

**REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN
POST-REVOLUTIONARY IRANIAN CINEMA**

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INTRODUCTION

“Representation of Women in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema” aims to focus on the portrayal of women in Iranian films produced after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The period after the revolution is particularly concentrated as it marks a turning point in the history of Iran with the changes and transformations it brought in terms of the political, social and the economic. In this period, the reign of 2500 years old dynasty which has from the beginning of 1900s tried to implement a modernization process and was in co-operation with imperialist powers close to the end, was overthrown. This dynasty came to an end by a revolution that takes its strength from the public.

The revolution against the Shah was a search for freedom and democracy and an opposition to his attempts to modernize the nation. However, the revolution brought certain changes and enforcements that have been disputed particularly on issues regarding women. Hence, before examining how women are represented in the films, I felt the need for a detailed exploration of the women issue in Iran; as I thought that a full understanding of how they are depicted in the films could only be possible with this background information.

My starting points were several questions: What had changed for Iranian women after the revolution? Have they lost their rights they had before? Could we talk about the existence of certain restrictive enforcements for them? How revolution affected their lives?

In search for an answer, I looked at the social, daily, economic and legal experiences of women living in Iran in the written sources on this issue. At this point, I tried to include different perspectives and counter arguments to enable a full picture and a deeper understanding of the women issue. In this context, I examined how women live in Iran, how they are placed in the religious point of view in terms of the Shari'a, how they are present in the public and private space; what are the traditional codes that define their status, responsibilities and freedom in the daily life. This sociological data is included as it is anticipated to contribute to an understanding of Iranian women's status in the society.

In the post-revolutionary era, at the end of March, a referendum was held and the majority of participants, approximately 98 percent, voted to support for the foundation of the Islamic regime. Afterwards, a period of ten years followed when Shari'a laws were taken at basis to regulate the life in the public space. Hejab and chador were once again introduced to the lives of women and became mandatory. Moggissi further relates that:

“The compulsory veiling of women was followed with the suspension of The Family Protection Law; the legal marriage age for girls was lowered to thirteen, and later to nine; female judges were disqualified from the bench; technical and vocational schools were closed to girls; women lost their right to educate at certain fields of higher education, such as engineering, agriculture and mathematical science; and hundreds of female professionals, teachers and government employees were purged, pressured into early retirement or forced to quit their jobs (Moghissi, 1999: 101)

Moreover, the public space was divided into two for both genders, particularly in the public transport, hospitals and movie theatres. At this

stage several questions emerge. What should be our criteria in evaluating these enforcements for Iranian society? In which terms could we define them as oppressive or restrictive? For a staunch believer of Islam who assumes that a girl becomes a woman at the age of nine, the enforcement of reducing the legal marriage age to nine will be an appropriate practice. Likewise, some Islamist women might be happy about the segregation of gender in the public spaces as it avoids the unnecessary encounter with the opposite sex and might argue that they feel more comfortable to get service by women when they have to go outside. But the same women might be unhappy about the consequences of the suspension of Family Protection Law, as their husbands have the unilateral right to divorce them without submitting any ground and could only take custody of their child whereas the husband takes the guardianship in case of a divorce.

The experiences are multiple, so the perspectives. Therefore, I think that, while analyzing the picture immediately after the revolution at the overall, a wider scope and perspective is necessary where one should evaluate by taking into consideration the cultural, and the social realities and dynamics of the Iranian society as well as the political developments before and after the revolution.

Particularly on discussing about the ‘women issue’, one should take careful steps when making definitions as terms might get different attributes and meanings in different societies. When we are talking about gender equality in Iranian society, it might certainly pertain to something different than might be defined by Western feminists for instance. Stressing that

Islamist women have no intention to follow what Western feminism stands for, Afshar further discusses that:

They are (Islamist women) particularly critical of the failure of Western feminism to carve an appropriate, recognized and remunerated space for marriage and motherhood. They argue that by locating the discussion in the domain of production and attempting to gain equality for women, Western feminists have sought and failed to make women into quasi men. (...) Islamist women are of the view that Islamic dictum bestows complementarity on women, as human beings as partners to men and as mothers and daughters. They argue that Islam demands respect for women, and offers them opportunities, to be learned, educated, and trained while at the same time providing an honored space for them to become mothers, wives and housemakers. They argue that unlike capitalism, and much of feminist discourse, Islam recognizes the importance of women's life cycles: they have been given different roles and every stage honored and respected for which they do (Afshar: 1999: 124).

But what we mean when we talk about Islam is of quite importance. Is it the text itself? Or the doctrines interpreted by the Islamic clergy? What is the picture when we take Quran literally? Could we argue that the Qurânic text includes the opportunities mentioned above? And hence from where do the enforcements of the Islamic government take their roots? While talking about secularists and Muslim modernists Moghissi suggests that:

Both secularists and Muslim modernists stressed that women's degraded conditions were the result of a gender biased misreading of the Quran, not the text itself. Muslim reformers claimed that Islamic rules were male-biased and a culturally distorted interpretation of the Quran. They argued that the Quran never meant men to be superior to women or to force the hejab on women which

prevented them from taking the same social roles as men (...) Unlike Muslim reformers, the ultimate goal of the secular reformers, however was not to modify Shari'a but to do away with it altogether. Some suggested Islam was their moral and spiritual guide. But they hoped to de-Sharitarize their country's legal and political structures (Moghissi, 1999: 131).

Hence, these secular women made demonstrations, protests and sit-ins to make Khomeini retreat on his enforcements. However in 1980, the Islamic regime established and a new era began with the introduction of Shari'a based laws. However, commenting that neither the Pahlavis nor the Islamic Republic were truly able to address Shari'a, Hosseini also argues that:

The point that needs to be made is that in 1979 the return to the Shari'a was achieved exactly in the same way as it had been abandoned in 1967 that is by manipulating the procedural rules. In this way, neither the Pahlavi regime nor the Islamic Republic had to address the theory of the Shari'a while both were able to achieve their objectives through changing its practice (Hosseini, 1999:144).

Some scholars also argue that the Islamic regime and its enforcements became the catalyst that raised the consciousness to issues like gender equality and strengthened the struggle of some woman to claim their rights at every term. Moghissi argues that the stronger the pressure, the more determined women became. The advent of female film makers, television camerawomen, taxi drivers, even a women truck driver-professional and artistic activities not accessible to women before the revolution must be seen in this light. (Moghissi, 1999:101) Hosseini also further suggests that:

...the impact of the revolution on women has been emancipatory, in the sense that it has paved the way for the emergence of a popular feminist consciousness. By feminism here I mean a broad concern with women's issues and an awareness of their oppression at work, in the home and in society, as well as action aimed at improving their lives and changing the situation. Such a consciousness, most active in the private domain of the family, is now extending to the public domain. What facilitates such extension is the widening gap between ideals and realities of the Shari'a as defined and enforced by a modern state. (Hosseini, 1999:143)

Evidently, the complexity of the cultural dynamics in Iran makes this issue a complicated one to discuss. Islamic doctrines, namely the Shari'a constitutes one of these important dynamics. However, in a society where certain religious practices and thoughts, whether truly or untruly interpreted, has long become traditions and cultural norms that penetrated deeply in the society; it becomes more difficult to trace the affects and consequences of enforcements that take their basis from Shari'a, executed by the Islamic government. Apparently, there is a distinction between experiencing religion as a personal practice and as a political regime. Hence, in my further analysis, I will put emphasis on this distinction.

As the post-revolutionary era also marked the industrialization process of Iranian cinema under control of the state, I think that there is also a need to explore the changes occurred on film making in this period. One significant development reported by Dabachi was on the prohibition of unveiling, he adds that until the arrival of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamization of cinema, none of the women in films appeared veiled in movies, if not the role required so (Dabachi, 2001:24). The compulsory veiling of women in the public space also caused women to be depicted as

veiled in the films as well. I will try to examine in which terms such an obligation has affected film making as well as the introduction of the several other codes that directors had to adhere to.

After the revolution, with the effort to 'Islamize' cinema, Film and Cinema Cabinet was instituted to decide, which films were permitted to be screened. This institution banned the imported films that had non-revolutionary qualities, some films were cut, reedited and changed and adapted to Islamic values by the magic markers (Aktaş, 2004:36). At this point, it was necessary endeavoring to find out; the outcomes of the censorship mechanism exerted by the government and to explore to what extent the cinema could be free to produce; whether the Islamization process was successful to make cinema a propagandist medium and whether the films strictly adhered to the censorship codes or created ways to violate them implicitly? And if so, what were the mechanisms invented to violate the codes?

The final stage of my examination will be the film analysis. Under the light of the key concepts put forth in the previous chapters, I will examine how women issue is presented in the Iranian films produced after 1990s. In doing so, I will inquire the narrational strategies, storyline as well as the visual leitmotifs of the films chosen. And I will explore the answers to the questions of how women are portrayed in Iranian films; what are the distinctive features about their representation in public and private space and what are the mechanisms to avoid restrictive censorship codes and to which extent these codes are stretched in depiction of women characters.

2 IMPORTANCE OF IDEOLOGY, RELIGION AND POLITICS IN DETERMINING THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN IRANIAN SOCIETY

2.1 World-wide Acclaim for Iranian Films and Islamization of Iranian Cinema

Since the beginning of 1990s, Iranian cinema has been acclaimed by the many international festivals and has received innumerable awards. Particularly from 1990 to the beginning of 2000s, it is possible to talk about a boom of Iranian films at festivals. Special film sessions dedicated to Iranian films began to be organized. This interest was particularly triggered when Kiarostami was awarded Golden Palm at Cannes Film Festival in 1997 for *Taste of Cherry* (Ta'm e Gilas). Next year, Mohsen Makhmalbaf received three awards at Venice Film Festival for *The Silence* (Sokout) (1998). In 2000, three Iranian filmmakers won prizes at Cannes, Makhmalbaf's daughter, Samira, won Jury Prize at Cannes for *Blackboards* (Takhte Siyah). Bahman Ghobadi, meanwhile, won the Golden Camera award for *A Time for Drunken Horses* (Zamani Baraye Masti Asbha) and Hassan Yektapanah for *Djomeh*. Samira Makhmalbaf later received Unesco Award at Venice Film Festival with 11'09'01 and Jury Prize at Cannes for *At Five in the Afternoon* (Panj é Asr) (2003). Jafar Panahi, who had already won the Golden Camera award at Cannes in 1995 for *The White Balloon* (Badkonake Sefid)(1995) received Golden Lion at the 2000 Venice Film

Festival for *The Circle* (Dayareh) (2000). He later received Jury Award for Crimson Gold (Talaye Sorkh) (2003).

There might be quite different reasons for the emergence of such an interest. The depiction of ‘different’ stories from a geography and space unfamiliar to the audience from the West, might be the driving factor to urge them get more interested with Iranian cinema. Commenting about Iranian cinema, Dabashi proposes that: “What is taking place in the best of Iranian cinema is precisely that it is not timely. By not being timely, these films have been far more relevant. Iranian cinema at its best is the Copernican heliocentricism that has surpassed the geocentricism of Iranian politics (Dabashi, 2001:277). By defining Iranian cinema as not being timely, Dabashi seems to attribute a quality of being ‘universal’ to Iranian cinema, intending to say that Iranian films handle universal themes (he makes the metaphor of Copernican heliocentricism) as well as the local (the Iranian geocentricism); however surpassing it. Supporting this view from a different angle, Nichols mentions that Iranian cinema addresses themes such as friendship, tolerance and togetherness, using a minimalist style and imagery:

Most forms of cinematic expressivity are minimally present. We find no magical realism, no expressionism, surrealism, collage or bold figured of montage. Melodramatic intensities, or excess are extremely rare. Point of view dynamics are usually weak to nonexistent. The great majority of scenes unfold in a third person, long-take, long-shot, minimally edited style. There is only limited use of music and even dialogue (Nichols, 1994).

Haghighat thinks that Iranian films went into a transition of revival after 1990s, although there was a period of stagnation in Iranian Cinema after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. She further suggests that besides the interest of the West, this cinema was also welcomed by the defenders of the Islamic revolution:

From a whimsical cinematic style partly based on Egyptian and Indian B-movies, Iranian films made the transition to something between "Italian neo-realism" and "French new wave," shattering taboos and washing Iran's dirty laundry in public. Worst of all in the mullahs' eyes, this new cinema captured the imagination and the talent of the regime's apologists (Haghighat, 2000).

As well as depicting universal themes, in terms of content Iranian cinema also nourishes from the parameters that make-up the society like ideology, religion, social values, history, political developments etc. However, it is possible to talk about the existence of a narrative strategy which implies, rather than conveying explicitly; which probably emerged due to the implementation of the new strict censorship.

