EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN'S POLITICAL AWARENESS AND THEIR SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY OF IRAN (ARDABIL PROVINCE)

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ABSTRACT

Among indices of development of a country is the level of activity and role of women in it. Women have fundamental role in social, cultural and economic development in society and any change in the direction of reaching advancement needs inclusion of their potential and actual energy. Social participation is considered one of the important criteria of democratic societies and one of the conditions of their successful development. This research is a descriptive and field study where by method of multi-stage cluster sampling, 398 women aged 18 years and above in the counties of Ardabil, Meshkinshahr and Parsabad were selected to participate in the study in the year 2013. Data collection was performed using demographic information questionnaire and researcher prepared questionnaire. The information collected was analyzed with the SPSS software using statistical methods such as distribution, percentage, mean, standard deviation and regression test. Results of the research showed that meaningful correlation exists between level of political awareness of women and their degree of social participation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental concepts in contemporary sociology is social activity and more widely participation that nowadays is considered among one of the main bases of a democratic system by experts (Sills, 1963; Lipset, 1965; Inkeles, 1975; Percheron, 1992; Fukuyama, 1995) According to them, stability and persistence of democracy is dependent upon social activity and participation of all individuals and members of society in matters and issues related to their social sustainability. This concept, even though similar to many topics in social and behavioral sciences has a long past

history and was seriously discussed, investigated, researched, and attended to by experts and researchers from the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century (Arefi, 2004). Social activity is an activity in accord with social interests or an activity that has social application. Social activity and social participation are among the important criteria of societies that are governed by the people and conditions of success in development of communities. Among the most important areas of development of human resources include culture, science, beliefs and creativity. (Giddenz, 2003). If we consider that women constitute half of the human resources, this valuable force can have a significant role in development. Advancement of new economy, urbanization, village immigration, internationalization of public media and tourist industry have led to changes everywhere in the family, relationship between the two genders and among youth and adults. These cultural and religious traditions still deeply affect the mode of acceptance of women in society, their view points, hopes, and participation in national renovation (Saroukhani, 2004). Despite the male predominant outlook in work and socio-economic environments, presence of women in recent years in social arenas is more sensed compared to the past. Yet, it appears that the presence of many of the women in social arenas is mostly for making a living (Artidar, 2003). Complete participation means that women should have the right and opportunity to participate and have influence on decisions that affect their lives and sustenance and influence the environment around them (Jakob, 1992). Activity of women with emphasis on political, social and cultural domains needs to be taken into consideration. "When women alongside with all social sectors acquire the permission to be active and completely participate, be equal in their evolution, and function in matters and endeavors related to social advancement, they will be able to have equal responsibility and meaningful share in social change and evolution designed by their society" (Ghaffari, 2002). Iranian women similar to women from other developing countries have less activity than men in professional and specialty organizations. The reasons for low participation should not be attributed only to lack of organizations with gender identification, but also to social and economic structures and indices such as literacy, level of education, level of income, services that production and occupational units provide for their employees, etc. To increase social activity and participation of women, methods should be thought of beyond strengthening their gender identity (Mohammadi, 2002). Among the most important purposes of this study, considering the importance of the issue and the fundamental role of women in social, cultural, and economic development of society and particularly in persistent advancement is finding a correlation between women's social activity and the variable of political awareness in the province of Ardabil.

2. LITERATURE

The process of renovation gradually began in Europe in the fifteenth century AC and little by little expanded across the world. Deep changes in all dimensions of human life, including economic, political and cultural resulted. For renovation economists, it brought with it wide technologic changes and even alongside it industrialization which led to strengthening of human resources in domination over the natural environment. Interest of sociologists in the process of structural variety is a result of new models of social systems and distribution of roles in all platforms of society consequent to modernism (Vahidov and Agayev, 2008). Gravitation towards

social activity of people alongside with increased political awareness and increased utilization of social forces began from this period and in the age of enlightenment and industrial revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it reached its peak (Ebrahim, 2005).

I-The History of Women's Social Activity and the Constitutionalist Movement in Iran before the Islamic Revolution:

The constitutionalist movement was one of the largest campaigns against dictatorship in the beginning of the twentieth century in the Middle East. In the twenty-second century, two important revolutions happened in Iran. One was the constitutionalist revolution in the year 1906 and the other was the Islamic revolution in 1978 in both of which women had important and effective role (Hafeznia Mohammad, 2003). In the period of constitutionalism, the activity of Iranian women took place in three different domains: educational activity (foundation of schools); social activity (publications); political activity (formation of political committees and political activity). (Hesari, 2004)

II-Background Studies on Women's Social Activity in Iran after the Islamic Revolution:

