

Limits on Women's Power from the Fundamentalist Social System in the Islamic World

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Abstract: Based on the events in Iran and Afghanistan, which are hotly discussed in the current society, the discussion is carried out to trace the oppression of Islam on women. This essay examines the restrictions placed on women's power by the Islamic world's fundamentalist social structure. On the basis of relevant literature and studies, the contemporary living conditions of Iranian women are evaluated. It has been established that the deeply ingrained social standards of Islam, such as the dominance of men and the inferiority of women to contemporary fundamentalism, severely limit the authority of women and contribute to the low social position of Iranian women. The freedom to choose one's clothing, make new acquaintances, go out, and pursue education are all subject to power limits. However, in the realm of Islam, female consciousness is emerging.

Keywords: Islam, gender, equality, religion revolution

1. Introduction

The goal of the study is to identify the underlying factors that led to the existing state of affairs in light of the current social climate, as well as the underlying factors that prevented the Islamic world from achieving gender equality in contemporary society. Countries that regard Islam as the state religion in the modern Islamic world typically have fundamentalist ideologies. Iran, like other Islamic nations, places significant restrictions on the power of women. In a societal sense, it is desired that more individuals and the global society will pay greater attention to the oppression of women and assist women in the Islamic world in obtaining more opportunities to learn about the outside world. Since the majority of them are unjust to women, scholarly research on the current legal frameworks of the Islamic world and the international community needs to be expanded. Islamic women's organizations are significant because they recognize the value that the world places on them and have the audacity to seek assistance from it. There are several studies on the effects of religion on women in the literature today, but there are comparatively few studies on the effects of religious fundamentalism on women. There aren't many recent documents that can be used as references. Despite extensive prior study on the headscarf, the Islamic revolution, and Islamic fundamentalism, it is not sufficiently tailored to a particular nation.

2. Islam

Islam is the religious belief of 99.6% of Iranians. After the Safavid dynasty established Shi'ite Islam as the state religion, 89% of the modern Shi'ites are still the 12 imams. The Shi'ites are based on the *Koran* and *hadith* records and the statements of the *Prophet Muhammad*, and also include some books that Shi'ites regard as holy books [1]. The provisions on women in the *Koran* and *hadith* can be regarded as the decisive existence that initially affected women's social image and social status. For example, the wife is the husband's field: "Your wife is like your field, and you can cultivate it at will", which is stated in chapter 2223. "If you are afraid that you cannot treat the orphans fairly, then you can choose to marry the women you love, and take two, three, or four wives each. If you are afraid that you cannot treat them fairly, then you can only take one wife each, or be satisfied with your female slaves. This is more equitable", which can be found in chapter 4-3. Women should obey their husbands. In chapter 4, it says "men protect women, because Allah makes them superior to them, and because of the property they spend. The virtuous women are obedient, and they are conservative and secretive with the help of Allah. You are afraid of their stubborn women. You should admonish them, and you can sleep with them, and you can beat them. If they obey you, then you should not try to bully them anymore. Allah is indeed supreme, and indeed is the greatest" [2]. The Book of the Prophecy of Buhari recorded some of Mohammed's remarks about women: women are inferior to men in intelligence and belief. Women have mental defects. If the wife refuses to have sex with her husband and causes him to fall asleep angrily, she will be cursed by the god until the morning. The residents of the Fire Prison are mostly women. People ruled by a woman will never succeed.

All of this show that women are lower than men, and women are the appendages of men. At the same time, women must abide by these regulations or they will be punished by Allah [2]. In this regard, the religious concept of Shiite Islam has established that Iranian women cannot obtain equal status with men in society. During the reign of Reza Pahlavi, the old king of Iran, from 1925 to 1941, he promoted the elimination of old customs in Iran, banned women from wearing veils and headscarves, and weakened the influence of religion on the country and the people. From 1941 to 1979, during the reign of the second monarch, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, he was also committed to the modernization and secularization of the country, carrying out land reform, nationalization of resources, improving the status of women, giving them political rights and the right to education, and strengthening the power of the secular government. During these periods, Iran was highly secularized and its religious influence was quite limited. In 1979, Iran's Islamists, socialists and liberals cooperated to launch a revolution and overthrew the Palevi dynasty. However, the Islamists did not share the revolutionary achievements with the other two factions, but after a short transition period, they suppressed non-Islamists through violent cleansing and public opinion control, and established the Islamic Republic, then monopolized political rights with religious forces. Instead of fulfilling the promise of respecting human rights and embracing different faiths before the revolution, they began to implement strict Islamic Shariah, and all state policies and national behaviors should follow the Islamic teachings and laws. When talking about the definition of Islamic fundamentalism, Karpas, a famous American historian in the Middle East said, "Islamic fundamentalism is expressed by the simplest definition, which means first returning to the *Koran* and the *Hadith* to organize and regulate the individual and collective lives of Muslims. This view means that any belief, attitude, system and activity that is inconsistent with religious laws must be abandoned and changed" [3].

