

**Political Participation of Women in Islamic Republic of Iran during
Khatami's Period**

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "Political Participation of Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran during Khatami's Period" submitted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Contents

Pages

List of Tables and Charts	I-II
Chapter I: Introduction	1-15
Chapter II: Status of Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, prior to Khatami's Period	16-44
Historical Dynamics of Women's Status	
Ayatollah Khomeini's Views on Women	
Iranian Revolution and Women	
Establishment of Islamic Republic of Iran and Question of Women	
Socio-economic and Political Condition of Women	
Chapter III: Role of Women in Iranian Public Sphere during Khatami's Period	45-75
Defining Public Sphere	
Rise of Khatami as a Reformist Leader	
Khatami's Efforts for Reforms	
Increasing Role of Women in Public Sphere	
<i>Role of Women in Education</i>	
<i>Role of Women in Economy</i>	

Role of Women in other Sphere

Chapter VI: Political Participation of Women in Khatami's Iran	76-103
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Establishment of Islamic Republic of Iran and Women's Political Participation

Women's Civil and Political Activities during Khatami's Period

Women's Role in Political Organisation

Women's Role

Women's Movement

Role of Women in Media

Women's Role in NGOs

Women's Participation in Formal Political Institutions in Khatami's Time

Women's Representation in Parliament

Role of Women in the Executive Bodies

Women in the Village and Municipal Councils

Women and other Government Institutions

Chapter V: Conclusion	104-108
------------------------------	----------------

References	109-117
-------------------	----------------

List of Tables and Charts

List of Tables

Table 2 (a): Youth Literacy Rate (15 to 24 years old)	35
Table 2 (b): Women's Share in Economic Activities (1976- 1996)	40
Table 2 (c): Female Representation in Parliament during Shah's Rule	41
Table 2 (d): Female Representation in Parliament in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1976- 1996)	42
Table 3 (a): Youth Literacy Rate (15 to 24 years old)	60
Table 3 (b): Total Percentage of Female Students in Public Higher Education Institutions (1991-2005)	62
Table 3 (c): Total percentage of female students in Islamic Azad (Private) University, (1996/97-2006/07)	63
Table 3 (d): Number and Percentage of Female Faculty Members in Higher Education Institutions	64
Table 3 (e): Female labour participation in state enterprises (1991-2008)	68
Table 3 (f): Female Labour Participation in Industries (1996-2007)	69
Table 3 (g): Fertility Rate (birth per women), (1990-2005)	71
Table 4 (a): Number and Percentage of Women Elected to the Iranian Parliament (1979-2004)	93
Table 4 (b): Number and Percentage of Female Candidates for Parliamentary Elections (1983-2004)	94

List of Charts

Chart 2 (a): Literacy rate in Iran (1966-1996)	34
Chart 2 (b): Female Students' Participation at Primary and Secondary Level (1975 to 1995)	35
Chart 2 (c): Female Students' Participation at Tertiary Education (1971 to 1996)	36
Chart 3 (a): Literacy rate for those over 6 year	60
Chart 3 (b): Female Student's Participation at Primary and Secondary Level (1990-2005)	61
Chart 3 (c): Total Numbers of Female Student in all Universities (1996/97 to 2005/06)	62
Chart 3 (d): Number of Male and Female Teachers and Instructors, (1986-2005)	64
Chart 3 (e): Percentage of Women's Economic Activities (1996-2007)	68
Chart 3 (f): Total Number of Women Cooperative Companies (1997-2005)	70
Chart 3 (g): Percentage of Female Journalists (1971-2006)	73

CHAPTER: I

Introduction

Political participation is an indispensable part of a democracy. There is a close relationship and continuous dialogue between government and society in a democracy. Political participation affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences, and to put pressure on them to respond¹. In any democratic system, citizens have the right to express their views and attitudes towards everything related to public sphere. Active involvement of individuals and groups in the governmental process is called political participation. In other words, political participation denotes, when citizens themselves play a crucial role in the formulation and implementation of the public policies and influence the decision making capacity of the government. Nie and Verba broadly defined political participation as those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions they take². Level of the political participation depends upon the political system of the state. Political participation is an important device through which people's concerns are transmitted to a government's decision-making apparatus and enable the government to set ahead the goals of the society in such a way as to maximize the allocation of benefits to the people as a whole. It implies actions of citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics. The activities include voting, seeking information, discussions, proselytizing, attending public meetings, contributing financially to party, and communicating with representatives. In other words, participation in political process which led to the selection of political leaders and determined public policy is called political participation. Political participation is the social voluntary activities in which citizens consider themselves being a part in public policy setting and the election of political leaders.

¹ Verba, Sydney (1995), *Voice and Equality, Civic Voluntarism in American politics*, London: Harvard UP, p 21

² Research Report (2004), "Gender and Political Participation" The Electoral Commission", [Online: web] Accessed 12 November 2014 URL: www.electoralcommission.org.uk p 15

In changing societies, conventional approach of political participation failed to address the contemporary political activities. Modern definition of political participation sought to incorporate informal political activities, such as; protest demonstrations, social movements, as well as increasingly, voluntary activities in pressure groups, civic associations, charity and so on³. As far as modern definition of political participation is concerned, Brady (1999) emphasises that we should think political participation, firstly as people's voluntary activities and observable actions. Secondly, here the "people" means common citizens, not any political elite and civil servant. Thirdly, the concept refers to deliberate attempt to influence the people who are in power and make a difference⁴. Here, based on the level of integration, decision making process can be categorised in two ways; first, institutional political participation, in which the activities involved in the government mechanisms for decision-making such as referenda, elections, advisory body, etc., and second non-institutional political participation, in which the activities that are not part of official channels for the establishment of policies and that are aimed at exerting pressure on them from without, such as demonstrations, electoral campaigns, individual and collective requests to public organisations, promotion of certain groups or social classes interests, and membership and activities within political parties⁵

The women's question became significant during 1970, and gender inequality is acknowledged worldwide as sensitive issue. In every society of the world, women face unequal treatment in both public and private spheres. As compared to western countries, Muslim countries are far behind in terms of gender equality. Although, there have been many efforts to ameliorate the women's condition by the national governments and many international organizations, it is very complicated to break the traditional gender relation in these countries. Similarly, in most of the Muslim countries, Iran has also signed International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, and Iranian constitution itself includes the protection of women. Western countries have the perception that the condition of women has been worsened after the

³ *ibid.* p 15

⁴ Ekman, Joakim and Amna, Erik (2012), "Political Participation and Civic Engagement: Towards a New Typology", *Human Affairs*, 22: 284

⁵ Regional Gender Programme in South East Asia (2009), "Gender Analysis of Women's Political Participation in 7 South East Asian Countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, East Timor and Vietnam", [Online: web] Accessed 21 December 2014 URL: www.bantaba.ehu.es p 11

revolution, because of Islamic ideology of the state⁶. Iran is the land of great paradox. Iranian women have occupied almost more than 60 per cent of the university seats, but Iran's rank is persistently low in the gender equality index⁷. Simmonetti describes Iran as the paradox of less rights and more opportunity for women. However, women's legal condition has deteriorated in Islamic Republic, but women are quite visible in the public sphere, in the field of education, industry and administration, though they are not highly represented in the decision making bodies. In terms of political participation, women have contributed in the success of Iranian revolution and they voted in referendum in support of Iran as Islamic Republic. Politically, women are aware and active but their representation in the parliament cabinet and other institutions is very low.

The status of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran is a highly contested issue. Although women have played a crucial role in the Iranian revolution in 1979, their expectations were not fulfilled by the new regime. Women participated in anti-Shah protests and demonstrations in a huge number. In the revolution, they came on the street as a political force. Women from every social class participated in the demonstrations and overthrow the Shah's dictatorship. Consequently, Iran was transformed as Islamic Republic on 1 April 1979 by the referendum, supported by 98 per cent of the population. The new constitution drafted in December 1979, was a reflection of *Shari'a*. Women are subjected to interpretation of the Islamic laws and traditional view points of the society. In the article 21 of the constitution, it is mentioned that "the government must ensure the rights of women in all respects, in conformity with Islamic criteria..." This is open to the interpretation of laws pertaining to women. It is ensured by the constitution that all citizen of the country equally enjoy the protection of law and all human, political, economic and cultural rights irrespective of their gender, within Islamic criteria. As far as the legal status of women goes, it depends on the interpretation of *Shari'a* law. The Islamic Republic introduced mandatory veiling system through article 139 of the Islamic Criminal code. Furthermore, the *Qesas* (the bill of retribution) has been proposed in 1980 and

⁶ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 14

⁷ 117 out of 128 in 2012, according to Women's Economic Opportunity Index, 127 out of 135 in 2012 according to Global Gender Gap Index, and 95 out of 102 according to 2009 Social Institutions and Gender Index,

legislated in 1983. This law declined the legal status of women by stipulating that woman's testimony would be equivalent to that of half of a man, or two women's testimony would be equivalent to one man's testimony. Laws in Islamic Republic of Iran are in conformity with Islamic jurisprudence.

However, on the one hand, Islamic Republic of Iran has curtailed the legal rights of women, and the other hand, socio-economic and political changes paved the way for women's empowerment; therefore, women are quite visible in the public sphere. From the beginning, the Iranian Revolution itself became the major source of change. Women came on the street with men and participated in the demonstrations, in order to overthrow the Shah's dictatorship. Many of them participated in the political activities together with men and were arrested as prisoners and suffered painful tortures which resulted in their martyrdom. An admirable contribution of women in the revolution showed the potential in public sphere that realized by the Iranian society. Khomeini who has been so opposed to the Shah's 1963 offer of suffrage for women, after the revolution he changed his position by realizing women's contribution in the revolution⁸. He appealed to women to come out and vote for the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran In December 1979, and then in March 1980 to elect the president. Khomeini urged that for women, voting was a religious, Islamic and divine duty⁹. As man has the right to vote, women also have the same right.

Post revolutionary education system is a cornerstone in the women's empowerment. In fact, the most benefited section of the society is women. However, the access to education during Pahlavi regime was limited in the urban areas only but post revolutionary education was accessible to rural areas as well. Education became an instrument of social progress and reform. As a consequence of rapid oil boom, female employment opportunities increased prior to the revolution. Despite of some barriers, the female labour increased even after the revolution. Increasing demand for labour brought women to the public sphere. The employment opportunities are commonly acknowledged as one of the major sources for women's empowerment. The

⁸ Halper (2010), "Law and Iranian Women's Activism" (ed.) Kassam R. Zyan, *Women and Islam*, Praeger: Santa Barbara, California, p 11

⁹ *ibid* page 12.

importance and role of Iranian women in the public sphere increased significantly during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Men were engaged in the war and women started playing an important role in the social and economic sphere of the country. The war situation led to the stagnation of economy; therefore the professionals, technicians, and skilled labour had migrated to other countries especially to West. Consequently, the regime had to compromise with its rigid attitudes, and it provided the opportunities to women. Women got the chance to fill this vacuum. In addition to the changes of the status of women, the feminist movement in Iran has made women aware about their rights. In the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war, women's movement in Iran intensified. Women's struggle against gender segregation has led to a radical change in their self-perception. Despite the anti feminist attitude of the state, the women's movement began to intensify in Iran. A number of feminist scholars and activists particularly Shahleh Shditalab, Tahmineh Milani, Hozatoleslam Saidzadeh, female lawyer Mehrangiz Kar, and Shrin Ebadi contributed to the development of a great deal of consciousness among women about their rights. They have spread their ideas through their writings in various magazines; *Zenan* is the most influential among them. Women's position was advanced by Mohsen Sa'idzadeh, in the 1990. He had written a series of progressive articles in the feminist magazine *Zenan* that challenged traditional interpretation of Islamic Jurisprudence concerning women. Sa'idzadeh was the first modern cleric who tried to attempt to reconcile feminism with Islam. He believed that religion and gender equality is reconcilable¹⁰. To some extent the factor of globalization, also facilitates the awareness of women's rights in Iran. The global communication system consisting internet, television, etc become the medium for exchange of ideas. Globalization makes them aware about women's movement which is going on in different parts of the world.

The supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1986 mentioned in his public lecture that women can participate in studying, trading, working in offices, factories and participate in the social and political activities. Women's respectable and higher status can be ensured through their share in education, economic life and political participation¹¹. After the first decade of the revolution, there were only three female

¹⁰ Halper Luise (2010), "Law and Iranian Women's Activism", (ed.) Kassam R. Zyan, *Women and Islam*, California, Praeger: Santa Barbara, p

¹¹ Sadat, Heshmat (2013), "Participation of Women in Iran's Polity", *gemc Journal*, (4):

deputies out of two hundred sixty-eight in the parliament. The female member constituted only 1.5% of the total seats in the first three parliaments. In 1992 female members of the parliament increased to 9 which was 3.3% of the total seats, 13 in 1996, and 14 in 2001, and reduced to 8 in 2009. The youth female literacy rate of Iran was only 42.67% in 1976 which increased to 98.5% in 2012¹². Since the revolution, Iran has been able to realise the significance of equality. The struggle against illiteracy has caught the attention of international organisations, including UNESCO which proclaimed that Iran is the most successful country in tackling the problem of illiteracy of the country.

It was after the Iran-Iraq war and particularly during the Khatami's period that women felt a greater sense of equality and opportunity. In 1997 presidential election, Mohammad Khatami has shown that Islamic teaching does not necessarily oppose women's rights, equality, and Islamic feminism and Islam are not incompatible. It is merely the patriarchal interpretation of Islam that makes the condition of women vulnerable. A large group of women got attracted towards the moderate political campaign of Khatami, who promised more liberties and equal rights to women. He received approximately 79 per cent votes of the Iranian population that showed a significant part of the population in favour of his moderate ideas relating to women. After election, they enjoyed somewhat greater freedom; they realized freedom in public spheres and witnessed intermixing of the genders.

There were several significant initiatives that have been taken by Khatami's government that led to the women's empowerment in Iran. Khatami allowed more political expression that encouraged women's participation in various sectors of the public sphere. Moreover, he has organised an international women's sport competition in which a wide debate about women has been taking place. Furthermore, Khatami's administration decided the minimum wages for the female should be equal to that of the male employees. However, the law concerning the election of the municipality was already passed in 1980, but it was Khatami's government which hold the election for the first time. There is no doubt, this regime was the most moderate and paved the

¹² Ibid, p

way for women's participation in the public sphere, but still there were only two female cabinet ministers which was the same in his predecessor Rafsanjani's cabinet.

There has been fluctuation in women's representation in formal political institutions such as in the parliament, cabinet and other government bodies in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Relatively, women's representation in parliament was far better during the Shah's regime than in Islamic Republic of Iran, especially in the period 1976-1979. Shah's last term has seen a witness of highest percentage of women in the parliament after giving the voting right to women in 1963, in the history of both Shah's and Islamic Republic of Iran. Female member percentage was 7 in the parliament of 1976-1979, and it was Shah's period. The highest women's representation has been recorded 4.4 per cent in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2002-2004 during the period of reformist president Mohammed Khatami¹³. Although women have acquired comparatively better condition in other fields of the public realms in the Islamic Republic of Iran, their representation in the formal political institutions remain almost constant even in the period of the most liberal president Khatami, 1997 to 2004. In the Khatami period, political expression was higher and women were enjoying more freedom in the political sphere as well, but they did not consolidate their representation in the political realms, as they had in the field of education, Industry, and health.

The numbers of women's NGOs were very few before 1989. In 1995, almost 55 women's NGOs have been recorded. The percentage of women's NGOs increased by 98.5 per cent in between 1997 to 2006. There has been some growth of female participation in the municipal and village Islamic councils as well. The percentage of women was zero till 1995. It was Khatami's administration that implemented the law related to municipal and village council elections. Women's percentage in the municipal and village Islamic council was only 0.84 per cent has been recorded in 1999 that increased to 1.51 per cent in 2004¹⁴. Thus, over a period of time, women became more visible in the political and other spheres of the society. The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran clearly describes that "Every person is entitled to

¹³ Research Report prepared for the project of, Religion, Politics and Gender Equality on the topic of "Can Women Act as Agent of a Democratization of Theocracy, in Iran by the Hooma Hoodfar and Shahi Sadr in United Nation Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

¹⁴ Pournik Milad (2013), "Civil Society Organisations and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Iran", *Institute for global and international studies*, p 12

choose the employment he wishes, so long as it is not contrary to Islam or the public interest or the rights of others”¹⁵. The economic participation of female was 9.1 per cent in 1996 which increased to 16.6 per cent in 2005, and then fell to 13.3 per cent in 2007¹⁶.

The interaction between modernisation undertaken by the state, regardless of the authorities’ initial intentions in the spheres of education, demography, changing economy and accelerated urbanisation, has led to major shifts in behavioural patterns and attitudes¹⁷. These developments led to the ground for better women’s condition in the country. Increasingly well educated women are interested in the equal opportunities and responsibilities. These changes show the contradiction between women’s modern social, demographic, political and cultural behaviour, on the one hand, and the conventional laws and institutions that attempt to reinforce the patriarchal power relations, in both public and private spheres, on the other hand. It can be argued that women’s increasing role in public sphere is determined by the changing socio-economic and cultural condition of the country and it is not done intentionally by the state and religious laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

As far as the present study is concerned, it is divided among three main chapters in which comprehensively women’s status, their role and participation in the different field of the public sphere has been discussed. Second chapter of the study basically focused on women’s status in Islamic Republic of Iran prior to Khatami’s government. It mainly focuses on women’s status having with brief historical discussion, and dynamics of women’s social, economic and political role in the Islamic republic of Iran particularly before Khatami’s government. However, historically, to some extent, women were visible in the public arena, but their role has been remaining marginalized in the main stream of society. Women’s political participation can be traced back to the Tobacco movement and constitutional movement in Qajar dynasty. Iran has a history of institutional development;

¹⁵ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran

¹⁶ Pournik Milad (2013), “Civil Society Organisations and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Iran”, *Institute for global and international studies*, p 13

¹⁷ Kian Azadeh (2012), “Gendered Citizenship and the Women’s Movement in Iran” (ed.) Parsi, Rouzbeh (2012) *Iran: A Revolutionary Republic in Transition*, European Union, Institute for Security studies, p 23

constitutional revolt which led to the establishment of a constitution and parliament in 1906-1911. Women's role was admirable in these struggles, but they did not get the right to vote till 1963. Women's status in the society was subjected to the patriarchal attitude of the society. They were not allowed in the formal educational institutions, some temporary *Mokhtabkhaneh* were teaching them, especially Quran. Child and forced marriage of girls were frequently allowed and legitimised by the society. Gender division in the society was very rigid; women were confined only to households, and very few women were involved in other public activities. However, in this period, through constitutional newspaper, women were able to raise their issues. Modernisation project led by Shah Pahlavi was very hasty and an irresponsible decision. Coercive measures were adopted by Shah in order to modernise Iranian Society. Forced unveiling in the public places spread the discontent among the cleric groups and traditional families of the country. However, in terms of ameliorating women's legal and political status, Shah's period was very significant, but it had limited impact on women's condition. During this time, women were granted voting rights, as well the betterment of their condition in case of marriage and divorce was intended, and Family Protection Law had been introduced. Furthermore, there were many educational institutions that were established for women. Women's visibility in the public sphere was promoted by the government, and they were allowed in the several field of the public sphere, including political. In fact, some initiatives had been taken by the Shah's government, but their implications were limited, and confined only to urban-upper class women. The modernisation project neither proved effective to bring the social reform nor able to solve the economic problems of the society.

Pahlavi dynasty has been overthrown in 1979, which resulted in Iran transformed into an Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as main architecture of the revolution and Islamic Republic, therefore his views on women's role in the society became significant. Women's participation in the revolution changed the perception of the society, and they were granted several rights that were not supposed to be given to them, for instance women's enfranchisement. In fact, women's legal status has declined following the revolution and denounced FPL (Family Protection Law) as un-Islamic code of conduct. Initially, women were barred from several occupations, and veiling (*hijab*) was strictly imposed. Women's rights in case of marriage and divorce were minimized. Secular and western oriented women were the main loser of the

revolution. Secular women were forced to leave from the various administrative and other jobs, but to some extent women from religious background were promoted in the public sphere with following proper Islamic dress code.

As far as women's condition is concerned, it was influenced through the socio economic political changes of the country over a period of time. Demographic change, rapidly growing urbanisation and economy provided opportunities to women in the society. However following the Iranian revolution in 1979, several restrictions had been imposed by the government on women's presence in the public sphere, but their representation in education has increased considerably. Although in order to consolidate the Islamic Republic and legitimise the government policies, state introduced a comprehensive education plan that was accessible to the every section of the society. It led to the unintended social development. Gradually female students surpassed the male students in the higher education. Expanding women's education had several implications. Education provided them opportunities in socio-economic and political sphere. Gradually women's access to labour market increased after the revolution, though they were not occupying the managerial and decision making positions. Educated women preferred to be self dependent; therefore they delay in marriage and bear fewer children¹⁸. So, the women's education, employment and demography interrelated to each others. Educated women were aware about their rights and their role in the society. However, constitutionally women were not barred to occupy the higher positions in the government, but the laws interpreted in a way that women cannot hold the post of president. Moreover, often female candidates were disqualified by the Council of Guardians, as a result, women's representation in the major political institution has been marginalised. In the post revolutionary Iran women developed a strong movement, and through various means they are raising their voices.

Third chapter of the study is primarily concerned with women's role in the public sphere during Khatami's period, and it deals with women's role in education, economy, media and other informal political activities. How did Khatami's

¹⁸ Mehryar, Amir H. And Aghajanian, Akbar (2002), "Women's Education and Labour Force Participation and Fertility Decline in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 21 August 2014 URL: aghajanian@uncfsu.edu p 2

government provide the favourable condition to women? How much women were able to represent themselves in the public sphere? What are the major obstacles in women's participations in the public sphere? Khatami belonged to moderate factions among the political groups, who had served as Member of Parliament, twice as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance and several other posts as well. Moreover he was the founding member of the *majma-e ruhaniyun-e mobarez* (Combatant Clerics Society), the largest Islamic left parliamentary group. Khatami emerged as moderate leader, and his liberal reputation became popular among the people especially youth and women. His election campaign was based on the rule of law, Islamic democracy, development of civil society, and women's right. Khatami's landslide victory in 1997 presidential election led to the hope among the women for substantial change in the society.

However, Khatami's vision was altruistic for women's empowerment and gender equality. His reforms symbolized an era of socio-political transformation, and his victory termed as second of Khoradad movement¹⁹. As far as his reform efforts were concerned, he mainly focused on four major issues; women's issue, economy, press and media, and government system itself²⁰. Khatami in third *Economic, Social and Cultural Development programme*, emphasised on women's comprehensive education, and allowed women's entry into engineering, agriculture and medical disciplines which were earlier restricted for women. Moreover, he established Centre for Participation of Women that was associated with President's office, and the head of the centre came from the cabinet ministry. In order to encourage political participation of the people, he implemented the law related to municipal and village council elections, as a result, in 1999 elections for these local political bodies had taken place²¹. One of the significant political developments during his period was the development of civil society organisations with a large number of NGOs, and considerable freedom to press and media. Khatami's administration promoted and

¹⁹ R. Ghomeshi (2011), "Changing Perspectives and Developments of Civil Society in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 15 August 2014 URL: shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream, p 115

²⁰ James, Russell, Jordan Jr. (2008), *A Change at Reform: Mohammed Khatami's Presidency, 1997-2005*, thesis, South Carolina, college of Charleston and the Citadel, p 34

²¹ Arjomand, Said Amir (2002), "The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (10): 726

protected several NGOs. News papers were granted more freedom, and film industry was able to make films on critical issues of the society.

The consequences of Khatami's reform policies were considerable. Women's representation and their role in education, economy, and in media and press increased drastically. Education was the most significant field in which women represented themselves in a large number, and Khatami's era witnessed higher percentage of women in the Universities and other higher educational institutions. However, following the eight years war with Iraq, Iran faced serious economic crisis that forced women to enter into the labour market. Although, women's increase in the labour market can be traced back to Rafsanjani's period, relatively during Khatami's government, women's participation in economic activities increased considerably. In fact women's labour force participation increased, though the pace of this increase was slow, the number of women at managerial position gradually moved. Moreover, it was the press and media where women's representation increased drastically in Khatami's period. The number of women journalist were very few before Khatami's government, even in 1996 the percentage of women as journalists was almost below 10 per cent, but in 2006 it increased to 22 per cent²². Demography of the country interrelated to education and economic aspect of the country. Growing education among women and their involvement in economic activities of the country have impacted fertility rate as well. Higher educated women prefer to secure their economic independency, therefore they marry latter and bear very few children, this trend led to the fertility decline in the country. Women's fertility rate was more than 4 children per women in 1992, which decline to almost 1 child per women in 2004-05²³.

Fourth chapter comprehensively deals with the most significant part of the study i.e., political participation of women in Khatami's Iran. It focuses on women's role and participation in both formal and informal political process with a brief description of political structure of Islamic Republic of Iran. After the revolution Iran adopted a political structure that partially theocratic and partially democratic, where ultimate power of the state is exercised by the Supreme leader of the country who controls the

²² Lily, Farhadpour (2012), "Women, Gender Roles, Media and Journalism", (ed.), Tara, Povey and Elaheh, Rostami-Povey *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century*, England, Ashgate press, p

²³ UNESCO data centre, [Online: web] accessed 25 April 2015, URL: www.stats.uis.unesco.org

elected institutions including the presidency. Islamic Republic of Iran has a parliament with 290 directly elected members. This is the most significant democratic institution where women have been elected several times. Council of Guardian has significant role in politics of Islamic Republic, having the power to monitor candidates for elections. Moreover, Assembly of Expert is one of the important political bodies among these, which exercises the power to elect and impeach the supreme leader of the country. Alongside all these institutions, it has independent judiciary that is primarily responsible to maintain the rule of law, and to enforce order of the government within Islamic criteria.

