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Topic-Gender Politics in Iran: Post Khomeini Period

Abstract

Five Keywords: Gender, Islam, Iran, Nation and State

Introduction

The present thesis is divided into six chapters preceded by an Introduction. Moreover, an appendix regarding public policies and a questionnaire regarding perceptions of Iranian Women towards Islamic Government in Iran is attached at the end of the thesis.

This work explores the linkage between religion, gender and nation and examines them in the context of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in post Khomeini period. The study has proceeded on the assumption that state, gender and religion, particularly Islam, are not monolithic categories. From this point of view, it demonstrates that the relationship among them is one of dynamic interactive processes without any fixed pattern. The interplay of gender-identity, religion, class, ideologies and political participation of women in the context of IRI brought out its implication for negotiating the privilege and rights of women with the existing polity and power structure and shifting nature of nation-building process in post Khomeini Iran.

Findings:

Within the above framework the thesis employs the perspective of ‘gender studies’ and ‘gendering politics’ and demonstrates that how through the process of ‘gendering politics’ women act as ‘lively citizenry’ and negotiate with the existing power structure of Islamic Republic of Iran since Khomeini period .This sometimes results in contraction of their rights and privileges and sometimes expands the same depending upon the nature of political regime, nature and strength of women’s movement and socio-economic-political contexts—both within and across the regimes. The vertical and horizontal contraction and expansion of women rights within the Islamic Republic of Iran ranging from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad regime has also been depicted in the format of chart, which is attached as appendix at the end of thesis. This is the principal finding of this research work.

A second finding of this research work is that the responses of women vary historically, not only by their class background, ideological dispositions, and religious outlook, but also by the degree of their political and feminist awareness and also how they can articulate their interests and issues of their concerns. The women movement in Islamic republic of Iran demonstrates a similar trajectory where it has moved through the phases of collaboration, conciliation, and confrontation using diverse tactics to advance their agenda for women's equality. Women activism has flourished in response and in reaction to the contradictory policies of the government, which created space for women to negotiate. The post Khomeini period witnessed a more robust kind of women movements and opposition resulting in many innovative and entrepreneurial characteristics of women's activism.

A third important finding of this thesis is a recognition of an interpretative field of Islam, as against monolithic, fixed and mechanical interpretation of Islam, that legitimizes and delegitimizes various actions of state including its gender related programme and policies. From Imam Khomeini to Ahmadinejad –all testify that there is no ‘monolithic, fixed Islamic gender ideology’ that determines and legitimizes the gender policies of Islamic Republic of Iran. All post-Khomeini regimes used Islamic narratives to legitimize the state policies intended to either liberalize or re-impose the Islamic restrictions on the lives of Iranian women. Thus even though all regimes--right from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad-- are Islamic; their Islamic understanding of the nation varies which itself has an implication in terms of hardening or relaxing the Islamic codes while claiming the authenticity of Islamic identity of nation-state. From this point of view the present work also contradicts the pervasive modernist view that religion, particularly Islam, obstructs the development of women in the various field of life.

Finally this works concludes that though the overall goal of ‘gendering politics’ is to usher into a gender friendly or gender-neutral nation building process, it would be difficult to argue in the light of analysis of this thesis that any substantial progress (in absolute terms) has been made in this direction in Islamic Republic of Iran. However, the gendering politics from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad regime, contrary to modernist viewpoint, has helped in democratizing the social and political process with a view to ensure a more meaningful participation of women in formal as well as informal spaces and has relatively resulted in diluting or reducing the power gap between the genders as evident from the enhanced position of women in various field of life.