From this point of view, the Islamic fundamentalist movement is essentially a social, political and cultural Islamic movement, so it is not a simple Islamic retro movement. There are various sects that have integrated this movement. Their banners are different, their ways are different, and their ideologies are different. However, their purposes are the same: to oppose westernization, to oppose secularization, to return to the original tenets of Islam, to change the existing secular order, to

overthrow the existing secular regime, and to establish a system ruled by religious leaders or scholars of religious law. The Islamic state and order based on Shariah finally realized the "will of Allah on earth". This movement, which uses religion as a weapon and attempts to seize power and establish an Islamic state through the "Islamic Revolution", is contemporary Islamic fundamentalism. Generally speaking, the emergence of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism began with the Islamic Revolution led by Khomeini in Iran in 1979. After the success of Iran's Islamic Revolution, a theocratic regime was established in Iran, which provided a realistic model for fundamentalism, thus reviving fundamentalism. At this time, fundamentalism was no longer a religious trend of thought, but a religionization of politics. At this point, Islamic fundamentalism has entered the stage of contemporary fundamentalism. In February 1979, the Islamic Republic dominated by the Mullah group was established in Iran, with Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Khomeini reformulated the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, determined that Islamic Shariah is the basis of the national legal system, governed the country by Islamic norms, and declared that "all civil law, private law, administration, finance, economy, culture, military, political and all other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic standards" [4]. He established the Islamic Republic Party, which advocates the unity of politics and religion, implements Islamic theocratic rule, and pursues "100% Islamization"; It advocates "neither the East nor the West". In terms of ideology, Khomeini systematically put forward a set of "Islamic ideology", emphasizing the self-sufficiency, independence and self-development of Islam. He believes that Islam is an all-encompassing religion, which has both spiritual guiding principles and social and political theories. Khomeini's important means to make Iran a "real Islamic country" are: first, to make Islamic fundamentalism an ideology that controls the country's political and social life, and second, to make the social system and people's social behavior fully Islamized. In this way, Iran has become the "realistic model of a true Islamic country" [5].

3. Definition and Introduction of Fundamentalism

3.1. Guilty Women

Fundamentalism emphasized at the beginning that women are not only guilty but also prone to make mistakes. God has condemned them, and the label of women is inherent. Generally, sin exists because there is a reference. In fact, in all fairy tales that do not involve women, the other is a simulated concept, such as Valonamido, day and night, the sun and moon, God and devil, good and evil. It can be seen that otherness is only a basic category of human thinking, and no group will identify itself as a group without directly putting forward the other. The religious right is superior to Iran's political system. Since it gives men rights and teaches them the ideology that men are born higher than women. The way to define the oblique line is to have an absolute vertical line, so men acquiesce that they are absolute people, and absolute people evolve into the main body in such a social environment. Women are regarded as objects.

Under the current Iranian political system, women are regarded as second sex and other sex. Iran's religious thought is based on male thinking to explore the value of women's existence, such as obeying their husbands, allowing men to farm at will, and so on. Such values allow women to evolve into non-independent existence of women who are subordinate to men. At the same time, it has also transformed Iranian society into a fundamentalist patriarchal society. The supervision of women in the patriarchal society can be understood as the gaze of the subject on the object. Gazing is a kind of supervision with rights. The rights of men make the society more repressive and control over women. To this day, Iran still controls women, This way of attacking and punishing vulnerable groups has become more rampant under the cloak of religion. The 2017 Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum listed Iran as the 140th gender equality in 144 countries [6]. In 2017, the new

Women, Peace and Security Index published by the Institute of Women, Peace and Security of Georgetown University and the Peace Research Institute of Oslo in cooperation Iran is ranked in the bottom third of the 153 countries. Amnesty International said that Iranian women face "legal and practical discrimination in marriage and divorce, inheritance, child custody, nationality and international travel". According to the Women, Peace and Security Index 2017-2018, Iran ranks 116th out of 153 countries in terms of legal discrimination. Women have no legal protection against domestic violence or sexual harassment by anyone, and the Constitution does not include gender as a non-discrimination clause in the category of protection [7].