It is a fact that women have played an admirable role in the major political events of the country. As far as women's political activities in Iran are concerned, it can be traced back to Qajar dynasty, in which women participated in the two main political events; Tobacco protest and constitutional revolution. However, during the Shah regime, gender issues played a crucial role in the politics of modernisation of the society. In fact, Shah's modernisation project had several drawbacks, but to some extent women had been granted a few very important political rights. The most significant political achievement for women was the voting rights, which was granted in 1963. During this period, first time women were elected as Member of Parliament, and at the end of the Pahlavi dynasty, women's number in the parliament was 15, and a number of women were holding several high rank posts in the ministry and administration²⁴. Due to the dictatorial nature of the government, independent women's organisations were banned, and state led organisations, and women's movement had been projected in order to deal with women's issues. Modernisation project headed by Shah's government benefitted only urban-upper class women, while a large group of poor-rural women remain untouched.

Iranian Revolution was one of the milestones in the women's political participation. Women in a mass level, from different section of the society participated in the revolution. However, following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, women's participation in formal political institutions, and their legal status declined sharply, as well as

²⁴ Hoodfar, Hooma and Sadr, Shadi (2010), "Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran", *Third World Quarterly*, 31 (6): 887

several rights had been denounced as anti-Islamic, which were granted to women during Shah's regime. But women were allowed with the right to vote and right to be elected in the political institutions. Initially hundreds of independent women's organisations had been formed in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Due to the war with Iraq, government banned most of these organisations, especially secular and communist organisations. In fact, till 1989 women's participation in political activities was marginalised and weak.

The war destruction causes economic crisis in Iran; therefore new government headed by the President Hashemi Rafsanjani led the reform policies. Road for reforms movement began with era of reconstruction. This time was witness of growing women's political activities in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Government itself created mechanism to improve the women's condition and ensure their participation in the public sphere. During this time, different ideological women's groups became active again, and numbers of secular organisations were established, and women's movement turned into a new direction. Moreover, women's representation in parliament doubled in 1992 while there were only 4 women in first three *majlis*, since the establishment of Islamic Republic of Iran.

Women participated in various elections since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. During presidential election in 1997 an almost 78 per cent woman voted for Khatami due to his moderate reputation and promises to establish rule of law, Islamic democracy and improvement of women's condition. However, Khatami's period witnessed of a strong women's movement, development of a modern civil society organisations, and expansion of political organisations including women's organisations. Women's role in informal political activities increased considerably. Khatami had a vision to bring gender equality and ensure the women's proper participation in the society. During Khatami's government several restrictions on press media had been removed and number of new press were allowed those were critical to several issues of the society and government. This was one of the significant developments during his time. Women's voices found relatively an open platform to express their views through writings in various magazines, news papers and periodicals. The study focuses on women's role and their participation in Islamic

Republic of Iran in general and Khatami's period in particular. It would be discussed following chapters in detail.

CHAPTER: II

Status of Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Prior to Khatami's Period

Condition of women is very vulnerable in the West Asian region, especially in the Muslim countries. In case of Iran, the women's issue is highly contested. On the one hand women's legal position had been declining and they were barred from several occupations following the Iranian revolution, on the other hand government's education and economic policies ameliorated their material conditions. Iranian revolution in 1979 transformed Iran as an Islamic republic with the great contribution of Ayatollah Khomeini. Women from every section of the society participated in the revolution alongside with men, and their contribution was recognised by the leading figure of the country, the first supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran Khomeini¹. When Ayatollah Khomeini replaced the dictatorship of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, women expected he would assure the social justice and gender equality in the country, but their expectations were not fulfilled by the new regime, a large group of secular women faced several problems in Islamic Republic of Iran². In the revolution there were different ideological factions that were fighting against Shah's dictatorship, but religious faction assimilated all these factions in one fold³. The immediate impact after the revolution on women's life was the abolition of social reform policies which were enunciated under Pahlavi's government. The white revolution of 1963 projected by the Shah, led to the Iranian society toward modernisation and progress through the lens of the Shah, was replaced with Khomeini's 'Islamic Revolution' with its emphasis that he protecting women's honour and modesty from western's corrupt values⁴.

¹ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 16

² Burki, Khan Shireen (2014), "Regime consolidation and Female Status in a Fledgling Theocracy: Khomeini's Vilayat-e-Fiqh, 179-1989", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51 (2): 208-223

³ *ibid*, p 221

⁴ *ibid*, p 208

Historical Dynamics of Women's Status

Women's quest for equal rights and their collective action to improve their status can be traced back from the Qazar rule, during the constitutional revolution of 1906-1911⁵. Before 1906 constitutional revolution, Iranian political system was a monarchy and people had no role in the policy and decision making process. The women's role was negligible in the political and social sphere of the nation, as compared to men.

During the Qazar period women had no formal education provisions, they were confine only to the reading of the religious text especially the Quran. However, some traditional primary schools were present in mosques or special houses known as "Moktabkhaneh"⁶. Some religious families used to ask tutor to teach their daughters at their homes. Mostly girls were allowed to learn and to read only the Quran. They were expected to be good housewives, who manage the family. Qazar time was very rigid in term of gender division. There was gender separation in homes and streets or public places, and this remained till Pahlavi's time, it highly prevailed among those in the lower class families⁷. Moreover, women had no right regarding divorce and marriage, divorce was very easy for men and polygamy was frequently permitted for men. There was common, child and forced marriages of girls. Women's attitude was not reactionary about their status in the society. Patriarchal norms helped to structure the gender relation in the society, where woman had denied having share in their families and social decision making⁸. In the monarchic system Shah had absolute power and took all the decisions without consulting others. This traditional political system affects all segment of the society, and strengthened the male dominated and patriarchal culture in the society.

Women's position became significant during the Qazar era since it coincides with the emerging women's social and political movement in the West. Qazar era witnessed two significant movement; Tobacco protest and Constitutional reform movement, in

⁵ Tohidi, Nayereh (2010), "Iran", in Kelly, Sanja and Breslin, Julia (eds.) *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa Progress Amid Resistance*, New York: Freedom House, Rowman and Littlefield, p 1

⁶ Shojaei, Nosrat Seyedeh, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 257

⁷ *ibid*, p 258

⁸ Terman, Rochelle (2010), "the Piety of Public Participation: the Revolutionary Muslim Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran", *Totalitarian Movement and Political Religion*, 11 (3-4): 301

which the fundamental role of the women could not be denied⁹. Tobacco protest occurred in 1890 in response to Shah's irresponsible decision on the tobacco trade with imperial power Great Britain. He gave the concession to Britain regarding the trade of Tobacco, in which Britain got almost full monopoly over the production, sale and export in Iran for fifty years. This protest was led under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Mirza Shirazi in December 1891. From the beginning of this movement women participated in it along with men to the end of the movement. Although women's role was significant in the Tobacco movement, the traditional and patriarchal nature of the society did not allow them to use this movement to improve their situation in society.

Constitutional revolution can be portrayed as a turning point in the history of Iran as well as status of women. During this time women formed various groups in order to facilitate the revolutionary forces; therefore women's social activities were increased¹⁰. Many of the women's private associations and hidden organisations had been formed in order to participate in protests and demonstrations. As a consequence of their active role in the constitutional revolution, women proclaimed their social rights, and they demanded their rights against issues like polygamy and men's monopoly over the rights of divorce and marriage during constitutional revolution¹¹. Many of the male counterparts, mostly intellectual journalist and lawyers supported their demands. After this revolution to some extent women were allowed in social and political participation, but it was confined only to urban upper class women. The women's participation in the politics began since this revolution. Women regularly published a journal called *Nesvan*. From the early twentieth century, Iran witnessed the growth of institutions for girl's education¹². In 1920, the formal education has been regarded as essential for women. Due to the conservative attitude of many parents, their daughters were not allowed to get education. And, the educational structure has been designed in such a way that it provides opportunity only to rich and urban few. A big achievement of this revolution for the women was that, women

⁹ Hoodfarar, Hooma (1999), "The Women's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization" *WLUML, the Women's Movement Series*, (1): 43

¹⁰ Shojaei, Nosrat Seyede, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 159

¹¹ Pournik Milad (2013), "Civil Society Organisations and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Iran" *Institute for global and international studies*, The George Washington University, p 30

¹² Shojaei, Nosrat Seyede, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 159

could express their views in the constitutional newspapers¹³. From 1908 to start of first Pahlavi era seven women's magazines were released. Despite of their significant role in the constitutional revolution women did not achieve their desirable participation in the public sphere especially in politics. Still they are denied to the voting rights and other electoral activities.

Qazar dynasty came to an end, overthrown by Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925. Reza Shah was highly influenced by the modernisation project of Turkey that was led by Atatürk. When he came to power, women's status was drastically changed, emphasised the importance of women within the state¹⁴. He frequently followed the westernization in order to modernise the Iranian society and culture without considering the significance of tradition and cultural value of the nation. Moreover, he abolished the veiling system in 1936, therefore many traditional clerics strongly opposed this action of Shah, and it created the bloody clash between government and religious groups¹⁵. Due to his modernisation policies, he was opposed by a large group of people, especially clergy class. Shah wanted to show the world that Iran can compete with West in term of modernity, and Iran could be like those of the western countries. In 1935, Reza Shah Pahlavi announced a ban on *hijab* (Veil), and had given the instructions to his forces to remove the veil forcefully if someone was wearing it on the street and public places¹⁶. He sent his daughters and wives to the public places and streets without *hijab* (veils). Removing the veils, wearing western dresses had been used as symbols of modernisation.

In case of betterment of women's status in the society shah had made a great effort in the field of women's education. Shah realized that without a substantial change in the women's condition the modernisation project would be incomplete. In the year 1935, Tehran University was established; women were allowed to get enrolled in it. Apparently, things changed in favour of women's betterment. More freedom helped

¹³ Burki, Khan Shireen (2014), "Regime consolidation and Female Status in a Fledgling Theocracy: Khomeini's Vilayat-e-Fiqh, 179-1989", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51 (2) 210

¹⁴ Shojaei, Nosrat Seyedeh, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 167

¹⁵ Kar, Mehrangiz (2008), "Focusing on Women in the internal politics of Iran", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 15 (1): 12

¹⁶ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), "Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution", *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London, p 6

women to bring them into public sphere. In fact, in Pahlavi era women enjoyed some more freedom and opportunities than in Qajar rule.

Although, to some extent women got the opportunities in the other realms of public sphere but their political participation remain constraint. During Reza Shah's period women were not allowed to participate in the elections, even they did not have the right to vote. There had been little scope in the field of political participation, therefore, a strong civil society failed to come into existence. Few women's organisations were functioning under the preservation of the government, but were only confined into the social activities, and could not develop a strong women's movement¹⁷.

King Reza Khan was succeeded by his son Mohammed Reza Shah in 1941, and he also followed the same path of modernisation, that was started by his father. The gender issue was the major political tool for modernization and nationalist project during Mohammed Reza Shah¹⁸. Iran has witnessed a number of political events during Mohammed Reza Shah's period. In fact, project of modernisation initiated by the Pahlavi government highly influenced upper class and urban society, though rural area and poor women were lagging behind. Modernization project had helped urban women to get employment in production industries, but in some selective professions, such as teaching and nursing, which helped in reinforcing norms of the traditional division of labour among genders¹⁹. However, these professions helped women to run organisations, and it brought women in contact of new idea. This experience made women aware about their situation. However, reform policies undertaken by the Shah were not made substantial social and political changes.

The year of 1963 can be marked as milestone in the women's political participation in Iran. The basic right of political participation that is called right to vote was granted to women in this year. This was the right that was accomplished after a long struggle; demonstration, and facing disapprovals from clerical community. However, finally women got the right to vote and to be elected in government and political institutions

¹⁷ Shojaei, Nosrat Seyede, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 260

¹⁸ Terman, Rechelle (2010), "the Piety of Public Participation: the Revolutionary Muslim Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 11 (3-4): 293

¹⁹ Shojaei, Nosrat Seyede, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 259

in the beginning of 1963²⁰. One can observe that women's status improved rapidly after 1963 in all sectors. For instance, women started working in the civil and political sphere, they were appointed as ministers in the government, and members of the police forces. Furthermore, their appearance increased in the private sectors; they worked as factory workers, clerical assistance, and secretaries. Women's participation in the secondary and higher education improved drastically, and many of them got the chance to study abroad. Due to increasing education among women, they migrated from village to towns and eventually larger cities²¹. They got experience of the public life, which they had traditionally been denied for a long back of history.

As far as improvement of women's legal status is concerned it was the Family Protection Law (FPL) that was enacted in 1967, which granted them more freedom and rights in the matters of divorce, polygamy, and custody of children. Moreover, the official marital age had been raised eighteen to thirteen, and women were allowed to become judges and lawyers in the court. However, the reforms introduced by Shah in the field of marriage, employment, and education were aimed at ameliorating the women's condition²². Modernization project led by Pahlavi Shah was too hasty, therefore modernisation process turned into westernisation and it became the cause of discontent among a large population of the country. It led to the social differentiation and corruption in the Iranian society and to political instability. The modernisation policies of Reza Shah Pahlavi neither achieved a meaningful economic reform nor political independence from colonial powers. State led project of social modernisation proved incomplete and resulted in new conflict and contradiction²³. Furthermore, these policies encouraged western values and lifestyles, and it inculcated among the masses a sense of loss of national and cultural identity²⁴. This modernisation was only accommodated of those women who belong to urban upper class; to some extent they only got benefits. It failed to influence women in general. It can be argued that the presence of women in the politics should not be considered as actual political

²⁰ *ibid*, p 260

²¹ Aryan, Khadijeh (2012), "The Boom in Women's Education", in Tara, Povey and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 38

²² Shojaei, Nosrat Seyede, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 260

²³ Terman, Rechelle (2010), "the Piety of Public Participation: the Revolutionary Muslim Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 11 (3-4): 294

²⁴ Shojaei, Nosrat Seyede, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 260

participation but a deliberate propaganda. In fact women's political presence did not occur in a mass level. On the contrary their widespread participation beside men came about during the process of Iranian Revolution in the form of their protest against Pahlavi Monarchy²⁵.

Ayatollah Khomeini's Views on Women

With the transformation of the Iranian political system as a consequence of revolution in 1979, gender policies of Iran also transformed accordingly. Although, the revolution was supported by the different groups with different ideologies; secular, nationalist, and leftist, but dominating figures were clerics group. Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as architecture of the revolution, who had led the foundation for Islamic Republic of Iran. During the whole revolutionary process he remained its central point and dominant political force in the country. He succeeded to accumulate all the diverse ideologies within one fold, and created the ground for Iran as an Islamic Republic. He was not just a role model for revolutionaries but also considered to be defender of Islam from Western decadence and corruption²⁶. Khomeini, the person who was contemplative, teacher, scholar and activist and was very much concerned about the Islam.

Here, after the revolution the views of Ayatollah Khomeini became important to analyse the women's status in Iran, because of his charismatic leadership, and vision to make Iran an Islamic Republic, where every aspects of life governed by the Islamic laws²⁷. As it has been described in the first chapter that women had a great role in the Iranian revolution, it showed the women's political potential that realized by the male counterparts particularly leading figures of revolution. Khomeini was at the forefront, of recognising and praising the women's pioneering role in the revolution. After the success of revolution Khomeini had given the credit to women for the success of revolution by stating that, because of women's admirable contribution in revolution,

²⁵ *ibid*, p 260

²⁶ Burki, Khan Shireen (2014), "Regime consolidation and Female Status in a Fledgling Theocracy: Khomeini's Vilayet-e-Fiqh, 179-1989", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51 (2): 217

²⁷ Nashat, Guity (1983), *Women and Revolution in Iran*, United State of America: Westview press, p 54

Iranian society has moved to the right path²⁸. Women were the focal point under the modernisation project led by the Shah, had spread western values and culture that corrupted Iranian society. Ayatollah vehemently opposed the western culture and values, and emphasised on the restructuring of Iranian society based on Islamic principles. He believed that Iranian society under Shah's rule supported by the external powers had been corrupted, that needed to be reformed by establishing Islamic society²⁹. In this society women will get their respected position, and actual freedom of women is possible in Islamic society. He appealed to women of Iran to change the life style and behaviour of the time of *taqut* (the tyrannical Shah), and to follow the purity of pre-Pahlavi period³⁰. Role of women in the family is considered to be very important in order to develop an Islamic society. Women's primary responsibility is motherhood and raising the children, because mother is the child's first teacher. If mothers bring up a good child, and one day that child will be the leader of the country, the credit will go to mother³¹. Therefore, Khomeini emphasised on women's role in the family. Khomeini believed that although women are equal to men but their role in the family as mother is more important for the society. So, for Khomeini motherhood was epitome of a women's life³². Processes of the reconstruction of 'Islamic family' start with abolition of the family protection law of 1967 and 1975³³. He denounced the family protection law arguing that it destroyed the social fabrics of an Islamic society.

Khomeini justified temporary marriage by saying that "*mut'ah* (temporary marriage) is ordained by the God for sexual gratification, and to prevent adultery, fornication, and prostitution³⁴. Moreover, he stated that law of the four wives is more progressive and in favour of women, they are more than men. More women are born than man and more man are killed in the war than women; however, it was more encouraged in order to facilitate the shoulder's widows during Iran-Iraq war. He suggested it is the religious duty of a man; he treats his wives equally and feed them properly. Khomeini

²⁸ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), "Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution", *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London, p 4

²⁹ Nashat, Guity (1983), *Women and Revolution in Iran*, United State of America: Westview press, p 54

³⁰ *ibid*, p 57

³¹ Burki, Khan Shireen (2014), "Regime consolidation and Female Status in a Fledgling Theocracy: Khomeini's Vilayat-e-Fiqh, 179-1989", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51 (2): 209

³² *ibid*, p 210

³³ Sehadeh, Rustum, Lamia (2003), *the Idea of Women in Fundamental Islam*, USA: University Press of Florida, p 85

³⁴ *ibid*, p 86

acknowledged women's right of divorce, if her husband mistreats her, she may appeal to a judge, first who will counsel her husband, then admonish him, if all fails, he is forced to divorce her³⁵.

On the issue of women's role in the public sphere, Ayatollah Khomeini's views were contrary to the other traditionalist clerics. He allowed women to participate in the public sphere, but with wearing proper Islamic *hijab* (veil)³⁶. However, following the revolution many clerics asked him to ban women's involvement in public affairs, but Khomeini acknowledged, that time has come for women to leave their homes and participate in society as the environment had become cleansed of all the decay of the Pahlavi and the perversion spread by Western governments³⁷. Alongside this view, Khomeini also gave the importance of women's role in the family and child bearing. It is surprising that Ayatollah Khomeini vehemently opposed the women's enfranchisement in 1963 introduced by the Shah, but after revolution the same person favoured women's enfranchisement. He addressing to whom those scared to Khomeini's opposition on declaration of women's enfranchisement in 1963. Furthermore, he mentioned that in Shia'ism women are not excluded from social life, but it elevates them to a platform where they can achieve a higher position in the society³⁸. He appealed to women to take part in referendum on first April 1979 when Iran became an Islamic Republic. Although, women were very few in number, but they were visible in the parliament. Gradually their number considerably increased in administrative services, and more surprisingly in the higher education as well. Khomeini was inspiring the legislative and executive power to form the policies and programs that were mean to elevate the status of women and facilitate their social, cultural and political participation.

³⁵ *ibid*, 86

³⁶ Burki, Khan Shireen (2014), "Regime consolidation and Female Status in a Fledgling Theocracy: Khomeini's Vilayet-e-Fiqh, 179-1989", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51 (2): 210

³⁷ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), "Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution", *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London, p 4

³⁸ Nashat, Guity (1983), *Women and Revolution in Iran*, United State of America: Westview press, p 76

Iranian Revolution and Women

Iranian Revolution was a turning point in the history of Iranian society, particularly for women's status and their political participation. As it has already been discussed above, women's contribution and their engagement in tobacco revolution, constitutional revolution, but in those revolution only urban upper class women were participated. Iranian Revolution known as 'Islamic Revolution' in which a substantial number of women participated across the country, from urban to rural, upper class to lower class, religious and secular groups. Freedom, Independence and 'Islamic Republic' became the ideal of the revolution, and women's liberation became central aspect³⁹. Women remained in the centre during the whole process of revolution. Dictatorial imposition of western values and culture in the Iranian society spread the discontent among the women especially belonging to traditional and rural background. Most of the activist women belonged to professional educated middle class who had nationalist aspirations. Moreover, a huge number of lower class and rural women participated in the demonstrations and protests on the street, and they supported the call of Khomeini, that it was essential for a Muslim to show their resistance against Shah's tyranny⁴⁰. Women were visible in the entire process of revolution; they joined strikes and organised protest groups along with men, to facilitate the first-aid for wounded revolutionaries, boycotting the work and administration, taking part in guerrilla attacks, donating blood and making passionate speeches among the peoples⁴¹. Women's contribution in the revolution stepped beyond the most conservative definition of their roles as mothers and wives. However, to be part of these activities women realised the increased sense of power and self confidence, political consciousness and the greater respect⁴². Moreover, young Iranian women became more aware of their own capabilities. Participation of women in the revolution and subsequent social and economic changes probably affected women's lives more than legal reforms.

³⁹ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 9

⁴⁰ Schepers, Gemma, (2007), *The Role and Position of women in Iran; is there a Need to Improve the Position of women in Iran?*, USA: University of Amsterdam press, p 6

⁴¹ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 8

⁴² Higgins J. Patricia (1985), "Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal, Social, and Ideological Changes", *Chicago Journals*, 10 (3): 479

Veiling system considered a symbol of backwardness by the Shah's regime, on the contrary same veil became a sign of resistance during the revolution. Both veiled and unveiled women joined different groups and participated in the revolution. From beginning of the revolution veil turned from religious issue to a political issue⁴³. An increasing number of women and girls, mostly from young and urban, deliberately had chosen a particular form of veiling that was political, not necessarily a testament to their religious belief. It was noted that women from northern part of Tehran, which was known most modern and western oriented social groups, appeared with veil in the universities, colleges and social gatherings⁴⁴. There were many western oriented women's groups who were not veiled also came with veil. However, the veil was a political tool to defeat Shah's dictatorship and imperialism, therefore these newly veiled modern women intended to get rid of veil once the Shah was overthrown and democratic government came into existence⁴⁵. However, women from diverse culture, ideology, class, and religious segments participated in the revolution, each had a different vision in the post revolutionary Iran⁴⁶. Eventually, on 11 February 1979 Shah's dictatorship had been overthrown; these unveiled working middle class women were targeted by the religious extremist groups. In their point of views, these employed and unveiled women were the symbol of Shah's regime, imperialism and Westernisation. From this point of view the issue of women's rights and Iranian social realities have remained among the most important internal conflicts of Iran⁴⁷. Before establishment of a new government various restrictions had been imposed on women those were advanced by *fatwa*.

Establishment of Islamic Republic of Iran and Question of Women

Women's issue and their rights continued to be used as a weapon in the power struggle between modernising Pahlavi regime and conservative religious leaders.

⁴³ Burki, Khan Shireen (2014), "Regime consolidation and Female Status in a Fledgling Theocracy: Khomeini's Vilayet-e-Fiqh, 179-1989", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51 (2): 218

⁴⁴ Kar, Mehrangiz (2008), "Focusing on Women in the internal politics of Iran", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 15 (1): 80

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p 80

⁴⁶ Mahdi, Ali Akbar (2004), "the Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle", *The Muslim World*, 94: 436

⁴⁷ Kar, Mehrangiz (2008), "Focusing on Women in the internal politics of Iran", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 15 (1): 81

However, following the revolution, a new political system shaped has two structures: first a strong theocratic structure headed by supreme religious leader whose legitimacy rest on a claim to divine power, and second, a weaker, but democratic structure, which includes institutions like presidency and parliament⁴⁸. In this system woman's question became very complicated. Women who have nationalist aspirations, dreams for secular nation and were highly influenced by the western model of governing system, they felt a lot of problems in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The most division contributed to conflicting expectation from outcome of the revolution is the division between secular and religious women. This sociological conflicting nature of the society has been described by the Mehrangiz Kar⁴⁹ as 'women against women'. Religious women those committed to their culture and tradition they are supporting the government policies and their programme, therefore women who wearing veil and following the proper religious code of conduct, were got the opportunities in the politics and other realm of the public sphere⁵⁰. Secular women, mostly from upper middle class who had the expectation of equal participation in the public sphere, were the major losers of the revolution⁵¹. Although, women's contribution had been realised by the emerging leader of the country but gender equality lagged behind due to the traditional cultural values and patriarchal nature of the society. There were several actions that had been taken by the new government that separate the women from men in the public sphere, and justified in the name of religious code of conduct. Furthermore, women were allowed only some specific field of the public sphere. Male and female classroom were separated in the higher education those were earlier coed⁵². Female student were not allowed in certain disciplines such as, engineering, agriculture and so on. In some of professions such as the judiciary and singing groups, women were restricted. Moreover, all the female judges were dismissed and barred from the law colleges. Furthermore, women were

⁴⁸ Hoodfar, Hooma and Sadr, Shadi (2010), "Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran", *Third World Quarterly*, 31 (6): 889

⁴⁹ Mehrangiz Kar is a well known activist writer and working for the promotion of democracy and women emancipation within the framework of Islamic law in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

⁵⁰ Kar, Mehrangiz (2008), "Focusing on Women in the Internal Politics of Iran", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 15 (1): 82

⁵¹ Mahdi, Ali Akbar (2004), "the Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle", *The Muslim World*, 94: 435

⁵² Kar, Mehrangiz (2008), "Focusing on Women in the Internal Politics of Iran", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 15(1): 83

forbidden to participate in some sports, and not allowed to watch men in sport field⁵³. Even a female vigilant group (*dokhtar 'e-zaynab*) had been organised to maintain state code of women appearances in the public places⁵⁴.

Realising the implications of these oppressive laws, women began to raise their voice and poured into street and demonstrated against the forced veiling and the abolition of the Family Protection Law (FPL). Moreover, after six month of the revolution, again they started protests and demonstrations with demands of equal wages, freedom to choose their own dress, the revival of protective measures in the previous Family Protection Act, and right to work in legal professions⁵⁵. Often these movements were crushed by the government, and accused participants being tools of Western imperialism and symbol of westernization⁵⁶. In order to suppress these movements, government systematically targeted women who involve in the movement, by replacing them from the jobs, segregating the public place, restricting women in the public sphere. Secular women who were capable to go abroad, they left the country, and those who could not they became silent and underground⁵⁷.