It was always possible to talk about a strong censorship mechanism in Iranian cinema. The films produced before Islamic Revolution (1979) were subject to censorship as regarded against Pahlavi regime. Whereas, after revolution, the target was to 'Islamize' film making, by producing films which are in accordance with codes of religion and society. Before the revolution, cinema was regarded as a Western invention and was perceived as blasphemous and sinful (haram), condemned by leading religious figures. It was due to this point of view that many movie theatres in Tehran was burnt down, blamed as a source of corruption. Naficy points out that:

The first stage in transforming Pahlavi cinema-dubbed 'cinema of *taqut* (idols) by Islamists-into an Islamic cinema was cleansing of the Pahlavi film theatres by means of what in retrospect turned out to be a literal baptism by fire. By the time the Islamic government was established, less than a year after Rex Theatre fire, up to 180 cinemas nationwide (32 in Tehran alone) had been burned, demolished or shut down, leaving only a total of 256 cinemas extant (Tapper, 2002:30).

The producers, filmmakers and technicians working in the film industry were anxious upon these developments. Some of the cinema artists and famous filmmakers left the country and went to Europe or USA and some changed their profession. In the period just after the revolution, defined as the first period of republic, an Islamic state was endeavored to be established. Ayatollah Khomeini and his radical followers have taken under control the reformist and modernist groups and have created a perception of Islam, taking at basis the rules of feqh (fikih). And in order to control cultural and artistic activities, they have established the Committee of Cultural Revolution. Soon after the Ministry of Culture established a 'Film and Cinema Cabinet' consisting of nine members who were responsible to decide which films were to be screened. The religious figures could not turn their backs to the power of visual representation, and the chance to use cinema as a propaganda tool. The first years of after revolution marks a period of instability. There was abundance of imported films in the market. A producer who makes a film held the right to import several foreign films. However it was not possible to talk about film production until 1981. Aktaş mentions that during that period, initially, Turkish, Indian and Japanese films which were thought to have imperialist and anti-revolutional qualities

were banned. After a short while, American films were also banned. Out of eight hundred and ninety eight films imported to Iran during the first three years after revolution, five hundred and thirteen of them were rejected. However, there was never a total ban of films imported from West. In order to meet the existing demand, many films produced before revolution were examined and were conformed to Islamic measures. Some of the films were cut and reedited and were renamed (Aktaş, 2004:36). She further states that from 1979-1982 out of 2208 Iranian films, only 252 were permitted. Except a few renowned filmmakers, the film production nearly stopped from 1980 to 1984. The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1990) was another factor that created political and economical instability, hence affecting the film production. Naficy points out that, in June 1982, the cabinet approved regulations regarding the exhibition of movies and videos. He mentions that as a codification of the earlier Islamic values, these regulations facilitate a shift from Pahlavi to Islamic cinema. According to these codes, the films which weaken monotheistic and Islamic principles; insult prophets, imams, ruling council; encourage corruption and prostitution or dangerous addictions; negate equality of all people; exalt Western ideals; criticize regime; show violence and torture; lower taste of audience; negate values of self-sufficiency and social and economic independence were banned (Tapper, 2002:190). The officials were visiting the film sets to control whether films were shot in accordance with moral values. These codes were quite general and their scope was so wide that one way or another, any film could be subject to censor or banned.

The control mechanism implemented upon Iranian films, consequently determine the content of the film and how they will be perceived by the public. In order for an Islamic film to be shot and screened in a movie theatre, it must pass four phases of censorship and a rating system. In the first phase, the script is read to determine its appropriateness. The elements incompatible with religion, social and moral values are searched. Tight feminine clothes showing any part of a women's body except the face and hands; physical contact and tender words or jokes between men and women; jokes on the army, police, or family negative characters with a beard (which could assimilate them with religious figures); foreign or coarse words; foreign music or any type of music which brings joy, showing a favorable character who prefers solitude to collective life, policemen and soldiers badly dressed or having a disagreement, is forbidden (Issa, 1997).

These censorship codes were particularly strict on the representation of woman. Women were obliged to wear hejab in the films in parallel with the new enforcement of wearing hejab on 1980 by Khomeini (Moghissi, 1999:101). They could not in any way contact with a male, even if they are depicted in their private space like home, they still have to be depicted with a hejab and comply with the rules of modesty. Colin suggests that due to the prevention of the physical contact of both genders, the depiction of love at the white screen was the most difficult theme for the directors. Even a mother, sending her son to war, could not touch him while saying farewell. The films which endeavored to convey the special feelings of a male and

female concentrated on the 'look'. And hence, films were subject to censorship as only a 'modest' look that implies no passion or lust could be depicted, with a short sequence of shot from a long distance (Colin, 2004:59).

It was for this reason that, during the first years of revolution, it was possible to talk about the absence of women characters in Iranian films. Aktaş argues that the ways women were represented in films during the reign of Shah had negative connotations in the minds of the public. Hence, in the first years when an indefinite atmosphere prevailed cinema, it was not possible to encounter a female character in the films shot. The producers were mostly interested in screenplays containing no female characters in order not to face up with any problems in screening their films. These negative connotations were due to the depiction of women having a 'loose morality' in film *Farsis* shot during the Shah period (Aktaş, 2004:198).

These restrictive codes apparently engendered difficulties in depicting women characters. But what were the real roots of such an implementation; was it the ideology, based on the Shari'a laws and feqh rules that determined the social order and the forms of relations in the society after the Revolution? In my opinion, in order to comprehend this matter at full, one should also take a look at the developments in political and social level. Then, it will be possible to trace why women were absent in films produced for a while, and why restrictive codes in their depiction had to be adhered to.

2. 2 Attempts to Improve the Status of Women in Iranian Society 1900-1979

In a society, where Shari'a based laws are in rule, when discussing the 'women question', it is impossible not to look at Islam, its doctrines that penetrates the everyday life, shaping the manners and attitudes. However, examining the women in Islamic doctrines would not be enough when discussing the place of women in Iranian society. Moghissi thinks that the matter is far more complicated than to relate the difficulties women encounter, to Islam only. She further suggests that:

The complex dynamics of gender struggle in Islamic societies require much analytical focus. We need to consider old dogmas, ideological perceptions and cultural stereotypes, while validating the experiences and voices of women. No political event in the Middle East in the last two decades forces us to conclude that the region's solution for women (and men) is an Islamic one (Moghissi, 1999:10).

In the pre-Islamic period of Iran, namely the jahilliya period, there have been stories about the inferior status of women in tribes. Women were sold as commodities and some little girls were buried when they were born. In tribal society, men as the protector of the tribe and family were more important than women. However, Yamani makes an important point about the matrilineal basis of religion in that period:

Not least in significance is the fact that we know of several female goddesses who were held in considerable esteem by the pre-Islamic Arabs. The three best-known of these, to whom many shrines existed, were Al,'uzza, Manat, and Al-lat. This suggests the existence at some time before Islam of ancient female-dominated religious cults. The existence of such cults in turn suggests that society was originally organized on a matriarchal and/or matrilineal basis (Yamani, 1999:77).

Islam is said to have expanded the rights of women and rescued them from the oppression of pre-Islam, the jahilliya, namely the time of ignorance and regard them in equal value with men and granted the same rights with them. In Iran particularly after the Islamic Revolution, women have encountered innumerable enforcements in the political, social and judicial level that (which will be discussed in detail in the forthcoming parts of this thesis) they have still been in struggle to win back their certain rights. At this stage a question emerges. How is woman regarded in Islam? Are the Islamic doctrines and their interpretations on woman, compatible with what is experienced in practice? To which extent Islam and its doctrines could be counted as responsible of the difficulties women encounter? In order to find the answers to these questions, as well as looking at the Islamic texts, we should also look at the period before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 to trace what has been done so far and later, after the Revolution.

As a part of modernization process, certain studies were carried out to improve the status of women as early as 1900s. One of the most significant developments was the establishment of girls' school in 1907. This was followed by the educational bill approved by the majles which ended up with the establishment of two colleges in 1919 for the training of both men and women teachers.

During the reign of 54 years of Pahlavi regime in Iran that lasted from 1925 to 1979 with Reza Shah (1925-1941) and Muhammad Reza Shah (1941-1979), three political decisions could be counted as significant and affecting the general status of Iranian women. The first was a 1935 decree

by Reza Shah which banned the public use of the chador by women. Veiled women were also prohibited from using public transportation and from shopping in most stores. The second was a 1963 decree by Muhammad Reza Shah granting right to vote and work in public office. The third was The Family Protection Law of 1967 which granted certain rights to Iranian women, by making it difficult for man to make multiple marriages, (as according to Islamic Law, a man can get married to four wives) and of terminating a marriage at will.

The years 1941-1952 marks a significant era in Iran's history when the dictatorship has weakened which paved the way for the emergence of certain social and political organizations. Women were also actively involved in these political organizations. Fathi makes a point about this period by saying that:

It is of interest that while no royal decrees affecting women were issued by Mohammed Reza Shah until the White Revolution of January 1963, during the 11 years between 1941-1952, when he was theoretically at his weakest, there were more newspapers and journals published for and/or by women than in the 20 preceding, or the 14 years following, this period. (Fathi, 1985:117)

Iran's family laws were rooted from Shi'a doctrines of Islam. Apart from this doctrine it is possible to talk about civil codes of 1928 and 1935 that regulates the family matters. The implementation of this law, gave the right to women to repudiate marriage contract if the husband decided to take a second wife. The husband now had to apply court to divorce his wife, whereas before, he could do it whenever he wanted. Marriage became valid with the witness of two people. However, when a man was financially able,

there was nothing to prevent him from marrying with a second wife. On the condition that she did not consent, the only right of the first wife was to petition for a certificate of non-reconciliation. Hence there was no total ban of polygyny. It began to be difficult as the husband had to prove his financial and physical capacity to the treatment for both wives justly. One of the most important codes of The Family Protection Law of 1967 was the ban of temporary marriages. In Iranian society, temporary marriage is exercised as a form of contract in which a man (married or unmarried and an unmarried woman (virgin, divorced or widowed) agree to marry each other for a limited period of time, varying anytime from one hour to 99 years. In temporary marriage the wife has no legal rights against the husband and the husband is not obliged for anything in case of a separation. However despite its drawbacks, after the revolution, temporary marriages began to be exercised again. Afkhami makes parallels with temporary marriage and prostitution and explains her thoughts about the perception of Shii ulema as follows:

The Shii ulema perceive temporary marriage as distinct from prostitution, despite structural similarities. For them temporary marriage is legally sanctioned and religiously blessed, while prostitution is legally forbidden, religiously reprehensive and therefore challenges the social order and the sanctioned rules for the association of the sexes (Afkhami, 1994: 106).

In her parallelism between prostitution and temporary marriage, Afkhami wants to draw attention to the moral side of the matter. However, in my opinion, such a parallelism would be incorrect due to the wide differences between these two institutions, both in terms of their structure

and intent. Such a parallelism presupposes the perception of prostitution as a 'morally corrupted institution' and while trying to criticize ulema for their double standard, Afkhami seems to share the same views with ulema in their perception of prostitution, labeling it as an immoral institution. Here, it is much more important to find the answer to the question of how a woman engages on an institution of temporary marriage. Is it at her will and approval? Does she know whether she will have no rights upon their wealth accumulated during the time of the contract? The point of criticism on temporary marriages and the ulema, who grant the right to exercise such an institution, should be the drawbacks of exercising such an engagement for the woman.

On the whole, The Family protection Law of 1967 was a step for the benefit of women. It abrogated the unilateral privilege of men to divorce and exercise polygyny. Certain valid reasons have to be presented to court by the husband to divorce his wife, and he could not marry a second wife without the permission of the court. It was mandatory for both sides to apply to a court of law for certificate of non-reconciliation in order that a divorce would be granted. Second, under specified conditions, a woman could petition for divorce whereas it was not possible to ask for divorce by a woman before. If the husband was imprisoned for five years or more, be a drug addict, married to a second wife without the previous wife's permission, the wife had the right to ask for divorce.

It is of course hard to predict whether the women of different social status and income living in the urban and rural parts of the country could

benefit from these rights in equal terms, or whether most of them were aware of it or not. Moghissi suggests that:

Much of women's sufferings in the third world societies relates to a low development of material production and the persistence of pre-capitalist social and economic structures that restrict women's access to the society's resources. Therefore, economic and social development is the main preconditions for women's emancipation. Yet this does not mean that economic and social change will automatically lead to a change in women's status. Deeply entrenched social norms and values inform patriarchal religious and cultural structures and practices that change more slowly and painfully (Moghissi, 1996:37).

Apparently, the introduction of certain codes and the Family Protection Law could not be a solution on its own as a political code which bans a practice widely executed by the society and accepted by the religious ulema. At this stage, how the society perceives and adopts such developments is of quite importance.

In her book *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*, Moghissi talks about the necessity to reinterpretation of the Islamic doctrines by a feminist point of view. She thinks that regardless of the interpretation of the Quran and the Shari'a, if the Qur'anic instructions are taken literally, Islamic individuals or societies can not benefit equal rights for women in the family or in certain areas of social life. Hence, a gender biased reading of Quran leads to incorrect cultural perceptions. She further suggests that:

Consequently Muslim women are not aware that their Islamic rights have been violated by the male-centered societies in which they live. A post-patriarchal Islam which can secure women's legal and social rights will be possible through liberating Islamic Orthodox scripture from the yoke of male-centered, patriarchal

interpretations of Quran, the Sunna and Hadiths (traditions and sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammed) laid down over the years. Women's urgent task is to deconstruct gendered Islamic discourses and to challenge the ulema's monolithic interpretational power (Moghissi, 1999:40).

