

Women And The Politics Of Human Rights Within The Islamic Discourse In Iran

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This paper is concerned with understanding what the Islamic path means to women who choose to adopt it and whether it could be used as a means for gaining Human Rights and liberation for women. The intention is to move away from the usual condemnatory approach to Islamism and consider it in the light of the views and activities of its female adherents. In Iran they have demonstrated that, in the context of a repressive theocratic government, Islam can be a liberating force. Working in the context of an extremely repressive theocracy, elite Islamist women in Iran have been using the Koranic discourse to gain ground and remove some of the post-revolutionary constraints placed on their lives.

The paper will not deal with the commendable, difficult and continuing struggles of secular women in Iran who have not ceased to struggle and frequently pay with their lives, in demanding equal rights and declaring the absolute need for an acceptance of the Universality of the declaration of Human rights.

It will seek to concentrate on the demands of Islamist women and place them in the context of Islamic discourse. It makes the assumption that the religious arguments put forward by Islamist women and their demands might be accommodated by the Western feminist analysis of Human Rights. The different emphasis, goals and strategies of Iranian Islamist women could be placed within the historical context of a misogynist post-revolutionary Islamist government and not merely evaluated by mainstream feminists' views in the West. The objective is to engage critically with the views which have defined Islamic revivalism as retrograde and oppressive to women. Using the writings and arguments of Iranian Islamic women, the paper will explore the extent to which they are aware of feminist theory and its human rights priorities as well as its practices in the West. Perhaps the most important difference between the implicit assumptions made by the Human Right's declaration of 1948 and the one made by Islamist women concerns the notion of equality. Whereas equality is pivotal to the Human Rights' declaration, it is less so for Islamist women who choose the alternative of complementarity between the

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sexes. This paper will review the rational offered by women for choosing the alternative Islamic path towards complementarity rather than equality of sexes. This paper will review the rational offered by women for choosing the alternative Islamic path towards complementarity rather than equality of sexes.

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As post modernism takes hold and feminists deconstruct their views and allow more room for specificities and the differing needs, demands and priorities of women of different creeds and colours it is no longer easy to offer pat denials of the Islamic women's positions. It may be useful to consider whether the religious arguments put forward by Islamist women and their demands can be accommodated by the Western feminist analysis of difference? The different emphasis, goals and strategies of Iranian Islamist women must be placed within the specific historical and cultural context of the post-revolutionary Islamic State and the constraints and limitations that it has placed on feminist strategies.

It is also essential to note that there are young women in Iran, as well as in the West, who knowingly and willingly choose to embrace the faith. They join the group of older generation of women in Iran who in the 1960s were at the forefront in abandoning the West and its plethora of beauty myths and sexual exploitation. Iranian Islamist women have used the theological basis of Islam to carve their own path towards liberation. Their arguments have been anchored in the teachings of Islam, the Koranic laws and the traditions and practices of the Prophet of Islam. They have engaged critically with Western feminists' analysis of women and their positions within the family and have chosen to reject the feminist options. They argue that a different and preferable form of liberation can be found by returning to the sources of Islam. They defend gender complementarity rather than equality as a cause and a means of serving their faith and living fulfilling lives. They note that Islam demands respect for women and offers them the opportunity of being learned, educated and gainfully employed, while at the same time providing an honoured space for those who choose to become mothers, wives and home makers. They state that, unlike capitalism and much of feminist discourse, Islam recognises the importance of women's life cycles; it offers them different roles and responsibilities at different times of their lives and at every stage they are to be valued respected and financially rewarded for that which they do. Islam at its inception has provided them with exemplary female role models and has delineated a path that can be proudly followed.

At the same time, Islamist Iranian women have challenged the male hegemony within their own country and have offered a woman centred interpretation of the faith. Over the past decade and a half these elite women have used the Islamic discourse to demand human rights denied to them by the post-revolutionary state. They fought and won the right to retain a presence within the judiciary and have

effectively revised some of the more draconian aspects of divorce laws. Throughout Islamic texts have been at the heart of demands for improved human rights . The strategy has been to applaud Islam and the state and demand better laws in the name of Islamic justice. A good example is the veteran Parliamentary representative Maryam Behruzi who cleverly combines flattery with insistence: Imam [Khomeini] changed the whole root of the matter by changing the general attitude to women. He stated that women are free to be educated, to work, that women are free and should be involved in politics and Islam sees men and women as equal and heaven knows that he helped women more than men. This great change has resulted in women...becoming a complete person equal to men, who are complete human beings, with equal rights and this is no longer in question. At last in the Islamic society women have the freedom to speak, in the radio, in the television, in international meetings and to defend Islam, not only women's rights but on all issues. They give their views on politics on economics they make public speeches, their advise is sought and their presence shows that the Islamic society has accepted the presence of women. This is the result of the revolution.