In fact, legal position of women has been marginalised under the new constitution. Nonetheless, patriarchal reading of *sharia*, and gender segregation were woven into the constitution⁵⁸. Two week after the revolution, Khomeini annulled the Family Protection Law (FPL). Men regained the unilateral right to divorce and polygamy, and temporary marriage were frequently allowed and encouraged. Child custody law also changed in favour of men; a woman only entitled to keep her boy child until the age of two years and girls seven⁵⁹. Women were denied to becoming judges in accordance with *Sharia* law. The maturity age of a girl was set to nine and of a boy fourteen. Sexual relation without marriage became a crime against the state and made the harsh punishment for the culprit, stoning and lashes. Moreover there were several articles

⁵³ Mahdi, Ali Akbar (2004), "the Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle", *The Muslim World*, 94: 434

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p 434

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p 435

⁵⁶ Hoodfarar, Hooma (1999), "The Women's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization", *WLUML, the Women's Movement Series*, (1): 23

⁵⁷ Pournik Milad (2013), "Civil Society Organisations and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Iran", *Institute for global and international studies*, The George Washington University, p 21

⁵⁸ Mahdi, Ali Akbar (2004), "the Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle", *The Muslim World*, 94: 435

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p 436

which had been introduced in the constitution that made women subordinate to men and strengthened the patriarchal nature of the society. There is a need to discuss some major articles of the constitution regarding women:

Article 10 of the constitution describes that “since the family is the fundamental unit of Islamic society, all laws, regulations, and pertinent programs must tend to facilitate the formation of a family and to safeguard its sanctity and the stability of family relations on the basis of the law and the ethics of Islam”⁶⁰. As it has been discussed that woman is well suited for a better family and she is the master of a family, in this regard woman’s primary duty is to serve in the family by being a good wife and mother. Motherhood becomes significant in an Islamic society. In article 21 it is mentioned that the government must ensure the rights of women in all respects, in conformity with Islamic criteria, and accomplish the following goals:

1. Create a favourable environment for the growth of woman's personality and the restoration of her rights, both the material and intellectual;
2. The protection of mothers, particularly during pregnancy and childbearing, and the protection of children without guardians;
3. Establishing competent courts to protect and preserve the family;
4. The provision of special insurance for widows, and aged women and women without support;
5. The awarding of guardianship of children to worthy mothers, in order to protect the interests of the children, in the absence of a legal guardian⁶¹.

As it is known that women were not allowed to be judges, and judiciary was dominated by clergy class who had great religious commitment, and often they interpret laws in favour of men. In this respect article 167 of the constitution explains that “the judge is bound to attempt to rule on each case, on the basis of the codified law. In case of the absence of any such law, he has to deliver his judgement on the basis of official Islamic sources and authentic *fatwa*”. Numerous provisions had been

⁶⁰ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, [Online: web] Accessed 3 August 2014 URL:

<http://www.alaviandassociates.com/documents/constitution>

⁶¹ *ibid.*

introduced in the constitution that makes women's condition vulnerable, subordinate to men, and restricted their freedom in the public sphere. Article 18 of the passport law stipulates, that a married woman need permission of their husband to apply for passport⁶². Article 105 of the civil code stated that 'in relationship between a man and woman, the man is responsible as head of the family. A woman cannot leave her home without her husband's permission, even to attend her father's funeral'. Furthermore, article 1117 of the civil code of IRI, mentioned that a husband can ban his wife from technical profession that conflicts with family life and/or her character, and article 1133 of the civil code gives the absolute right to men in case of divorce, it states that 'a man can divorce his wife, whenever he so chooses and is not bound to give her advance notice'. Various restrictions have been placed on the women's political participation and acquiring a higher position in the government through the legal mechanism. Article 115 of the constitution deals with the suitable candidate and his qualification for the post of candidate, it stipulates that "the president must be elected from among religious and political personalities possessing the following qualifications: Iranian origin, Iranian nationality, administrative capacity and resourcefulness; a good past record; trustworthiness and piety; convinced belief on fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official religion of the country⁶³. The major condition in this article is that presidential candidate needs to come from the religious and political statesmen (*rejal*). Interpretations of the *rejal* always disqualify the women candidates. Women's value, not only in practice but also in the legal domain has been valued half that of a man. Additionally, article 261 describes that the chief of the Supreme Court and the Prosecutor-General must be just *muztahids*, well versed in judicial matters⁶⁴. They will be nominated by head of the judiciary branch for a period of five year, in consultation with judges of the Supreme Court. Article 300, of the penal codes has the provision that "*Deyeh*" of a Muslim woman is half of the *Deyeh* of a Muslim man. By law, life of a Muslim woman has half of the value that of a man in Islamic criminal law in Iran⁶⁵.

⁶² WFAFI, (2005), [Online: web] Accessed 13 August URL: info@wfafi.org

⁶³ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, available on the website [Online: web] Accessed 3 August 2014 URL: <http://www.alaviandassociates.com/documents/constitution>

⁶⁴ WFAFI (2005), [Online: web] Accessed 13 August URL: info@wfafi.org

⁶⁵ WFAFI (2005), [Online: web] Accessed 13 August URL: info@wfafi.org

As far as legal status of women is concerned, it is not in favour of women's betterment and their role in public sphere, especially in political participation. Their legal status depends upon the interpretation of the *Shari'a* law. They were subjected to the patriarchal interpretation of the religious laws. Islamic Republic of Iran by various methods excludes women's from the mainstream of society. Legal position has been declined and their rights were diminished, and whatever they gained from the Shah's regime, especially legal rights has been taken back in the Islamic Republic of Iran. They got some sort of opportunities in the new regime, but their rights have been curtailed, and legally they were valued half of a man and were portrayed as inferior to men. In this point it can be argued that women are the major losers of the revolution, as they saw their legal status and social positions dramatically declined in the name of the religious revival.

As far as women's status is concerned it began to change following the eight years war with Iraq. War destruction causes serious economic crisis that forced to government bring substantial changes. This situation led to the reconstruction of economy which had socio and political implications as well. Road to reforms began with this time, and Hashemi Rafsanjani elected as president in 1989⁶⁶. He introduced liberalisation, privatisation, and directed to integrate Iranian economy into global economy, in order to reconstruct the economy. In this period, a greater degree of industrialization, development and urbanisation took place⁶⁷. Growing economic development required labour force in higher level that provided opportunities to women. Under the Rafsanjani's presidency women's participation increased not only in economic sphere but also in other realms of public sphere such as education, and politics. Under pressure from civil society activism, the state invested in public services especially education, which benefitted low-income families in both rural and urban areas. This time witnessed freedom and openness of speech and expression the press and assembly, though within Islamic criteria⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 102

⁶⁷ Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (2012), "the Women's Movement in its Historical Context", in Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 28

⁶⁸ *ibid*, p 28

He supported the women's role in the public sphere which he lauded as the progressive Islamic code of ethics that sanctions the complete social participation of women. During this time a new approach had been developed by the government regarding women's issues. In order to address the women's issues and their participation in public sphere, Rafsanjani's government established an institution termed Women's Bureau that was associated with office of president⁶⁹. Shahla Habbibi was appointed as head of the Women's Bureau. During Khatami's government this institution was replaced with Centre for Women's Participation. During this time secular women's organisation also became more vocal and active. The voices from the secular women's organisations started being raised; many women from secular to religious factions began to question the limitations of the state's gender ideology⁷⁰.

Socio-economic and Political Condition of Women

In the history of women's empowerment and their betterment much influenced by the changing socio-economic and political aspect rather than legal reforms initiated by the regimes⁷¹. Although Islamic Republic of Iran is not favourable for women in term of their legal rights, but it provides ample opportunities for women in the public sphere, though it was not intentionally done by the regime. This situation was captured by the Simonetti as paradox of less right and more opportunities. In fact the role and participation of women in the public sphere and feminist consciousness of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran are determined by historic, social and economic factors and changes, in contrast to Islamic laws and religious ideologies⁷². Simonetti questioned the general perception that because of the Islamic nature of the state women had been negatively affected. However, paradoxically the Islamization of Iran has been having a positive influence on women's status and position in the public sphere. There has been contradiction between modernisation process initially led by

⁶⁹ Shojaei, Nosrat Seyedeh, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 261

⁷⁰ Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (2012), "the Women's Movement in its Historical Context", in Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 28

⁷¹ Burki, Khan Shireen (2014), "Regime consolidation and Female Status in a Fledgling Theocracy: Khomeini's Vilayat-e-Fiqh, 179-1989", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51 (2): 208

⁷² Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 5

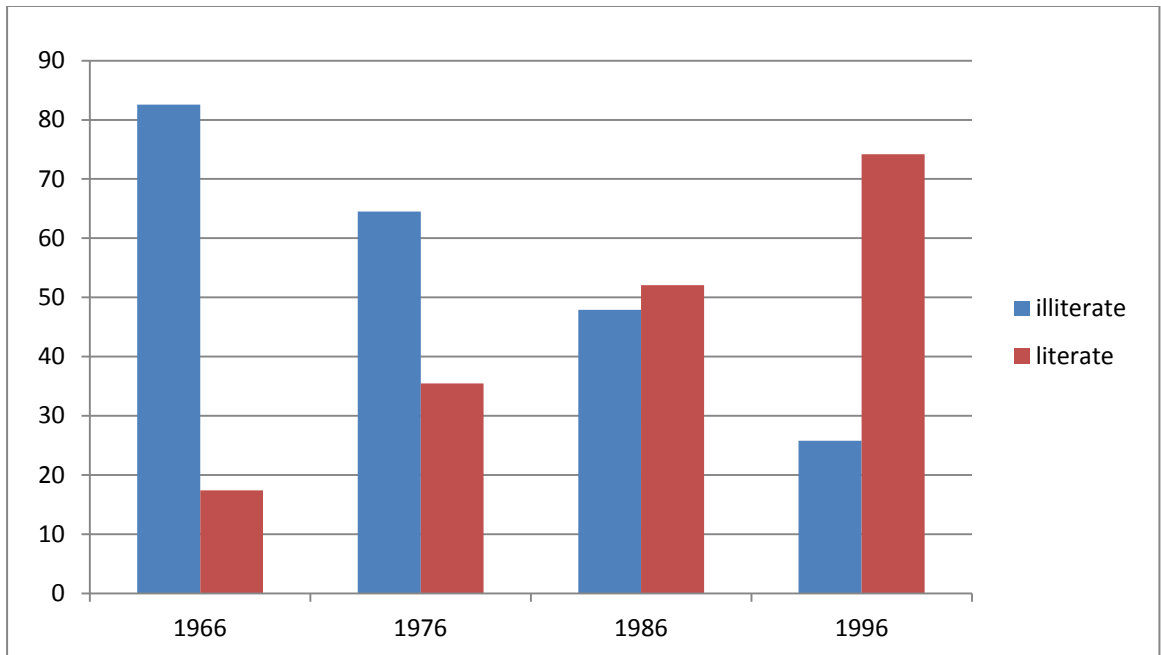
the regimes, demographic shift, increasing economic development, rapid urbanisation and growing women's education on one hand, and traditional behaviour of the government and religious laws on the other hand⁷³.

In the field of women's empowerment and ameliorating their condition, education became an important factor for them. Traditionally, girls and women have been in a disadvantageous position in reference to education. In fact, some of the factors, such as initiative which had been taken during the Pahlavi era and post-revolutionary Iran reforms have had mixed impact on the education of women in Iran⁷⁴. To some extent women's participation in the revolution forced to cleric groups facilitate the education for women. Most of the educated women during the Pahlavi regime belonged to the upper-urban class; the education lagged behind in the rural area. After the revolution Khomeini appealed and encouraged all the section of the society to get education. On the appeal of Khomeini, most religious and traditionalist people were also convinced, and they started to send their daughters into schools. Education opportunities rapidly increased after the revolution, both in urban and rural area, qualitatively and quantitatively. Following is the data from various primary and secondary sources that explain the increasing trend of education among the women. After the revolution, Islamic republic of Iran has been witnessing a rapid increase in literacy rate.

⁷³ *ibid*, p 6

⁷⁴ Iravani, Reza Mohammad (2010), "women's education, employment and unemployment in Iran", *journal of social development*, 1 (2): 34

Chart 2 (a) Literacy rate in Iran (1966-1996)



Source: UNESCO, data centre, stats.uis.unesco.org⁷⁵

Through the data, it can be observed that the percentage of literate population has been increasing noticeably from 1966 to 1996. The literate population were only 17.41 per cent and illiterate were 82.59 per cent in 1966. And in 1976 literate were 35.48 per cent and illiterate were 64.52 per cent. Literate population constituted 52.07 per cent of the total population and 47.93 per cent remained illiterate in 1986. Among these decades 1996 is the year which saw the most increase in literacy rate. In this year, literate population were recorded 74.21 per cent and illiterate were only 25.79 per cent.

Data shows that there was drastic change in the literacy rate in Iran especially after the revolution. In fact, it was the post revolutionary education system that spread the education in both urban as well as in rural area. Women participation cannot be ignored in the increasing trend of literacy rate and education.

⁷⁵ UNESCO data centre [Online: web] Accessed 23 February 2015 URL: www.stats.uis.unesco.org

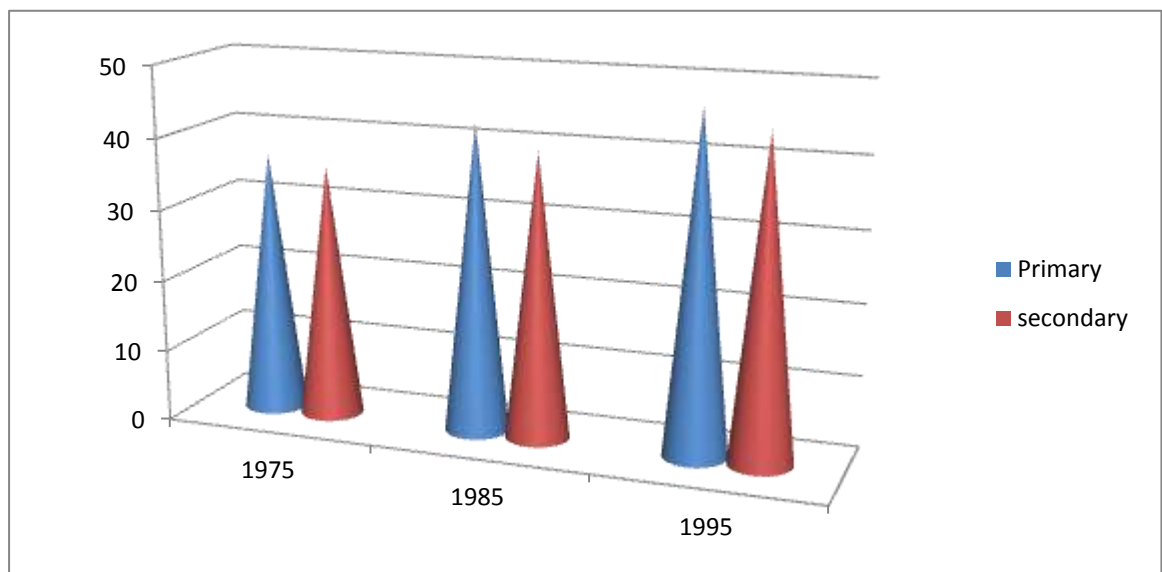
Table 2 (a) Youth literacy rate (15 to 24 years old)

Year	1976	1986	2001	2006
Male	71.05%	84.85%	97.03%	97.14%
Female	42.67%	65.52%	94.01%	96.13%

Source: Dr. Ansia Khaz Ali (2010)⁷⁶

The scenario of the statics shows that women’s literacy rate is not lagging behind, and post revolutionary education system proved as a cornerstone in gender equality in the field of education. There was a rapid change in women education from 1976 to 2006. So, it is a fact that Islamic Republic of Iran has paid tremendous attention to education especially to women’s education.

Chart 2 (b) Female Students’ Participation at Primary and Secondary Level (1975 to 1995)



Source: UNESCO, data centre, stats.uis.unesco.org⁷⁷

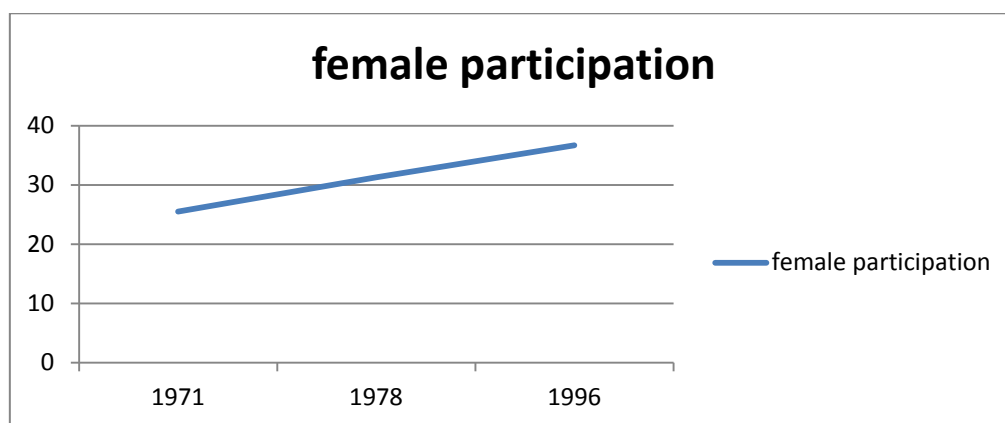
Here the graph shows that over a period of time both primary and secondary academic levels of women have increased. In the year 1975 the female student in primary education constituted only 36.6 per cent, in secondary it was 35.5 per cent. Female student in 1985 recorded 42.9 per cent at primary level and 39.7 per cent at secondary level. In 1995 female participation in primary education have been recorded 47.1 per

⁷⁶ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), “Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution”, *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London, p 23

⁷⁷ UNESCO data centre [Online: web] Accessed 23 February 2015 URL: www.stats.uis.unesco.org

cent and in secondary, 44.5 per cent. This scenario shows the increasing trend of female participation in both primary and secondary education. Relatively secondary education is slow rather than primary.

Chart 2 (c) Female Students' Participation at Tertiary Education (1971 to 1996)



Source: UNESCO, data centre from stats.uis.unesco.org⁷⁸

Graph shows that women's participation in higher education in universities and colleges have increased continuously over a period of time. Female participant were only 25.5 per cent in 1971 and 31.3 per cent in 1978, which increased to 36.7 per cent in 1996.

Women's participation has increased considerably in the field of education as students, their participation as teachers also increased accordingly. According to UNESCO increasing proportion of female teachers is a measure of gender equality for two reasons. Giving training and recruiting females as teachers is an attempt to improve women's participation in the social and economic sectors. Moreover, it observed that recruiting female teachers is a key strategy to facilitate girls' access to and retention in school⁷⁹. Women were greater in number as teachers in the primary and secondary education during the year 1990-1991 to 1999-2000, female teachers at primary level increased from 52.9 per cent to 53.9 per cent and at secondary level from 43.4 per cent to 45.6 per cent.

⁷⁸ UNESCO data centre [Online: web] Accessed 23 February 2015 URL: www.stats.uis.unesco.org

⁷⁹ Golnar, Mehran (2003), "Gender and Education for all: the Leap to Equality", [Online: web] Accessed 24 September 2014 URL: <http://efareport@unesco.org> p 6

Above data analysis shows that after the revolution, education has increased among the women rapidly. Initially the basic purpose of the nation builders was to reconstruct the Islamic society and spread the religious values through education⁸⁰. Paradoxically, the expansion of education had many unintended consequences and has presented the ideologues of the regime with serious dilemma concerning women in the public sphere and labour market⁸¹. State policy of gender segregation and expanding female education has created the ground for women's entry into the public sphere. This situation forced the government to recruit female candidates as teachers, nurses and doctors; thus segregation meant an expansion in specific field of jobs opportunities for women⁸². Due to the gender segregation in the public sphere women got the chances in the medical education and other fields where women were required. The regime initially promoted education as an Islamic duty for all. Subsequently, female students surpassed male students as they studied hard to demonstrate their worth. Slowly they constituted as majority in the universities and other higher education institutions. Even they began entering into the traditionally male dominated field of science and engineering. This unintended development was taken as a threat for the Islamic society by the conservative groups, therefore following Khatami's government a quota system has been introduced in the higher education for male.

After the revolution, a lot of restrictions have been imposed on women's role in the public sphere, and they were always reminded that motherhood was their primary duty in Iranian society⁸³. As a result of introducing new *shari'a* law and government policies that restrict women in the public sphere and emphasised their role in the family as mother and wife, but women's number gradually increased in the labour market. Even some restrictions have been imposed on women's public activities, but paid female labour has increased in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Trend in women's economic rights reflects the impact of changing state policies, legal reforms and cultural attitude. Although, article 38 of the labour law provides the equal pay for equal work and prohibits the discrimination on the basis of gender in determining the

⁸⁰ *ibid*, p 7

⁸¹ Hoodfar, Hooma and Sadr, Shadi (2009), "Can Women act as Agents of Democratization of Theocracy in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 13 September 2014 URL: [www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/.../WebIran.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/.../WebIran.pdf), p 12

⁸² *ibid*, p 13

⁸³ Shojaei, Nosrat Seyedeh, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 253

wages. But there are various legal measures that maintained the gender differences in the economic field, however women were allowed only in some particular jobs, for instance in teaching and medical. Various constitutional measures prevent the gender equality in the economic sphere. Article 75 of the labour law barred women from dangerous jobs and hazardous working conditions. There are certain benefits such as maternity leave are allotted to working women. According to law passed by the *Majlis* in 1995, women can have four months maternity leave. A married woman has the right to manage her own property under the article of civil code 1118. Women have the legal right to independent use of their money and property.

In the list of contribution of female representation in the public sphere, the economic factor also has a significant role. As consequence of increasing oil production, Iranian economy began to expand during the last two decades of the Pahlavi regime. Women's role in the society changed with the economic changes. Social attitude towards women to some extent changed due to the economic reasons⁸⁴. By 1985 many restrictions have been lifted by the government, and all study areas have become available for both men and women. President Rafsanjani in 1988 formally declared that there were no barriers in education for women in any field, and in 1989 he declared that there is a need to create greater employment opportunities for youth and equal pay for equal work to women⁸⁵. Employment of a woman is determined by her level and type of educational achievement. Women's participation in the economic activities had significant impact in ameliorating their status. A lot of factors have contributed in increasing women's economic activities; increasing number of educated women, as it has already been discussed, the decline of fertility rate; the increasing age of marriage for women; urbanisation and population growth.

During the Iran-Iraq war, factories and hospitals lacked professionals, doctors, engineers and skilled labourers, it remains so till the end of the war. Consequently the regime was forced to change its attitude. This situation required women to fill this gap. In later years of war when Iran was at very critical situation Khomeini appealed to women to take arm in defence of Islam. In 1985 he argued that "what is not

⁸⁴ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 17

⁸⁵ Iravani, Mohammad Reza (2010), "Women's Education, Employment and Unemployment in Iran", *Journal of Social Development*, 1 (2): 39

accepted in the *shari'a*, is women's participation in primary jihad⁸⁶. But when it comes to the question of defence, there is consensus in Islam that women are obligated to take part in every possible way including military defence. Women should receive military training. The war situation led the change in conservative and traditional attitude of the society especially in cleric groups. Government had realized the economic compulsion after the war, in order reconstruct the economy that was destroyed in the war, it created much more inclusive economic environment. In other words, the end of war and implementation of reconstruction policy provided the better ground for women's visibility in the public sphere⁸⁷. The economic crisis and inflation badly affected the real income of the household, majority of which relied on single income of the man. Consequently, the financial contribution of women proved necessary⁸⁸. Although, earlier there were harsh restrictive and discriminatory policies that discouraged women's work outside the house, the post war reconstruction policies and the introduction of liberalization facilitated the women's involvement in the labour force⁸⁹. For a large group of educated working women, participation in the labour force became a fundamental part of their identity. Since the 1990 the work environment outside of the home for women became much friendlier than earlier. Therefore, it can be argued that Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and post war economic crisis have contributed to women's financial independence.

Growing urbanization, demographic shift and increasing age of marriage influenced the economic activities and women's role in the public places. After the revolution, urban regions grew rapidly in Iran that provided ample opportunity to women. In 1976, the numbers of cities were 373 which increased to 614 in 1996. Due to this increase in the cities, the majority of the population lived in urban areas. Delaying marriage is another factor for women to be active in the labour market. Educated women were worried about their career rather than getting married. Their aspiration for job and to be a part of a working population led to delay in their marriage. Education and economic activities are two main determinants of the women's status

⁸⁶ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 23

⁸⁷ Sadat, Heshmat (2011), "Participation of Women in Iran's Polity", *Gemc Journal*, 4 (3): 28

⁸⁸ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 27

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p 27

and these factors are also commonly considered as two of the main determinants of fertility decline and demographic transition⁹⁰.

Table 2 (b) Women’s Share in economic activities (1976-1996)

Year	% Economically active			%Employed		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1976	42.6	70.8	12.9	38.3	64.3	10.8
1986	39.1	68.4	08.2	33.5	59.5	06.1
1991	38.1	65.5	08.7	33.9	59.3	06.6
1996	35.3	60.8	09.1	32.1	55.6	07.9

Source: Amir H. Mehryar and Akbar Aghajanian (2003)⁹¹

As the above Table 2 (b) shows that female share in economic activities moves around 9 per cent to 12 per cent in between 1956 to 1976. In the first decade of Islamic Republic it fell noticeably but it has taken upward trend from 1986 to 1996. It is noted that after 1996 it has been rapidly increasing.

Here an assessment can be made that till 1997 there was not a noticeable increment taken place in the women’s participation in the labour force. Although, women’s economic involvement has increased after 1986, it was very slow. It increased rapidly after moderate President Khatami came to power in 1997.