Undoubtedly Iranian rural and tribal women were less affected by these and other laws; furthermore, these changes could even be perceived as non-religious by the urban lower class women. Fathi also suggests that: "The lack of total success of Reza Shah and Muhammad Reza Shah's efforts in changing the status of Iranian women was chiefly due to their equation of social reform with modernization, and modernization with Westernization" (Fathi, 1985:125).

After Shah Mohammad Reza left Iran on January 16, 1979, Khomeini came to Tehran from Paris where he was sent to exile. After the referendum that took place at the end of March, 98 percent of the participants voted 'yes' for the foundation of the Islamic regime, and a ten years of period in which the process to 'Islamize' the society was implemented. The Islamic Revolution could take place thanks to the effort of women. They were active in political campaigning, distributing leaflets and selling newspapers and booklets as well as participating in various welfare projects, and attending meetings and demonstrations. However on the political arena, after the revolution the repressive political and social authority had mostly affected the lives of women.

The first step of this movement was to implement the laws of S'haria. Women were expelled from high offices. They were no longer employed as judges. Hejab and chador became mandatory. Although 100

thousand women made a protest demonstration for this decision, they were harshly dispelled. The legal age of woman to get married was reduced to 9.

After the Revolution of February 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Family Protection Law had also been unofficially suspended. With the new legislation, even if women had the custody of their children, at the time of divorce or because of the death of their husband, this right does not include guardianship. It is the non-negotiable right of the father and of the paternal grandfather in case of father's death. Afshar also, criticizes of this suspension as follows:

Khomeini decided to return to all fathers their Islamic automatic right of custody of their children on divorce, which they had lost under the 1976 Family Laws in Iran. By doing so and legislating the Qassas laws, the post-revolutionary state endowed fathers with the undisputed right of life and death over their children. Men gained the right to kill anyone who violated their harem. Men who murder their wives or their sisters or mothers on the charge of adultery, are not subject to any punishment (Afshar, 1998: 126).

Soon after, there was a movement on the part of the academic Ministry of Education to segregate schools on the basis of sex. Elementary schools which had boys and girls studying in the same school, even if not in the same classroom, were forced to separate them completely. The public space divided into two spheres for both genders, particularly in public transport, hospitals and movie theatres.

There were reactions against these developments; the conservative Islamist women approved gender differentiation in the public sphere, whereas they wanted freedom for women to work on the condition that they work for other women. Modern Islamist women wanted freedom for women

on the public sphere, whereas secular modernists wanted a secular government, refusing the implementation of Shari'a laws.

Women lost their position in the universities and they could no longer get education on certain professions such as engineering, agriculture and mathematical science (Moghissi, 1999:101). She further suggests that:

This sexual segregation of public life, the curbing of women's access to education and employment led to "de-womenizing" of certain professions. The hard won achievements of the previous decades in advancing women's legal and social status were now put under threat (Moghissi, 1999:100).

On the other hand, Hosseini from a different point of view thinks that due to segregation, more women participated in the work force to serve for the other women. The segregation necessitated the participation of women in employment. She explains that:

On the socio-economic front, women did not lose their public persona after the revolution. It is true that women in government offices bore the brunt of early purges, but it is equally true that a larger number of women have found types of employment that were not available to them before (Hosseini, 1999: 149).

In an opposite view Poya thinks that the new rulers were to reinforce Islamic gender relations as their major feature of the ideology. The leading figures of 1979 revolution like Khomeini (1987-88) Motahhari (1981) and Nouri (1964-1965) criticized that Pahlavi reforms promoted a capitalist and imperialist culture of consumerism. And women's labor was also sold, resulted in breakdown of family laws:

After the establishment of the Islamic state, this view became dominant among Islamists, and authorized the clergy to preach the ideology to seclusion, the complete withdrawal of women from public sphere of employment and their

confinement to the private sphere of the home. At the heart of this position was a belief that reproduction is the basic law of nature, and that the biological differences between the sexes give biological men and women specific roles and functions. They argued strongly that women's primary activity is in the home, nurturing and creating an atmosphere of shelter and comfort for their family (Poya, 1999:3).

After revolution, there were not many married women with children under eighteen that work outside home. According to the statistics, of the 2.16 million employees working directly (government) or indirectly (revolutionary foundations) in the public sector, less than one third were women (632.000) and they generally occupy lower level positions in the job hierarchy. (Hooglund, 2002: 16).

Yet, it is possible to talk about positive developments as well. One of the most important was the introduction of birth control in 1988. Educated women taught their lower class counterparts how to read and write and acquainted them with contraceptive devices. Women of the secular also contributed to the women's press in magazines including *Zanan*, *Farzaneh*, *Payam-e Hajar*, *Zan-e Ruz*, *Huquq-e Zanan*, *Zan* and *Zan-Emruz* through which a forum was created. According to Hooglund:

These alternative spaces of expression play a crucial role in disseminating intellectual debates on the condition of women, debates that flourished especially after the end of Iran-Iraq War. In doing so, they largely used contributions from reformist clerics who are increasingly attentive to the plight of women. And women are demanding that rules of Islam be adapted to the realities of Iranian society, an integral part of which are women's social, political, economic and cultural activities. (Hooglund, 2002: 66)

There was hope for change when Khatami was elected as President in 1997. Although they considered that large-scale changes were to take place, there were not very satisfactory developments on women issue. In the period from 1997 to 2001 when Khatami was the President, 15 women were sentenced to reem (Killing by stoning). Khatami, being a member of the clerical regime seems not to intend implementing structural changes towards a secular democratic government. On the other hand, due to the relatively mild perspective of Khatami towards art, the censorship mechanism implemented upon movies loosened a little bit. A rating system was introduced in 1987 to decide whether a film could be shown or not and where and when it will be shown. A committee that comprised of members from film industry, academicians, and film critiques were rating the films in respect to their artistic quality. From A to D, films were rated and the ones with better rates had the opportunity to be screened in the best movie theaters at the best séances. With this new system, the productions that were rated A and B earn more, whereas, shown on the rural cinemas, the films with C and D rates lost money. Aktaş points out that although A and B rated films were supported, it was not planned to remove the C rated films which could be put in the category of film Farsi, in total. As there is demand from the audience for film Farsi, their production was planned not to exceed 20 percent. As a new content, a new artistic perspective and the quality of scenario were the determining factor for the rating system, a balance of artistic and commercial success and quality was inquired (Aktaş, 2004:45).

The post-revolutionary era also brought many women directors to forefront that dealt with women issue, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad actively shooting film since 1978 started her career making documentaries dealing with issues like polygamy, women's oppression, social values whereas her feature films deal with strong social and political concerns. *Nargess* (1992), *The Blue Veiled* (Rusari Abi) (1995) with which she won Fibresci Prize and Bronze Leopard at Locarno International Film Festival, *The May Lady* (Banoo-Ye Ordibehesht) (1998), *Under the City's Skin* (Zir-e Poost-e Shahr) (2001) which received awards at Moscow and Montréal film festivals, *Our Times* (Ruz-egar-e Ma) (2002) which received Netpac at Locarno International Film Festival and *Gilane* (2005).

Another prominent figure at cinema industry is Tahmineh Milani. She is one of the most popular women directors of Iran with her strong political thoughts and feminist approach. She was arrested for making *The Hidden Half* (2001), dealing with the left wing student groups against Pahlavi regime brutally suppressed by Islamic groups after revolution she was later released. Her arrest caused many women to make street protests to support her. Among her important films, *The Legend of a Sigh* (Afsane-ye-ah) (1991), *Two Women* (Do Zan) (1999), *The Hidden Half* (Nimeh-ye Penhan) (2001), *The Fifth Reaction* (Vakonesh Panjom) (2003) and *Unwanted Women* (2005) can be counted.

Marziyeh Meshkini, challenging the social and religious restrictions put on women in Iranian society, received appraisal with her debut feature film *The Day I became a Woman* (2001). Working as assistant director to

many films of Samira Makhmalbaf, her daughter Meshkini made *Stray Dogs* at 2004.

Today, around 20 gifted directors, including Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf, Mehrjui, Beyzai, Jalili, Forozesh, Naderi, Panahi, Milani and Bani-Etemad, actively produce at the film industry.

2.3 Veiling: Hejab and Chador, Indispensable Elements of Social Life for Iranian Women

In 1936, Reza Shah banned veiling as a part of his modernization project. Women who appeared veiled in the public space were arrested or their veils were forcefully removed. There were reactions against this enforcement. Hosseini suggests that:

This not only outraged clerics but some ordinary women to whom appearing in public without their cover was tantamount to nakedness. Yet it was welcomed by others, both men and women, who saw it as a first step in granting women their rights. Since then, the hejab issue has become a deep wound in Iranian politics, arousing strong emotions on all sides. It also became a major arena of conflict between the forces of modernity and Islamic authenticity, where each side has projected its own vision of morality (Hosseini, 1999:153).

Upon reactions, later the rules were relaxed. And after Reza Shah's abdication in 1941, veiling was no longer compulsory, though the policy remained throughout the Pahlavi era. However unveiling began to be widely adopted by certain walks of life and became a means of leaping to a higher social class. Hosseini further relates that:

Between 1941 and 1979 wearing hejab was no longer an offence, but it was a real hindrance to climbing the social ladder, a badge of backwardness and a marker of

class (...) Fashionable hotels and restaurants refused to admit women with chador, schools and universities actively discouraged the chador, although the headscarf was tolerated (Hosseini, 1999: 151).

In the 1970s, hejab became a symbol of anti-Pahlavi regime. It began to represent what the Pahlavi regime had rejected. The opponents of the regime reconciled the veil with the ideals that oppose modernization and Westernization. Apart from Islamist students, many middle class urban working women began to veil to show their own rejection of the Shah's regime.

Hence, although veiling was prohibited by Reza Shah Pahlavi with a royal decree in 1935 as a part of modernization process, it began to be obligatory again, after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Since then, dressing in accordance with hejab rules is a determining factor of availability and non-hejab defines the availability and non-availability in public space for women in Iran. Proper veiling has become one of the major issues of the Islamic government. Afshar thinks that:

Women have become the major emblem of Islamization and their dress code the most significant identifier of revolutionary success. There has been a continuing insistence on both covering women and separating them spatially for men in the public domain. The veil has become one of the non-negotiable elements governing women's lives (Afshar, 1998:197).

There were reactions against this enforcement. Emphasizing that the ban and the enforcement of veiling bears the same forceful policy, Moghissi says that:

At first, women's forceful demonstrations, protests, sit-ins and work stoppages made the Ayatollah and his regime retreat on veiling. But this was only temporary.

A year later, in the summer of 1980, when the Islamic regime had firmly established itself in power through intimidation and by silencing and brutal suppression of the opposition, women were forcefully pushed under the veil, from which they had been forcefully pulled out by a modernizing state some forty years earlier. (Moghissi, 1999: 101)

Some of the inadequately veiled (bad hejab) women in Iran were subject to humiliation, some of them were fined or arrested, and some were lashed or even murdered. But there are still women in Iran who do not comply with hejab rules, which will make this problem a concern for the Islamic Republic.

When we come to nowadays to the year 2006, the chief of Police Department Morteza Telai, has declared that they organized teams to warn the ones who does not comply with hejab rules. Besides, the Minister of Justice Chemal Karrimerad further declared that the ones who do not stick to hejab rules will be imposed fine or sentenced to jail. But why the Islamic government has insisted on implementing hejab rules that strictly? What are the scope, extent and requirements of hejab rules? First we should define what veiling and hejab is: Veiling is used as a general term to define the act of covering. Hejab on the other hand, corresponds to a certain way of covering, the codes of which are determined in Shari'a and Islamic texts. However in Quran, the revelation which is regarded to relate to hejab is vague (Awde, 2000: 47).

Tell also the women of the Faithful to lower their gaze, and they should guard their chastity, and they should display any of their charms publicly save what is decently observed, and they must draw their over their bosoms; and they not should display any of their charms to anyone except their husbands or their fathers

or their husbands' fathers or their sons or their husbands' sons or their brothers or their brothers' sons or their sisters' sons or their womenfolk or those whom they possess with their right hand or those male servants who feel sexual desire no longer or children too young to be aware of their nakedness of women. And women should not move their legs in such a way when they walk as to attract attention to the charms they have concealed (Q24:30.1).

A proper hejab requires a woman to cover her body with loose clothes that reaches her ankles. Her skin and her hair should not be exposed, except for the face and hands. Actually, a woman's face has attractive features that are not proper to leave out. However, as in daily life it would cause inconveniences for women, leading to recognition and communication problems, it is allowed to uncover the face and hands.