This paper will focus on three major human rights demands made by and gradually gained by elite Islamist women which benefitted all women in Iran. These may not be the ones that would have been more obviously selected by Western observers, but they are the ones that have been deemed as achievable political goals by the contenders and as such would merit respect.

Since the revolution, Iranian women, young and old, secular and religious have fought hard and succeeded in improving access to a less unequal education. They have expanded women's participation in the formal political arena and this in turn has enabled them to regain grounds within the judiciary and to alleviate some of the harshness of the post revolutionary divorce custody and maintenance laws. To begin with men were granted unilateral right of divorce, irrevocable right of custody and no payment of maintenance. A decade and a half after the revolution almost all of these provisions, granted in the name of Islam, have been revised or rejected on Islamic grounds.

Women and Islam

Elite Islamist women have consistently argued that Islam as a religion has always had to accommodate women's specific needs. Since the first convert to Islam was the Prophet's redoubtable and wealthy wife Khadija, no religion which she accepted could discriminate against women. Khadija, who was nearly 20 years older than the Prophet, had first employed him as her trade representative and subsequently commanded him to marry her; overcoming his reserve and reluctance by informing his uncle that she was the very best wife that he could ever have. Their marriage was a happy one and the Prophet did not take another wife till after her death.

Thus some 14 centuries ago Islam recognised women's legal and economic independence as existing and remaining separate from that of their fathers and or husbands and sons. Islamic marriage was conceived as a matter of contract between consenting partners (The Koran 4:4, 4:24), and one that stipulated a specific price, mahre, payable to the bride before the consummation of marriage. Women must be maintained in the style to which they have been accustomed (2:238, 4:34) and paid for suckling their babies (2:233).

Besides personal and economic independence, women were also close confidants and advisor to the Prophet. Khadija supported him in the early years and undoubtedly her influence protected the Prophet against the various Meccan nobles who wished to quench Islam at its inception. After her death Mohamad's favourite wife Aishah, who married him as a child and grew up in his household became not only his spouse, but also his closest ally and confident. She is known as one of the most reliable interpreters of Islamic laws. Besides being a renowned source for the interpretation and extension of Islamic laws, Aishah was also an effective politician and a remarkable warrior; like many of the Prophet's wives, she accompanied him on his campaigns. After his death she ensured that her father Abu Bakre and not Mohamad's nephew Ali succeeded to the caliphate, and led the Muslim community. Subsequently when Ali became the Caliph Aishah raised an army and went to battle against him, taking to the field herself. Although she was defeated, Ali treated her with respect, but besieged her not to interfere in politics. Thus, if true Islam is about returning to the golden age of the Prophet, Muslim women argue that they have much reason for optimism and much room for manoeuvre.

In their pursuit of the golden age the Muslims are equipped with fifty years of government by the Prophet and the first four rightly guided caliphs, and some 114 verses of a holy book, perhaps as good a resource as those offered by any other ideology or utopian vision. But like all utopias the past and the holy book has difficulties adjusting to the present. It is the domain of interpretation and adjustments to history that Islam is deemed to have become degraded. Yet without such adjustments, it would find it hard to survive as a creed. Thus the notions of return, and revivalism are very much anchored in the processes of interpretations and adjustments. They seek to present new interpretations, puritanical interpretations, interpretations that wipe out the centuries of misdeed and hardship and open the way for the future.

Maryam Behrouzi is a leading Iranian exponent of this view: The revolution brought about by Islam 14 centuries ago has been gradually eroded and with it all the human rights that Islam indicated for women. After the Prophet and his descendants these righteous laws were not implemented. Without the Islamic revolution we would have had a more limited view of women and we would not have the benefits that we have now. But seeing what is available today in terms of

equality, in terms of women's rights, in terms of liberty for women as people, in terms of women's values; when we make a comparison we find that Islam has the first and the last word. I am of the view that if there was no question of women's liberty may be we would not have appreciated the Islamic gift and not valued it as much. But since the question has arisen we see that by comparison with other religions Islam is fairer .