Women’s appearance in the political arena, especially their representation in the formal political institutions lagged behind. Although article 20 of the constitution stipulates that “all citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of law, and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria”. By law there are no restrictions on women to access the higher position in the government⁹². However, after the Iranian revolution, in order to establish Iran as an Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini not only allowed women to vote or participate in politics but also announced that women are

⁹⁰ Mehryar, Amir H. And Aghajanian, Akbar (2002), “Women’s Education and Labour Force Participation and Fertility Decline in Iran”, [Online: web] Accessed 21 August 2014 URL: aghajanian@uncfsu.edu p 2

⁹¹ ibid, p 6

⁹² Sadat, Heshmat (2011), “Participation of Women in Iran’s Polity”, *Gemc Journal*, 4 (3): 28

bound by *Sharia* to participate in the political arena, contrary to other conservative clerics⁹³. There are many studies which have shown that women have not been paid adequate attention as a fundamental force in the development and progress of the country, and their participation in different social affairs is negligible and marginalized, such as the presence in major decision making bodies of the society⁹⁴. Due to the social and cultural barriers, women's presence in parliament remained lesser than it was before the revolution during Shah's period, despite their enthusiastic participation in the revolution⁹⁵. Council of Guardian often disqualify women candidates based on lack of qualifications. Only that woman approved as a candidate who have appropriate religious credential (strong link by blood or marriage to male political elites, or occasionally a long history of religious activism and devotion to the religious law or spiritual leader)⁹⁶. Women are always restricted to becoming a chief executive of the country. Through the vetting process, women were disqualified every time by the Council of Guardians. The interpretation of the *rejal* prevents women to become a president. The following table describes the scenario of women's representation in the parliament over a period of time.

Table 2 (c) Female Representation in Parliament during Shah's Rule

Year	Elected female members from Tehran	Elected female members from other provinces	Total elected female members	As percentage of all MPs
1963-1967	3	4	7	3.5
1967-1971	3	7	11	3.5
1971-1976	3	14	17	5.6
1976-1979	3	15	18	7.0

Source: Hooma Hoodfar and Shadi Sadr (2010)⁹⁷ Shojaei, Nosrat Seyedeh, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010)

⁹³ Kar, Mehrangiz (2008), "Focusing on Women in the internal politics of Iran", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 15 (1): 79

⁹⁴ Shojaei, Nosrat Seyedeh, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 253

⁹⁵ Hoodfar, Hoom and Shadi, Sadr (2010), "Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran", *Third World Quarterly*, 31 (6): 893

⁹⁶ *ibid*, p 893

⁹⁷ *ibid*, p 894

**Table 2 (d) Female Representation in Parliament in the Islamic Republic of Iran
(1979-1996)**

Year	Elected Female Members from Tehran	Elected female members from other provinces	Total elected female members	As percentage of all MPs
1979-1983	4	0	4	1.5
1983-1987	4	0	4	1.5
1987-1992	4	0	4	1.5
1992-1996	5	4	9	3.3

Source: Hooma Hoodfar and Shadi Sadr (2010)⁹⁸

As the above data revealed that women representation in the Shah's time was much higher than women's representation in Islamic Republic of Iran till 1996 of fourth parliament. At the end of Pahlavi dynasty, women constituted 7 per cent of the total Member of Parliament, which steadily decreased in the first *Majlish*, in the Islamic Republic of Iran; it remained only 1.5 per cent of the total MPs. During the first decade of the revolution, it remained as it was. It was after 1990 that women's representation increased from 1.5 per cent to 3.3 per cent, women occupied total nine seats, out of 290 seats. Although women's representation in the parliament has suddenly decreased in the IRI, but gradually one can observe the number has increased upwards. However, Iran's progress in engaging women in top management and decision making positions, including representation of women in the parliament has been slow.

However, several women's organisations were active in the politics, but they were divided among various factions. Initially in the beginning of the Islamic Republic of Iran, women's movements were basically led by the secular and western oriented women had been crushed by the state. Hundreds of small organisations have been formed for the women's cause. Women tried to organise themselves around their professional associations as well. Among these organisations, many of them were led by the educated and experienced people that became vocal critic of provisional

⁹⁸ Hoodfar, Hoom and Shadi, Sadr (2010), "Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran", *Third World Quarterly*, 31 (6): 895

government⁹⁹. Others were involved in grassroots level to build consciousness among the women, initiating training and literacy class. During 1979 and 1980, a 'Women's Solidarity Committee' has been established with the coalition of different organisations, but it proved fruitless¹⁰⁰. It was failed because different groups had their different interest, therefore, it did not address the real problems of women in general. These bursts of organised feminist activities were short lived. These women were projected as anti-Islam therefore many of them had been imprisoned, exiled and others remain silent or underground. During 1997 a new kind of feminism has emerged that is known as Islamic feminism. Islamic feminist believe in culture and religion, and through the feminist interpretation of religious text, they tried to bring the gender equality. Most influential among them was Women's Society of the Islamic Revolution (WSIR). These organisations were more successful rather than secular organisations because of their religious nature. There were various organisations, sponsored by the state dealing with the women's problems. These organisations included the socio-cultural council for women; the international office for women in the ministry of foreign affairs; and offices for women's affairs, other key ministries such as education, health, justice interior and Islamic guidance¹⁰¹. It is a fact that Islamic Republic of Iran relatively has given more freedom to civil society organisations. During the Shah's rule, by 1976, there were only 13 NGOs that were working, but by 2002 there were 250 NGOs that have been taken into account¹⁰².

The above analysis shows that women's legal position and their political participation is very slow. Women's participation in education, labour force has increased surprisingly in the Islamic republic of Iran. It has been discussed that various socio economic and political factors have contributed considerably in women's empowerment rather than legal reforms. These factors led the unintended developments that were always contradicting with religious groups of the society¹⁰³. Government basically wanted to develop a consolidated Islamic society in order to

⁹⁹ Hoodfarar, Hooma (1999), "The Women's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization", *WLUML, the Women's Movement Series*, (1): 28

¹⁰⁰ Hoodfarar, Hooma (1999), "The Women's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization", *WLUML, the Women's Movement Series*, (1): 28

¹⁰¹ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos* p 28

¹⁰² *ibid*, p 32

¹⁰³ Burki, Khan Shireen (2014), "Regime consolidation and Female Status in a Fledgling Theocracy: Khomeini's Vilayet-e-Fiqh, 179-1989", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51 (2): 223

protect Islamic culture, therefore; it introduced an education system that benefited every section of the society. It is a fact that in the Islamic Republic of Iran women's education led the foundation for women's empowerment; it led the women's representation in labour force, political institutions, and gave them the inspiration to establish organisations and to fight for gender equality.

CHAPTER: III

Role of Women in Iranian Public Sphere during Khatami's Period

The present chapter would deal with the brief introduction of public sphere as a concept, latter it would describe the rise of Khatami as moderate leader and his major efforts to bring about reforms. Largely, it would focus on women's role in the Iranian public sphere; women's active participation in the field of education, economy, media and in short, it would deal with the political activities of women in Islamic Republic of Iran.

As it has been mentioned in the second chapter that women's role in the public sphere has increased over a period of time after the revolution in Islamic Republic of Iran, but it was the Mohammed Khatami's period of presidency when women realised greater sense of gender equality, freedom as well as opportunities in the public sphere. As far as women's role in the public sphere is concerned, it drastically increased during Khatami's government. One can observe the women's rapid increase in the higher studies, traditionally male dominated occupations such as engineering and management and their active involvement in the government administrative jobs as well as women's participation in the labour market. Due to access to education, women became skilled and became eligible to contribute to the society.

Defining Public Sphere

Public sphere can be defined as social life that does not belong to formal structure of the political authority and the space of household¹. Public sphere means, the domains of social life in which public opinion are being formed by the private people. Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens². According to Habermas 'public sphere as a realm of social life in which something approaching public

¹ Salvatore, Armando and Eickelman F. Dale (2002), "The Public Sphere and the Muslim Identities" *European Journal of Sociology*, 43 (1): 95

² Seidman, Steven (1989), *Jurgen Habermas on Society and Muslim Identities*, Boston Massachusetts: Beacon Press, p 231

opinion can be formed. Citizens act as a public when they deal with the general matters without being subject of coercion; thus the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely'³. Authority is vested in the public sphere itself. In a large public sphere communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence. Nowadays, the newspapers, periodicals, radio, television and internet are the media of public sphere. Public sphere is clearly itself distinguish from both the state as well as from the private domain⁴. In that time they are neither acting as business and professional people conducting their private affairs, nor as legal consociates subject to the legal regulations of a state bureaucracy and obligated to obedience.

Ideally public sphere can be seen as an intermediate space in which ideas are presented on their own merits rather than as emanating from such authorities as preachers, judges, and rulers⁵. In another words public sphere can be explained as a sphere mediating between state and society. It is a sphere in which the public as a vehicle of public opinion is formed; there corresponds the principle of publicness. This publicness once has to win out against the secret politics of monarchs and that since then has permitted democratic control of state activities⁶. Here the public opinion becomes significant in the domain of public sphere. The term public opinion refers to the informal function of the people through they control and criticise the organised state authority, as well as influenced formally during periodic elections⁷. In other words public opinion both formally and informally exercised its power to control the state's coercive use of the power.

Public sphere is the domain where public opinions are formed which influences and regulates the government activities. Democratic government gives more space to the people to formulate the public opinion that effectively influences the government rather than a monarchic or authoritarian system of the government. However in the democratic government has wider opportunity for informal institutions that can

³ ibid, p 232

⁴ Hohendahl, Uwe, Peter (2001), "Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture: Jurgen Habermas and his Critics", [Online: web] Accessed 21 January 2015 URL: www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/ p 91

⁵ Salvatore, Armando and Eickelman F. Dale (2002), "The Public Sphere and the Muslim Identities" *European Journal of Sociology*, 43 (1): 96

⁶ Seidman, Steven (1989), *Jurgen Habermas on Society and Muslim Identities*, Boston Massachusetts: Beacon Press, p 231

⁷ ibid. p 232

control and regulate the organised states authorities, because democratic countries allowed the different opinion within political system.

Rise of Khatami as a Reformist Leader

Khatami's time has been witnessed by greater freedom of speech and expression, political openness, economic reform and social transformation. During this time women were much more visible in the public places and streets. By various attempts he tried his level best to develop a democratic political atmosphere and has shown the way for creation of a vital public sphere, where society becomes stronger than the state in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Khatami not only politically but also scholarly supported the democratic institutions and will of the people. As a philosopher, he had contributed in academic also. In his book *From the World of the City to the City of the World*, he greatly supported the common consensus and agreement of the people in the development of political organisations and institutions. According to him consensus and social contracts are the real source for the superior will and civil society⁸. He has given the importance to the will of the people and social agreement. However, from the beginning after the revolution Khatami's view was liberal in terms of the role of religion in the politics. According to him in the post revolutionary Iranian political system, only Islam should not be the state religion or an ideology of government alone, it should be inclusive religious, democratic pluralistic religious forces⁹.

Before enter into the discussion of Khatami's attempt to reform policies, it becomes imperative to throw some light on his background, who Mohammed Khatami was and where he came from? Mohammed Khatami was born in 1943 at Ardakan in Yazd province in a respected religious family of Sayyids (descendents of the Prophet Mohammed). He studied theology in Qom in 1961 and later around mid 1970 was awarded with the title of hojjatoleslam. Among their teachers, he was greatly influenced by the Hojjatoleslam Mortaza Motahhari who was one of the most

⁸ James, Russell, Jordan Jr. (2008), *A Change at Reform: Mohammed Khatami's Presidency, 1997-2005*, thesis, Charleston: College of Charleston and the Citadel p 35

⁹ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, Newyork: I.B Touris, p 73

important theoretician of the Islamic Revolution in Iran¹⁰. His education was not limited to theology, but in addition, he entered in Tehran and Isfahan universities from where he got bachelor degree in philosophy. During 1978-1979 Khatami was appointed as director of Islamic Centre in Hamburg, Germany. In the newly established Islamic government from 1980 to early 1990 he held several minor posts¹¹. He was elected as a parliament member in the 1980-1982 from Ardakan, and Ayatollah Khomeini's representative to the *Kayhan* newspaper group. Furthermore he was appointed as a Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in November 1982¹². During the war with Iraq (1980-1988), he served in different capacities as a deputy and head of the joint command of the armed forces and chairman of the war propaganda headquarters¹³. Again in 1989 Khatami had been appointed as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Moreover, he also served as a senior advisor of President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and also head of the Iranian National Library¹⁴.

Khatami was not only a politician but also a scholar, who has written several books dealing primarily with the analysis of current socio-political and religious issues, such as *Fear of the Wave*, and *From the World of the City to the City of the World*, that have already been mentioned. He also taught western political thought at Tehran University¹⁵. The main asset of Khatami's life was his liberal reputation. From the beginning, he supported the freedom of speech and the press. To some extent, he was influenced by the concept of 'rule of law' in Politics propounded by Aristotle¹⁶. However, even under Khomeini to some extent he succeeded in winning considerable freedom of speech and the press with some colleagues in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance¹⁷. Therefore, he was repeatedly and harshly attacked for being

¹⁰ Buchta, Wilfried (2000), *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, USA: The Washington Institute of Near East Policy and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, p 30

¹¹ James, Russell, Jordan Jr. (2008), *A Change at Reform: Mohammed Khatami's Presidency, 1997-2005*, thesis, Charleston: College of Charleston and the Citadel, p 5

¹² Buchta, Wilfried (2000), *The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, USA: The Washington Institute of Near East Policy and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, p 30

¹³ Vahdat, Farzin (2006), "Mohammed Khatami the Philosopher President", *ISIM Review* 18

¹⁴ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, Newyork: I.B Touris, p 76

¹⁵ Abrahamian, Ervand (2008), *A History of Modern Iran*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p 185

¹⁶ Arjomand, Said Amir (2002), "The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (10): 726

¹⁷ Buchta, Wilfried (2000), *The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, USA: The Washington Institute of Near East Policy and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, p 30

promoter of western culture in the Islamic society. It is argued that he had been forced to resign from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance because of his relatively liberal views and opposition to harsher censorships on the press¹⁸. In July 1992 Khatami tendered his letter of resignation in which he severely criticised the restriction on freedom of thought and expression. Khatami was the founding member of the *majma-e ruhaniyun-e mobarez* (Combatant Clerics Society), the largest Islamic left parliamentary group, and his outspoken moderate position was popular among secular intellectual and artists¹⁹.

The revolution was supported by various groups; it was not a homogeneous effort. Therefore, it led to the factions in the politics of the Islamic republic of Iran. At present, one can find at least four major Islamist factions vying for power²⁰. Of course, the first most prominent group was extreme left hard-line Khomienist. From the beginning of the revolution till 1989 (the Khomeini decade), the power was shared by a group of Islamic conservative revolutionary faction. This faction was a collection of Islamic socialist sometime known as *Moktabis*, it comprised two sub-groups, one liberal and moderate and the other clerical. They were leading their politics with the agenda of land reform, the nationalization and Islamization of the economy, the redistribution of wealth, the regulation of foreign trade, and control over the *bazari* sector. The second main faction was radical right that opposed the Islamist left known as *hujjatis*, it comprised of both economic conservatives and cultural extremist²¹. In contrast to Islamic left they believed in *laissez-faire* policies. They opposed any possibility of secular notion in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Nateq Nuri, the presidential candidate who was defeated by Khatami belonged to this (*hujjatis*) camp. Khatami belonged to the moderate faction of the Iranian political group. On the economic issue the moderates, to some extent were close to the centrists; they opposed left policies of imposing harsh restriction over the *bazari* and foreign sector. Like the right, they were in favour of removing many, though not all, vestige of Pahlavi legal system, and to replace it with a court system staffed largely by

¹⁸ Kiani, Tehmoures (2012), *The Iranians' Debate after the Crackdown: Is Green Movement Revolutionary or Reformist?*, thesis, Washington: University of Washington, p 13

¹⁹ Buchta, Wilfried (2000), *The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, USA: The Washington Institute of Near East Policy and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, p 30

²⁰ Wells c. Mathew (1999), "Thermidor in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Rise of Mohammed Khatami", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 26 (1): 29

²¹ *ibid*, p 30

the clergy group. While they supported clerical rule, but sought to place limits on clerical participation in the legislative and executive branches, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of the administration²². On the cultural level they were flexible and claiming themselves as liberals. Till 1987 all these factions were represented within Islamic Republic Party (IRP). It was an umbrella that controls the different ideology within one fold. Dissolution of this factional coalition led to the birth of two major political associations; first *Jameh-e Ruhaniyat-e Moarez-e Tehran* (the Society of combatant clergymen of Tehran), or Ruhaniyat, and second one was *Majma-e Ruhaniyoun-e Mobarez-e Tehran* (the Society of Combatant Clergy of Tehran), or Ruhaniyoun²³. Ruhaniyat unlike IRP comprised diverse factions like moderates, centrists, leftists and conservatives therefore in later elections they enjoyed the majority. Due to the right's bullying tactics, Rafsanjani and moderates disgruntled over the right that led to the breaking of Ruhaniyat. It created a rival political association known as the Servants of the Reconstruction and that became increasingly friendly with the left. It also comprised various factions, unlike IRP and Ruhaniyat. In the general election of 1997, there were disagreements over the candidate for the post of president due to the factionalism within the party. But the liberal Islamic-leftist Mohammed Khatami emerged as a suitable and tolerable candidate for both sides²⁴. By December coalition factions had developed a common consensus about the candidate. Finally, on January 30 various factions announced that they would support the candidacy of Mohammed Khatami²⁵.

Khatami's opponent was Nateq Nuri who had served in various prominent posts and supported by the traditionalist clerical group, well known figures in the Iranian politics. On the other hand Khatami's popularity increased within few weeks²⁶. Election campaign was the determining factor in a landslide victory of the Mohammed Khatami in 1997. On one hand Nateqi Nuri belonged to conservative clerical faction, and in his campaign slogans, he portrayed himself as a preserver of the status quo with experience of handling economic and administrative issues. And

²² *ibid*, p 31

²³ *ibid*, p 33

²⁴ Buchta, Wilfried (2000), *Who Rules Iran?: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, USA: The Washington Institute of Near East Policy and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, p 28

²⁵ *ibid*, p 28

²⁶ Buchta, Wilfried (2000), *Who Rules Iran?: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, USA: The Washington Institute of Near East Policy and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, p 29

Khatami's campaign slogans were totally different to Nateqi Nuri, in his speeches and interviews, Khatami addressed the issues of freedom of speech, human rights, party pluralism, and the balancing of democracy and Islam²⁷. In his campaign he made promises to the masses of creating strong civil society, bringing political reforms, rule of law and religious democracy that attracted majority of the voters from the group of women and youth²⁸. He used the slogan of *mardomsalari-e deeni* (religious people's sovereignty) that can be described as equivalent to the "religion based democracy" the term democracy has been avoided because of its western connotation²⁹. Furthermore Khatami emphasised on the women's freedom and equal rights to women in the public sphere, and he got about 79 per cent votes in 1997 presidential election³⁰. Women voters participated in the election in unexpected numbers, and the great majority of them voted for Khatami because of his liberal reputation. More than 78 per cent of the total vote of the women had been casted for Khatami in 1997 general election³¹. It shows that a large chunk of the society especially women and youth were waiting for Khatami as a reformist president. Moreover, reformist group carried this victory further and in the parliamentary election in 2000 they got 80 per cent of the total vote, and obtained 195 of the 290 *majlis* seats³². Khatami's brother topped the list in Tehran. Once again people shown their trust on Khatami, and in 2001 presidential election he won second term as president increasing his vote by two million, and receiving 80 per cent of the total votes. Approximately, more than 67 per cent voters participated in the election³³. His second term victory was the manifestation of continuing popular support his campaign for the rule of law, civil society and democracy. Now the president was able to fill the cabinet with reform oriented leaders. It was a significant time for reformist when both parliament and presidency were controlled by them.

²⁷ *ibid*, p 29

²⁸ Golnar, Mehran (2003), "Gender and Education for all: the Leap to Equality", [Online: web] Accessed 24 September 2014 URL: <http://efareport@unesco.org> p 13

²⁹ James, Russell, Jordan Jr. (2008), *A Change at Reform: Mohammed Khatami's Presidency, 1997-2005*, thesis, Charleston: College of Charleston and the Citadel, p 29

³⁰ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 41

³¹ Hoodfar, Hooma (2009), "Against All Odds: The Building of a Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 25 August 2014 URL: www.palgrave-journals.com, p 7

³² *ibid*, p 7

³³ Abrahamian, Ervand (2008), *A History of Modern Iran*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p 188

Khatami's Efforts for Reforms

Khatami's victory surprised everyone, especially the hard-liner conservatives. His election led to the beginning of the third Islamic Republic. This election must be understood in the context of the fundamental social changes of the first and second republics³⁴. His reforms symbolised as an era of socio-political transformation, predicted on a political platform that focused on consolidating the rule of law, encouraging political and intellectual discourse. Shrin Ebadi (2006), coined Khatami's period as "reform era" of Iran which lasted from 1997 to 2005. Iranian reform movement is also known as second Khoradad Movement, it refers to groups of the reformist who supported to Khatami, as well as the ideology of Khatami and the movement was based on Islamic Democracy³⁵. Khatami's view of civil society and "the rule of law" evoked a clear contrast with *hukumat-e islami* (Islamic government) the slogan of the revolution. Reformist Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Ayatollah Muhajirani removed several restrictions on the press, and allowed several new press agencies in order to make a vibrant civil society³⁶. Khatami represented a new desire for societal openness and changes, and he advocated for greater political and social freedom, and the relaxation of cultural norms³⁷. He outlined his principles regarding reforms on 4 August 1997 at the *Majlis* in which he focused on the freedom of the individual and the rights of the nation, dignity of the individual in the religion, provision for the necessary conditions for the realisation of the constitutional liberties, strengthening expanding the institutions of civil societies, right and legal liberties³⁸. His intention was to make a more open and democratic political system in the country.

However, Khatami provided people with a vision of a more democratic nation from the very start of his campaign. Economic revival could not appear without political reform and more specifically, without institutions for civil society and participation in politics by all the citizens. Khatami adopted a strategy consisting of three

³⁴ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, New York: I.B Touris, p 76

³⁵ R. Ghomeshi (2011), "Changing Perspectives and Developments of Civil Society in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 15 August 2014 URL: shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream, p 115

³⁶ Arjomand, Said Amir (2002), "The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (10): 726

³⁷ Menashri, David (2010), "Reform versus Radicalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 27 September 2014 URL: www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/ p 13

³⁸ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, New York: I.B Touris, p 64

components. First, component he had taken into consideration was “increase the political consciousness and change the nature of the tolerated political discourse. Second was to “encourage and expedite the creation and formation of political parties, and third was to involve the common people in the political process³⁹. He believed that through the support of the general population he could force the clerical elite to bring the reform. Broadly the major area of reforms can be categorised in four categories: reform for women, the economy, media/film, and government itself⁴⁰.

Here the first subject that was taken into serious account by the Khatami’s administration was rights of women. It can be argued that Khatami willingly wanted to bring women to equal footing with men. His effort to bring women in the main stream of the society can be traced from the third ‘*Economic, Social, Cultural Development Programme*’ of the Islamic Republic of Iran that was lasted from 1999 to 2003. Under this programme Khatami expanded the women’s participation in the various educational courses, heretofore among them many courses were not allowed for women. In order to explain it becomes significant to highlight the major points of this programme:

- 1- Revising existing education laws that are gender biased.
- 2- Reducing gender gaps in the fields of science, mathematics and applied sciences.
- 3- Modifying educational materials in order to portray the correct image of women’s roles in the family and society, and of the mutual rights of women, men and the family at all levels.
- 4- Emphasising the participation of female specialist in planning and policy making at all levels of education.
- 5- Developing and promoting counselling services in high schools to prepare and guide students towards more appropriate fields of study in order to eliminate the concentration of female university students in certain degree.
- 6- Determining a particular quota for creating equal opportunities for women in a number of specific universities degrees.
- 7- Teaching management skills to women with the aim of enhancing their participation in the sphere of decision making.

³⁹James, Russell, Jordan Jr. (2008), *A Change at Reform: Mohammed Khatami’s Presidency, 1997-2005*, thesis, Charleston: College of Charleston and the Citadel, p 34

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p 36

- 8- Expanding and diversifying technical and vocational training programmes for women with a view to create employment opportunities⁴¹.

Above points show that Khatami strongly emphasised on the gender equality in the field of education. Moreover he was enhancing the women's representation in the decision making process related to women's education.

Khatami had promised to the people of Iran during his election campaign, that he would implement the law concerning the organisations and elections of the council that was incorporated in the original draft of the 1979 constitution, but never implemented till 1999⁴². He believed that participation of the people in the governmental affairs is the key factor in the political development. As he put it in a major speech, the first step in political development is participation, and the elections of the councils were "the most evident channel for participation"⁴³. For the first time in 1999 the council elections had taken place in Islamic Republic of Iran. The main architect of the council election was the reformist Deputy Minister of the Interior Mostafa Tajzadeh. He was responsible for carrying out the election. More than half a million (among them 5000 were the women⁴⁴) candidates contested for 35,000 village councils and over 900 for municipal councils. In these elections approximately 80 per cent eligible citizens had voted, among them 65 per cent votes were received by the supporters of Khatami's reform movement⁴⁵. On his second anniversary of presidential victory, he addressed the gathering of some 107,000 elected members of the village and town councils in Tehran, again emphasising the importance of political development and the need to struggle for the consolidation of Islamic democracy and popular government⁴⁶. Moreover he pointed out that sacred terms such as revolution, freedom, Islam and leadership were not the monopoly of a particular group. In addition, to making more democratic powerful elected institution (presidency) and established the rule of law, he appointed a commission for the implementation and

⁴¹ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, New York: I.B Touris, p 69

⁴² Arjomand, Said Amir (2002), "The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (10): 726

⁴³ Arjomand, Said Amir (2009), *After Khomeini: Iran Under his Successor*, New York: Oxford University Press, p 99

⁴⁴ Abrahamian, Ervand (2008), *A History of Modern Iran*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p 188

⁴⁵ Arjomand, Said Amir (2009), *After Khomeini: Iran Under his Successor*, New York: Oxford University Press, p 100

⁴⁶ *ibid*, p 100

supervision of the constitution in 1998. Article 113 of the constitution was not changed from its original draft in any constitutional amendment that made the implementation of the constitution one of the main duties of the president⁴⁷. Despite the opposition of the powerful leaders and resourceful Ayatollahs, Khatami challenged the monolithic Islamic-ideological interpretation of the law by clerical jurist. Moreover, he introduced two bills in September 2002 to reduce the power of Council of Guardian and to increase the power of president as the constitutionally responsible for upholding the constitution⁴⁸. However, both bills were passed in the parliament, but vetoed by the Guardian Council. It led to the intense debate among the reformist camp. Due to the weak constitutional position of the elected institutions, he could not bring the substantial reform in the government.