Since hejab has an important affect in determining the social relations between women and men and sets the rules or participation in the public space, it is necessary at this point to find out the roots of forms of veiling in Iranian society; how veiling emerged and practiced, in order to understand whether it is a traditional phenomenon that dates back to pre-Islamic times or whether in Iranian territory it began to be adopted after conversion to Islam.

From 500 to 330 B.C.E., in the Mesopotamia arena, during the Achaemenid Empire, which constitutes the ancestors of today's Iran, due to interaction with other cultures, a change occurred in the public participation for women. Nashat and Beck relates that:

...but exposure to other cultures began to modify the role of women, at least within royal and noble households as suggested by the introduction women's seclusion, some of veiling and use of eunuchs to ensure that rules of seclusion

were observed. Women were not as restricted in Iranian highlands as they were in more urbanized areas of Achaemenian Empire. Women's participation in activities that defied urban norms was greater at the beginning of the Achaemenian period, but their visibility still shocked many urbanites who reflected their disapproval in their accounts of the period (Nachat, Beck, 2000: 33).

However, today the codes of hejab are more carefully adhered to in the rural districts of Iran, compared to the urban, whereas in Achaemenian Empire, it was exactly the opposite. Therefore it is possible to assert here that veiling at those times was an indicator of "social class". The elite of the urban differentiated themselves from the lower class of the rural. Talking about the Sassanian Empire that ruled from 224 to 651 C.E., Nashat and Beck further informs:

Passages in the Sassanian law book indicate that women's clothing reflected social distinctions. Aristocratic women "are attired in silk garments, live in magnificent palaces, wear headgears, go hunting and follow all the other manners of the aristocracy. Some type of veiling and seclusion probably upheld social and economic roles. Elite women were probably more strictly veiled and secluded to protect them from contact with non-elite men, but it is uncertain whether other categories of women were also veiled. Because many aspects of women's roles in Sassanian society derived from earlier practices in the region, where wealthy women in urban areas did not appear in public and wore some type of veil, this pattern probably also existed for Sassanian women, especially in Mesopotamia (Nachat, Beck, 2000: 33).

It was during late times of the Sassanian Empire that Prophet Mohammad in Mecca was born (570) and Islam was founded (610). There were rapid conquests of lands that belonged to Sassanian Empire by the Arab Muslims, during which conversion to Islam from Zoroastrianism

occurred. Talking about the change of women's lives, Nashat and Beck further suggests:

(In early Islam) Women's lives changed slowly at first, but by the end of the first Islamic century, they became gradually less visible. The change is reflected in the discrepancy among Qur'anic teachings, the Prophet's treatment of women, and their position in Islamic law (Shari'a). An obvious example is spread of seclusion and the veil. Although a Qur'anic revelation addressed to the prophet's wives recommended seclusion to them, contemporary women seem to have treated it as a special ordinance. Another revelation recommended that women dress modestly and did not display their ornaments. It is unlikely that the purpose of this revelation was the type of veil that enveloped women later in Islam, because women who participated in the pilgrimage to Mecca which began during the prophet's time would have adopted such a practice (Nachat, Beck, 2000: 38)

Tracing back from Achaemenian Empire to the early times of Islam, it is not possible to talk about a tradition of veiling that is perceived widely by the masses. The existing form of veiling by the elite was mostly for a sign of social class, rather than what is perceived by veiling today. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that after they were converted to Islam, veiling was introduced to the lives of more women, with the way it was accepted by a larger majority. It is due to this fact that today the rural regions are more sensitive to hejab than urban areas, as they are more religious. Mottahedeh further suggests that:

During the last half of the fifteenth century and until the Qajar period, the veil was an exclusive attribute of holy personages and was not used to cover the faces of women. However, once it became in Ta'ziyeh productions a standard part of the costume of women-- a sign of their modesty...it becomes in Kərbela paintings a standard feature of Alid women. No longer used so consistently as the sacred

symbol it formerly had been, in Qajar religious painting the veil is ascribed somewhat arbitrarily to holy figures; thus the faces of the Shi'a Imams appear veiled and unveiled (Mottahedeh: 2000).

Hence, it is possible to conclude that the codes of veiling have its roots mostly from the Islamic theology, the sayings of the clerics, Hadiths and the interpretation of the related verse at Quran. However the form of how to veil is uncertain in Quran verses.

Both secularists and Muslim modernists stressed that women's degraded conditions were the result of a gender biased misreading of the Quran, not the text itself. Muslim reformers claimed that Islamic rules were male-biased and a culturally distorted interpretation of the Quran. They argued that the Quran never meant men to be superior to women or to force the hejab on women which prevented them from taking the same social roles as men (Moghissi, 1999: 130).

Islamist women are particularly defensive of the veil although there are disputes about the actual imposition of the veil and the form that it has taken. Afshar points out that Islamist woman regard veiling as emancipating, liberating and gaining them a respectful position:

Nevertheless, many women have chosen veiling as the symbol of Islamification against Westernization and modernization and have accepted it as the public face of their revivalist position. For them veil is a liberating and not an oppressive, force. They maintain that the veil enables them to become the observers and not to be observed; that it liberates them from the dictates of the fashion industry and the demands of the beauty myth. In the context of the patriarchal structures that shape women's lives, the veil is a means of bypassing sexual harassment and gaining respect (Afshar, 1998: 124).

Islamist women seem to take men as the reference point for women to gain esteem, which makes veiling an indicator of social respect. Besides, they argue that veiling stands against the unnecessary consumption of fashion and cosmetics. However, a point that should not be neglected is that veiling has its own fashion as well, with its variety of colors and styles of what is also worn underneath and different ways of tying the headscarf. And the face, which bears the most attractive features of a woman's beauty, is totally left outside. Hosseini argues that: "There are women who have found in hejab a sense of worth, a moral high ground, especially those who could never fare well in certain elitist and Westernized sections of pre-revolutionary Iran, which was self-consciously obsessed with the display of wealth and beauty." (Hosseini, 1999: 156)

The question of hejab has created a wide dispute in Iran. While it undoubtedly restricts some women, it emancipates some by giving them the permission, the legitimacy for appearing and working in the public domain. However if a personal choice of a woman is to veil, she might have given the right to exercise this practice in the public space, instead of imposing veiling as a compulsory enforcement. By not doing so, there is no room left for women who does not share the same belief or desire to veil for any reason. What should be considered is that banning and imposing veil as an enforcement has the same dictating manner. And the enforcement has the right to speak for all women regardless of what their thought and preference.

Hosseini in her book gives an example of a prominent veiled physicist, who resigns in protest when it becomes compulsory to veil in

government offices. In her resignation statement she declares that veiling has no religious sanction and such enforcement would ultimately negate the very purpose of hejab, whose practice must remain to personal decision (Hosseini, 1999: 156).

The younger generation of 2000s has begun to choose modern garments and dress, 'loosening' or from time to time 'violating' hejab rules. Hosseini thinks that: "Noone can doubt that the Islamic Republic has succeeded in veiling women (just as Reza Shah succeeded in unveiling them earlier), yet it is clear that it has failed to sell the ideal of hejab to many women, especially to the younger generation (just as the Pahlavis failed to obliterate it)." (Hosseini, 1999: 154)

The reaction to this violation by the Shari'a government has been harsh. According to the newspapers, this year on 2006, 10 thousand women and men were taken into custody and questioned with the claim that they violated Shari' a and Islamic codes of dress. Some of the young people were even attacked by the vice squads. Although these operations took place at the whole country, most of them were in Tehran. In the year 2005, 700 women were arrested and punished on the grounds that they dressed improperly. Even, apart from vice squads, private agents were commissioned to report people with improper dressing. Within the last year, 2 million sudden raids were organized to public spaces and according to police reports, daily operation number reached to 6 thousand only in Tehran (Korkmaz, 2006).

The recent past is full of incidents; women were attacked, taken under custody and punished, as they were dressing inappropriately. In 1993, strict precautions were taken to avoid poor veiling, during when 15 thousand girls were arrested. In 1995, women appeared in public wearing loose scarves. It was as if there was a moderate atmosphere regarding hejab, until the Minister of Education tried to make chador obligatory for students (Afshar, 1998:208).

The regime seems to recognize space only to ‘believers’ and close the doors for any other option and refuse to leave the ways of worshipping to the liberty of conscious of an individual:

Most women do at different times experience practical inconveniences placed on them by the morality rules. But there is a divide between the Islamist and the secularist elite women in their approach to these rules and the ways they confront the veil. On the whole the secularists regard it as an unacceptable imposition to their freedom and liberty, whereas Islamist women supported by some Islamist intellectuals and even a few religious leaders choose to contest its validity in Islamist terms. However, both groups face a substantial and powerful opposition both from the religious and political establishment and from the Islamist media (Afshar, 1998: 198).

According to Mernissi, the word ‘hejab’ stands for a wider meaning than it suggests in the first place, connoting to different dimensions:

The concept of the word hejab is three-dimensional and three dimensions often blend into one another. The first dimension is a visual one: to hide something from sight. The root of the verb hajaba means “to hide”. The second dimension is spatial: to separate, to mark border, to establish threshold. And finally, the third dimension is ethical: it belongs to the realm of the forbidden. So we have not just tangible categories that exist in the reality of the senses-the visual, the spatial-but

also an abstract reality in the realm of ideas. A space hidden by a hejab is a forbidden space (Mernissi, 1991:93).

Hejab 'hides' women from the forbidden gaze of the male community... The gaze of the unrelated man is regarded as sinful as is thought to bear an unfulfilled sexual desire. And it is the women who have to avoid arousing this desire, by covering themselves, so that they will no longer be an object of desire and tempt men to sin and gain respect in the eyes of them.

Chador on the other hand is regarded as a perfect hejab, which excellently hides a woman's complexion. However, due to its impracticality, chador has some drawbacks in terms of usage for women and restricts the capability to move for women. Afshar mentions that:

The state's favored dress code, which is adopted by the most modest women, is the all-enveloping cover chador, which is worn over the scarved heads. The chador is a single piece of material which has to be held in place by the wearer, holding on to its ends and securing it over her head with her hands; thus it is one of the most debilitating garments for a woman to have to wear (Afshar, 1998:198).

Veiling corresponds to a code of behavior that constitutes the codes of modesty. A woman should avert her eyes and lower her voice when talking to an unrelated man; and choose her words. Naficy mentions that there is an artful relationship between veiling and unveiling in Iranian hermeneutics and a search for the hidden, inner meanings, while concealing intentions. He further suggests that:

Instances abound in Iranian culture: high walls separate and conceal private space from public space, the inner rooms of a house protect/hide the family, the veil hides women, formal language suppresses unbridled public expression of private

feelings, modesty suppresses and conceals women, decorum and status hide men, the exoteric meanings of religious texts hide the esoteric meanings, and the perspective-less miniature paintings convey their messages in layers instead of organizing a unified vision for a centered viewer. Modesty is thus operative within the self and pervasive within society. Veiling is the armature of modesty, requiring further elaboration (Naficy, 2000).

Veiling in general, also covers social activities. Any expression of feelings like anger, happiness and joy, or singing in merriment is another method of exposure that might engender excitement on the opposite sex, and is therefore forbidden. Hence, it is necessary for women to watch their behavior, conducts in society and her body language, as if she has been observed all the time. Limits on social conduct led to the emergence of certain codes of communication that implies rather than explicitly expressed. Naficy further points out that:

Veiling as a social practice is not fixed or unidirectional; instead, it is a dynamic practice in which both men and women are implicated. In addition, there is a dialectical relationship between veiling and unveiling: that which covers is capable also of uncovering. In practice, women have a great deal of latitude in how they present themselves to the gaze of the male onlookers, involving body language, eye contact, types of veil worn, clothing worn underneath the veil, and the manner in which the veil itself is fanned open or closed at strategic moments to lure or to mask, to reveal or to conceal the face, the body, or the clothing underneath. (Naficy, 2000)

The code of veiling, which has additional regulations, has affects on the representation of woman in cinema as well. The codes of veiling determine the public space and the relation of the unrelated, whereas in cinema, even in the depiction of a private space, women characters have to

comply with hejab. 'Diegetic' world of the film has to constitute its own atmosphere by taking into consideration the 'extra-diegetic' existence of the male look. In the films, the costume, choice of color and hair-style give great information about a certain character to the audience. However, it is not possible to come up with ideas from outer appearance of women characters in the Iranian films. Any emotional act of kissing, hugging and making-love which are present in the daily life of Iranian people has to be absent from the films. Naficy points out that

One of the most significant consequences of veiling in films was that filmmakers were forced to represent all spaces in the films, even bedroom scenes, as if they were public spaces. This resulted in unrealistic and distorted representation of women, since they were shown veiling themselves from their next of kin in the privacy of their homes--something they would not do in real life. This was true even if the diegetic husband and wife were married to each other in real life (Naficy, 2000)

These hardships encountered by the directors led most of them to leave out woman characters after Islamic Revolution. The women characters of imported films, and Iranian films shot previously were cut or corrected with magic markers. This led to an obstruction in the flow of narrative and decreased the aesthetic quality of films. After a short absence of women characters, they slowly found place in the films. However, they represented limited stereo-typed characters with limited appearance. Directors were as if unsure of how to make woman characters three-dimensional. The strict codes that limit the appearance of women were also another factor for their absence.