Education

Using the Koranic instruction that all Muslim must become learned, Islamist women have joined in the struggle to remove some of the many bars placed on their education. The Islamic government is committed to compulsory, publicly provided schooling, but it has not been able to provide it; not least because of critical shortage of funds . At its inception the Islamic Republic instituted segregated schools and insisted that girls be taught by female teachers. given the shortages of trained women scientists and mathematicians in Iran this would have been a serious handicap for the younger generation of Iranian women. But this regulation was more or less universally flouted by private schools and even government schools chose to disregard it in most cases.

At secondary and tertiary levels women faced the added problems of the Islamic morality laws which demanded strict separation of sexes; they were likely to pay a high price for any transgression. This became particularly problematic in mixed colleges and universities. Thus for example in the summer of 1993 a woman professor was sacked because she was caught shaking hands with a male colleague: the charge was "adultery in an upright position" *zenayeh istadeh* . Similarly a male and female student in the Teachers' Training College were caught talking; they were immediately expelled and a court sentenced them to be lashed for the crime of "verbal adultery", *zanayeh mosabeheyi* . It is worth noting that they appealed to the Chief Justice who squashed the sentence. But the college that has refused to re-admit them and has insisted on condemning their "Immoral" conduct.

Some leading religious figures have opposed some of these discriminatory measures. So for example when, at the inception of the revolution Khomeini decreed that women must be barred from the Faculty of Law. But some leading religious figures such as Ayatollah Mohamad Hosein Beheshti, the first post-revolutionary Head of the Judiciary, Ayatollah Mussavi Ardabili and Ayatollah Mohaqeq Damad set up their own informal classes for male and female post graduate law students, to teach them Islamic law. This enabled some of the Islamist women who had graduated just before the revolution to acquire the necessary Islamic legal training. Given the shortages of male lawyers and the closure of the Faculty of Law for about three years, those amongst these women who were both educated and had good revolutionary credentials found themselves propelled into relatively powerful

positions in no time at all. For example, Azam Nuri, the Director General of the Legal Department of the Ministry of National Guidance Ershadeh Meli was appointed to her post in 1979, when she was 24 years old.

In their battle for access to education, Islamist Iranian women have been at pain to insist that Islam, its demands for dignity for segregation, the importance given to motherhood, all require that women should be well educated. It has now become a tradition to refer to Khomeini as a defender of women's rights, even though this does involve a substantial revision of reality. His daughter, Farideh Mostafavi Khomeini, for example uses a personal example to assert a universal truth about her father: hazrat imam was always concerned with and supported women's education. He personally taught my mother and asked my late brother to teach me. At the time where women were viewed as unsuited to education , the late saint Khomeini told my late brother [Ahmad] to teach me, which he did for many years

I remember one day on the eve of an exam. The house was full of guests... I picked up my books and went to my father's room and said "your room is quiet I've come to study here"... a little while later he came in with a tea tray. I was most embarrassed and said "sir why have you taken so much trouble?" He smiled and said "A person who studies is worthy of respect"... This clearly denotes the importance that the hazrateh imam attached to education .

Similarly Azam Nuri, the first women in the post revolutionary era to reach the rank of First Secretary, of Legal Affairs, at the Ministry of Islamic Guidance, Ershad, told reporters in April 1994 that: Women must arm themselves with knowledge. They must seek to learn at any age under any condition be it at work or at home... They must study. Our religion recognises no limit whatsoever for learning and the acquisition of knowledge. Once humanity is armed with knowledge it can remove all the problems .

In the early post revolutionary years there was a serious disregard for the right to equal access to tertiary education "equally accessible on the basis of merit" . Women were excluded from 54% of the subjects taught at the tertiary level and were reduced to 10% of the total student population in 1983 . Slowly and painfully women fought their way back. Even though by 1991 women were still barred from 97 academic areas , they managed to obtain some quotas specifically for them. In this they were assisted by the Women's Cultural Social Council. Despite its conservative membership, it submitted 13 women's projects to the High Council of Cultural Revolution in 1991. Only one of these was considered and ratified by the Council. It was a proposal to eliminate the prejudicial treatment of women in higher education and in the selection for degree courses.

Some of the success however can be directly attributed to the phobia about contact between the sexes. Deputy Minister of Health Larijani voices these fears:

We must reduce to a minimum the contact between sexes in medical centres. this is one of our serious principles and no amount of seemingly enlightened thinking would deviate us from this correct path. Operation theatres must not be a place where people expose their bodies. Hence the need to have all women hospitals and clinics.