This is also a fact that civil society organisation began to expand drastically after Khatami came to power. Heretofore, there were only about 39 parties, political societies and associations had been granted permission from the ‘Article 10 Commission’ of the Ministry of Interior⁴⁹. This commission comprised with representative of the state prosecutor general, the political judicial council, the ministry of interior and two *majles* deputies that had the responsibility of issuing operational permits for parties, and supervising them. It is noted that by January 2000 the number of new parties and groups increased to 103. Within 28 months of Khatami’s presidency 64 new groups and parties received operational permission. However it is a fact that among these, almost 12 were genuinely active, some of them are: *Jam-eh eh ye Rouhaniyat-e Mobarez*, *Jamiyat-e Motalefeh-ye Islami*, *Majma-e Rouhaniyun-e Mobarez*, *Jebheh-e Mosharekat-e Iran-e Islami*, *Kargozaran-e Sazandegi* and *Mojahedin-e Inqelabi-e Islmi*⁵⁰. After Khatami came into power, a rapid formation of the diverse political parties and groups began, although there were some restrictions on them, it reflected the evolution of civil society and democratic

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p 100

⁴⁸ Kiani, Tehmoures (2012), *The Iranians’ Debate after the Crackdown: Is Green Movement Revolutionary or Reformist?*, thesis, Washington: University of Washington, p 19

⁴⁹ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami’s Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, New York: I.B Touris, p 73

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p 74

momentum from the grassroot. In fact this was the most significant contribution of the Khatami's rule⁵¹.

Moreover, the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance encouraged and issued the required publishing permission to newspapers, periodicals etc. Print media became strong and started to raise issues that had previously been off-limits. Academics, journalists, analysts, relentlessly expressed their views for public accountability, judicial impartiality, transparency, bureaucratic integrity and personal liberties. There were some particular newspapers which were highly active such as *Jame-eh, Tus, Neshat, Khordad, Sobh-e Imruz*, and weeklies such as *Rah-e No* and *Aban*, together with *Salam, Iran-e Farda, Asr-e Mah* and *Kiyan*, they were involved in debating controversial religious, ideological and political topics⁵². Print media; newsstands, bookstores, and book exhibitions became popular in the public especially among the youths. Gradually an educated and critical public emerged throughout the country with an appetite for reading diverse newspaper, journals and magazines. Due to the efforts of Mohajerani and his deputy, in 1997, the first 'Assembly Guild for Writers and Journalist' of the press had been established⁵³. Expansion of print media had been seen as sign of loosening state control and expansion of civil society. The influence of the print media can be observed with this event, when conservative forces led by the judiciary and armed forces, set in motion a series of trials that led to the closing down of over 30 newspapers among them some were related to women issues⁵⁴.

The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance allowed various art exhibitions and cultural programmes that were earlier restricted. The new director of the Museum of Contemporary Art received the permission from the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance to place the collection on regular display in 1998⁵⁵. After the revolution, first time there was a collection of 400 important paintings that had been stored in the vaults of the 'Museum of Contemporary Art'. In the social and cultural sphere people realized greater sense of freedom. Government attitude became more flexible and tolerable towards social and cultural freedom. Furthermore, women got some more

⁵¹ *ibid*, p 74

⁵² *ibid*, p 65

⁵³ *ibid*, p 65

⁵⁴ Shoemaker, Jolynn (2006), "Women's Rights and Democracy: a Peaceful Transition in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 12 October 2014 URL: www.huntalternativesfund.org, p 10

⁵⁵ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, New York: I.B Touris, p 72

freedom in dress code. Several sport grounds and gymnasiums were opened for young women, athletes and other enthusiasts. Western video cassettes, compact disks were officially permitted and allowed to have private possession of that. Internet cafe started opening up across Tehran, and private parties were not frequently raided by the police and security forces. In fact among the reforms Khatami achieved tremendous success in reducing the governmental restrictions on press and films industry⁵⁶. Film industry truly became expressive and critical of their society and government in his time of presidency. During this time film industry was allowed to make films on the topic that were restricted earlier⁵⁷.

Increasing Role of Women in the Public Sphere

As far as the role of the women in the public sphere is concerned it was the Khatami's period where women realized greater sense of freedom and perceived ample opportunities in the public sphere. As it has been mentioned, the reforms in the women's condition had given the major priority in the Khatami's administration. Khatami already had served as the 'Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance' twice, where he supported and tried to strengthen the women's condition. Eventually, when he failed to work freely and was pressurised by the conservative clerics group, he resigned from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in 1992. His past reformist experience was reflected in his two term presidency. There is no doubt; he wanted to bring women to the main-stream of the society. Furthermore, Khatami stressed the expansion of knowledge, awareness and education for women's rights and recognition⁵⁸. His period witnessed women's access to education, employment, and opportunities were created for women to participate in and to contribute to the socio-economic and political life of the country. Centre for Women's participation paid high attention to women's participation in the public domain under the Khatami's government⁵⁹. It is a fact, during Khatami's period (1997-2004), special

⁵⁶ James, Russell, Jordan Jr. (2008), *A Change at Reform: Mohammed Khatami's Presidency, 1997-2005*, thesis Charleston: College of Charleston and the Citadel, p 43

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p 43

⁵⁸ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 41

⁵⁹ Nejadbahram, Zahra (2012), "Women and Employment", in Tara, Povey and Elaheh, Rostami-Povey, (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 76

attention had been paid by the government on the policies which empowered women's status and expanded women's opportunities in the public sphere. In fact the first time in Islamic Republic of Iran government headed by a reformist camp, had taken women issues into serious consideration. It can be remarked that after 1990, and particularly when Khatami came to power in 1997, women's participation had grown exponentially in the public sphere. During this time, the aim of reformist government was to increase women's potential and place them in main-stream of the society⁶⁰.

Role of Women in Education

Post revolutionary education system in Islamic Republic of Iran had wider implications on women's participation in the public sphere. Education proved as a source for women through which they tried to represent themselves in the main stream of the society. Through education women enhanced their present in the society and build up confidence. The feminist attitudes are associated with women's education, that increases their economic prospects, the increased economic prospects lead women to delay marriage and bear fewer children, and that this effect is largest in societies that are most patriarchal⁶¹. Higher education facilitates, gender equality and women with higher qualifications are able to have greater and more effective participation in the society⁶². In case of Iran, off course, the most prominent factor in contributing women's increasing participation in the realm of public sphere is education itself. Whatever the achievement gained by the women, education played a significant role. Education not only changed women's personality but also led to the amorphous positive consequences. Access to education requires students to move from one part to another part of the country, from one city to another city, from rural to urban. Due to this process female students experienced more freedom and openness in the big cities that changed their attitude and personality. In many cases female students find more opportunities for work in the city where they study and choose to

⁶⁰ Aryan, Khadijeh (2012), "The Boom in Women's Education", in Tara, Povey and Elaheh, Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 37

⁶¹ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p, 36

⁶² Regional Gender Programme in South East Asia (2009), "Gender Analysis of Women's Political Participation in 7 South East Asian Countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, East Timor and Vietnam", [Online: web] Accessed 21 December 2014 URL: www.bantaba.ehu.es, p 16

remain there. In this context, university life has a hidden function as it provides young people with freedom of movement and choice⁶³. Women's participation in the education, receiving training, developing skills and expertise have increased women's awareness, self confidence, dignity, growth and development. It led to the rise of women's participation in social, economic and political activities. As it has already been mentioned that women's education was taken into serious account during the reform period, therefore government had expanded the women's area of education under the third "Economic, Social, Cultural Development Programme"⁶⁴. Khatami had paid great attention to education of women. Khatami addressed a public meeting in 2003, in which he mentioned that women faced many restrictions to enter into the universities, the restrictions were gradually removed, and women's participation in higher education drastically increased, and stated, the best way is to open the higher education system at various levels to women, and to remove the quota system in courses such as mining, engineering and medical disciplines that were only occupied by the male students⁶⁵. However some of these disciplines were restricted for women earlier, but Khatami allowed women to enter into these disciplines.

In fact, the women's participation in the education had been increased continuously after the revolution, but during the Khatami's period women's involvement in the education accelerated more than before. After Khatami came into power a new trend began in the women's education. However, before Khatami's government women were restricted from some of the courses, such as agriculture engineering and mining. He not only allowed them to pursue these courses but also encouraged the vocational training and employment oriented education for women, therefore they could contribute in the Iranian economy. Gradually women's acquired higher posts which were earlier dominated by the male counterparts. Following is the data related to women's education that would explain the women increasing participation in the education.

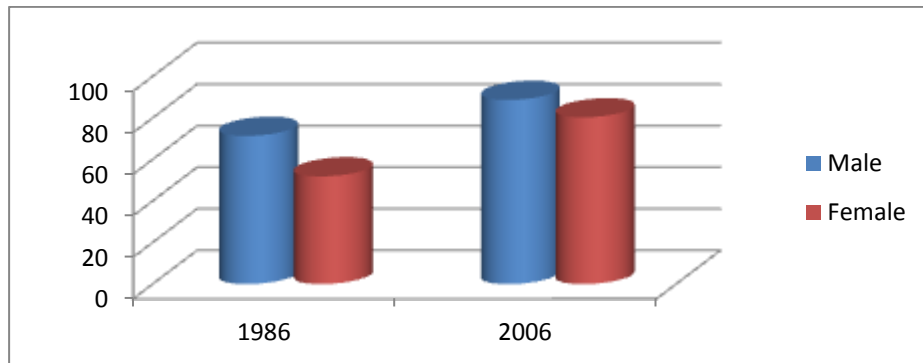
⁶³ Aryan, Khadijeh (2012), "The Boom in Women's Education", in Tara, Povey and Elaheh, Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 39

⁶⁴ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, New York: I.B Touris, p 69

⁶⁵ Aryan, Khadijeh (2012), "The Boom in Women's Education", in Tara, Povey and Elaheh, Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 39

A Comparison of the Literacy Rate before and after the Khatami's Period

Chart 3 (a) Literacy Rate for those over 6 year



Source: Dr. Ansia Khaz Ali (2010)⁶⁶

Here the chart 3 (a) shows, female literacy rate for those over age 6 was only 51.9 per cent and male was 71.4 per cent in 1986. Within 20 years female literacy rate increased from 51.9 to 80.34 per cent, and male literacy rate from 71.4 per cent to only 88.74 per cent. Above data shows that growth rate of female literacy is much higher than male.

Table 3 (a) Youth Literacy Rate (15-24 years old)

Year	1986	2001	2006
Male	84.85%	97.03%	97.14%
Female	65.52%	94.01%	96.13%

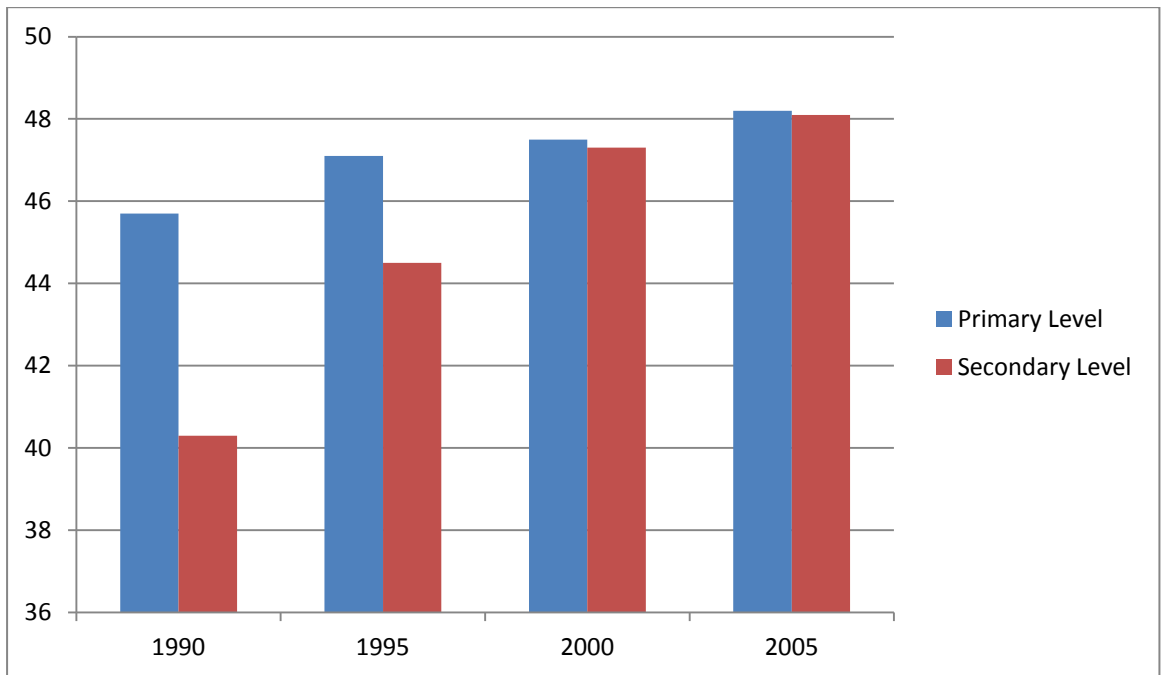
Source: Dr. Ansia Khaz Ali (2010)⁶⁷

From the table 1 one can observe a rapid booming of youth literacy rate, especially female youth literacy rate. In 1986 female literacy rate was only 65.52 per cent, the male literacy rate was 84.85 per cent, and there was a huge gap between male and female literacy rate. Till 2001 the gap remains almost 3 per cent of literacy rate between male and female, and in 2001 male literacy rate constituted 97.14 per cent and female literacy rate 96.13 per cent.

⁶⁶ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), "Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution", *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London, p 7

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p 7

Chart 3 (b) Female Student's Participation at Primary and Secondary Level (1990-2005)

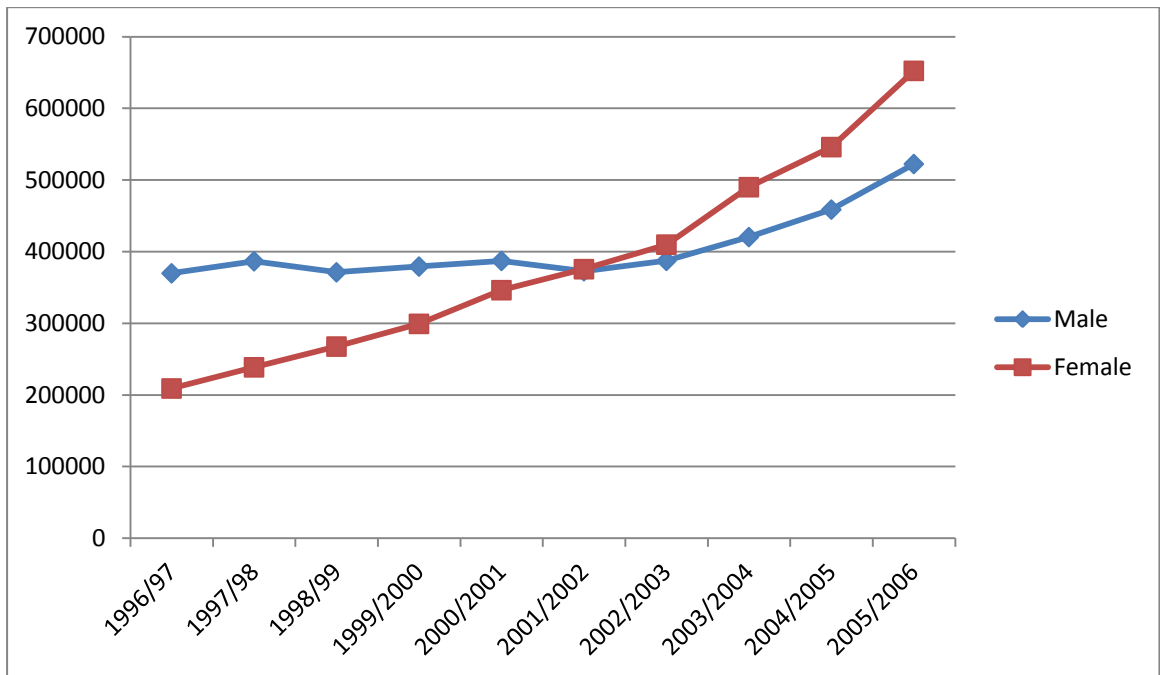


Source: UNESCO, data centre from stats.uis.unesco.org⁶⁸

Above data shows the increasing graph of both primary and secondary participation of female student. Female student participation in primary education was 45.7 per cent and in secondary education it was 40.3 per cent in 1990. Furthermore, in 1995 female student constituted 47.1 per cent at primary level and 44.5 per cent at secondary level. In the year 2000 female student participation at primary level was 47.5 per cent and secondary level recorded 47.3 per cent. In 2005, female student participation at primary level constituted 48.2 per cent and at secondary level 48.1 per cent. According to present graph it can be argued that dropout rate of female student has declined over a period. In 1995 the gap between female participation at primary level and secondary level was 5.4 per cent that remained only 0.1 percent in 2006. It shows that Khatami's reform policies had actually influenced the female education.

⁶⁸ UNESCO data centre, [Online: web] Accessed 21 April 2015, URL: www.stats.uis.unesco.org,

Chart 3 (c) Total Numbers of Female Student in all Universities 1996/97 to 2005/06



Source: Dr. Ansia Ali Khaz (2010)⁶⁹

Females have achieved a considerable progress in the higher education, here women constituted more than male students. In the beginning of Khatami period female students were only 209163 and male students were 369907 in Universities and other colleges. Surprisingly it went reverse from 2001/2002, in these year women numbered 375663 and male were 372825 of the total number of the universities and colleges. With the end of the Khatami period in 2005/2006 women number rose to 652459 and male student constituted only 522382. This scenario shows the dramatic change in participation of women in higher education within 10 years.

Table 3 (b) Total Percentage of Female Students in Public Higher Education Institutions (1991-2005)

Year	1991/92	1996/97	2001/02	2004/05	2005/06
Female students	28%	36%	50%	54%	55%

Source: Khadijeh Aryan (2012)⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), "Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution", *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London, p 10

Table 3 (c) Total Percentage of Female Students in Islamic Azad (private) University, 1996/97-2006/07

Year	1996/97	2001/02	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Female students	41%	48%	48%	48%	46%

Source: Khadijeh Aryan (2012)⁷¹

As data indicated in the Table 3 (b) above, 28 per cent women were constituted in the government led higher education institutions in the year of 1991/92. It is a rapid boom in the female education, within about 15 years women growth rose to 55 per cent. According to data it can be argued that government had taken women's education into serious consideration. As in the Table 3 (c) data shows that female student's percentage almost remained constant in Islamic Azad (private) University, because female student could not afford the high fees charged by the private Universities⁷². During 1997 to 2005 the reform policies provided the more opportunities in the government institutions, therefore women's percentage had grown rapidly in government led institutions rather than private led higher education institutions. As far as the number of female university or college graduates are concerned, there were only 32 per cent graduates in 1991/92 that increased to 55 per cent in 2006/07⁷³. It shows that the reform period was really significant for women's education.

In fact, the gender segregation policies provided opportunities to women in employment. Girls' students required female teachers; therefore educated women got the opportunities in the education sector as teachers and instructors. Booming female education led to the rise of female teachers and instructors. The number of female teacher also increased considerably.

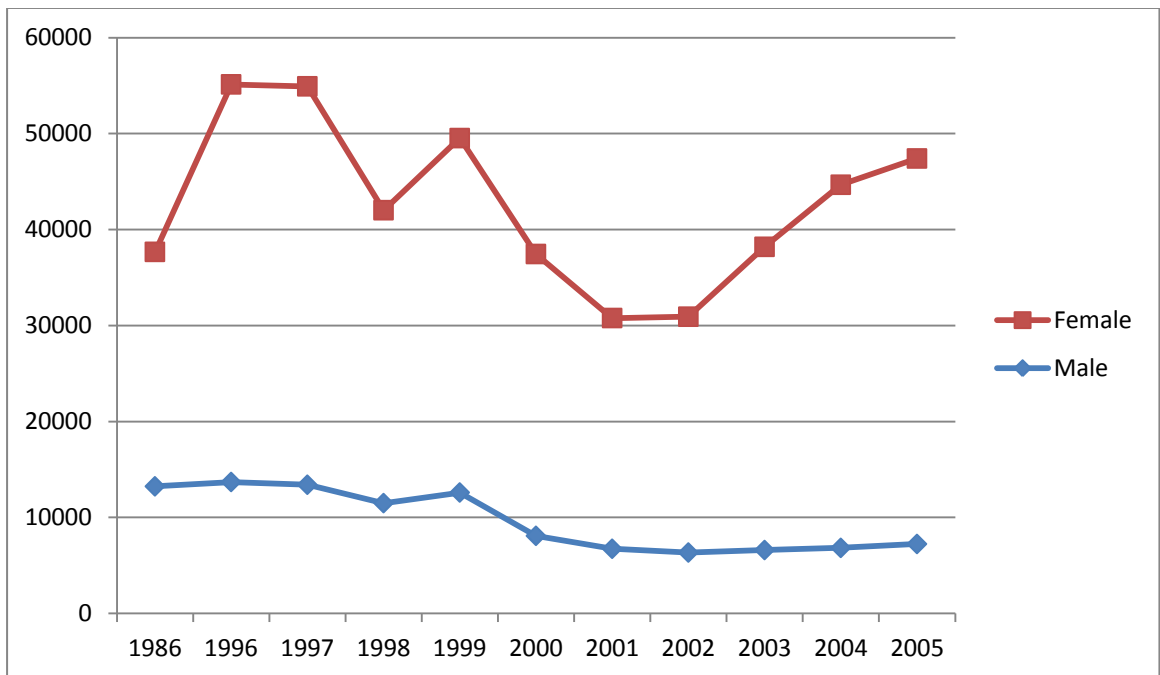
⁷⁰ Aryan, Khadijeh (2012), "The Boom in Women's Education" in Tara Povey and Rostami-Povey Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p, 47

⁷¹ *ibid*, p 47

⁷² *ibid*, p 47

⁷³ *ibid*, p 48

Chart 3 (d) Number of Male and Female Teachers and Instructors, (1986-2005)



Source: Dr. Asia Khaz Ali (2010)⁷⁴

Table 3 (d) Number and Percentage of Female Faculty Members in Higher Education Institutions

Year	Public Universities	Islamic Azad University	Grand total
1995	7,171	2,285	9,456
	18%	13%	16%
2009	10,414	14,590	25,004
	13%	23%	18%

Source: Khadijeh Aryan (2012)⁷⁵

As indicated in the chart 3 (d) female teachers and instructors are higher relatively than male teachers and instructors from the beginning of the establishment of Iran as an Islamic Republic. Although, in 1998 there was sharp decline of the teachers and instructors but it was relative. Female teachers declined same as the male teachers. Women were constituted greater number till 2005. It was a huge margin between male and female teachers and instructors; male were only 13242 in number and 24432

⁷⁴ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), "Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution", *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London, p 12

⁷⁵ Aryan, Khadijeh (2012), "The Boom in Women's Education" in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p, 47

female teachers and instructors in 1986. And in 2005 also women remained in higher position; women constituted 40170 and male only 7235. But it is contrary, as Table 3 (e) indicates; women participation did not increase even two per cent in between 1995-2005. It shows that still women were facing problem to occupy the higher posts in the government and society. This situation had been admitted by the Khatami, that Iran had not yet met the needs of women in society as women constitute the majority of the students in universities, but occupy only 2.5 per cent managerial positions. Although, women have education and experience but they faced discrimination in term of wage, jobs and promotions. Women were rarely offered position such as heads of department, deans of faculties and director or chancellor of the Universities.

Moreover, over a period of time women as a writer and artist became more influential in Islamic Republic of Iran. The number of books written by female writers increased, especially in Khatami's Period. In 1996 women had written 663 books and translated only 321. It was a considerable achievement in 2005; women wrote 2497 books and translated 1507 books. As it has been discussed in the second chapter, women specialist of gynaecology and obstetrics were only 16 per cent in the year of 1976 to 1986 that increased to 98 per cent in between 1996 -2006⁷⁶.

During the reform era (1997-2004), a large number of seminars and conferences were organised to deal with women's issues and to promote women's status in the society. One of the significant developments of this era was development of numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) by the women themselves in various fields. Under Khatami rule, women in the state bureaucracy and parliament had close relationship with women NGOs. They always offered public facilities and convenience for the meetings and programmes of women NGOs⁷⁷. These NGOs promoted women's confidence and created opportunities for them to seek new employment and enter into the new areas of social activities. Furthermore, these NGOs provided the ground for social interactions and debates among different groups within society, including various women's communities and associations, had a great

⁷⁶ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), "Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution", *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London, p 17

⁷⁷ Shoemaker, Jolynn (2006), "Women's Rights and Democracy: a Peaceful Transition in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 12 October 2014 URL: www.huntalternativesfund.org, p 13

impact on the views of many statesman and authorities⁷⁸. Consequently there was a great shift in the views of the conservative and traditional families. To some extent they removed the restrictions on the women to get higher education and they promoted their girls and women to pursue education. Majority of the population began to support their women financially and allowed them to leave their home and towns and move to different part of the country. Consequently it demonstrates the boom in women's education.

This period saw rising women's gender consciousness which led women to struggle for their rights and gender equality. Women realised that the higher education is the weapon for them that could raise their position in the society⁷⁹. In this era several different centres had been established within ministries and state organisations that promoted women's positions, these contributed significantly to the participation of women in the society and the rise of the women's movement. The High Commission of Planning established a new Women's Studies course at the graduate level in 2000, which constituted with the three topics: women and family, women's rights in Islam, and the role of women throughout history. Number of universities had offered such as Alzahra University, Allameh Tabatabaei University, and Tarbiat Moddaress University⁸⁰. Later this reform period and with emergence of new government of Ahmadinejad a quota system had been introduced for male student in order to maintain the gender equilibrium in the higher education. Increasing number of the women posed threat to conservative group of the policy maker therefore they introduce several policies in order to check the female student in higher education⁸¹.