In the second phase (mid-1980s), women appeared on the screen either as ghostly presence in the background or as domesticated subjects in the home. They were rarely the bearers of the story or the plot. An aesthetics and grammar of vision and veiling based on gender segregation developed, which governed the characters' dress, posture, behaviors, voice, and gaze. (...) The evolving filming grammar discouraged close-up photography of women's faces or of exchanges of desirous looks between men and women. In addition, women were often filmed in long shot and in inactive roles so as to prevent the contours of their bodies from showing. Both women and men were desexualized and cinematic texts became androgynous (Naficy, 2000).

However, after 1990s, when Iranian films received international acclaim world-wide, it began to be possible to come across with women characters at the center of films, shot by the directors like Makhmalbaf, Milani, Kiarostami, Meshkini and Bani-Etemad. They are bolder to depict the aspirations, thoughts and feelings of women characters. However, there are still problems in depicting women in all spheres of life due to the codes of censorship. Veiling also lead to a certain narrative style which depend on implications. Naficy thinks that what obstructs vision such as veiling finds itself as a metaphor in films, where plot indirectly conveys its meaning:

Objects and boundary-marking features such as fences, walls, and columns constantly obstruct vision. Long tracking shots with these obstacles in the foreground highlight them as visual barriers and as metaphors for modesty and veiling. The reciprocity of veiling and unveiling, however, necessitates that the obstructions that seem to conceal certain things from view also reveal something else, namely, the director's intention (Naficy, 2000).

3. A CLOSER LOOK AT HOW WOMEN ARE REPRESENTED IN IRANIAN FILMS

In this part I tried to examine how women are portrayed in post-revolutionary Iranian films. While choosing which films to examine, my criterion was to pick up films with distinctive features that raise and discuss women issue in Iran. And I ended up with films that belong to the period after 1990.

In addition, my aim was to choose films from different directors in order to be able to trace their different style and manner in handling women issue in Iran.

Each film is separately examined and due to their different style and distinctive features, they are not examined in a special order or put into chronological sequence.

3.1 Kiarostami's 'Ten' (2002): A Panorama of How Women Live in Iran

Kiarostami's *Ten* (2002), is a collection of ten sequences at which a woman, driving her car at the streets of Tehran has different conversations with her various passengers. On different times she takes 6 people in her car. During these ten episodes, her conversations become a panorama of the encounters and experiences of different women. Colin argues that like other women who are in prison in their houses, the protagonist is stuck within the borders of the car. And besides her young son who represents the male

world alone, she only takes women as passengers. She is encircled with the outside, which belongs to males, and there is a world inside the car without their existence. However, males are also the main subject of the conversations (Colin, 2004: 61).

In terms of narration, *Ten* could be regarded as different from the conventional narrative strategy where there is just one single grand story, with side stories that contribute and enrich the main story by eventually tying the episodes.

The sequences count backwards but we do not encounter with a straight story separated into different episodes and narrated in a linear fashion from the end to the beginning. Episodes, which could be defined as mini stories of their own, are rather like meditations on contemporary experiences of Iranian women of different ages and socio-economic background on issues like divorce, motherhood, love, adultery, religion, prostitution, etc.

Except for the main subjects of the episodes, the conversations are left to be created spontaneously by the actors. Hence, the narration gives the sense to unexpectedness, as if flowing in an unplanned fashion, like the car wandering in the streets, meanwhile, unfolding different tales each time.

Besides, the micro-world of the car as a space becomes an important designating element of the narration with its suffocating, narrow and gloomy atmosphere; contributing to the little tragedies exchanged between the characters, hence contributing to the narrative impact of the film.

Moreover as a strategy, the narration does not take a moral side or comment on anything. It is not possible to come across with any background music or any non-diegetic sound, as well as lightning that directs the spectator for a moral comment. Hence, the film gives the sense of a semi-documentary with its natural, spontaneous dialogues, avoiding to become a moral arena and it rather brings forth the different perspectives on certain issues.

In the first episode of the film, we come across with a female protagonist who is represented by her voice. She takes her son from school. The mother-son goes into an argument in which the audience had the details that the young lady with an 'invisible face' was a divorced woman with a child at the age of 12. She later marries with another man. During the argument that seems to break out of nowhere, the female protagonist tries to explain why she decided to get divorced, how her ex-husband shut her away, destroyed her and wanted her only for himself. The little boy resists listening to her, blaming his mother of telling the same old stories over and over again. The child (Amin) further accuses her of being a selfish mother and goes on to explain that Mortaza (the new husband) is not his real father and he does not want him to pay for his food as if he is poor or an orphan.

Being at the care of the step-father seems to hit the little boy's pride, although his mother is also working and contributing for the household expenses. The little boy disregards this fact totally and assumes that the house subsists on the step father's effort.

Evidently, after 7 years, the little boy does no longer want to live with his mother. Amin wants to move to his father's house as soon as he gets married, just because he does not want a 'stranger's (the step-father) food and shelter anymore. The little boy, though very determined to leave his mother, waits for his father to get married again. This is probably because the father practically cannot look after the child. Hence a new step-mother is waited to cook, to wash, and to take care of the boy.

In order to justify his accusations, the boy blames his mother to lie at the court. It is very important to emphasize that even this educated and economically independent woman had to lie at the court in order to be able to get divorced. The female protagonist explains this out of hopelessness with the following words:

It was a good way of getting a divorce. The rotten laws in this society of ours give no rights to woman. To get a divorce a woman has to say that she is beaten, or that her husband's on drugs!" A woman has no right to live? A woman has to die so as to be able to live?

However, the argument ends meaninglessly, when the boy gets out of the car by saying: "You stupid idiot, I have never seen anyone so stupid." Only at this moment the woman becomes visible for the audience, who was only represented by her 'voice' before. Capote suggests that:

(...) we imagine her via the vocalization of her voice – its pitch, timbre, intonation and grain. When the image finally comes, it's a revelation, both in the sense that it confounds our expectations about what she may possibly look like, and, in the sense of an unveiling of someone being exposed to public scrutiny. This is after all a film dealing with the image of woman within an Islamic culture. Between what

is heard and what is seen, between voice and body, *10* play an elaborate game of ventriloquism. (Capote, 2003)

The audience comes across with a beautiful, fashionably dressed woman in her thirties, with a full make-up, wearing a loose scarf. Considering the strict codes on veiling for women characters in Iranian films, the loose veiling of the female protagonist could be explained by the political atmosphere of the times film shot. In 2002, Khatemi was the president of Iran. He was known for his moderate policies especially on the film making. That was also why he was supported by the film industry to be elected in 1997.

Coming back to the mother-son episodes, which takes place for three more times in the film, after the first excursion, the mother takes the child from the father for three times, during her weekly visits. It is interesting to note here that although at first excursion, the shouts, cries, blaming and accusations of the boy seem like protests and rebels of a little spoiled boy, after the second and third episodes, the audience witnesses that the little boy has already adopted a masculine way of thinking and that he has been quite influenced by his father, speaking like a 'little man'.

He definitely behaves disrespectfully and barely tolerates his mother. Sooner, the weekly visits end up with the child's demand to be brought to his grandmother. Their communication slowly fades away, and the mother comes to such a point that she seems to handle and cope with him on the condition that she accepts what he says. And seeing that there is no way out and it is in vain to communicate, the mother just asks dull, simple questions in order not to argue. Indirectly, over the relationship of the mother and the

son, the spectator acquires clues about the relationship of the mother and the ex-husband; how their communication faded away and they come to the point of divorce. The boy becomes the mirror of the father, who still indirectly manipulates his ex-wife's life by means of their little boy and unsurprisingly, he transforms into a perfect copy of his father which is evident from the change in his tolerance, endurance and speech.

In the second episode, the female protagonist takes her sister in the car. During their journey, they discuss the behaviors of Amin. The sister of the protagonist believes that her niece had convinced him to be unhappy by thinking that 'his mother has remarried, whereas his father does not have a wife'. The solution of the sister to the disputes among her sister and niece is noteworthy. She thinks that the little boy has to go to his father 'to be set straight' and that a boy 'needs his father while stepping to manhood'. She thinks that the father as a figure of 'male authority' has more power to 'discipline and introduce the proper way of behaving' to the child. Indeed, this point of view portrays the patriarchal approach of the society as well. Moreover the laws in case of a divorce, does not grant the guardianship of the child to the mother in any case, even it grants the custody.

In the third episode, the passenger is a very old woman who is going to the mosque. She tells how she sold all her property after the death of her husband and her only son. Now all she does is to pray. Slowly bit by bit, the audience gets to know about the point of view of the female driver. She says 'the fewer ties you have, the better you live', when she hears that the old woman has no one and no property. The old woman is very much occupied

by praying, it seems that she has left everything aside and praying has become the only way she can endure life. She seems to get her strength and reason to live from going to mosque. She even insists the female driver to go inside and have a pray and that she can look after the car when she is away.

The fourth passenger of the female driver after that highly religious old woman, was a prostitute whom she mistakenly got into her car. Thinking that she wants a ride, she brakes and gets her whereas the other woman thinks he is a male driver who wants a female companion. The driver begins to ask the woman why she chooses to do this job and what her motives were. The young woman seems to be quite happy, perceiving this as a trade, a job, she honestly performs. As if proud of what she does, she puts it in such a way that she is aware of the 'real face of man': that they are unfaithful and unreliable. And without growing fond of any man, she is just having sex with them, fulfilling her own sexual desire and earning money at the same time. Sooner, as the conversation deepens, the young woman explains that once, she was engaged and a 'loving fool' like the other women, 'clinging' to his fiancé, until she learnt that she was deceived. She portrays a character that has lost all her faith in man after she has been deceived and got broken and then she begins to think that the only sensible way to have a relationship with a man is to have sex without a feeling. She seems to choose behaving that way consciously to neutralize the sexual independence of man. She thinks that a great majority of men lie to their loved ones and have sexual intercourse with other women and think they

have the right to do so, just because they are male. Though not deceiving anyone, this young woman in a way acts as independent as these men, in order not to get 'used' by them, but to use them for her own satisfaction... Explaining what she does as a 'trade of give and take', she wants to be in equal terms with men. That is why she criticizes women who are dependent to their husbands and boy friends, by saying that: "you satisfy yourselves by clinging to your men." She thinks that in order to satisfy their sentimental needs women become dependent to their loved ones by making them the center of their lives and they are fooled with lies. However, the real way of satisfaction for her, is to be aware of their real face and to act accordingly.

When the young woman leaves the car, the audience is unable to see her face. Only from a long distance she is seen from her back while bargaining with a customer and getting into his car. As a character that makes sincere revelations that had consciously chosen such a trade, it neither aimed, nor intended to condemn or show prostitution as a shameful or corruptive act. On the contrary, she is portrayed as a character that is strong, sensible and independent. Therefore, as a strategy, the director might have intended to protect the female actress who portrayed the prostitute, in the real life and that was why the character was represented only by her 'voice'. Another reason to do so might be to increase the curiosity of the audience but leave them unsatisfied to emphasize that instead of the 'face' of the woman, what she tells and stands for is important. Capote also suggests that:

In some sense their talk is indeed therapeutic for it gives a *voice* to issues that are troubling both at an individual, private level, and at the public level of

cultural ideology. The question of the *voice* and its varied formal uses and meanings in and for this film is particularly emphasized in the episode with the “prostitute”. According to Kiarostami’s account he could not convince an actual prostitute to partake in the film and thereby resorted to casting an actor who would perform the part as scripted. In as far as the body of the actor remains off-screen; the performance is rendered at a purely vocal level. The pattern of “on-screen figure/off-screen voice” is one of *10*’s evolving formal tropes. (Caputo, 2003)

In the sixth episode, the female driver takes a young woman to her car that goes to the mosque to pray. They began to talk about religion and going to mosque. Being not a firm believer, the passenger explains that ‘she had never imagined herself going to a mosque to pray’ and she confesses that she was not a believer before and that she now believes only to a certain extent. When asked why she prays, she replies that she wants her wishes to be granted and wanted to try her chance, also hopelessly adding that though coming for ages, she has still had nothing. It is important to note here that, though not a believer at all, this young woman takes her chador and goes to praying not to fulfill a religious obligation, but to try her chance in granting her wishes. Certainly, in Iranian society though in appearance women comply with the rules of veiling, hecap and chador, not every one of them with a veil is a believer of Islam. The religious thoughts of this woman character which she bravely puts forward, shows that veiling in a sense has become a figurative, an empty act, just like going to Mosque. Hence, there is a difference in experiencing religion in the personal level and in the social one... As there is no way that an Iranian woman whether be a believer of Islam or not goes out without a veil, it is not possible to differentiate the believer and the non-believer from appearance. However, in any case,

women have to be protected from the male gaze. So veiling has become a social norm, a social fact that is imposed by the religious majority. On the other hand, just like in the case of this character, it is not a fact for some women in the real world as some of them might not desire to adopt such a practice being a non-believer. Still, it is impossible to depict a non-religious or a non-Muslim woman without a veil just like it is not possible for any woman to participate in the public space without veil as well.