The result was the setting up of an all women Faculty of medicine at Qom in 1994 and a 25% quota for women in certain medical fields.

Another strategy has been to emphasise the importance of educating mothers so that they could raise good families. A classic economic efficiency analysis to justify this was offered by Dr. Mohab Ali, Professor and head of research on productivity and efficiency, bahrevari of Alameh Tabatabayi University. He explained that educated women institute efficiency and good practice within the household. He stressed the centrality of the family for the Islamic Republic and went on to explain the importance of effective organisational skills in planning, forecasting and using of resources within the household to create an efficient "social unit" with a saintly director which is the mother" (my underlining):

To improve society we must improve the character and calibre of individuals who form that society, and to do so we must improve the family. If in a consumer society we see production levels falling then that is indicative of the people's indifference. We must break this cycle by introducing a learning process within the family where individuals learn to value their time and be educated to plan to participate fully in the household and be an organised and responsible person and learn that work is part of life so that as a fully grown person work and consumption will be seen as two halves of the same process.

He is of the view that an educated woman could institute a fair division of labour within the household by having a clear domestic plan and exacting the appropriate cooperation. He comes to the conclusion that: Women as the director of household must organise a working system. This takes up a lot of time and energy. But once the system is in place, then its like a clean conduit, there are no blockages and the system can run. Women should train their husband and children to participate in the household chores according to their plans... The problem in our society is that we do not prepare and plan .

Such arguments contributed to the reinstatement of technical training for women. The first women's institute for technical and vocational training was opened in Ahwaz in 1993 with 1500 students. But the term technical was widely interpreted to mean not only courses in computing, electronics, technical drawing, repairs of household goods, accountancy , design, but also tailoring, knitting and cake making.

It is nevertheless extremely helpful to have more and more educational facilities for women since in Iran, as in much of the world, the educational sector is also the

most important single employer of women; in this respect segregated schooling could be helpful, though given the severe fall in overall female employment its impact has been marginal. There may however be some room for optimism; Dr. Mohab Ali thinks that there is:

Although women do not have equal opportunities in Iran the prospect is not too bad, it is their responsibility to move and move the society with them. There are problems including the absence of chreches, but women must go on fighting .

What is certainly the case is that in the formal government sector it is the Ministries of Health and Education that provides the bulk of female jobs. As table 1 indicates, the Ministry of Education is the most important employer of women with only 16% of its employees being male.

Percentage of male/female employees of selected Ministries in 1986

| Name of Ministry | Male% | Female% |
|---|-------|---------|
| Ministry of Power | 93 | 7 |
| Ministry of Industries | 95 | 5 |
| Ministry of Agriculture | 94 | 6 |
| Ministry of Road and transportation | 95 | 5 |
| Ministry of Construction Crusade, Jahadeh sazandegi | 99 | 1 |
| Ministry of Minerals and mining | 95 | 5 |

Source: Census no 8, Iran dar Ayineyeh Amar Iran reflected in statistics, Statistical Centre of Iran, of 1988

Female employment has increased in the public sector especially as civil servants working in the education, cultural, health and medical sectors. 20% of men and 87% of women employed In the formal sector are government employees and women are concentrated in the typically female jobs of teaching and caring. 82.7% of women civil servants work in teaching and education followed by administrative, financial, clerical, health and medical professions. But if the Ministries of Health and Education were to be excluded, then women's employment in the public sector would fall to an average of 9.6 % of the total . Thus although women in Iran are gaining some grounds, particularly in terms of improving their access to education, the process is slow and the battle continuous.

Politics

The struggle to gain the right to take part in the government of their country too has been slow and painful. The post-revolutionary state had made women politically marginalised; article 115 of the Islamic constitution follows Ayatollah Khomeini's instructions in insisting that the leader of the nation, Valayateh Faqih, would be a man, and so would the President. Since its inception the Islamic has never had a female member of the cabinet and the numbers of female Majlis, (Parliamentary)

representative had been less than five in all but the last Majlis, where they reached nine.