The ultimate goal of the fundamentalist patriarchal society to stare at women is that women have to live up to the will and law of male society. Just as Beauvoir proposed, "women are not born as women, but become women" [5]. Under the social system of subject gaze, women will conduct self-examination according to the standards set by the subject. For example, women in Iran must wear a headscarf. Such mandatory provisions have been implemented for nearly 40 years, but there has been little large-scale awakening of female consciousness in the past 40 years. Up to now, the cruel reality faced by 40 million women in Iran is a gender-segregated society. For decades, Iranian women have been opposed on a small scale to the laws that force them to wear headscarves and loose robes to hide their bodies. The women's rights movement also promoted the boycott of some laws, but with little effect, which made the divorce procedure easier for men than for women: granting men exclusive custody of children, lifting the restrictions on male polygamy, and lowering the marriage age of girls. This kind of gender segregation, to a large extent, their imprisonment cannot even be perceived by themselves, and they take the unequal requirements of this society for granted. They have received brain-washing education from childhood to adulthood, but because of the legal provisions, they lack the opportunity to learn more about the outside society except Islamic teachings. At the same time, in the social environment of Iran, their desire to contact the outside world will be hindered by many obstacles.

3.2. Family Restrictions on Women's Rights

Muslim women are not allowed to contact with non-Muslims to get married and have children, so the opportunities for Muslims to contact with the outside world are very limited. Such regulations are aimed at avoiding the invasion of external ideological values and religious culture into Islam. Therefore, in a closed environment, it is difficult for Islamic women to even realize that they have been imprisoned and oppressed. In marriage, "women themselves have dependency, to cater to the requirements of men and serve men" [4]. These are applied to not only Iranian women, but Iran has written this dependency into the law into the doctrine, making it a social default rule.

3.3. Social Restrictions on Women's Rights

The World Bank's database lists 23 restrictions on married women in Iranian law, including applying for passports, traveling, choosing residence and becoming the head of a family. The report also points out that there is no law to punish or prevent the dismissal of pregnant women, and there is no law to provide for the right of paternity leave, parental leave and childcare to pay tax-free payments. However, before 2019, even the compensation for male and female victims was unequal. The Iranian Civil Code empowers the husband to prohibit his wife from engaging in any work that is incompatible with the interests of the family or the dignity of the husband or wife. At present, the proportion of paid working women in Iran is less than 20%, which has increased by 7% since 1990 [4]. Compared with the rapidly developing world situation, the female employment rate of both sexes in Iran is too low. These data especially point out that the vast majority of Iranian women do not work. And no job means no financial ability, which forces them to rely on men only.

In *The Second Sex*, it is pointed out that women's subordinate performance is attributed to gender physiological weakness, and their subordination is related to social status, economic status and job opportunities of peers [5]. The United Nations pointed out that women are different from men in employment and cannot guarantee equal pay for equal work, and there is no law to restrict gender discrimination in recruitment. At the same time, women in Iran have been greatly restricted and hindered in their seemingly daily activities such as going out, going abroad and working.

In the last generation, what Islamic women lacked most was the way to get ideas. The lack of independent thinking and access to other values has imprisoned them. Now, a new generation of Islamic female consciousness is awakening. All this can be explained by the linear growth of women's higher education rate and the developed network world. More and more women are receiving modern education, so they began to think about questioning the shackles imposed on them by the fundamentalist social system. Most of Iran's new generation of young women have values, norms and behavioral priorities and preferences based on modern value systems, such as personal freedom and personal choice.