Role of Women in Economy

As it has been discussed, booming women's education in the Islamic Republic of Iran had impact on several aspect of women's life. Educated women started seeking their interest outside of the houses. Women's education has a close relationship with women's participation in the labour force and fertility rate. Education and labour

⁷⁸ Aryan, Khadijeh (2012), "The Boom in Women's Education", in Tara, Povey and Elaheh, Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century*, England: Ashgate press, p 43

⁷⁹ *ibid*, p 43

⁸⁰ *ibid*, p 44

⁸¹ *ibid*, pp 44-45

force participation are generally considered as the main pillars of determining women's status in the society⁸². An educated woman preferred to take more responsibility in the society. Hence, for many educated, working Iranian women participation in the labour force became a fundamental part of their identity⁸³.

After the eight year war with Iraq, Iran had undergone serious economic crisis, therefore the state was forced to show great efforts to improve women's economic capabilities, Including: increasing women's economic capabilities at the individual and family level by introducing protective laws in the field of marital payments, dowries and meeting women's primary needs and supporting women's economic participation by introducing protective labour laws which prevented women from performing difficult and dangerous works. Under Article 75 of the Labour Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran, introduced a law preventing the firing of pregnant women, granting 185 days of maternity leave after childbirth on a full salary, calculating a period of pregnancy leave based on years of service, setting a time allocation for breastfeeding of one hour a day for two years, banning hard labour and child labour, ensuring the freedom of association and the freedom to set up organisations and unions related to the sphere of work, increasing loans in agriculture and village women's handcrafts and helping women supporting families in the countryside and in towns⁸⁴.

When Khatami was elected as president, Iranian economy was in bad shape. To bring economy to right track, he introduced drastic reforms. In the beginning of his time, 86 per cent GDP was derived from government owned businesses. This mode of economy benefitted the clerical class. Khatami attempted to remove the control over the open competition on business, partially he was success⁸⁵. In fact, it was Khatami's period when women realised greater freedom and opportunities in the public sphere. Women were more visible in the street and workplace due to his moderate policies. Women's labour force participation had increased considerably

⁸² Mehryar H. Amir, Aghajanian Akbar (2002), "Women's Education and Labour Force Participation and Fertility decline in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 29 October 2014 URL: aaghajanian@uncfsu.edu, p 17

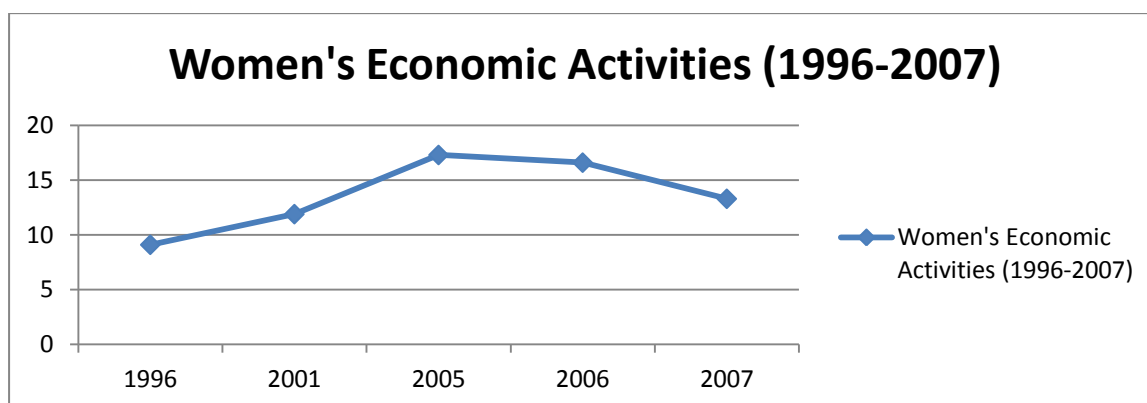
⁸³ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p, 28

⁸⁴ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), "Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution", *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London

⁸⁵ James, Russell, Jordan Jr. (2008), *A Change at Reform: Mohammed Khatami's Presidency, 1997-2005*, thesis, Charleston: Caollege of Charleston and the Citadel, pp 38-39

during his presidency. In order to analyse the women’s participation, there is a need to go through the following statics regarding women’s role in the Iranian economic activities.

Chart 3 (e) Percentage of Women’s Economic Activities (1996-2007)



Source: lib.ohchr.org⁸⁶

As the graph indicates, the economic participation of women was 9.1 per cent in 1996. With the beginning of the Khatami’s period, women’s participation increased continuously. In 2001, women’s participation had been recorded around 12 per cent. As the graph shows, highest women’s participation had been recorded in 2005 which was the last year of Khatami’s period, it was around 17.5 per cent. Later on there was considerable decline in the women’s participation in the new government led by Ahmadinejad.

Table 3 (e) Female Labour Participation in State Enterprises (1991-2008)

Year	Male	Female
1991	70%	30%
2001	69%	31%
2006	66%	34%

Source: Zahra Nejadbahram (2012)⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Annex V (2009), “Women’s Statistical Status in the Islamic Republic of Iran”, [Online: Web] Accessed 14 September 2014 URL:

lib.ohchr.org/HRbodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/IR/A_HRC_WG6_7_IRN_1_ANNEX_E.pdf

⁸⁷ Nejadbahram, Zahra (2012), “Women and employment”, in Tara, Povey and Elaheh, Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century*, England: Ashgate press, p 78

Table 3 (f) Female Labour Participation in Industries (1996-2007)

Year	Male	Female
1996	94%	6%
2001	92%	8%
2006	90%	10%
2007	89%	11%

Source: Zahra Nejadbahram (2012)⁸⁸

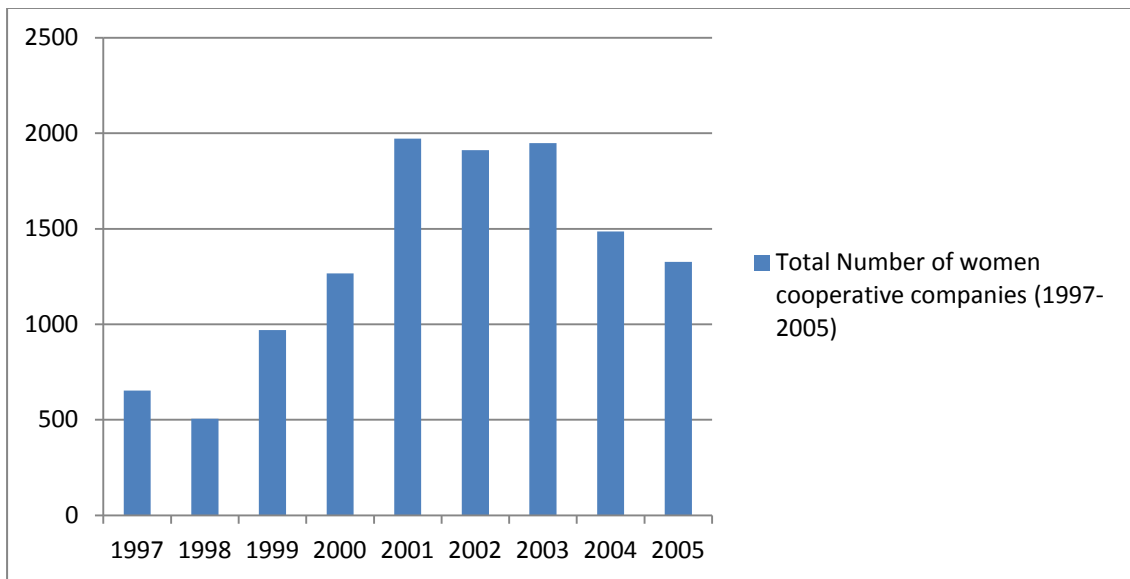
Data mentioned in both the table shows the increasing scenario of the women participation in the labour force participation. Not only in the public enterprises but also in the private industries (enterprises) off course, slow but representation of women has increased in this period. Both the above tables demonstrate; comparison with the pre-Khatami period, women's participation in the labour force increased during the Khatami's period. It is a fact that the pace of women's participation is very slow as compare with women participation in the higher education and their experiences.

However, women were active in several economic fields through the Women Cooperative Companies. Women Cooperative Companies means those companies led by more than 50 per cent women⁸⁹. Generally these companies considered as public machinery which engage the public in socio economic activities. In these companies even a deprived women can join with minimum investment. All the decisions and the higher posts are hold by the women. Women cooperative basically engaged in two significant economic areas; Industry and agriculture. In industries they active in carpet weaving, handicraft, food industries, medical industries, electronic industries, clothes, toys manufacturing and packaging etc. And in agriculture, they involved in producing dairy products, greenhouse flowers and plant cultivation, mushroom cultivation, honey bee cultivation, husbandry and fishery etc. Following are some data regarding women's cooperatives company that shows the women's involvement in the economic activities:

⁸⁸ Nejadbahram, Zahra (2012), "Women and employment", in Tara, Povey and Elaheh, Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century*, England: Ashgate press, p 78

⁸⁹ Annex V (2009), "Women's Statistical Status in the Islamic Republic of Iran", [Online: Web] Accessed 14 September 2014 URL: lib.ohchr.org/HRbodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/IR/A_HRC_WG6_7_IRN_1_ANNEX_E.pdf.

Chart 3 (f) Total Number of Women Cooperative Companies (1997-2005)



Source: lib.ohchr.org⁹⁰

As above graph indicates, women cooperative companies were only 654 in number, in 1997 that increased to 1972 in 2001. Number of women cooperative companies remained almost constant till 2003 but two years later it has declined but remained higher than in 1997. Women participation in the industries and agriculture had increased considerably in between 1997-2005. These data show that women were not only involved in state led enterprises and industries but also in their own business where they were taking decision independently and organisation directed, managed, and supervised by women themselves. In other words these kinds of cooperative companies helped women to developed and enhance their abilities and stance.

Role of Women in Other Sphere

Growing higher education of women and their involvement in the economic activities out outside of the house had impacted fertility rate as well. Higher educated women marry latter because of their involvement in the education, and educated women seek employment and are interested to do something in the society. With family planning policies introduced by the Islamic Republic of Iran, women education and economic involvement had significant impact on low fertility rate in the Islamic republic of

⁹⁰ ibid

Iran⁹¹. Fertility rate has declined over a period of time but during Khatami's period it had decreased more drastically as revealed by the following data:

Table 3 (g) Fertility Rate (birth per women), (1990-2005)

Year	fertility rate
1992	4.137
1995	3.204
1997	2.716
2000	2.193
2002	1.994
2005	1.873

Source: uis.unesco.org⁹²

As above Table 7 shows, fertility rate had declined continuously from 1992 to 2005. Fertility rate was 4.137 in 1997; it remained only 1.873 in 2005. There were considerable decline of fertility rate in Khatami's Iran.

The women's organisations and NGOs were working from beginning, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, those primarily dealing with women's issues, but the numbers of these organisations and NGOs were very limited. A group of women always remained conscious of the women's issues and led the various organisations. Around 1999, most influential women in the Iran were Zahra Mostafi (daughter of Khomeini), Fatemeh Hashemi (daughter of Rafsanjani), Fatemeh Karubbi (former Member of Parliament), and Azam Taleghani (daughter of Ayatollah Taleghani), headed different organisations. During Khatami time, women's organisation were supported and sponsored by the government also, therefore these organisations steadily increased⁹³. This time saw the formation of some influential NGOs such as *Tanvanyab* (2000), *SPASDI* (2000), Associations of Women's Entrepreneurs (2004), and The Entrepreneurship Development Foundation for Women and Youth (2005)⁹⁴.

⁹¹ Mehryar H. Amir, Aghajanian Akbar (2002), "Women's Education and Labour Force Participation and Fertility decline in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 29 October 2014 URL: aaghajanian@uncfsu.edu p 18

⁹² UNESCO data centre, [Online: web] Accessed 25 April 2015, URL: www.stats.uis.unesco.org

⁹³ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 29

⁹⁴ Pournik Milad (2013), "Civil Society Organisations and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Iran" *Institute for global and international studies*, The George Washington University, p 30

These NGOs were basically dealing with socio-cultural and economic activities. In 2000, the UNDP commissioned a comprehensive review of civil society activity in Islamic Republic of Iran. The project led by the Baquer Namazi, in which he surveyed more than 700 NGOs in Iran, among them 137 were directly focused on women's issues and development. In the acknowledgement he recognised that women's NGOs are obviously a leading sector in Iran's civil society development⁹⁵. Number of women NGOs and organisations had increased over a period of time considerably. Before the revolution, there were only 13 NGOs related to women that were in function but in the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly during Khatami's period it has increased drastically. However, before Khatami's period in 1995 women NGOs had been recorded 55 which increased to 480, in 2004, and later the pace of increment continued⁹⁶. These NGOs were primarily acting as: Charity Organisations, Minority Organisations, Health organisations, Communication and Publications Organisations, Socio-cultural Organisations, Environmental Organisations, Technical and research organisations⁹⁷. One of the most significant Khatami's efforts to support women was the establishment of the Presidential Centre for Participation of Women⁹⁸. Although, Khatami tried his best to develop a social environment, where women got equal status as those of men, but it did not yield due to the constitutionally sanctioned impediments.

One of the most significant developments for women in the reform era was freedom and expansion of press and media. Press and media provided a platform for women, from where women effectively expressed their views and ideas. Development of the channel of communication became the major instrument of exchange of ideas. Women got the right to publish their own magazines in the year 1990⁹⁹. Women's number in the courses of journalism increased considerably, during this time, media flourished and absorbed a large number of women. Women's visibility highly increased during this time in the media as journalists, editors of magazines, writers,

⁹⁵ *ibid*, p 11

⁹⁶ Koolaee, Elaheh (2012) "Women in the Parliament", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 140

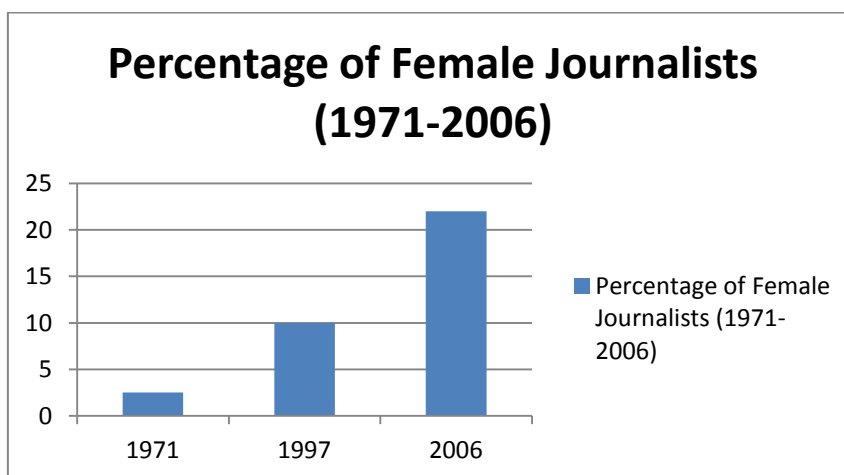
⁹⁷ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 32

⁹⁸ Pournik Milad (2013), "Civil Society Organisations and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Iran" *Institute for global and international studies*, The George Washington University p 15

⁹⁹ Simmonetti (2011), "women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Paradox of less Rights and More Opportunities", *Instituto Univesitario de Estudios Europeos*, p 37

directors and managers, and women’s visibility increased in the film industry as well. The women’s percentage as journalists had increased rapidly with the presidency of moderate leader Khatami. Increasing trend of women in media as journalist was demonstrated in the following Graph 7.

Chart 3 (g) Percentage of Female Journalists (1971-2006)



Source: Lily Farhadpour (2012)¹⁰⁰

Above graph indicates that women’s role in the media has increased significantly over a period of time. The most important years of the women’s increasing role as journalists were 1997-2006, that was the rule of Khatami’s government. In between 1997 to 2006 female journalist increased drastically. In fact before the revolution as above graph shows women were only 2.3 per cent. With the beginning of the Khatami’s period in 1997 women constituted 10 per cent, but within 8 years of Khatami’s presidency women as journalists increased to 22 per cent. In addition women made significant achievement in the field of film industries as well. Women were very less in number in the broadcasting before Khatami government. In 1996 women as employee in the broadcast were only 1784, but the women’s involvement increased after Khatami came to power. Women increased to 1907 in number in the 1999¹⁰¹. Subsequently, it would be argued that Khatami’s government had promoted and encouraged women to enter into the field of media and journalism. Presence of

¹⁰⁰ Lily, Farhadpour (2012), “Women, Gender Roles, Media and Journalism”, in Tara, Povey and Elaheh, Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 103

¹⁰¹ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), “Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution”, *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London, p 12

women in the journalism was rare before Khatami's period, while during the reform period their participation in this field increased significantly¹⁰². Women were working in the various newspapers such as: *Jamee* (Society), *Neshat* (Happiness), *Asre Azadega* (Age of Freedom), and *Akhbare Eghtesad* (Economic News) etc. Almost 40 per cent women were working in the reformist paper as journalists, and in this period, professional female journalism was encouraged. Furthermore in the first year of the Khatami's presidency the Association of Journalist had been established with effort of the reformist, later that was closed in 2009¹⁰³.

In fact women had achieved much during the Khatami's period in the Islamic Republic of Iran, but he failed to realize the women's expectations. Although, women's representation in education had increased drastically, their involvement in the economic activities did not meet their qualifications. Despite of women's higher qualification, they were not in position to occupy the higher posts in the government. In fact in this period a large chunk of women had access to education, employment, and opportunities which were created for women to participate and contribute to the socio-economic and political life of the country. Women played an important role through the NGOs as civil society organisations. These organisations become an instrument for them to demand their rights. But women's participation at the higher posts remained very low; it did not increase more than 2.2 per cent¹⁰⁴. In fact Khatami actually wanted a drastic change in the society, therefore he led the reform policies in Islamic Republic of Iran, but the political structure of the country was a major obstacle in the reform. The elected institutions such as parliament and presidency has very minimal power, they work under the control of the unelected institutions such as Council of Guardian, Military, and Judiciary. These institutions were under the control of the conservative cleric groups; they always prevented the reforms policies and plans. But it is a fact that despite a powerful opposition of the conservative groups, Khatami made some admirable improvement in women's status. Relatively women's representation in the education, labour force participation and in political activities had increased. Women's visibility in the street and public sphere

¹⁰² Lily, Farhadpour (2012), "Women, Gender Roles, Media and Journalism", in Tara, Povey and Elaheh, (eds.) *Rostami-Povey Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 96

¹⁰³ *ibid*, p 101

¹⁰⁴ Nejadbahram, Zahra (2012), "Women and employment", in Tara, Povey and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century*, England: Ashgate press, pp 83-84

considerably had increased. As far as women's role in the political sphere is concerned, it has been discussed comprehensively in the fourth chapter.

CHAPTER: IV

Political Participation of Women in Khatami's Iran

This chapter is particularly an analysis of political participation of women in Islamic Republic of Iran, during Khatami's period. It is dealing with women's involvement both in formal political process as well as in informal political process. As far as political participation is concerned, it is used to be commonly understood as citizen's activities aiming to influence government and the public policy process¹. In other words, political participation means activities of the people that influence the structure of government whether in support of the existing system or in against the system. These political activities could be collective or individual actions, active and passive actions, legal and illegal, as well as support and pressure actions². Conventionally Verba, Nie and Kim defined political participation as: 'Political participation as those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed influencing selection of the governmental personnel and/or the actions they take'³. In changing societies conventional approach of political participation failed to address the contemporary political activities. Modern definition of political participation sought to incorporate informal political activities, such as; protest demonstrations, social movements, as well as increasingly, voluntary activities in pressure groups, civic associations, charity and so on⁴. As far as modern definition of political participation is concerned, Brady (1999) emphasises that we should think political participation, firstly as people's voluntary activities and observable actions. Secondly, here the "people" means common citizen, not any political elite and civil servant. Thirdly, the concept refers to deliberate attempt to influence the people who are in power and

¹ Research Report (2004), "Gender and Political Participation", [Online: web] Accessed 12 November 2014 URL: www.electoralcommission.org.uk p 15

² Regional Gender Programme in South East Asia (2009), "Gender Analysis of Women's Political Participation in 7 South East Asian Countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, East Timor and Vietnam", [Online: web] Accessed 21 December 2014 URL: www.bantaba.ehu.es p 11

³ Research Report (2004), "Gender and Political Participation" [Online: web] Accessed 12 November 2014 URL: www.electoralcommission.org.uk p 16

⁴ *ibid*, pp 15

make a difference⁵. Therefore Brady defines political participation as “actions by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes”. Furthermore, Parry (1992) defined political participation as actions by citizens which are aimed at influencing decisions which are, in most cases, ultimately taken by public representative and an official⁶. However, the government and political activities of political elites and officials can influence through both institutional political participation as well as none-institutional political participation.

Here, based on the level of integration decision making process can categorise in two ways; first, institutional political participation, in which the activities involved in the government mechanisms for decision-making such as referenda, elections, advisory body, etc., and second non-institutional political participation, in which the activities that are not part of official channels for the establishment of policies and that are aimed at exerting pressure on them from without, such as demonstrations, electoral campaigns, individual and collective requests to public organisations, promotion of certain groups or social classes interests, and membership and activities within political parties⁷.

As far as women’s political participation is concerned, it has connotation of gender perspective. Gender transforming perspective considers women as responsible individuals, having decision taking capacity and indispensable for the democratization of the society. There is a close relationship between political participation, gender equality and the process of democratization. Implementation of each concept depends upon the implementation of the other or vice versa⁸.

It is imperative to have a brief discussion of political structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As it has been discussed that Iran transformed into an Islamic Republic, following the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Consequently, religion (*Shi’ism*) became a state ideology upon which foundation of Islamic Republic of Iran stand. The constitution 1979 and its amendment in 1989 define the political, economic and social

⁵ Ekman, Joakim and Amna, Erik (2012), “Political Participation and Civic Engagement: Towards a New Typology”, *Human Affairs*, 22 (10): 284

⁶ *ibid*, p 286

⁷ Regional Gender Programme in South East Asia (2009), “Gender Analysis of Women’s Political Participation in 7 South East Asian Countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, East Timor and Vietnam”, [Online: web] Accessed 21 December 2014 URL: www.bantaba.ehu.es p 11

⁸ *ibid*, p 12

order of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Furthermore it declared *Shi'a* Islam of the *Jaafari* school of thought as official religion of the Islamic Republic of Iran⁹. Due to the complex nature of the modern nation-state Iran adopted contemporary modern political institutions, such as republicanism and constitution, alongside with theocratic institutions¹⁰. Islamic Republic of Iran consist a unique political system. The theory of the Islamic Republic represents a new theory in the area of contemporary existing political system, which was called religious democracy in another version. In the Iranian political system the role of *vilayat-e faqih* is very significance, it makes a contact and coordination link between republicanism and Islamicity and as the only factor combining two¹¹. Every act passed by the parliament need to confirm its Islamic precepts by the Council of Guardian. This control is based on the fundamental concept of the Islamic Revolution that is why the control of *vilayat-e faqih* above the state and the concept of government¹². The political system and governmental structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran is unique and complex because of its amalgamation of theocracy and democracy¹³. It is a conglomeration of elected and non elected political institutions, where ultimate authority headed by the supreme leader of the country, who is unelected¹⁴.

The Establishment of Islamic Republic and Women's Political Participation

As far as women's political participation is concerned, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 is one of the most significant event in which a large chunk of women considerably contributed in the Revolution, later that influenced the conservative approach of their male counterparts toward women in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Women were visible in the protests and demonstrations on the street alongside with men and helped

⁹ R. Ghomeshi (2011), "Iranian Political System-an Analytical View", [Online: web] Accessed 5 May 2015 URL: <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream> p 81

¹⁰ Andersson, Jones (2009), "Is Iran an Islamic State? A Comparison between Shia Islamic Theory of State and Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic of Iran", *Jonkoping University*, p 35

¹¹ R. Ghomeshi (2011), "Iranian Political System-an Analytical View", [Online: web] Accessed 5 May 2015 URL: <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream> p 82

¹² Redaelli, Reccardo (2007), "Constitutional Complexity and Political Paradoxes of the Islamic Republic of Iran", *Oriente Moderno*, 87 (2): 487

¹³ Jones, Stephen (2009), "The Islamic Republic of Iran: An introduction", [Online: web] Accessed 17 April 2015 URL: <http://www.parliament.uk/> p 4

¹⁴ Beeman, O William (2004), "Election and Governmental Structure in Iran: Reforms Lurks Under the Flaws", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 11 (1): 9

revolutionaries through various means. Women's political potential had been realised by the leading figure of the revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini who vehemently opposed the women's suffrage in 1963 introduced by the Shah, recognised women's right to vote and political participation in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Participation of women in politics legitimised the Islamic policies of the state and created an image of popular support and stability internally and internationally¹⁵. Although on the name of religion, various restrictions have been placed on women; introducing compulsory veiling, giving unilateral power to men regarding marriage and divorce, and restricting women from several occupations and so on.

However Islamisation of politics badly affected the secular women's organisations and their actions but religious women organisations flourished. New state suppressed the secular women's movement and favoured only religious women's organisations and political activities¹⁶. In the early post-revolutionary period IRP (Islamic Republic Party) took control over the mass mobilisation of *mostazaf* (poor) women. It set up the committee for the Celebration of Women's Day which had responsibility to organise the mass rally on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Fatemeh. During this time, women were mobilized against the secular forces, later, the Islamic opposition also¹⁷. Demonstrations and rallies from the secular and oppositional women's group often faced women's counter demonstrations in support of hardliner factions of the state. The veil became a political tool for religious women. The veil for religious women activists became a sign of resistance against western values which were considered immoral and which made women a sex object only¹⁸. It led to the beginning of the new form of women's movement and political activities. Secular women believed that Islamic State exploited the participation of religious women to suppress the women's movement which was struggling against the reproduction of a new form of patriarchal order. On the other hand, religious women argued that Islamic State provided them a new form of political inclusion. The Islamist women structured a form of self-

¹⁵ Paidar, parvin (1995), *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p 303

¹⁶ Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (2012), "the Women's Movement in its Historical Context", in Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 25

¹⁷ Paidar, parvin (1995), *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p 304

¹⁸ Burki, Khan Shireen (2014), "Regime consolidation and Female Status in a Fledgling Theocracy: Khomeini's Vilayet-e-Fiqh, 179-1989", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51 (2) 209

representation and self-empowerment by their own narratives, arguing that Islam is compatible with women's rights¹⁹. It led to the indigenous women's movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Iran-Iraq war created a state of emergency which led to a more oppressive and authoritarian state that repressed all forms of secular movement, especially the secular women's movement²⁰. These war years led to the decline of women's movement and intensified religiosity of the state. It was after the war, and under the new government led by Hashemi Rafsanjani that some fundamental changes had taken place in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this period, industrialization, development and urbanisation process intensified. He supported the women's role in the public sphere which he lauded as the progressive Islamic code of ethics that sanctions the complete social participation of women²¹. During this time a new approach had been developed by the government regarding women's issues. A new institution regarding women's issues named 'Women's Bureau' had been established that was associated with office of the president²². The voices from the secular women's organisations started being raised; many women from secular to religious factions began to question the limitations of the state's gender ideology²³. It is quite interesting that initially there was an antagonism between secular and religious women, by the 1990s a form of unity had come about. After 1990, a new phenomenon began in the struggle for women's rights. Women's movement intensified through civil society activism including women's non-governmental organisations. The history of women's movement in Iran clearly demonstrates that women's rights activism has been an integral part of the struggle for democracy and independence²⁴.