The female protagonist takes the same young woman, who went to mosque to pray for getting married as soon as possible. This time the young woman tells the female protagonist that her fiancé left her for someone else and he plans to get married with another woman. Seeing that her veil is quite tight, the female driver asks her whether she is modest or not. Upon this question, we see the young woman loosening her scarf and under the scarf her very shortly-cut hair appears. Evidently, she has cut her hair short as a protest. She explains that the moment she cut it, she felt better and stopped crying. The function of the veil is to cover the hair, because the hair contributes to the beauty of a woman's complexion and hence even a string of it should not be seen by men so as not to arouse any sexual desire. By cutting her hair short she removes what makes her 'beautiful'. The female driver suggests her to let her 'head' breathe, which can be interpreted in two different meanings. One of them is that she has now got rid of something 'excessive' (her hair) that she keeps but has also to hide, as well as her burden (the ex-fiancé) who was in contradictions, hesitating to get married with her.

3.2 Nargess (1992) by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad: Crime, Poverty and a Love Triangle

In *Nargess* (1992) directed by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, the audience comes across with the love triangle between a young male thief (Adel), his work-mate and wife, (Afagh) who is also a thief and the young wife of Adel: Nargess. The film melodramatically relates the contradictory, passionate and destructive relationship of the threesome, who also represent the lower class of the Iranian society. What makes the film important is its depiction of a morally indecent woman character, Afagh. Her presence on the contrary to Nargess, who embodies the moral ideals of Iranian society with her humble, submissive and righteous character, stands for the marginal. In the first scene of the film, Adel and Afagh are chased by the police in a dark night at Tehran streets. By coincidence, while running away from the police, Adel gets acquainted with Nargess, who brought her ill father to the hospital and Adel pretends to help them in order to escape from the police, he takes the young woman and her father home. At the taxi, they exchange glances. According to Naficy: “The film pushes the boundaries of what is permissible in terms of direct eye contact, especially between the male protagonist and his young wife-to-be, Nargess...” (Tapper, 2002:30). It was one of the reasons when the film was banned for a while when it was released.

Sooner, Adel finds himself in love with Nargess and decides to get married with her. Warning Afagh not to look for him as he will be on a

journey, Adel secretly goes to see Nargess. Later, he confesses to Afagh that he is in love with someone else, plans to get married with her and lead a decent life. This marks the end of Adel-Afagh relationship.

Adel can not convince her mother to ask for the girl. On the condition that he will continue to see her, Afagh suggests Adel that she could pretend to be his mother and asks for the girl. She even opens her house to the newly-wed couple to prevent Adel going into an embarrassing situation by bringing the bride to his hovel. She makes their bed and looks at her photographs taken when she was young. She later turns them in the opposite direction as she does not want the pictures to be the witnesses of the first night of the couple.

What makes Nargess a distinctive film is the depiction of two strong women characters. Though having quite different motives and aspirations in life, the mutual point of Nargess and Afagh is their love for Adel. Without making a concession from her principles of honesty and leading a decent life, Nargess endures all the troubles that befell on her and waits for Adel when he is in prison, hoping that he will find the decent way and quit stealing. She leads a difficult life outside, without money and even when she learns the truth about Afagh, that she is not the mother but the wife of Adel, she still forgives and helps him to get out of the jail. Nargess and Afagh are depicted as quite clear-cut characters with their standpoints. Adel oscillates between them with his indecision and immaturity. Nargess stands for the purity, moral and the righteousness whereas Afagh except for her self-sacrifice, which seems to be her only positive character trait that emerges

due to her weakness for Adel, stands for the impurity, immorality and deceitful as she has earned her life as a whore and thief. Dabashi thinks that: “Bani Etemad constructs Afagh from the very heart of Iranian underclass. She is a professional thief who has employed Adel as both her accomplice and her lover. She is a moral pariah, a social outcast, a renegade form of the culturally constituted norms of respectability” (Dabashi, 2001: 229).

According to Colin, the thief Afagh is the first bad woman character of the Iranian cinema after the revolution, during which women have mostly been encouraged to appear as characters of sacrificing mothers, wives or daughters (Colin, 2004:65). This is what makes Afagh a character with a depth. Afagh has no intention to leave Adel and by asking Nargess to him as a jest, she wants him to see her from time to time and threatens him to reveal his secret if he does not keep his promise. However, though she tempts him to steal for several times, after their secret comes out, the audience learns the life story of Afagh when she explains all to Nargess. She was left by her husband and separated from her child and she had to steal to survive. She meets Adel and takes him under her protection. Adel becomes her lost child; then her young lover and then her husband. She seems to have strong feelings for him, as he is the only one she has in her life. Both of the women, accepting the presence of each other, fight for Adel with their own methods. Nargess insists on having a decent life, whereas Afagh wants him to steal once more, so that they will all run away with the money and start a new life.

At the final scene of the film, while Nargess runs away from Adel, Afagh follows behind. The time comes for Adel to choose. Adel hesitates for a while but runs away after Nargess. Disappointed to see that, Afagh wants to stop him, but she is crushed by a tractor with the bag full of money which she holds tightly. The money scatters all around like her dreams. Colin thinks that, having lost the love of the man to whom she gives her everything, Afagh is a much more impressive character compared to Nargess who represents the 'ideal woman' the religion imposes. However, in order to protect the sanctity of marriage and in order to give back her respectability in society, the woman who sins has to pay this with her life (Colin, 2004: 66).

In my point of view, Bani-Etemad does not introduce the death of Afagh as a cathartic effect, with the intention to purify the audience, as a solution for a moral justice to prevail. In doing so, she would fall in a melodramatic trap and take a moral side, in a sense condemning the vice and exalting the virtue. In the climax, events come to such a point in the film that there is no formula for the three to live happily together. This disagreement is solved by Adel, who is at the center. Although he is indebted to Afagh, as she took him under her wings and helped him all the time, and knowing that Afagh can not go on living without him, he still chooses Nargess he is in love with. Afagh is abandoned one more time. She loses her child, her lover, her husband. Being at the near of a busy highway, without looking at the road, she steps forward to stop Adel, knowing she will die. Rather than introducing it as purification, a punishment for the

indecent character and the removal of an obstacle, Bani-Etemad introduces Afagh's death to strengthen the dramatic effect and to emphasize her passion. Afagh tries hard to keep him in her hands and at the moment she understands that he is gone for ever, there is no reason for her to go on living.

Aktaş suggests that Nargess is shown as a good example of Islamic film making in terms of its subject and cinematic language. Defined by Bani-Etemad as a 'skillfully shot' film Farsi, Nargess is worth to be emphasized, due to the existence of a feminist point of view and its success to break away with certain clichés. Bani-Etemad manages to break away them in several levels. In most of the film Farsis, man is the owner of the absolute wisdom, the identifier of the moral criterion of the family and the only means of living of the family. However in Nargess, Adel is depicted as an immature adult, controlled by the leading woman characters (Aktaş, 2004: 239-240).

The film is also successful at eliminating certain codes of restriction by visual motifs. For instance, in a very important scene due to the code that bans physical contact between the male and female characters, the wedding night of Adel and Nargess is depicted through implication. The white shoes of the bride and the black shoes of the groom staying side by side in front of the door, represents the sexual intercourse. Moreover, the costume is also used as a means to portray the woman characters. We see Nargess in a black chador in public space, in compliance with the code of Islamic dressing which signifies her propriety and morality. In a scene where she locks

Afagh inside her house and runs away, she even turns back to the courtyard to take her chador she forgot. Beneath her chador, she wears a white scarf which symbolizes her purity. On the contrary, Afagh wears colored and patterned scarves.

3.3 The Circle (2000) by Jafer Panahi: An Unbreakable Vicious Circle

The *Circle* (2000) directed by Jafer Panahi, has received acclaim from international festivals and has won Golden Lion at the 2000 Venice Film Festival, though it was removed from one of the most important festivals of Tehran, Fajr Film Festival and was banned due to the depiction of police corruption, prostitution and abortion. Panahi brings together episodes from the lives of unrelated female characters to depict the difficulties women encounter in Iran, both due to the repressive political government and the patriarchic laws and traditions that restrict their lives. The film, mostly shot in actual locations gives a documentary taste. It has a narrative style which combines different stories in sequence, making a circle in the end. The complex camera movements and the visual motifs that strengthen the thematic approach, also contributes to the distinctive narrational style.

Druick suggests that the *Circle*, by using circular structure of overlapping stories, is the most explicit feminist critique of the Islamic state so far. She says that by giving a clear picture of the repressed nature of

women's lives that are under the male authority, even smoking becomes a forbidden pleasure (Druick, 2001).

The Circle is a quite striking film that introduces the hardships experienced by the women in Iranian society. The circular narration shifts from one story to another. The film begins in a hospital, when a desperate mother asks whether it might be wrong that her daughter is given birth to a baby girl. She can hardly believe it is a girl as the ultrasound announced it to be a boy. She is in a panic to find this out, and she questions it for a reason unrevealed for sometime. Later, we learn that the in-laws want a boy, instead of a girl. The anxiety of the mother mounts up each second, because she thinks that the husband of her daughter will divorce her when the family finds out the truth. Out of desperateness in order not to face up with the in-laws, the mother runs away from the hospital. This is a meaningful episode as it depicts the fact that baby boys are much valued than baby girls. The new born little baby girl has already become a victim. It is important to note here that this chain of events triggered by this birth, affect the women of three generations: the grandmother, the mother and the poor daughter. Panahi in one of his interviews explains why he preferred to start with the hospital episode:

Maybe the most common way to tell this story would have been to begin at a prison, with the women coming out of prison and telling their story of leaving prison. But rather than to have this introduction, I think it's more suitable to put out a simple question in the first scene: Why is it a problem that these people are having a girl? And then there's 86 minutes of explanation (Kaufman, 2001).

The camera later shifts to the story of three women who had a temporary leave from prison: Arezou, Moedeh and Nargess... The audience never finds out why those women ended up in jail and why they are released. These three women hopelessly want to find their friend named Pari, who was left from prison before them, in order to ask for help. However, their roads diverge when Moedeh is taken away by the police. The streets of Tehran are not safe for these women even at the daylight. They become the target of questioning looks everywhere they go; hence they have to find money and a safe place before it gets dark. Nargess is still hopeful and she thinks a better life is possible at Raziliq, her hometown. She wishes Arezou to come with her; however, their roads also diverge.

Even a simple act of buying a ticket becomes a psychological torture for her. Nargess, swearing she is a student manages to convince the ticket seller. However, she is unable to take the bus as it is controlled by the police before departure. Having no student ID and a male accompany, it is forbidden for an Iranian woman to travel. Due to a regulation that might seem unimportant, a way for a 'better life' for Nargess is obstructed.

Now, there is no other way out for Nargess but to find Pari to ask help from her. At this point, the story shifts to Pari. The moment Nargess finds Pari's house, her brothers are already punching the door to take Pari. Threatened by her brothers, Pari flees away from her parent's house. It is later revealed that Pari's husband is executed, and she is four months pregnant. In order to ask for help and to have abortion, Pari goes to the hospital to find Elham, whom she was friends with in the prison. Elham,

married to a consultant, now works as a doctor in a hospital. Though she has connections, she refuses to help as it remains absolutely illegal to have an abortion or to carry out an abortion. Article 91 of the Criminal code imposes the death penalty, according to the Islamic laws, for anyone murdering an unborn child if that child possesses a soul (Afshar, 1999: 138) and the pregnancy is far advanced and explains that the permission of both of the fathers is required.

Besides being unable to help her, Elham is dreadfully scared that her husband will ask questions about this mysterious visitor because he has not even a slightest idea about Elham's past... Pari desperately sets out. She now needs a place to spend the night. However, this will not be that easy, as she also needs a male companion. Wandering on the streets of Tehran, Pari comes across with Nayareh, who has to abandon her little girl as she can not look after her. After she leaves her baby girl in tears, Nayareh begins to walk in the streets of Tehran. Several cars stop to take her but she refuses. Later, she gets into a car. Mistaken as a prostitute, she is taken by the police. The police chief who questions Nayareh in his car, stops at a controlling point to check a problem. Meanwhile, a man is begging a police officer not to arrest him explaining that he has a family and a child, and explains that he pitied and gave the woman a lift. Nayareh takes advantage of the busy atmosphere and sneaks off the police chief's car and runs away. The other woman on the begging man's car, who is a prostitute watches a bride's convoy passing. Meanwhile, the man is still begging the police officer to let him go. The police officer leaves the man and takes the woman as expected.