4. Female Consciousness Awakening

4.1. The Trigger—Headscarf

The awakening of female consciousness is becoming more and more intense in Iran. At the beginning of October 2022, the nationwide protests in Iran have lasted for two weeks. The protest in Iran was related to the death of a 22-year-old Iranian woman. On September 13, the 22-year-old woman was arrested by the Tehran morality police on the charge of "the headscarf does not conform to the regulations" [6]. According to the current Iranian law, women must wear headscarves in public places, and there are strict regulations. Failure to comply with the regulations may result in the arrest of the Iranian moral police. On September 16, the woman died in prison [7]. This makes people start to think whether the existence of the headscarf law has evolved into a tool for the patriarchal society to control women in the name of religion.

According to the interpretation of the *Koran*, Hijab originally refers to the curtain separating the visitors of Muhammad's home from the residence of Muhammad's wife. That is, curtains and coverings. Later, according to the interpretation of Islamic law formulated by the *Koran*, Hijab was defined as covering the rest of the body parts except the face and hands in public, that is, the head scarf. This is why Islam requires women to wear headscarves. Iran formulates Islamic Shariah according to the *Koran*, which stipulates all aspects of the country's social life. Including the provisions restricting women's rights such as wearing headscarf, polygamy, and the wife's unconditional obedience to her husband [7]. Persian women wear headscarves in an all-round way, which began from the Safavid dynasty. The 9-14th century was the most brilliant period of Islamic civilization, but women gradually retreated in the field of knowledge. With women covered with veil, the freedom and public life enjoyed by early Muslim women disappeared, and the gender segregation system that lasted for centuries hindered the belief practice of Muslim women to some extent. After the modern development, Leila Ahmed put forward that the veil is just a common dress in "The Silent Revolution" [8]. However, in different historical transformations, it has been deduced into various symbolic representations with rich meanings.

In modern society, the headscarf law is the clearest manifestation of the patriarchal rule that makes women lower than men in politics, work and family. As is shown in the protests, various factors have led to the headscarf problem represented by Iran developing into a social crisis, the most important of which are government policies and social changes. The problem is not to wear a headscarf, but to force women to wear a headscarf law.

The headscarf has been regarded by the western world as a symbol of the oppression of Muslim women. As early as 30 years ago, anthropologist Hanna Papanak once described the veil of Muslim women as a "portable isolation device". Papanak also pointed out that many Muslim women believe that the veil is a revolutionary great invention, because it can not only let them come out of the closed living space to contact the outside world, but also protect them from the harassment of unrelated men [9]. People all over the world, including Americans, will wear different styles of clothing that conform to their social standards, religious beliefs and moral concepts. Muslim women's free choice in dress should be respected just as women's free choice in other countries. The headscarf itself has no problem, but the headscarf law restricts women's right to dress freely.

4.2. Intensified Conflict

The Iranian government also lacks understanding of the new generation of values despite the changes in the world environment. In these decades, with the arrival of a new generation, the idea of modernity has exposed the younger generation of Iran to ideas and doctrines other than the Islamic system through increasingly developed networks. However, religious and social values still only emphasize tradition and copy its traditional values, thus losing the possibility of understanding, accepting, communicating and interacting with the modern world and its values. It has been in conflict with the above modernity. Under social environment, the issue of headscarf has aroused extensive discussion in Iran's religious, political, social and cultural fields. According to the law, the headscarf has become a political symbol beyond its religious and doctrinal significance. Therefore, women take off their headscarves in public places as a form of protest. And the problem of headscarf has exceeded or even extended to other problems. For example, the death of Mahsa Amini after being arrested by the "Gasht-e Ershad", which is responsible for supervising the wearing of headscarf and public behavior, triggered protests, which fundamentally reflects the state of this crisis [10].

One of the root causes of this crisis can be traced back to the victory of the revolution. At that time, despite extensive discussions, the rulers imposed their will because they Islamized the political and cultural system in the name of religion and tradition, and kidnapped the people with this social morality. Therefore, this system can and must define rules and procedures in all fields, including social construction patterns and people's lifestyles. The social tradition of Iranian women who have been stuck for decades is gradually disappearing. With the development of technology, let them see the outside world; Let them be exposed to the values and doctrines instilled in them in addition to social stereotypes; Let them have the right to think independently and choose their own life freely.