Political participation of women can be analysed through their active involvement in various elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the first decade following the

¹⁹ Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (2012), "the Women's Movement in its Historical Context", in Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 25

²⁰ *ibid*, p 27

²¹ Burki, Khan Shireen (2014), "Regime consolidation and Female Status in a Fledgling Theocracy: Khomeini's Vilayat-e-Fiqh, 179-1989", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51 (2) 217

²² Shojaei, Nosrat Seyedeh, Ku Hasnita, Ku Samsu and Asayeseh, Hossein (2010), "Women in Politics a Case Study of Iran", *Journal of Politics and Law*, 3 (2): 262

²³ Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (2012), "the Women's Movement in its Historical Context", in Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 28

²⁴ *ibid*, p 31

revolution, Iran had witnessed; two referendums, two elections for assembly of experts, three *majles* (parliamentary) elections, few *majles* by-elections, and four presidential election²⁵. In all these occasions people were asked to cast their ballot more than eleven time. Before the elections, a comprehensive campaign was launched in order to encourage people to vote. Women's role in all these elections was significant. Women through their articles in various magazines and newspapers described the women's vote as a national, political and Islamic duty²⁶. But it is a fact that Islamic conservative cleric groups allowed women's voting rights, but their representation in Parliament and other government institutions were restricted by various means. As it has been mentioned earlier, Guardian Council often disqualified the secular and women candidates during the nomination process. It is a fact that women's representation has decreased following the revolution in the Parliament. In the first *majles* election, only 4 women were elected as members of parliament, till 1996, the number of women did not increase more than 9 out of 270. Women have never been elected as president; *rejal* (bill of retribution) is always interpreted in a way that a woman cannot serve as president.

As above observation is concerned, historically women always played a crucial role in the major political events in Iran, whether it was Tobacco Protest in late nineties, Constitutional Revolution in 1906 or it was the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Moreover, women were always termed as a political weapon by the political elite of the country. As far as women's formal political participation is concerned, despite being a significant political force, women remained marginalise in major government affairs and decision making bodies.

Women's Civil and Political Activities during Khatami's Period

Khatami's period can be termed as a milestone in the history of women's political participation. Modern civil society organisations and the expansion of political organisations including women's organisations began with election of moderate

²⁵ Paidar, parvin (1995), *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p 305

²⁶ *ibid*, p 305

president Mohammed Khatami²⁷. However, the reform activities can be traced back to the presidency of Hashemi Rفسانجانی. In fact, it was Khatami's government when women realised and exercised relatively greater freedom, opportunities and participation. Khatami came to power with promises; rule of law, civil society and improving women's condition²⁸. In this period, both secular and religious women's civil and political activities became considerably more vocal and visible. In 1997 Mohammed Khatami created a Centre for Women's Participation affiliated with the president office that was basically related to handling the women's issues and promoting their political participation²⁹. Under his presidency, the Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) expanded unprecedentedly, the social environment became more favourable to women, so that women enjoyed greater freedom in public sphere; holding meetings, publishing numerous writings, making films and facing less harassment for clothing choices³⁰. In this period, women themselves played a crucial role within the reform movement. Women's involvement in the politics demonstrated that gender had become an important force in shaping of politics in Iran³¹. As it is said that media is the forth pillar of the democracy, that facilitates the expression of diverse opinion within political system. In Iran women's voices became more vocal through the media and press. Khatami allowed greater freedom of expression to press that changed the face of media in Islamic Republic of Iran³². Khatami's government led the favourable environment to women's civil and political activities through their reform attempts; to promoting women's NGOs, and other political organisations, allowing critical women's magazines, periodicals, newspapers, promoting them in administrative jobs, allowing them to visible in the public places and participating in the public activities. Khatami had an altruistic vision to make women aware about

²⁷ Hoodfar, Hooma and Sadr, Shadi (2010), "Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran", *Third World Quarterly*, 31 (6): 893

²⁸ R. Ghomeshi (2011), "Changing Perspectives and Developments of Civil Society in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 14 December 2015 URL: <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream> p 111

²⁹ *ibid*, p 119

³⁰ Hoodfar, Hooma (1999), "The Women's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization" *WLUML, the Women's Movement Series*, (1): 8

³¹ Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (2012), "the Women's Movement in its Historical Context", in Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 29

³² Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 139

their legal rights and sponsoring legislations to improve women's economic, political, social and legal status³³.

Women's Role in Political Organisations

However, Khatami's government promoted a more open political environment, but women's political and organisational activities were not a new phenomenon in Iranian politics. Most considerable women's political organisation was Iranian Women's Party that was formed in 1942 and later transformed into National Council of Women in 1946. Following the revolution, religious women's organisations had been encouraged, but secular organisations including women's organisations were suppressed by the state. The Iranian constitution describes that the formation of parties, societies, political or professional associations as well as religious societies, is permitted provided that they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom and national unity, the criteria of Islam or the basis of Islamic Republic³⁴. The Association of Islamic Revolutionary Women, the oldest women's political organisation under Islamic Republic of Iran was founded by Azam Talaghani, an anti-Shah activist, Member of Parliament in the first *Majlish*³⁵. The organisation was involved in facilitating poor women materially and psychologically, but it mostly deals with the public discourse and debating women's issues.

The Most significant changes had taken place in the status of women in Islamic Republic of Iran since 1990s under Rafsanjani and more notably since 1997 under moderate president Mohammed Khatami³⁶. With the era of reconstruction that started with the presidency of Rafsanjani, secular women's organisations became more receptive. Secular women's organisations usually perform their electoral political activities with reformist camp because of their political compulsions. Rafsanjani's associates created the *Hezab-e Kargozaran* (Executives of the Construction party). Although there were no women's wing in the party, but number of women were

³³ Osanloo, Arzoo (2008), "Whence the Law: the Politics of Women's Rights, Regime Change, and the Vestiges of Reform in the Islamic Republic of Iran", *Radical History Review*, (101): 43

³⁴ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum Press, p 147

³⁵ Hoodfar, Hooma and Sadr, Shadi (2009), "Can Women act as Agents of Democratization of Theocracy in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 13 September 2014 URL: [www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/.../WebIran.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/.../WebIran.pdf), p 21

³⁶ R. Ghomeshi (2011), "Changing Perspectives and Developments of Civil Society in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 14 December 2015 URL: <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream> p 119

active in the party. Rafsanjani's daughter Fatmeh Hashemi, who was popularly elected one time Member of Parliament, was an active member of this party. She organised Muslim women's Olympics and published a women's daily newspaper *Zan*, in 1998³⁷.

As the period of reform lasted from 1997 to 2005, in which women's issue remained in forefront of the political activities in which women themselves played a crucial role through political organisations. Before Khatami, there were only 39 parties, political societies and associations were granted permission by the Ministry of Interior. Within Two and half year of Mohammed Khatami's presidency the number of these organisations considerably increased to 103 in 2000³⁸. The emergence of diverse political parties and groups is the reflection of the evolution of civil society and democratic momentum from below³⁹. There were various parties functioning during this time, but in very few had considerable representation of women. However, there were two significant parties which accompanied with women's wing within the party; the first was the Islamic Workers Party (*Anjoman-e-islami-e-kargran*), and the second was the Participation Party (*Hezb-e-Mosharekat*), which were formed after the election of President Khatami in 1997⁴⁰. Participation Party was unique in its form; in all of its decision making bodies women had 30 per cent quota, as well as for women's concern, the party had a women's branch and an office dedicated to researching women's issues⁴¹. Female political member from different political groups created a coalition to encourage female political participation, particularly in small towns and rural areas where the conservative parties had stronger support⁴². However, the more structural goal of the women's wing was to lobby with other parties to ensure women's 30 per cent quota at the parliamentary level.

³⁷ Hoodfar, Hooma and Sadr, Shadi (2009), "Can Women act as Agents of Democratization of Theocracy in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 13 September 2014 URL: [www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/.../Weblran.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/.../Weblran.pdf), p 21

³⁸ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, Newyork: I.B Touris, p 74

³⁹ *ibid*, p 74

⁴⁰ Hoodfar, Hooma and Sadr, Shadi (2009), "Can Women act as Agents of Democratization of Theocracy in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 13 September 2014 URL: [www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/.../Weblran.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/.../Weblran.pdf), p 17

⁴¹ *ibid*, p 17

⁴² Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Isalmic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum Press, p 147

Women's Movement

Women's role in the politics was not passive after the revolution in the Islamic Republic of Iran. They have been active and involved in the politics of resistance⁴³. From the beginning of the revolution, many visionary women leaders continued to be politically active for women's causes and played a crucial role to develop a women's movement; Azam Taleghani, Faizeh Hashemi, Marziyeh Dabbagh, Zahra Rahnavard, Shrin Ebadi, Mehrangiz Kar, and Maryam Berouzi. After a few month of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini announced women's were barred from becoming judge, women should wear the *hijab*, and the marriage age was reduced. Due to all these unprecedented events, women led the demonstration on the occasion of Women's Day, in which thousands of people demonstrated against the imposition of these codes⁴⁴. However, women's movement was divided between two factions; religious women and secular women following the revolution. In fact, religious women through indigenous movement had a significant impact on women's condition rather than secular women's movement. Religious women's movement had tried to reconstruct the gender and Islamic discourse. Moreover, in many cases, they challenged the clergy's monolithic power, and started a new trend in Islamic Feminism⁴⁵. Following the eight year war with Iraq in 1988, secular women began active again. However, most of the active and popular women came from the families of political elites. Hashemi Refsanjani's daughter was one of the most active women in that time. The significant achievement of the women of this time was passing of the bill *Ojrat-ol-mesal* (wages for housework) in 1991⁴⁶. Furthermore, in 1992 a new policy allowed women to serve as a legal consultant in many courts and in 2002 with the agitation of women, the marriage age for a girl was increase from 9 to 13 year⁴⁷. Women played a crucial role in women's movement including Fatemeh Hashemi during Rafsanjani's period. Furthermore, women were excluded from the sport facilities or participation in the Olympics. Women activists claimed that Islam does

⁴³ Sedghi, Hamideh (2007), *Women and Politics in Iran Veiling, Unveiling and Reveiling*, New York: Cambridge University press, p 246

⁴⁴ Hoodfarar, Hooma (1999), "The Women's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization", *WLUML, the Women's Movement Series*, (1): 24

⁴⁵ Ahmadi, Fereshteh (2006), "Islamic Feminism in Iran: Feminism in a New Islamic Context", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 22 (2): 34

⁴⁶ Hoodfar, Hooma (2008), "Against all Odds: the Building of a Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 17 August 2015 URL: www.awid.org, p 7

⁴⁷ Kurzman, Charles (2008), "A Feminist Generation in Iran", *Iranian Studies*, 41 (3): 300

not prohibit women's participation in sports. Finally, after a long agitation, the International Muslim Women's Games was launched as a parallel to the Olympic Games⁴⁸.

Under Khatami, reform policies had significant impact on the women's movement. Women's movement was fighting against the patriarchy in general and demanding reforms in family law in particular. Primary aim of women's movement was demanding equal rights for women and change in discriminatory laws⁴⁹. However, the leadership of women's movement was divided between secular women like Mehrangiz Kar and Shrin Ebadi and Islamic leader Fatemeh Hashemi and Shahla Sherkat (publisher of well known Magazine *Zenan*) among others, but both groups had a common dedication to the cause of women in Iran⁵⁰. Particularly during this time, preparation and celebration of women's movement became a significant occasion that brought all political and religious women together, that provided a space for dialogue and acted as a channel of communication between religious and secular women⁵¹. Younger women activist started to set up websites and blogs in order to promote legal reforms related to women's issues⁵². In 1998 there were several round table conferences held in which both secular and religious, male and female intellectual participated on the issues that women were facing. In the discussion, some intellectual argued that there was no serious gender discrimination in law; it was the conservative group that misinterpret the laws that discriminate women⁵³. Shrin Ebadi, a lawyer and long time democracy, women's and children's rights activist awarded the Noble Prize for peace in 2003. This event influenced the women's movement throughout the country. It renewed the energy within the women's movement as a whole, but especially to the secular women's movement. Furthermore secular

⁴⁸ Hoodfar, Hooma (2008), "Against all Odds: the Building of a Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 17 August 2015 URL: www.awid.org, p 7

⁴⁹ Nabavi, Negin (2012), "From "Reform" to "Right": Mapping a Changing Discourse in Iran, 1997-2009", in Nabavi, Negin (eds.) *Iran from Theocracy to Green Movement*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan press, p 48

⁵⁰ R. Ghomeshi (2011), "Changing Perspectives and Developments of Civil Society in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 5 May 2015 URL: <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream> p 81

⁵¹ Hoodfar, Hooma (2008), "Against all Odds: the Building of a Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 17 August 2015 URL: www.awid.org, p 8

⁵² Hoodfar, Hooma and Sadr, Shadi (2009), "Can Women act as Agents of Democratization of Theocracy in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 13 September 2014 URL: [www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/.../Weblran.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/.../Weblran.pdf), p 25

⁵³ Mir-Hosseini, Ziba (2011), "Religious Modernist and the "Women Question", in Ali M, Ansari (eds.) *Politics of Modern Iran*, New York: Routledge Press, p 187

women's movement with collaboration of other organisations organised a larger oppositional protest in 2005, demanding reform in legal discrimination against women and revision of the constitution⁵⁴. Due to the lack of advancement in legal reform (particularly reform of the family law), it frustrated and disappointed the women activists. Moreover, many religious women activists also joined the camp those who had been demanding change from a secular and human right framework. In 2004 number of joint meetings between various women's organisations had taken place to discuss the agenda of women's movement. Constitution and legal reforms were the most pressing issues of these meetings⁵⁵.

Role of Women in Media

One of the most significant political developments in Khatami's time was open and less controlled press and media. Women's voices found a relatively open platform to express their views through their writings and other activities. In Khatami's time several restrictions on Press and media had been removed by the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance. Before long, numbers of news paper were closed by the government, their editorial staff given licence by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance⁵⁶. With encouragement of Mohajirani, Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance and his deputy Ahmad Borgani, the First Assembly Guild for Writer and Journalist of the press was established in December 1997⁵⁷. Despite the several restrictions in political sphere, women continue using media to publicise their efforts, draw support, and educate the people. A large group of women writers, novelists, journalists, publishers, and movie directors flourished during this time. Their collective creative emphasis on women's legal and social problems and the portrayal of women as active and courageous people with strong personalities brought more social awareness to gender issues⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ Hoodfar, Hooma and Sadr, Shadi (2009), "Can Women act as Agents of Democratization of Theocracy in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 13 September 2014 URL: [www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/.../WebIran.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/.../WebIran.pdf), p 25

⁵⁵ Hoodfar, Hooma (2008), "Against all Odds: the Building of a Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 17 August 2015 URL: www.awid.org p 8

⁵⁶ Arjomand, Said Amir (2002), "The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (10): 726

⁵⁷ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, Newyork: I.B Touris, p 65

⁵⁸ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 151

After revolution there were many women organisations that came into existence, each published their own literature and campaigned for women's right, such as Etehade Melli Zanan (National Union of Women) published a newspaper, *Barabari*, and a magazine, *Zanan Dar Mobareze* (Women in Struggle). Anjomane Rahaie Zan (the Emancipation of Somen Society) was a organisation influenced by the communist ideology, produced a newspaper, *Rahaie Zan*, and Jamiat Zenane Mobarez (Militant Women Society) produced a newspaper called *Zenan Mobarez*⁵⁹. Alongside these organisations, there were many other women's paper and magazines published by different women's groups. However, in 1980 Iraq-Iran war intensified the conservative Islamism, therefore the secular and left organisations led newspapers and magazines were no longer tolerated and were persecuted, but a number of religious women's rights activist continued their activism⁶⁰. Azam Taleghani published the women's journal *Payam Hajar*, and some state sponsored publication continued. It was after Iraq-Iran War different publications emerged and represented diverse views on women's issues. There were several state institutions which published women's publications, discussing gender issues within Islamic framework, for instance *Payame Zan* (Women's Message) published by Islamic Propaganda Office, *Jelveh Honar* (Art Presentation) in association with Alzahra University, *Neda*, managed the Khomeini's daughter Zahra Mostafavi, and the Journal *Rayhaneh* which discussed women's issues and gender equality, managed by the Shahla Habbibi who was presidential advisor for women's affair in Rafsanjani's cabinet⁶¹. After 1990 there were some independent publications which came into existence. One of the most popular and influential magazines was *Zanan*, founded by Shahla Sherkat, equally significant was another one, *Farzaneh*, managed by Massoumeh Ebtekar and edited by Mahboubeh Abbasgholizade⁶². *Zanan* is the most significant magazine which had played a crucial role in creating a platform for women's rights activism. Women's writings became more vocal and their range of discussion expanded gradually. After 1997, voices from both religious and secular groups being tolerated and different point of views were allowed on women issues. Particularly during Khatami's period, some

⁵⁹ Farhadpour, Lily (2006), "Women, Gender Roles, Media and Journalism", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 95

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p 95

⁶¹ *ibid*, p 96

⁶² *ibid*, p 96

cultural secular magazines were published such as *Adineh*, *Donyayeh Sokhan*, and *Gardun*⁶³. Moreover, a progressive young writer of this time has written very significant writings on women issues. Nooshin Ahmadi Khorasani who edited second sex (*Jens-e Dovvom*), Women's Chapter: A Collection of Feminist Writings (*Fasl-e Zanan: Majmu'eh-e Ara'va Didgahhay-e Fiminisity*), and Iranian Women Calendar (*Salnamaya-e Zenan*), Mahashid Fahsa⁶⁴. However, the aim of these writers was to occupy the public space through written expression, and to give greater visibility to women, their problems, and their struggles. The reform movement had a significant impact on women's participation in Journalism and women's writings. Women got a platform to express their views through media and communication channels. The Publications related to women increased considerably after Khatami came to power, equally the women's participation in media also increased. As far as women's ratio in journalism is concerned, it was only 10 per cent in 1997 but considerably increased to 22 per cent in 2006⁶⁵. Before the reform period, presence of women in the journalism was zero but later during the reform period women participation has been significant. In reformist news paper had 40 per cent participation of women as journalist during this time⁶⁶.

Women's role in NGOs

One of the most significant features of Khatami's time was the establishment of several NGOs by women volunteer in many different fields. These NGOs played a significant role in promoting women's confidence and creating opportunities to seek new employment and enter into new areas of social activities. Moreover NGOs provided a platform of social interaction and debates among different groups within society, including various women's communities and associations, had a great impact on the views of many statesmen and authorities⁶⁷. However Khatami government paid a considerable attention to the development of a vibrant civil society in which NGOs

⁶³ Kar, Mehrangiz (2008), "Focusing on Women in the internal politics of Iran", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 15 (1): 83

⁶⁴ Sedghi, Hamideh (2007), *Women and Politics in Iran Veiling, Unveiling and Reveiling*, New York: Cambridge University press, p 23

⁶⁵ Farhadpour, Lily (2006), "Women, Gender Roles, Media and Journalism", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 100

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p 100

⁶⁷ Aryan, Khadijeh (2012), "The Boom in Women's Education", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 39

had played a significant role. The expansion and development of voluntary associations and non-governmental associations are an integral part of a democratic country⁶⁸. Centre for participation of Women, established by Khatami basically focused on, education, cultural affairs, sports affairs, economic participation, women's legal affairs, as well as expansion of women's civil society organisations⁶⁹. Moreover, the State Welfare organisation was also handling the NGOs; it recruited NGOs and private sector-sector organisations as contractors to deliver the social services to the people. However, pro-NGO policies of the government facilitated the drastic increment of NGOs. With these growing NGOs, some of youth-initiated NGOs primarily dealing with human rights issue, environmental issues had been established⁷⁰. The Third Plan of Economic Development in 2002 allocated considerable budgets for the empowerment of NGOs as civil society organisations⁷¹.

The number of women's NGOs grew considerably, although most of them primarily have been dealing with health, charity, education, environment, development. In 2002, there were 137 NGOs primarily dealing with women's issues⁷². NGOs played a crucial role among the civil society organisation. In pre-Khatami Iran, the number of women's NGOs was very few, but during Khatami's period the number of NGOs increased drastically. An estimate of the number of government affiliated women's NGOs were 57 in 1995, while in 2004 NGOs numbered over 480⁷³. However, in later period of his presidency, the pace of increment continued, and it became a significant tool for women to ameliorate their condition in the society.

As far as modern definition of political participation is concerned, it includes informal political activities such as protest demonstrations, social movement, and increasingly voluntary activities. Participation in informal political activities has increased considerably during Khatami's period. As historically women had played a crucial

⁶⁸ Gheytauchi, Elham (2001), "Civil Society in Iran, Politics of Motherhood and the Public Sphere", *International Sociology*, 16 (4): 559

⁶⁹ Pournik Milad (2013), "Civil Society Organisations and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Iran" *Institute for global and international studies*, The George Washington University, p 9

⁷⁰ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 127

⁷¹ Koolae, Elaheh (2012) "Women in the Parliament", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press: p 140

⁷² Pournik Milad (2013), "Civil Society Organisations and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Iran" *Institute for global and international studies*, The George Washington University, p 11

⁷³ Koolae, Elaheh (2012) "Women in the Parliament", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 140

role in major political upheaval. Moreover during reform era, women played a significant role in the politics of Islamic Republic of Iran. They were visible in campaigning and voted for Khatami as president. In this time women were involved in various organisations fighting for women conditions, and their movement also intensified. As civil society became more vibrant due to the government initiatives, women got the platform to ameliorate their condition. In this regard, NGOs proved very significant to provide women a platform through which they influenced their role in the society.

Women's Participation in Formal Political Institutions in Khatami's Time

However, women were granted voting right in 1963 and during that time Ayatollah Khomeini strongly objected the political enfranchisement of women. The role of women in the Iranian Revolution demonstrated the women's political potential. Following the revolution, women continued with this right. Female participation in politics consolidated Islamic Republic of Iran and legitimised the state's policies⁷⁴. Although women were entitled with right to vote and right to be electing, women's formal presence in politics has declined following the revolution. In fact, women were encouraged and asked for vote in several elections in the first decade of the Islamic Republic, but systematically their presence in parliament and constitutional process was kept minimal⁷⁵. There was not even a single woman member in the first post-revolutionary government, the provisional governments⁷⁶. Constitutionally there is no restriction on women to occupy the higher position in the government but the patriarchal interpretation of the laws often prevented women to occupy the higher position in the government⁷⁷.

⁷⁴ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 124

⁷⁵ Hoodfar, Hooma and Sadr, Shadi (2009), "Can Women act as Agents of Democratization of Theocracy in Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 13 September 2014 URL: [www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/.../Weblran.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/.../Weblran.pdf), p 14

⁷⁶ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 124

⁷⁷ Sadat, Heshmat (2011), "Participation of Women in Iran's Polity", *Gemc Journal*, 4 (3): 27

Women's Representation in Parliament

Historically Parliament is one of the prominent democratic and elected institutions that played a significant role in Iranian politics. Although women's representation in Parliament often remained marginalised from the beginning but their numbers sharply declined after the revolution. In the first decade of the Islamic Republic of Iran there were only four women deputies out of two hundred sixty eight in the Parliament, they occupied only 1.5 per cent of the total seats⁷⁸. In fact after the end of the eight year war, the political environment of the country considerably changed, and it became more women friendly, and it provided a better ground to improve women's condition. Rafsanjani became the new president of Islamic Republic of Iran. This period led the road to reform where women's movement influenced the electoral politics. Moreover women's mass participation in different field of politics, for instance in electoral campaign and international conferences were encouraged by the government⁷⁹. It was after 1990 that women's participation in Iran's politics focused more on national elections. In 1992 parliamentary election, women's number increased to 9 which were 3.3 per cent of the total seats⁸⁰. During the reform era women's representation peaked in the parliament, and it was during this period that gender equality became a considerable political issue. Moreover, in 1996, fifth parliamentary election, 320 women members were nominated as candidates and finally 14 were elected as Member of Parliament⁸¹. In terms of voting behaviour, women feel more responsible to determining their fate through electoral politics. It was the women's vote that led the vital victory of reformist president Mohammed Khatami in 1997. Women's participation was unexpected in this election, more than 78 per cent women voted for Khatami⁸². In 2000 parliamentary election 513 women candidates had been nominated for contesting election, among them 13 won the election. Women have been active in voting parliament and there were larger electorate of women than of men in seventh parliamentary election. There were 65 per cent women voted and only

⁷⁸ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 125

⁷⁹ Koolae, Elaheh (2012) "Women in the Parliament", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 140

⁸⁰ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 125

⁸¹ *ibid*, p 125

⁸² Hoodfar, Hooma (2009), "Against All Odds: The Building of a Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran", [Online: web] Accessed 28 August 2015 URL: www.palgrave-journals.com p 8

62 per cent male were among the electorate in 2004 parliamentary election⁸³. In this election the conservatives came in majority with 54 per cent of the seats, reformist were in minority. Council of Guardian deliberately disqualified many reformist candidates, even some of them were former parliamentarians.⁸⁴ As a result, many pro-reformist leader boycotted the election. However in this parliament 13 women were elected but most of them belong to the conservative faction of the political group except reformist MP, Mehrangiz Morovati⁸⁵. In fact women expected a lot from the reform movement and they actively involved in this entire process. Enthusiastically, women participated in electoral campaign as well as in parliamentary and presidential elections; they presented themselves not only as voter but also as candidates.