Although they fought shoulder to shoulder with men, Islamist women were not given high office by the revolutionary government. It has never appointed a woman to a Ministerial post the highest rank ever achieved is the appointment of Dr. Masumeh Ebtekar in 1997 to become one of seven Vice Presidents, without gaining a Ministerial portfolio. A point made by the leading Islamist author Zahra Rahnavard in 1990 when she complained:

Women have been and continue to be present, at times in larger numbers than men, in our public demonstrations, for the revolution and in its support. But when it comes to public appointments, they are pushed aside ... Women like myself have continuously campaigned for better conditions. We have made our demands in the press and in the public domain. But no one has taken any notice and our voices are not heard

But getting elected is only the first step, women Majlis members are severely constrained by the mainstream religious views that designate them as inferior, demands of them to be modest, silent and invisible, and defines them as interlopers in the public domain. Maryam Behrouzi, a veteran representative who had served a prison sentence before the revolution and whose 16 years old son was "martyred" in the Iran Iraq war, still found herself firmly discriminated against in Majlis. She pointed out that women are never elected to high powered committees. Nor did they become chair or officers of other parliamentary committees. Azam Taleqani who gained a seat in the first post-revolutionary Majlis, explained that women were expected to be "naturally modest" and this prevented them from "saying too much in the Majlis".

In April 1991 as the country was preparing for the Parliamentary elections, Maryam Behrouzi demanded that bills allowing an earlier retirement age for women, reforming some of the more Draconian divorce laws and provision of national insurance for women and children be put before the next session of the Majlis. Behrouzi also asked for the laws to be reformed to allow single women to travel abroad to continue their studies. A request that was not endorsed by President Refsanjani's Advisor on Women Habibi; she stated that such an act would devalue Iranian women and knock them off their perch of purity:

Since women are the public face of our society and the guardians of our honour, we must not intentionally dispatch them to a corrupt environment (i.e. the West).

Behrouzi and her colleagues argued that the post revolutionary Iranian public had to be "educated" to vote for women:

What we have to do is to educate people and encourage them and expand their understanding and their horizons to such an extent that they choose to vote for

women. this is what we have been doing in Iran and this is what should be done. We must ensure that men as well as women vote for women candidates .

In the subsequent Majlis nine women were elected. Representatives Behrouzi, Monireh Nobakht and Marzieh Vahid Dastjordi succeeded in pushing through a bill which allowed women to retire after 20 years of active service, while the men still had to serve 25 years. This success was in part achieved because it permitted women to return to their proper sphere, that of domesticity, all the sooner.

Behrouzi, who failed to get elected to the Fifth Majlis in April 1996, offers a re-constructed evaluation of Khomeini's role in "educating" the public to accommodate women politically. Looking back at her own long career in politics and the continuing struggle to gain grounds Behrouzi claimed that Khomeini had given them the final accolade :

In the early days there was talk about whether or not women could stand for Majlis? Eventually women stood and some were elected. But many of the men and many of the Ulama viewed this as being against Islamic law Shaar and Islamic practices. They argued that if women get into Majlis then it would not be possible to control them and it would not be possible to implement the rule of Islam. As a result at the end of the first Majlis's term some members wrote to the imam, and some of these gentlemen are still in the Majlis. One of the Ulema told me that he was one of the people who did so to "indicate that we did not think that it was proper for women to be in parliament". Imam did not reply, but he asked Mr. Hashemi [Rafsanjani, the Majlis Speaker] to give us a verbal answer and Mr. Hashemi told us that the imam has stated "I think that women have the right to participate in the political arena and in the law making process and I think anything else to be unfair and unjust. Today it is right and proper for women to take part in all social domains."

Two groups went to the imam, a 12 man group demanded that women's participation be declared against Islamic law. He told the twelve man group "women's presence in Majlis is not against Islamic law, what you are asking is". Well you can imagine what an impact such a statement had .

By 1994 Behrouzi could confidently claim that elite Islamist women were beginning to play a role in the politics of the country. At least it had become obvious that they would no longer be silent obedient observers in the Majlis. I think that the problem with some of the male Majlis representative is one of prejudice and personal views. I think that perhaps it is not their fault. In a society where injustice is done to women where the people who commit such injustices, the husband who is unjust to his wife the father who is unjust to his daughter the brother who is unjust to his sister maybe they do not consider their deeds to be unjust. They may think that they have the right to behave in this way. They may even think that it is their duty to behave in such a way. Well we have different cultures and different views amongst different families. But we also have representatives who have a very

positive and enlightened view to women and who support us and encourage others to vote for us.