The fact that the Iranian government has deployed guidance patrols on the streets shows that the current political system still fails to make progress according to changes in values. "Gasht-Ershad", which means "guiding patrol", is usually called "moral police", and is a branch of the Iranian police force, responsible for implementing Islamic dress code laws in public places. According to the regulation, all women after puberty must wear headscarf and loose clothes in public, but there is no specific age. A major part of Iran's legislation is based on the state's interpretation of Islamic Shariah, which requires both men and women to dress appropriately. However, in practice, "moral police" mainly targets women in law enforcement. There are no clear guidelines or detailed regulations on which types of clothing are inappropriate, leaving a lot of room for everyone to explain. The "moral police" are accused of regularly arbitrarily detaining women. This further confirms the previous argument: Iran's use of religious power to give men absolute rights makes women become second sex and object. The moral police are the concrete expression of the subject's gaze and supervision on the object. As early as 2019, the United Nations human rights expert reminded the Iranian authorities in a statement that female human rights defenders who opposed the compulsory dress of women were defending human rights that should be universally guaranteed. The use of repressive legislation to

criminalize the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly does not conform to Iran's obligations under international human rights law [10].

However, the Iranian government did not stop or try to change the legal provisions. Even in 2022, legal provisions were added: since July 5, the law "on the national headscarf and chastity", launched by President Ibrahim al-Rasi, imposes new restrictions on women's clothing. The mandatory clothing requirements for women are that the headscarf cover not only the hair, but also the neck and shoulders. In July, the President ordered all "competent entities and institutions" to develop strategies to strengthen the implementation of the headscarf law. He said that violations are damaging the values of the Islamic Republic and "promoting corruption". Iran's chief prosecutor announced his support for prohibiting women without proper cover from using social and government services, including the subway. The guidance department ordered cinemas to stop showing women in advertisements. Therefore, in the past few months of 2022, the moral police strengthened their street patrols, harassed women wearing so-called "loose headscarf" verbally and physically, and even arrested them. The United Nations Human Rights Office has received a large number of confirmed videos of violence against women, including slapping women in the face, beating them with batons and throwing them into police cars. The practice of the Iranian authorities is undoubtedly a radical and tough desire to further preserve the rights of men in the political and social aspects of Islam, and also to suppress the increasingly strong female awakening force influenced by modern ideas. Undoubtedly, the symbolic significance of the existence of the headscarf law has largely deviated from its original intention and its religious significance, and can even be understood as a tool for controlling women in the fundamentalist patriarchal society. The strong opposition to the policy comes not only from the secular camp of the country, but also from the religious and conservative Iranians, who said that it would only deepen the differences between the government and the people [10].

This protest is the largest in decades, and the previous protest has far exceeded the usual group of activists. Iranian women "never abide by the ideal expectation of the country for the headscarf", said Susan Tahmasebi, a senior Iranian feminist in exile. "And now we have seen the emergence of young people who really care about their physical rights, and the headscarf may be the most obvious violation of their physical rights" [10].

Successive governments, including Ruhani, have regularly cracked down on non-compliance with headscarves through fines, arrests and verbal warnings, but hardliners are eager to reverse the trend of liberalization. Since taking office as President a year ago, the extremely conservative Ibrahim Lehy has systematically strengthened the implementation of strict social and religious rules. With regard to the protests, the clerical regime attributed the public's response to foreign interference. "In the history of Islamic Iran, the life of Iranian women has always been associated with chastity and headscarf," Lehy said last month [11]. The headscarf is a symbolic thing. It brings women to the forefront and center of the topic, but it links them with all kinds of discrimination and social problems that everyone faces.

5. Conclusion

Iran is one of the most representative countries of fundamentalism in the Islamic world today. It has realized the visualization of fundamentalism. Putting religious power above politics infiltrated all aspects of social life and blocked communication in modern society. The fundamental goal of its religion has been subverted by a social structure that insists on rigorous adherence to its founding principles but mandates compelling its populace to adhere to Islam and its founding precepts. The women's rights groups who have suffered terrible violations are severely restricted by these regulations, and many of their legitimate rights have been reverted. The current state of protest is a result of the struggle between oppressive religious practices and contemporary thinking. Political action should be based on individual decision, not on religious conviction. This article's limitations

are unquestionable. Future study should involve more women who are aware of the circumstances in Iran rather than relying solely on theory and literature.

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