Table 4 (a) Number and Percentage of Women Elected to the Iranian Parliament (1979-2004)

Year	Number of female Parliamentarians	As percentage of All Parliamentarians
1979-1983	4	1.5%
1983-1987	4	1.5%
1987-1992	4	1.5%
1992-1996	9	3.3%
1996-2000	14	3.7%
2000-2004	13	4.4%
2004-2008	13	4.1%

Source: Vakil, Sanam (2012),⁸⁶ Hooma Hoodfar and Shadi Sadr (2010)⁸⁷

⁸³ Sadat, Heshmat (2011), "Participation of Women in Iran's Polity", *Gemc Journal*, 4 (3): 29

⁸⁴ Hoodfar, Hooma (2010), "Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran", *Third World Quarterly*, 31 (6): 893

⁸⁵ Koolae, Elaheh (2012) "Women in the Parliament", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 144

⁸⁶ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 125

Table 4 (b) Number and Percentage of Female Candidates for Parliamentary Elections (1983-2004)

Table 4 (b)

Year	Number of female candidates	Total candidates	Total % of women candidates
1979-1983	66	3694	1.79%
1983-1987	28	1592	1.76%
1987-1992	37	1999	1.85%
1992-1996	81	3223	2.51%
1996-2000	320	5366	5.96%
2000-2004	513	6853	7.49%
2004-2008	829	4679	5.64%

Source: Sanam Vakil (2012)⁸⁸

Although, women continue to be visible in the parliament but their numbers are very less. Since the enfranchisement in 1963, their representation marginally increased. Moreover, after Khatami's period, women's representation had officially declined. Women were highly active in the Iranian politics having with women's movement but the patriarchal nature of the state kept them away from formal political institutions. However the laws are not only the sole cause to keep women marginalized in political institutions but the perception of the people is also equally responsible⁸⁹. As the number of female candidates increased for the parliamentary elections but finally very few women could win the election.

However, due to the reformist movement women parliamentarians influenced the legislature even their number was very less. Women members have played a primary role in the direction and promotion of gender legislation. Despite their diverse socio-economic background, and political and religious views, they worked together for

⁸⁷ Hoodfar, Hooma (2010), "Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran", *Third World Quarterly*, 31 (6): 894

⁸⁸ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 125

⁸⁹ Koolae, Elaheh (2012) "Women in the Parliament", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 145

strengthening women's condition. However, female legislation always had been passed with the intuitive of women member of parliament⁹⁰. In fifth parliament 21 bills which were directly related to the status of women had been passed by the parliament, and in sixth parliament 17 bills had been passed.⁹¹

Role of Women in the Executive Bodies

There were many obstacles for women to occupy a higher position in the government. The state institutions acted, and the laws were interpreted in a way that always barred women to serve at a higher post of the government. Parliamentary election of 2000 added a great momentum to the reform movement. However, in this election reformists were in majority, and it led to the proper coordination between parliament and president. It resulted as a threat to the cleric opposition group. In response, the conservative clerical group through the institutional means blocked most of the reformist efforts by the Khatami government⁹². After the end of the first term of Khatami, it was clear that the reform movement had limited legal and institutional power to influence political changes and conservative had power to use state institution to resist the reformist efforts.

It is a fact that women's participation in the executive bodies remained marginalised. However, not even a single woman had been directly appointed as a cabinet minister in post-revolutionary Iran until 2009.⁹³ However, there had been some women who have served in the cabinet but they were indirectly elected as advisors and directors. It was in Rafsanjani's presidency, the Office of the Presidential Advisor for Women's Affairs had been established, and first time a woman, Shahla Habibi, who was a women's right activist was appointed as head of this institution as well as president's advisor on women's issues.⁹⁴ This body tried to improve the women's political potential and to empower women in the states policies. The Khatami's administration

⁹⁰ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 126

⁹¹ Sadat, Heshmat (2011), "Participation of Women in Iran's Polity", *Gemc Journal*, 4 (3): 28

⁹² Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 143

⁹³ Kadivar, Jamileh (2012), "Women and Executive Power", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 125

⁹⁴ *ibid*, p 125

replaced this institution by the Centre for Women's Participation. Zahra Shojaee was appointed as head of the Centre for Women's Participation, which was part of president's office.⁹⁵ Moreover, Khatami appointed Massoumeh Ebtekar, as a vice president and head of the Department of Environment. She was the first woman who was appointed as vice president in Islamic Republic of Iran⁹⁶. These two women effectively participated in Khatami's cabinet. Along with these two women, there were some other women advisers in his administration. In 2000, he appointed Jamileh Kadivar who was wife of Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Ayatollah Mohajirani was appointed as advisor of press and media affairs, Zahra Rahnavard was appointed as chancellor of the women's Al Zahra University, Sohayla Jelodarzade was the advisor on labour affairs and Zohreh Sadeghi, wife of President Mohammed Khatami, was appointed to oversee a special committee to address the need of rural women⁹⁷. In addition many women occupied some top-level managerial posts in Khatami's administration; it included governors, director generals both in ministries and at the provincial level, district mayors, judges and provincial deputy governor generals⁹⁸. Under the Khatami government two women were elected as deputy city governor. First woman Zahra Nejadbahram, was appointed as the deputy governor of Tehran, the capital city, and second Parvaneh Mafi was the deputy governor of Shemiranat County in Tehran province⁹⁹. Moreover, in 2004, 630 women were appointed at decision making position in the Provincial Planning and Development Council¹⁰⁰. However, relatively women effectively involved in Khatami's administration and to some extent they influenced the government regarding their social economic and political conditions.

Women were expecting a considerable participation in cabinet from Khatami's Government, but it did not become possible because of strong opposition from conservative cleric groups. In 2001 presidential election Khatami was elected for second term as president. In this time many women activists were called for women to

⁹⁵ Paidar, Parvin, (2001), "Gender of Democracy the Encounter between Feminism and Reformism in Contemporary Iran", *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development*, p 11

⁹⁶ Kadivar, Jamileh (2012), "Women and Executive Power", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 124

⁹⁷ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 142

⁹⁸ Sadat, Heshmat (2011), "Participation of Women in Iran's Polity", *Gemc Journal*, 4 (3): 30

⁹⁹ Kadivar, Jamileh (2012), "Women and Executive Power", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 132

¹⁰⁰ Sadat, Heshmat (2011), "Participation of Women in Iran's Polity", *Gemc Journal*, 4 (3): 30

be directly appointed as cabinet ministers and to have more women serving in major administrative positions. Around one hundred and sixty-three reformist parliamentarians of sixth parliament signed an official letter and send to the president regarding the women's representation in cabinet¹⁰¹. However, no woman was selected in the list of cabinet minister that submitted to the parliament. It happened because Khatami confronted with strong opposition of many grand Ayatollahs; therefore he withdrew from nominating women's in his cabinet.¹⁰² Finally Khatami announced that he did not want to take risk, and to be blamed as un-Islamic by the conservative cleric group. It was the patriarchal perception of the ruling elite that did not allow women in the government. Although, some women had got the opportunities to serve in the cabinet, most of them belonged to the families of political elites and came from upper class background. Still conservative cleric group had prejudice that women were not well suited to occupy the decision making position in the government. Jamileh Kadivar addressed two major interrelated reasons as obstacles to women's participation in the executive and other significant political institutions. Firstly, due to the consensus among the Islamic jurist that governance must be assigned only to men. Secondly, the general perception that women are emotional, not rational and therefore they are not fit for positions of leadership and governance¹⁰³.

Women in the Village and Municipal Councils

The most important achievement of Khatami's government was to conduct the elections of local and municipal council. As it has been mentioned the law regarding council election was passed much earlier but elections had never taken place. Khatami believed that political development required political participation; therefore he recognised that channel for political participation was the election of local and municipal council. The election for local and municipal council took place in February 1999, as Khatami promised¹⁰⁴. Moreover, for reformist political participation became a significant tool to mobilize people, the coalition that was

¹⁰¹ Kadivar, Jamileh (2012), "Women and Executive Power", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, 126

¹⁰² *ibid*, p 126

¹⁰³ *ibid*, p 132

¹⁰⁴ Arjomand, Said Amir (2002), "The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (10): 726

formed in parliamentary election in 2000 termed as Participation Front¹⁰⁵. Women's participation was considerable in local and municipal councils. As first local and municipal election was held in 1999, in which 7,276 women were approved by the Council of Guardians to run for 236,138 positions throughout the country, among them 1,375 got elected¹⁰⁶. Moreover, in 2002, city council elections 5,867 women were approved as candidates, finally 2,336 were elected as city councillors¹⁰⁷. In 2006 city council election 7,106 were nominated among them only 1,491 got elected as councillors¹⁰⁸. The women's representation in city council drastically increased in 2000, which was the time of the culmination of the reform movement. The percentage of female members in Islamic Municipal and village council was recorded 0.84 per cent in 2000 and 1.51 per cent in 2004¹⁰⁹.

Despite the deeply rooted patriarchal attitude in the families, state and society, women's participation could be made acceptable to society. In fact women's representation in formal political institutions was very less. The rate of women's political participation in parliament was about 4 per cent and in local rural and city councils it was 1.5 per cent¹¹⁰. In addition women were only 2.1 per cent in high managerial positions. However, there were numerous problems for women to participate in formal political institutions. Despite unelected Institutions led by conservative cleric groups, women faced financial problems, therefore they could not be able to bear the administrative cost of elections. Only the employed women are able to access the necessary funds to participate in elections as candidates and pay for their administrative costs¹¹¹.

Women and other Government Institutions

The post of president is the second most powerful political institution after the Supreme leader in Islamic Republic of Iran. However, there is no constitutional

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, p 726

¹⁰⁶ Tazmini, Ghoncheh (2010), *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, London, Newyork: I.B Touris, p 72

¹⁰⁷ Zahra, Nejadbahram (2012), "Women and Employment", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, 86

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, p 86

¹⁰⁹ Ali, Khaz Ansia (2010), "Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution", *Conflicts Forum*, Beirut, London, p 16

¹¹⁰ Zahra, Nejadbahram (2012), "Women and Employment", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 87

¹¹¹ *ibid*, p 87

gender barrier in the constitution for women to be elected as president of the nation. But, women were often being disqualified for contesting elections because of the patriarchal interpretation of the laws. Article 115 of the constitution, the president of the Islamic Republic is identified as being *rejal* or *rajol* (statesman) as well as fulfilling other qualifications as constitutional required¹¹². The term *Rejal* (statesman) is interpreted in a way that president only could be a Male. However, since the mid-1990 it came under the critical debate that there is any formal obstacles in the constitution, to women becoming president or not. Many women activists challenge this conservative patriarchal interpretation of the term *rejal*. This became a major debate whether the term ‘man’ refers only to men or to human kind¹¹³.

Many women activists stood for reinterpretation of the term *rejal*, Azam Taleghani was one of them who sought to expose the contradiction in the constitution¹¹⁴. Her intention was to clarify the term *rejal* which is ambiguously defined in the constitution therefore; she nominated herself for presidential election in 1997¹¹⁵. Moreover, later in 2001, 2005 and 2009 presidential elections she stood as a candidate to demonstrate a form of protest. This action influenced other women activists also, therefore women started to nominate themselves in the presidential election. In 2001 presidential election, 47 women nominated themselves as candidates, women’s number increased to 100 in 2005 presidential election, but it fell down to 42 in 2009 presidential election¹¹⁶. The Council of Guardian disqualified all women candidates in every election, but did not state that they rejected these candidates because they were women. On the name of required qualification, women were systematically disqualified to be nominated for election of president¹¹⁷. However, still some women activists are fighting for reinterpretation of this law, and have hope in future they will be able to be elected as president. As far as constitutional barrier is concerned, there

¹¹² Kadivar, Jamileh (2012), “Women Working as Judges and Making Judicial Decision”, in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 108

¹¹³ Ibid, p 122

¹¹⁴ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 124

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p 124

¹¹⁶ Tohidi, Nayereh (2010), “Iran”, in Kelly, Sanja and Breslin, Julia (eds.) *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa Progress Amid Resistance*, New York: Freedom House, Rowman and Littlefield, p 24

¹¹⁷ Kadivar, Jamileh (2012), “Women and Executive Power”, in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 124

are no clear gender restrictions to occupy the higher position in the government for women; it is the interpretation and the patriarchal attitude of the political elite and society that prevent women to be elected in the major political institutions.

However, women have never been appointed at most powerful top level political institutions such as in the Council of Guardians, in Expediency Council, and in Assembly of expert. Reform movement led the confidence and political awareness among the women, therefore women began to challenge the male domination over the political institutions. Inspired by the reformist movement of this time, 7 women nominated themselves for the election of Assembly of Expert in 1998¹¹⁸. All the women candidate were rejected based upon their lack of religious and other qualifications. The council of Guardian restricted women entry into these two (Presidency and Assembly of Expert) prominent political institutions. However a large group of prominent Ayatollahs objected the women's participation even at lower level of the politics, but at the same time some Ayatollahs such as Ayatollah Sanei'i and Ayatollah Bojnourdi have supported female elections to all positions even including that of the Supreme Leader¹¹⁹.

As far as women's participation in the Judiciary is concerned, following the revolution women were barred from serving as judges. Women were forbidden to work as judges, the employment of women judges was stopped and the position of working women in the judiciary changed¹²⁰. Although Shrin Ebadi was appointed as first female judge of a district court before revolution was demoted from her position after revolution¹²¹. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran significantly change women's issues in many ways. Among them, one of the changes regarding the eligibility of those who were working as judges therefore mostly women judges was badly affected¹²². However, the judges' employment law was first ratified

¹¹⁸ Vakil, Sanam (2011), *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum press, p 143

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, p 124

¹²⁰ Kadivar, Jamileh (2012), "Women Working as Judges and Making Judicial Decision", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 108

¹²¹ Tohidi, Nayereh (2010), "Iran", in Kelly, Sanja and Breslin, Julia (eds.) *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa Progress Amid Resistance*, New York: Freedom House, Rowman and Littlefield, p 24

¹²² Kadivar, Jamileh (2012), "Women Working as Judges and Making Judicial Decision", in Povey, Tara and Rostami-Povey, Elaheh (eds.) *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, England: Ashgate press, p 108

in 1934 during Pahlavi regime and there was no mention of the gender of the judges¹²³. No woman was appointed as a judge until 1970, when for the first time they worked as judges, and they worked in this posts until the revolution in 1979¹²⁴. Furthermore, even in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran did not specify the gender of judges and other who hold any important post in the judiciary such as the head of the judiciary, attorney general and head of the Supreme Court¹²⁵. According to article 163 of the constitution, the characteristics of the judges would be decided by the law and according to *faqih*. It was in 1982 the Law Governing the Appointment of judges was ratified and it is declared for being eligible to work as a judge is to be a man, and in 1983 law for the employment of judges explicitly include stated that only men could serve as judges¹²⁶.

However in 1985 due to the women's rights activists, women were granted to serve in some specific posts in judiciary. Furthermore, in 1996, law was further reformed and it stated that women, who possess the eligibility to work as judge, can work as advisors in other legal institutions such as the Supreme Administrative Court and investigative judges at the office of legal studies and the codification of law in ministry of justice¹²⁷. In the same year Ministry of justice appointed 200 female judicial counsellors in order to deal women's issues effectively¹²⁸. In addition, in 2003 there were some reform that took place in which women were allowed to hold the rank of judge and the right to serve as legal counsellors, but still they were not granted the right to make legal judgement or to make the law and issue warrant and sign the final verdict¹²⁹. In fact, there were some legal reforms that have taken place in the judiciary regarding women's role in the judiciary but still women have not able to occupy a position that a man have. Their presence and participation in the court limited even to that of advisory position.

As far as issue of women's political participation is concerned, it largely depends upon the state's behaviour and attitude of the society. The government structure of the

¹²³ *ibid*, p 108

¹²⁴ *ibid*, p 108

¹²⁵ *ibid*, p 108

¹²⁶ *ibid*, p 109

¹²⁷ *ibid*, p 109

¹²⁸ Sadat, Heshmat (2011), "Participation of Women in Iran's Polity", *Gemc Journal*, 4 (3): 35

¹²⁹ Tohidi, Nayereh (2010), "Iran", in Kelly, Sanja and Breslin, Julia (eds.) *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa Progress Amid Resistance*, New York: Freedom House, Rowman and Littlefield, p 23

Iran is Islamic Republic, having with a conglomeration of theocratic and democratic institutions. Unelected theocratic institutions have a strong control over these elected democratic institutions therefore the major democratic changes become difficult to materialise. In fact, the institutions such as Guardian Council, Expediency Council, Assembly of expert and others were dominated by the conservative cleric groups. During the reform movement several reform efforts were prevented by the conservative cleric groups by using the power of these institutions. Despite having altruistic vision of gender equality, Khatami failed to place women equal to men because of the patriarchal nature of the society and the state.

Women's Movement is indispensable to the process of democratization and reform movement in Islamic Republic of Iran in general and Khatami's period in particular. Women were visible since a long time in Iranian politics, but their representation in formal political institutions and decision making bodies remained marginalised. However, women's informal political activities can be traced back to the early twentieth century. The gender issue remained a significant tool in the Iranian politics; gender had been used in politics of modernisation by Pahlavi government, and in response it had been used in Iranian Revolution as well. However, following the revolution, women were barred from several occupations and responsibilities by the state, therefore their role in formal public institutions had declined. Women through indigenous movement had ameliorated their condition in the society. Women were highly active in informal political activities of the country. It was during Khatami led government, when several reform policies were initiated and implemented by the government. Women's participation increased in the several political organisations, and had been formed new organisations where women are in considerable number. Although, the women's movement was divided between religious group and secular group, this time both the factions were to some extent fighting together for women's rights. In fact women's role in public sphere including political sphere drastically changed. Despite women possess similar eligibility a man, they were not able to represent themselves in the higher decision making bodies in the government. However, some women had been elected in parliament, appointed in the cabinet as minister, and served as governor general, advisors, and counsellors but their number was very few. Major barrier for women's political participation in the formal political institutions is the patriarchal nature of the society and domination of the conservative

cleric group on the powerful political institutions. Often reformist and women candidates faced problems during nomination for contesting elections. Council of Guardians through vetting process always disqualified women candidate to contest presidential election. On top of all these obstacles women were financial dependent upon their families therefore only women who had any occupation and resources were able to nominate themselves as candidates.

CHAPTER: V

Conclusion

After the Iranian revolution in 1979, women's legal status and political participation had declined sharply. It was the socio-economic, political and demographic changes, which contributed to strengthening women's status significantly. The growing women's education, changing demography, economy, and increasing urbanisation led to the major shift in behavioural pattern and attitude of the society, and created a favourable ground for women in the country¹. These factors led to the unintended developments that contradict with conventional laws and institutions which attempt to reinforce the patriarchal power relations in women's public and private sphere. To be part of Iranian revolution women realised the increased sense of power and self confidence, political consciousness and the greater respect. Moreover, young Iranian women became more aware of their own capabilities. Participation of women in the revolution and subsequent social and economic changes probably affected women's lives more than legal reforms. Initially the basic purpose of the nation builders was to reconstruct the Islamic society and spread the religious values through education. The expansion of education had many unintended consequences and has presented the ideologues of the regime with serious dilemma concerning women in the public sphere and labour market. Paradoxically the Islamization of Iran has been having a positive influence on women's status and position in the public sphere. There has been contradiction between modernisation process initially led by the regimes, demographic shift, increasing economic development, rapid urbanisation and growing women's education on one hand, and traditional behaviour of the government and religious laws on the other hand.

New political system came into existence following the revolution which is basically based on the Islamic laws (especially *shari'a*), comprising with democratic institutions, called Islamic Republic. Women are subjected to the interpretation of the

¹ Kian Azadeh (2012), "Gendered Citizenship and the Women's Movement in Iran", (ed.) Parsi, Rouzbeh (2012), *Iran: A Revolutionary Republic in Transition*, European Union, Institute for Security studies, p 23

laws and patriarchal nature of the society and state. Following the Revolution different ideological women's organisations were banned especially secular and communist, but religious women's organisations flourished and were allowed to address the women's issues within Islamic criteria. Women's movement in Iran has been divided between the secular and religious line, gradually the growing overlap and unity between secular and religious women has produced reform in family law, employment and education as well as constitutional law which have favoured women. Women's involvement in the politics demonstrated that gender had become an important force in shaping of politics in Iran. The history of women's movement in Iran clearly demonstrates that women's rights activism has been an integral part of the struggle for democracy and independence.

As it is noted that war situation causes serious economic crises that led to the reconstruction policies with economic prospects for women. During this time women's participation not only increased in economic activities but also in political and social sphere. Moreover, secular and communist women's organisations were allowed to function and were tolerated by the government. By 1990, a new phenomenon had developed in the struggle for women's rights. Khatami came to power with promises; to establish rule of law, a modern civil society, Islamic democracy, and to improve women's condition in society. However, he had altruistic vision to improve the women's status in the society. Women's issues had been taken into serious consideration during reform period. Moreover, during this time, the aim of reformist government was to increase women's potential and place them in the main stream of the society. His period witnessed women's access to education, employment, and opportunities were created in the public sphere for them to participate and contribute in socio-economic and political life of the country. Women's education had been taken into serious account during the reform period, government had expanded the women's area of education under the third 'Economic, Social, Cultural Development Programme'. They were allowed into the courses such as engineering, medical, mining, which were earlier barred for women. Higher education facilitates gender equality, and women with higher qualifications are able to have greater and more effective participation in the society. In case of Iran, off course, the most prominent factor in contributing women's increasing participation in the realm of public sphere is education itself. Whatever the achievement that has been

gained by the women, education played a significant role. Education not only changed women's personality but it also led the amorphous positive consequences.

Booming women's education and changing socio-economic and political nature of the state led to higher representation of women in labour force participation. Education and labour force participation are generally considered as the main pillars of determining women's status in the society. Women's role in economic activities increased sharply after 1997. Women's participation in labour force, education, has increased during Khatami's government considerably due to his reform movement. Women as a labour force considerably increased in state enterprises as well as in industries. Furthermore, during this time women's cooperative companies have been established in large numbers. Generally these companies were considered as public machinery which engaged the public in socio economic activities. These companies were headed by more than 50 per cent women, and decisions making body, and higher posts were hold by them.

Although, women's representation in education had increased drastically, their involvement in the economic activities did not meet with their qualifications. In fact, in this period a large chunk of women had access to education, employment, and several initiatives had been taken by the government to provide opportunities to women. Despite of women's higher qualification, they were not in a position to occupy the higher and managerial posts. However, women's participation has increased in labour force and in other economic activities, but their representation at managerial level increased only 2.2 per cent.

Role of women in political activities can be traced back to late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, women were visible in the major political upheavals as a political force from 1890, but they have never been allowed in decision making process and in main stream of the society. Khatami's period can be termed as a milestone in the history of women's political participation. Modern civil society organisations and the expansion of political organisations, including women's organisations began with election of moderate president Mohammed Khatami. Under his presidency, the social environment became more favourable for women so that women enjoyed greater freedom in public sphere; holding meetings, publishing numerous writings, making films, creating women's organisations and NGOs. These

NGOs played a significant role in promoting women's confidence and created opportunities to seek new employment and enter into the new areas of social activities. One of the most significant developments of this time was allowing greater freedom to press and media. Women's role in the press and media significantly influenced the women's issue through writings in various journals, books, newspapers, and films.

The most important achievement of Khatami's government was to conduct the elections of local and municipal councils. It was considered as an effective mechanism to ensure political participation of the common masses. As far as women's representation in parliament and other top formal political institutions is concerned, it has been lagging behind. Although women were entitled with the right to vote and the right to be elected, women's formal presence in politics has sharply declined following the revolution. In the first three parliaments, the number of women was only 4, though during the Rafsanjani's period it increased to 9 in 1992 and to 14 in 1996. Despite of a reformist government, women's number did not increase more than 13 in both 2000 and 2004 parliamentary elections. However, some women had been elected in parliament, appointed in the cabinet as ministers, and served as governor generals, advisors, and counsellors but their number was very few. It is a fact that women's participation in the executive bodies has remained marginalised. However, not even a single woman had been directly appointed as a cabinet minister in post-revolutionary Iran until 2009.

Historical, economic, and social factors have ameliorated women's status in the society, and their role has changed in the public sphere over a period of time in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Most particularly during Khatami's government, women's participation in the public sphere drastically increased in compare with other governments in Islamic Republic. Although, he had an altruistic vision to place women in equal footing with men in every realm of the public sphere, he failed because of domination of conservative cleric groups over the powerful unelected government institutions. Women were expecting their participation in his cabinet and other decision making bodies, but opposition from cleric group did not allow him to do so. There is no doubt, this regime was the most moderate, and paved the way for women's participation in the political institutions, but still there were only two female cabinet ministers that was the same during his predecessor Rafsanjani's cabinet.

Moreover, most of the women candidates economically depend upon the male family member, therefore often they not able to pay the fee of the election nomination and other administrative expenditure. Reform movement had certain limitations, and it failed to bring substantial change in the society. As far as women's formal political participation is concerned, despite being a significant political force, women remained marginalise in major government affairs and decision making bodies.

Women's movement is indispensable to the process of democratization and reform movement in Islamic Republic of Iran in general and during Khatami's period in particular. However, women played a crucial role in informal political process of Iran since a long time, but their representation in formal political institutions and decision making bodies often have been marginalised, even during Khatami's period in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although Khatami had made several attempts to ensure the women's political participation in formal political institutions, but social and political structure of the state did not allow them to actualise his ideas. However, constitutionally there are no restrictions on women to be elected as Member of Parliament, as President, as member of Council of Guardian, in Assembly of Expert and in other government bodies, but the interpretation of the laws by the political elite and Council of Guarding often prevented them to be elected in these bodies. However, Council of Guardian never clearly stated women candidate has been disqualifying because of their gender. On the basis of lack of required qualification, women candidates were systematically disqualified. Despite deeply rooted patriarchy at family, society and state level, women's political presence could be made acceptable to society. Women representation in formal political institutions is very less despite of women possess required eligibility. However, women's participation has increased in other realms of public sphere such as education and economy, but their political participation remained marginalised in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The central hypothesis 'women's participation is less than their participation in other realms of public sphere has been tested and validated.

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