Of course Islamist women still find it difficult to get women centred measures through. They were refused the right to have a Parliamentary women's committee, or to gain access to government funded scholarships to study abroad for single women. Behrouzi attributes these to the absence of enlightened views in the Majlis; but she remains optimistic:

On the whole I think that the Majlis has a very positive view of women and our leader Ayatollah Khameneyi has a very positive view of women as have the head of the judiciary as well as our President as well as the Speaker of the Majlis . The first speech that the Speaker of the House made this session was in defence of women's issues which highlights his interest in this question and this is most gratifying .

Divorce laws Where women Parliamentarians in Iran have been more successful is in making inroads against the men's Islamic, unilateral, right of divorce. Slowly, but steadily women are approaching their strategising to approach their UN declared entitlement to "equal right as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution" .

In July 1993 the Majlis ratified a bill which made it more expensive for men to discard their wives at will. In fact except for a brief period, the Post- Revolutionary government had not succeeded in closing down the Family Courts set up before the revolution to curb divorce, or defend the aggrieved party, who was usually the wife, in familial disputes . Thus even though the Islamic government had restored the male prerogative to easy divorce, by using the marriage contract, and insisting on the Koranic right to fair treatment, many Iranian women had continued going to the Family Courts . Nevertheless on the whole the courts favoured the men and on divorce women were not entitled to any of their husband's property. As Azam Taleqani explained:

Unfortunately after the revolution ... the government and even the clergy have not paid enough attention to women as full human beings. All their efforts has been concentrated on making women stay at home, at all cost; to make them accept self sacrifice, oppression and submissive. Even if they go to court to get their due, I am not saying that the courts are totally patriarchal; but unfortunately there are these tendencies. So the problem is presented in a way that does not illuminate the truth .

However the 1993 bill curtailed men's automatic right of divorce, by stipulating that men who "unjustly" divorce their "obedient" wives should do their Koranic duty and pay "wages" for the wife's domestic services during their married years. Maryam Behrouzi welcomed the bill as a public demonstration, both to Iranians and the world, that the government recognised and respected women's rights. She also put the blame for divorce on men and argued that if men chose to destroy the domestic hearth and break the family up, then they had to pay for their foolishness: The ones who fear us

feel that giving women rights, for example paying them for housework if they decide to divorce them make for unruly and disobedience amongst the women folk. They worry about the prospect of marriage and feel that women may become uppity once they have got a financial security of their own, they might then go for divorce. But this is no so...If women are happy and comfortable in their lives they would not seek to divorce a husband. In any case the law is about those women whose husband's seek to divorce them. It is for women who have done no wrong, who have been obedient, who have not misbehaved and still the husband wants to divorce them. Yet we still have people who think that if women have such a right they would exercise it to gain grounds in the family and are therefore against it.

Behrouzi saw this bill as a useful first step but argued that the government had yet some way to go towards the goal of honouring women's rights in Iran. However being an astute politician Behrouzi also argued that the bill indicated that the Islamic solution could be vastly preferable to the Western alternative: We have some of the most advanced laws concerning women, such as the law for payment of wages for housework which is unique in world...In the West they require couples who divorce to half their worldly goods, but that is because there women are obliged to work, so from the start they put in half each into their married life. So when they split they take half each. But here women are not obliged to work. Women don't even have to bring in a dowry- those who do so are offering a gift- But it is the duty of the men to provide housing to furnish and equip the house and to pay for the household. Even so those women who stipulate it in their marriage contract can get up to half of their husband's worldly goods. They can also claim for suckling the baby or they can claim wages for house work, if they have been dutiful and obedient .

Conclusion

Although the path towards liberation of women in Iran has been hard and stony, Islamist elite and secular and feminist women in Iran have shown a remarkable resilience and have fought long and hard to secure some of the basic human rights that had initially been denied to them by the Islamic Republic. Of course there is still a long way to go, or as Behrouzi tactfully states "there are still minor legal adjustments that need to be made". In the context of the current theocracy the most effective way to make these "minor" adjustments is to centre the struggle within the Islamic discourse. For Behrouzi and other elite Islamist women it is essential to claim that "on the whole we do better than those who ask for equality." The road to success is through a pretence that has enabled women over the past decade and a half in women to move towards equality by persisting on their demands for complementarity. In the post modernist world of difference and fragmented perspectives, it must be possible to recognise the achievements of Islamist elite Iranian women in the domain of human rights and support the feminist causes that they have adopted.

Endnotes

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