In the police bus, during her journey to police station, the prostitute smokes, which Arezou tries to do several times but unable to do so. The recurrent theme of being unable to smoke is an important leitmotif in showing the extent of restrictions women encounter in the society. Grunes suggests that: “Panahi calls this an ‘insignificant restriction’ that, divested of moment and focused on a small part of everyday life, provides a more telling index of the complex of restrictions to which Iranian women are subject than might some more salient behavior” (Grunes: 2000).

In the final scene, we see all the women are in the jail. Their daily adventure in the streets of Tehran, brought them back to the point where they started, proving that a new beginning is no more than a dream. At this stage Druick comments: “The jail cell is no more repressive than the rest of the society like hospital, street and home. In fact, in the dim jail cell, they are actually afforded some freedom from prying eyes that control their behavior for the rest of the time” (Druick, 2001). The film clearly depicts the hardships and restrictions women encounter in Iranian society that penetrates into even simple acts of daily life like buying a ticket, renting a room and smoking. Rapfogel points out that: “In *The Circle*, the oppression that women in Iran (and elsewhere) suffer is never simply theoretical-it's not a contention or an idea, it's an experience (Rapfogel, 2001).

In the *Circle*, the different stories related in sequence, which end up in the final prison scene, is enriched with metaphors that contribute to the circular narration. During what befalls in between, after they get out of prison and end up there finally, they are as much restricted as a person could

be in a prison. Like the unwanted little girl, going out of the womb of her mother, these women are released from the prison, and they encounter many incidents that they inescapably find themselves in the prison again. Instead of standing for a beginning or an emancipatory action, the birth and the release becomes the triggering factor of tragedies.

The camera movements also play a crucial role in strengthening the dramatic affect at the overall. During the hospital scene, from the moment the woman asks about her daughter, who is given a birth, until she leaves the hospital in haste upon bad news, the camera follows her. And through the camera movements the spectator closely feels her terror and her desperateness. Moreover, during the film the close-ups to the women's faces which linger for a while are intentionally used to enable the spectator perceive the changes of expressions closely. The circular staircase in the office building, where Arezou goes to a store to find money, is depicted from a wide angle with a tracking shot, emphasizing its circularity. We come across with these stairs for twice, when Arezou and Nargess are trying to find money to go Razaliq and when Nergiss departs with Arezou and goes back to find her. Each time, they come here; they are helpless to find something, first time it is money, next time it is Arezou. And the circularity of the staircase symbolizes the vicious circle they are in. No matter what effort they put on to reach their aim, they are entrapped, hunted one by one and caged. In a casual manner the camera tracks the women, who are fleeing away from somebody or something all the time, or trying to find someone, or desperately trying to get somewhere.

The costumes of the women as motifs also contribute to the narration. All of the women are veiled. They have scarves and they wear loose garments and tunics. However, when they see the police, or go to a place that they feel insecure, they take out their chadors and wear them. Pari is also asked to use chador when she goes to see her friend at the hospital. She borrows one which she uses to hide her identity at the corridors of the hospital. She is unrecognizable with her black chador, like any other women walking in the hospital. As a symbol of respectability, humbleness and conformity, the chador for the women in the film is a tool that protects them and for the audience it is the alarm of the coming danger, the evident fear of the female characters.

The closed doors, of maternity ward and prison cell, also appear as a recurring image both at the beginning and the final scene of the film, completing the circular narration.

3.4 The Hidden Half (2001) by Tahmineh Milani: Unrevealed Secrets of a Past Life

In *The Hidden Half* (Nimeh ya-Penhan, 2001) Tahmineh Milani portrays the turbulent youth of a today's 40-years-old housewife Fereshtah. Through the private life of a young woman from the province, who has recently attended the philosophy department of university, in a retrospective style the film depicts the political and social changes occurred during the Islamic Revolution of 1979. After the release of this film, Milani landed in jail, in 2001, by the Tehran Revolutionary Court on the grounds that by

depicting of the events in 1970s, she supported counterrevolutionaries. Although Khatami's reformist government approved the film before it was made, she was convicted to abuse her art to insult revolution and to express her anti-revolutional ideas. However, upon her defense she was consequently released from jail after two weeks.

The film starts with a happy middle-class family scene. Fereshtah's husband Khosro is about to leave for Tehran to investigate an appeal of a woman, who has been a political prisoner of ten years, sentenced to execution. On his arrival to hotel at Tehran, the husband finds a letter from his wife, telling him that she has been unable to express herself during all those years and the notebook she left on the suitcase contains of her real-life story, her real past, aspirations and experiences. By giving this notebook, Fereshtah intends to draw the attention of her husband to the case of the political prisoner and to the importance judging without prejudice, by listening to the 'other' side. The film with a flashback returns back to the years of revolution, when Fereshtah, is a young philosophy student from province. She joins a leftist group of women, organizing weekly gatherings where they exchange their thoughts, hand out flyers, sell newspapers and Che Guevara posters, depicted as wearing Chinese army jackets of green color, all of them scarved. Thomas suggests that she arrives in the immediate aftermath of the Islamic Revolution a naive, idealistic but bright 18-year-old, and eager to understand the wrenching changes transforming Iranian society and not realizing they will soon prove repressive rather than liberating for women (Thomas, 2000).

Fereshtah in one of the gatherings comes across with the editor-in-chief of an art & society magazine Javid Roozbeh, whom she immediately falls in love with. Although their first encounter ends up with a sharp speech, their relationship improves after when Fereshtah takes refuge at his office coincidentally, while running away from the members of an opposite group, who were to beat her. However, her actions make her be included in the black list. When one of Fereshtah's friends was taken up by the police, Roozbeh decides to send her to England until the political turmoil settles. However, Fereshtah disappointedly learns that Roozbeh is married and has a son of her age. On her confrontation with Roozbeh's wife, Ms. Shafiee, Fereshtah learns about the real story. That she resembles so much to Mahmonir, the cousin to Ms. Shafiee, and the fiancé to Roozbeh. However, Mahmonir was lost in a public demonstration and was never found. Ms. Shafiee relates that Roozbeh's concern to Fereshtah is due to her resemblance to Mahmonir. Having learnt the truth, Fereshtah leaves Mr. Roozbeh without saying a word and listening to his explanations. She begins to look after a disabled lady, the mother of her present husband. However 20 years later, Fereshtah and Javid come across at a friend's funeral and he explains her how she was wrong to judge him that earlier, without listening the other side of the story.

Fereshtah seems to tell all these to reveal her past, in a sense confronting with her self and confessing what she has hidden up to now, to warn her husband not to take action in haste but to listen the other side of the story the political prisoner will tell him.

The title of the film ironically has double meaning; the hidden half corresponds to the hidden past of Fereshtah and the other half of the society that is made of women who have been repressed. Smith suggests that:

The Hidden Half also draws compelling parallels with the failure in 1953 of the anti-western, Marxist modernization of Iran, whose collapse ushered in the rule of the Shah. It's as if, in naming her protagonist Fereshtah once more, and casting the same actress, Milani is mapping out through this film yet another possible future for her, and by extentison, all Iranian women (Smith, 2002).

Fereshtah's political efforts in a minimal scale, ended up with a failure to change, when revolution erupted and universities were closed for three years and a more repressive administration was in power. Meanwhile, her love affair ended up with a disappointment. Losing in different aspects of her life, Fereshtah becomes a perfect symbol of a certain era, the youth of which was disillusioned. Smith further explains that:

Fereshtah is betrayed by an older generation: her lover cannot initiate change, limiting his involvement with a Marxism that might have protected Iran from the excesses of both the Shah and the Ayatollahs to futile romantic infatuation. His wife prefers the security of an enclosed, protected existence to the possibility of an independent life without a man who has probably never loved her (Smith, 2002).

Fereshtah's transition from a revolutionist character to a humble housewife happens both on the social and private level. Whereas fighting for freedom and more expression for woman, she has been silenced and repressed by the revolution. Escaping to be convicted for her thoughts, she took refuge in an old woman she looked after, and ended up getting married and became a housewife. However, while depicting the effects of the

revolution on the life of a woman, the film boldly portrays a woman rather intellectual, intelligent and productive.

Objecting to the depiction of women as stereotypes, Milani portrays women that react and endeavor to change the injustices. Aktaş mentions that the woman characters of Milani are idealist, devoted to the moral value judgments but they also think that it is important to realize the self. They object loudly against the obstacles introduced by their spouse, family and the society (Aktaş, 2004: 235).

The film takes its strength from its rich storyline rather than its visuality. By relating the immediate post-revolutionary Iran through a romantic intercourse, the melodramatic narration of the film does not shadow its political criticism. Spanning for a time period covering 20 years, the film flashbacks to the end of 1970s and from time to time, the voice-over of Fereshtah relates her own confessions written at the diary. The atmosphere of revolutionary era which dethroned shah is depicted in a criticising manner. Fereshtah and her leftist friends can not continue their activities of holding their routine meetings and giving out with fliers followed by Islamist militants. Evidently in the turmoil when the revolution took place, there was no room left for any other political stance except for Islamic fundamentalism and their initiation for a change not only failed but also, they were expelled from the university.

However, Fereshtah by relating her own story steps forward to save a woman's life, which instills hope, denoting that woman that carry on their struggle personally may initiate change at the micro level.

When the accused woman begins her statement to Fereshtah's husband she uses the same words Fereshteh uses to begin her story: Khosro's head bends slightly. The reference to Fereshtah's words underlines the similarity of what women experience in Iran.

3.5 The Apple (1998) by Samira Makhmalbah: A True Tale of Emancipation

In *The Apple* (Sib) (1998), Samira Makhmalbaf depicts the story of twin sisters who were locked inside by their father since their birth. The semi-documentary-fiction film clearly brings out the oppression upon woman in the micro-level, exerted within the family, by the parents. In this film, it is the society that emancipates them. The film starts with people filling a petition to Welfare Department, to take action against a father who has been keeping his twin daughters at home since their birth. The children are obviously not properly cleaned and fed, uneducated and as they are unable to communicate with anybody, their mental development is delayed. They walk improperly and hardly explain themselves.

The girls are taken to welfare institution by the social worker upon petition. In the hospital we see the parents come to take back their children. Once they promise not to lock them and to keep them clean and properly, they could take the girls home. In the scene when they are at the building of Welfare Department, it is interesting to note that the blind mother embraces her daughters Massoumeh and Zahra and is frustrated to find out that the girls are not veiled. Cursing the social workers to remove their scarf, although it was done for the sake of cleaning the girls' hair, she immediately

wants veil to cover the heads of her daughters, calling them ‘little bitches’ meanwhile. Under her chador, hardly visible and being unable to see also, the mother acts in a more repressive manner. After the girls are taken to home, the father feels himself responsible to do something about their education. He tries to teach them how to cook rice. He explains: “God made woman for her to marry. Look, when you are married, you will have to know how to cook. Then people will not say because of her blind mother, she never learnt anything.” In one of the following scenes, he orders one of them to wash the clothes and the other to sweep the courtyard, so that they will get used to doing housework. They had no opportunity to explore the world outside and get acquainted with other people. The father is dreadfully afraid that a mishap may happen to them. Afraid of the dangers awaiting them outside, the father also underestimates his daughter’s capacity to handle with a problem they might encounter outside. He is also afraid of being ‘dishonored’ and being ‘slandered’ as this case was taken to the newspapers.

Although the girls are taken home, they are still locked inside. Upon realizing this, the social worker warns that the girls will be taken again if they continue to lock them up. The father tries to justify himself by the condition of his wife- that she is blind and is hence insufficient to take care of her daughters- by listing the dangers that may befall on his daughters when he is not at home. However, the social worker is determinant. She releases the girls and locks the man instead and giving him a hacksaw, tells him to cut the bars or break the lock. The girls go outside to explore the

world. They buy ice-cream, they make friends with an ice-cream vendor little boy, they get acquainted with two girls of their age that play hopscotch and make friends with them. They even go to the city center and look for watches.

Based on a true story, this semi-fiction, semi-documentary film is highly symbolical in putting forth the certain way of perception that restricts women's lives. In one of the scenes, Massoumeh and Zahra look at the sun behind the bars. They run inside and by plundering their hands into black dye, they make handprints to the white walls in the shape of sun. In the following scene, they water the flower in the pot at the other side of the bars. These consequent scenes find meaning when the father recites a sentence to the social worker from the book 'Advice to Fathers': "It says a girl is like a flower. If the sun shines on her, she will fade. A man's gaze is like the sun and will wither her." The handprints of black suns on the wall here, express their wish to explore the world outside and their aspiration is intensified when they water the flower outside the bars, so that it will not fade away and grow.

Apple as a fruit also plays an important role in the symbolical level throughout the film. Although the apple has negative associations, it becomes a positive symbol of their emancipation from the chains they were locked before. When they first leave the hospital, there are apples in the hands of Massoumeh and Zahra and it is the first thing they want from the social worker after they go back home. When they are released, the little boy of the neighboring house teases them with an apple which he ties to a

stick with a rope. Then he takes them to greengrocery to buy apple. In the last scene of the film, the blind mother also goes outside and the same boy teases her with an apple again. In one of her interviews Samira Makhmalbaf explains:

At the end, this boy [who teases the mother with an apple] is at the same time a symbol of Satan and God together. He is provoking [the mother] to have this apple. But at the end, he is the person, the same as God, who put the apple, put the life, in the hand of the mother. So, at the same time, [he is] Satan and God. Provoking, but [ultimately] putting the apple (Lehrer, 2003).

