to partially reduce the financial and social gaps with men, but they still suffer lack of political power. Unlike the social and economic status of women, their political status has not had considerable progress.

All the barriers of women's political participation in Iranian society are not result of the government's policies and actions of men rather a number of them are result of women's own actions. A large number of Iranian women are influenced by religion and patriarchal culture dominated in Iranian society. They have accepted their status as the right

status for women, hence they in fact cooperate with men to keep and develop barriers on women's rights. The number of independent and influential women's organizations in Iran is very low and cooperation between these few influential organizations is very rare. We cannot ignore women's achievements in the years after the Islamic revolution for reviving women's rights, but these gains are very small compared to true place that Iranian women deserve it.

Political Participation of Women in Western Iran Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran

Western Iran is an area with considerable ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. The people of this area are a combination of Kurds, Persians, Arabs, Turks, Lurs, etc. The languages Persian, Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish and some local dialects are common in the region and people of the region are generally Sunnite or Shiite Muslims; Sunnite people of the region mainly belong to the Kurdish and Arab ethnics of the region. As we mentioned in the previous section, barriers of women's political participation in Iran are divided into two levels: local and national levels. In the previous section we explained the obstacles to women's political participation at the national level. We can state that almost all the obstacles to women's political participation mentioned in the previous section apply in the Western Iran, but beside national factors, there are a number of factors in regional and local levels in Western Iran that increasingly restrict the political participation of women in Iran, including;

- Discrimination between Persians and non-Persians ethnics of the region
- Discrimination between Shiites and non-Shiites ethnics of the region
- Child marriage

The Islamic Republic has a security oriented policy towards non-Persian ethnics in western Iran. For many senior politicians of the Islamic Republic of Iran, ethnic minorities, especially the Kurds and Arabs of western Iran are not insiders. Areas populated by ethnic minorities of Western Iran such as Kermanshah, Kurdistan and Lorestan provinces as well as Arab regions in Khuzestan province are much underdeveloped than the central part of Iran largely settled by the Persians. It is very difficult for non-Persian citizens of western Iran, especially Kurds and Arabs to achieve high ranks in the power structure of the Islamic republic. For example, in the cabinet of the current president of Iran—president Rouhani—none of the deputies of the president or ministers are Arab or Kurd. Governors of cities and provinces and chief commanders of police and army in western Iran settled by non Persians are usually Persians and only medium and low ranks are accessible for non-Persians of the region. Political activities for non-Persian ethnics of Iran are more difficult than their Persian compatriots, therefore, Iranian women belong to ethnic groups of western Iran are suffering from discrimination between Persians and non-Persians ethnics of Iran. In a country like Iran that there is a discrimination between men and women as well as between Persian and non-Persian ethnics of Iran easily can conclude that how much is difficult for a non-Persian woman in Iran to have political activity and more that has a chance to access to political power.

Despite the rhetoric of senior Iranian officials and Clergymen, discrimination between Sunnis and Shiites in Iran is commonplace. Majority of Iranian Sunnis belong to ethnic groups settled in Western Iran, as a result, discrimination against Sunnis in Iran directly affects ethnic groups of Western Iran. Shiism is the official religion in the Islamic republic and according to the constitution of Iran Supreme leader and President must be Shia. From the Safavid period onwards, senior officials and clerics all efforts to strengthen and spread Shiism in Iran, so politicians and Shiite clerics ruling in the Islamic republic effort to limit political and religious activities of Sunnis in Iran, consequently Iranian Sunnis including

Sunni women of western Iran face many restrictions for free and effective political participation in Iran. Non-Shiite and non-Persian women of western Iran are in fact the most handicapped women in Iran for political participation and political activities; there is duplex discrimination against them in comparing to other Iranian women. It is a very rare non-Shiite woman belong to non-Persian ethnics of western Iran can access to political power.

Child marriage is still a common phenomenon in the tribal and rural areas as well as the small towns of western Iran. Traditions and customs are still very influential in some areas of western Iran, especially among Kurds, Arabs and lures; hence child marriage as a longstanding custom among people of this region is still common in western Iran. The rate of illiteracy and poverty in the areas settled by non-Persians are much higher than the Persians settled areas of Iran, hence these areas are culturally less developed areas and child marriage is still common phenomenon in these areas. Marriage of girls at an early age not only deprives them from higher education, but also deprives them to access to job opportunities outside the home, hence the restrictions imposed on women in western Iran not only prevent them from political activities, even prevent them to gain the required skills and knowledge to participate in social activities.

At the end should be noted that despite all the restrictions against women in Iran they have achieved significant gains, especially in the fields of health and education. According to the report of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, March 2014; "the literacy rate among women aged 15 to 24, as compared to men of the same age, increased from 96.1 per cent in 2000 to 99.2 per cent in 2012. The ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education increased from 79.2 per cent in 1990 to 98 per cent in 2012" (Report of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, March 2014, op.cit). In general Iranian society is in a transformation, awareness of Iranians towards women's rights has increased and in many parts of Iran, especially in large cities, the culture of patriarchy is declining and awareness of men towards women's rights and women's awareness of their rights is increasing. In recent years, the taboo of women's participation in many of previously restricted areas is broken. For example, for the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran the ex-president of Iran, Mr. Ahmadinejad introduced three women to parliament of Iran for vote of confidence for ministerial posts which one of them could gain vote of confidence of parliament for the health ministry. We can say that barriers of social and political participation of women in Iran, especially in western Iran is a lot, but at the same time, major efforts are underway to remove these barriers and enhance the status of women in Iranian society.

CONCLUSIONS

Since more than one century strives, status of Iranian women, especially their social and economic status has partly improved, but their political status has not improved considerably. Most important hindrances against women's rights in Iran, especially for their political participation are rooted in the heart of Iranian society and change of political systems doesn't help much to remove these hindrances. Although we cannot ignore the rule of political systems in developing women's rights, but political systems are responsible only for a portion of the less developed status of women in Iran. Almost all main hindrances against women's rights in the Qajar, the Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic periods are similar, but with differences in details and intensity. Therefore, it is important to consider that the main step for improving women's status in Iran is removing the obstacles that are existing in the Iranian society.

It needs to mention that various regions of Iran that are settled by ethnic groups, especially western Iran are disadvantaged in different grounds in comparison to other parts of the country, but still they are suffering from inattention.

Women of western Iran are the most disadvantaged women of Iran, but it is difficult to find a comprehensive study on the status of women of western Iran, especially about their political participation. In a short article like this article it is not possible to study all aspects of the status of Iranian women, especially the status of women of western Iran, hence I suggest to other researchers who are interested in women's issues, especially Iranian women's issues to pay attention to issue of political participation of ethnic groups of Iran, especially women of western Iran.

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