Toumerkine also explains how apple transforms into a positive symbol in his article:

Apples obviously possess the biblical resonance of illicit temptation and bring to mind sexist stereotypes concerning women who undermine male virility. But apples become positive symbols in this film, catalysts that suggest that two abused girls might be capable of emerging from their familial cage and becoming free, productive citizens (Toumarkine, 2003).

The film celebrates the power of women to break away with the oppression to get free. It is the social worker woman, who determinately releases the girls outside to play and have contact with other people. She takes their responsibility although they hardly walk and speak, being mentally underdeveloped. But she trusts them and believes that they would eventually find the truth instinctually. And twins girls with all their innocence and hunger to explore, does not fail to get by outside even making friends and learning to contact with people in the right manner very soon. Dabachi mentions that:

The apple thus becomes a devastating condemnation of the mind-numbing oppression of women not just in Iran but anywhere. An allegory of global relevance, *The Apple* has particular force in Samira's own homeland where the hopes and aspirations of the young are bursting through all the historically received and ideologically reinforced injustices perpetrated against women (Dabachi, 2001:271).

3.6 The Day I Became a Woman (2000) by Marziyeh Meshkini: Three Generations, Three Different Tales

Marziyeh Meshkini's *The Day I Became a Woman* (Roozi ke zan Sodam) (2000) tells three different stories of women from different generations that interlink at the final. The first story is about Havva (means Eve) who steps her ninth birthday. On her ninth birthday, everything begins to change completely for Havva. Perceived now as a woman, Havva's mother sends away her best friend Hassan, who came to call her outside to play, telling him that 'Havva is a woman now. She is no longer a girl and he should go and play with boys instead.' Finding this change within a day quite strange, Havva is unable to understand. However, she objects by saying she was born at noon, hence, can not yet be counted nine (and a woman) and has the right to go out and play until noon. The grandmother, who measures her chador, allows her out by giving a stick in her hand to measure time. When the stick will no longer cast a shadow, at noon, she will be a woman and has to come back home.

Havva runs immediately to call Hassan, who is now locked inside his house by his mother to finish his homework. Periodically measuring the

time with her stick, Havva goes to seaside to wait for him. At the seaside, boys who made sailboats from barrels ask for Havva's veil to stretch it as canvas on the corners of the arch-shaped sticks. In exchange of a small plastic fish, Havva agrees to give her scarf. She later comes back to call for Hassan, who gives her money to buy ice-cream. Finding no ice-cream, she buys candies and lollipop. In a shot-reverse shot, they enjoy their lollipops and candies, the symbol of their innocence as children.

When the shadow is gone, Havva's mother comes to fetch her, and covers her head with the new veil. Havva looks back to Hassan, whom she will not be able to play with anymore. Overnight, her freedom as a child is taken from her hands and a series of restriction will encircle her life as she steps into womanhood.

She accepts it without much objection, maybe because she is too small to question. As representatives of older generations, the grandmother and the mother seem to accept it as a fact, quite naturally. Meshkini says in one her interviews: "The first story isn't really about religion; rather it describes how habits that have become ingrained over time restrict women's freedom" (Meshkini, 2000).

The second episode is the tale of a young woman named Ahoo (means Gazelle) who participates in a women's bicycle race. The competition takes places in a road by the seashore, where many women cycle under the hot sun covered with their black veils that billows as they are pedaling. Very soon, Ahoo is pursued by her angry husband on horseback. When she refuses to give up, she is threatened to be 'sort out

right here and now'. But when she insists to continue, the husband brings a hadji to convince her. Ahoo is determinant to finish the race. She does not take heed of her husband and the mullah. Her resistance leads the annulment of her marriage while cycling. After a while, four men on the horseback began to chase her; the father, the grandfather and the elderly of her family. Ahoo quite bravely goes on her race. Her father threatens her: "We'll drag you off that thing if we have to. Your brothers are on their way. You've insulted our honor. Your husband has divorced you. What are we to do? Ahoo's quite simple act of joining a bicycle race turns out to be a disgraceful, a corrupted behavior and there is no explanation of why it is such. However, Ahoo does not surrender to intimidation. She in a sense cycles to a 'change'. However, at the final of the episode, her way is blocked by her two brothers who take away her bicycle. Yet, she borrows someone else's to finish the race.

Despite the heavy pressure coming from males, Ahoo is depicted as a quite strong character who denies obeying restriction. Although she lives difficult moments under the sun without water, the arrival of each man makes her become more ambitious to finish the race.

This episode is indeed quite allegorical. It depicts the position of women in Iranian society. The road represents the life whereas the race stands for the hardships, particularly encountered by woman in a male-dominated society. The men on horseback symbolize the males in that society that tries to detain women from realizing their aspirations. Although there is a certain point when women can no longer resist (when her brothers

block the road on horseback) there is still an alternative to go behind your desire (she borrows someone else's bike and continues). It portrays a hopeful picture, telling that though there will always be restrictions, women will find alternative ways to fulfill their wishes.

In the third episode, Houra (means black-eyed beauty) an old women in her seventies comes to town to buy herself the households she has been unable to buy for years. As if compensating for all those years in deprivation, she has been inherited money which she extravagantly spends. She hires a group of boys to cart her and her new purchases. At the seaside, she wants them to unpack everything to see what she has forgotten. It is as if a skeleton of a house is established over the sand. Houra is enjoying her possessions, during her limited remaining time on earth, granting herself this delayed pleasure. As she is and her possessions are loaded on sailboats made from barrels, she sails to the vessel anchored further away, as if sailing to eternity. Meanwhile on the shore, Ahoo and Havva watch her to leave.

In the overall, when I look at the films, I have analyzed so far, although each of them are distinctive in terms of their genre, subject matter and narrational style, they bear some resemblances as well. For instance, comprising of different episodes, *Ten*, *The Circle* and *The Day I Became a Woman* resemble at certain aspects in terms of their narrational strategy. All of them consist of different episodic parts and in all of them, there is more than one story told that contributes to the plot. However in *Ten*, five different stories are divided into ten different episodes whereas in *the Circle*

there is a linearity in the episodes and in the climax where each story cross with a circular narration. On the other hand, *The Day I Became a Woman* talks about three different stories of three different generations which has no relation with each other. In my opinion, as well as making them have unique narrational styles, the strategy of including different episodes of multiple stories enable these films to have a rich and broad perspective and content. Therefore it becomes possible for them to have room to discuss many issues regarding women at the same time. For instance, during the dialogues of ten episodes in *Ten*, contemporary experiences of Iranian women of different ages and socio-economic background on issues like divorce, motherhood, love, adultery, religion, prostitution, etc. are discussed. Likewise, In *The Circle* starting from the hospital scene until the cell episode, the micro stories follow each other and just like a relay race, the women character perform and exit from the scene, until they will reappear again at the final. Meanwhile, the spectators follow these women characters and witness the hardships each of them encounter at different levels in the streets of Tehran. And in *The Day I Became a Woman* the episodic approach enables the differences of the experiences of different generations and gives us the opportunity to compare their experiences to understand being a woman in Iran.

In the *Hidden Half*, the same approach of shedding light to different generations is present with a slight difference from *The Day I Became a Women*. This time, there is just one woman and she relates her own story in parallel with the revolutionary period with a flashback. And from the

personal details of her life and experiences, the audience witnesses with a picture of a certain period which bears transformations that affect the lives of some Iranian women.

Semi-fictional and semi-documentary, *The Apple* is in a different category compared with the rest of the films I have examined. Based on a true story, the film begins with a video footage of the social service scene, where there is no intervention to the story, the camera only witnesses. And the film continues with the story acted by the real participants of the experience... What makes *The Apple* different is its narration at the symbolical level. The apple stands for temptation and emancipation as well in the film, it is the first thing girls go to buy when they are released. When they are behind the bars at home, the flowers they water not to wither symbolizes them. And the sun stands for the freedom, which withers the flower, however, the flower need the sun to live. Likewise, we also come across with a deep layer of symbolical narration in *The Day I Became a Woman* as well. The candies stand for the childish innocence of the small child; the bicycle race becomes the freedom of woman, whereas the man with horses that tries to stop them is the symbol of male dominance and the new households for the old woman symbolizes what she has not owned so far.

One more important resemblance in the films I have examined was about the veiling of women. It was not possible to come across with unveiled women in any of the films I have analyzed. Women were veiled in private spaces as well. In *Nargess* and in *The Hidden Half*, the women

characters were veiled, while depicted at their houses. Moreover, in *The Hidden Half* while depicting the revolutionary era, the leftist woman character was depicted in veils, although veiling was not obligatory yet. Only in *Ten* there was the violation of veiling, in which one of the woman characters unveiled herself after she has cut her hairs short. And its possibility is confusing. Was it because her hair was cut short? She has now been deprived of what makes her beautiful, or because there has been a milder perspective in code of veiling in Iranian films, are questions I search answers for.

CONCLUSION

In my thesis, before examining how women are represented in the films of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, I thought that it is required to explore the women issue in Iran; as such background information would help me to make a more complete analysis of how women are portrayed in Iranian films produced after the revolution.

However, while I searched answers to the question of how revolution affected the lives of Iranian women; whether they have lost their rights they had before; and if it is possible to talk about a regression in their status, I have encountered with the difficulty of placing a definite answer.

In my opinion, this stems from the fact that the complex dynamics of the culture, where tradition, religious doctrines and social values are interwoven, make the analysis of this issue a complicated one. The singularity of each experience engenders multiplicity of interpretation.

Therefore, I concluded that in the effort to handle this matter comprehensively, examining different perspectives is of great importance. Evidently, some women have encountered with hardships due to the certain enforcements of Islamic regime at the political, judicial and the social level. However, it is also an undeniable fact that, revolution also enabled some women to comfortably participate in the social space and attend the workforce. Revolution had different impacts on the rural and the urban; as well as the lower and upper class and what makes this picture a wider one is the diversity of these outcomes.

Despite some discouraging enforcements like the suspension of Family Protection Law, it is possible to talk about positive ones like the continued operation of the Family Courts where many Iranian women has continued to use as bargaining grounds for divorce proceedings and even claim the half of their husband's wealth.

On the other hand, although when exercising mut'a (temporary marriage) and polygamy, a man has to apply for court permission, as there is no legal sanction for not doing so, the penalty removed, there is a legal loophole that is disadvantageous for the women as well.

Though it may not be regarded as adequate, in a society where it is banned to have abortion, the introduction of birth control campaigns becomes an important step that improves the lives of women. This situation clearly exhibits the importance of evaluating a society with its own realities.

Before discussing how women are represented in Iranian cinema, as a last remark, I would like to say that although in terms of women issue, I think that there is still lots of things to do to improve the status of women (as in the rest of the world), the picture is not that dark when you try to include different perspectives and have a comprehensive approach on the matter.

And in my opinion, the existence of a productive environment in Iran where women discuss and claim their rights (through women's magazines like Zanan, or by raising the women question through films) and the presence of the debates that continue on political enforcements, legal

sanctions and social realities, is of great importance improving the women's status as well as the personal efforts and struggles in the micro level.

When coming back to the issue of film making in Iran, it is possible to see that the new codes of censorship introduced after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 brought some restrictions in film making particularly on the portrayal of women. For a period, it even led to the absence of women characters as the producers mostly preferred screenplays that contain no female characters in order not to face up with any problems in screening their films.

These restrictions brought difficulties in film making. For instance, one of the existing censorship codes, which prohibits touching of the opposite sexes in the films, even if they are related in the real life is an issue that prevents the depiction of any intimate physical interaction. But in the meanwhile, it also introduces certain narrative strategies which represent a certain feeling through implications, (the wedding night scene in *Nargess* by Rakhsan Beni-Etemad) symbols and images that enable various readings.

However, the requirement to veil in the films even when depicting the private space, leads to the removal of public and private space difference and blurs the borders of diegetic and non-diegetic space. The presence of the male spectator and his invisible but existent gaze is taken at account.

Moreover, the prohibition of unveiling also makes impossible of depicting a non-Muslim woman in the films as well as the times when some women preferred to go outside unveiled, before it became obligatory.

However, despite this control mechanism and the restrictions implemented through these new censorship codes and the drawbacks experienced, particularly after 1990 post-revolutionary Iranian cinema managed to bring women issue to Iranian films, discussing problems women encounter in Iran at length. One of the factors that enable this is the environment of intellectual debate on the condition of women that emerged especially after the end of Iran-Iraq War.

The Iranian cinema after 1990 introduces films with three-dimensional women characters that have thoughts, aspirations and expectations, who struggle and fight for their rights. And films with women protagonists make social and political criticism, shedding a light on the hardships encountered by women living in the Iranian society.

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