During the period of victory of the Islamic revolution of Iran, Iranian women had active presence in various domains and, maybe they were one of the factors of encouragement in involving the other members of society and reason for the victory of the revolution. After the victory of the revolution, in the first expansive party, a unit named Sisters of the Party of the Islamic Republic was formed whose mission was identification and attraction and use of talented and revolutionary sisters of society? Later and gradually, the number of committees, conventions, cultural, religious, social, and economic organizations increased (Shojaii, 2005). In a study titled evaluating factors influential on social participation of occupied women in the city of Bushehr which was implemented by the Bushehr Province Office in 1999, the survey method was used and the study population consisted of all women occupied in executive, education; and developmental organizations in the province of Bushehr. Based on random sampling, 420 of them were selected as study sample (Monfared, 2005). The results of the study showed that the variables of level of education of the husband; age at marriage; kind of profession; level of interest in group activities; view point of spouse (or father) toward social activity of the women; being married or single; level of activity of women at home; level of participation of women in decision making in the family; women's access to media; and their level of awareness of their rights had significant correlation with their social participation (Kobadi Fatemeh, 2004). In a study by Sadeghi and Safiri (2009) where the connection between social participation of female students and social factors influential on it were evaluated survey method was used. Statistical population of this study consisted of female students 18 to 29 years of age who were studying in social sciences colleges of governmental universities of the city of Tehran. The Pearson correlation tests showed that the relation between the three variables of social capital, social trust, feeling of powerlessness and self-esteem with social participation was meaningful and the most influence exerted on social participation of female students was by the variable of social trust (Sadeghi and Safiri, 2009). With regards to participation, expansive research has been conducted in other countries (Western

countries) and in Iran. The first study on this topic was an experimental research using survey by Paul Lazarsfeld. In addition to Lazarsfeld, numerous experts have performed studies on the topic of participation in politics and elections such as the research by Lipset (1965); "Lerner (1964); Nyilas (1967); Weiner (1974); Robert (1985); Huntington (1989); Millbrath (1981) and Sidney and John (1976) each of which using different approaches evaluated this issue and they have been mentioned in the discussion on theories of participation (Mohseni, 2005).

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Under conditions that social participation is considered in a wider outlook and as an interactive and bilateral activity, the following can be presented as the theoretical framework of this research along with relevant theories: Tavassoli (2003) in the book "Social participation in anomic conditions" relates social pathology and deviations to lack of social participation. Ebrahim (2005); Alavi Tabar (2003) in a study regarding citizen participation states that the newest area of participation is in managing city matters and this is a necessity in human life and reveals itself with citizens leaving their individualized states in a location called a city and becoming members. (Shaditalab, 2002). Bashirieh (2007) represents participation in the framework of political advancement and considers the purpose of political development to be increased participation and competition of social groups in the political arena. (Ebrahim, 2005)

3.1. Women's Social Activities from the View Point of Western Theoreticians (Structural Functional Approach)

In this theoretical approach, participation and activity is considered social interaction in light of the stable and balanced structural definitions. In this model, society is a system that is interconnected and consistent of similarly purposed and built components and elements that continuously protects and care for its perimeter and exist in persistent balance. As Giddenz notes, based on the concept of structural balance, sustenance and persistence of society depends on cooperation and agreement between its members over principle values which at the same time suggests the presence of a general consensus. Ritzer (1981) believes that the presence of the societal enterprise is necessary for establishment of order. Overall, it should be emphasized that an enterprise that takes upon itself the responsibility of control and organization of the social situation into a balanced collection itself can act in the form of a threatening factor. In the opinion of Parsons (1963) in order for a family to be able to carry out effective functions, there is need for a kind of gender based division of tasks such that men and women can harbor very different roles (Giddenz, 2003). From the view point of functionalists, for enhancing the entrance of society's individuals in the process of participation and upgrading even in its instrumental form which is attended to in this approach, changes should occur in side takings and personal characteristics of the society's individuals. The theories of structuralist-functionalist approach regarding participation are divisible into three theoretical models; Model of political renovation and participation; Theories of women in development; Traditional views regarding women. (Mohseni *et al.*, 2003).

3.2. Theories Used in the Conceptual Framework of the Research

1. The theory of political participation of Robert (1985): He presents a psychological model of political participation and involvement based on social behaviorist approach. In his opinion "People despite finding themselves in closed political perimeters never become connected to political life. Some people are indifferent to politics and some are sensitive to it.

2. The Theory of Participation by Lerner (1964): "Lerner" in his studies in six countries in the Middle East including Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Syria and Iran evaluated the correlation between social variables such as: location of residence (city or village), level of education, Socio-economic status, age, religion with level of use of media (radio and television, newspapers, cinema) and political gravitation (left extremist, left moderate, right moderate and …).Using the data obtained, he presented his theory based on stages of evolution of innovation and social, cultural and political growth. In his studies 73 countries, he built a model where four stages of participation have been discussed (Ebrahim, 2005).

City dwell ship → education → media participation → political participation

Figure 2-3: Stages of participation by Daniel Learner (Ebrahim, 2005)**.**

He believes that these four stages are in interaction with each other and participation in them is equivalent to participation in the overall system of society. Learner connected the level of city dwell ship, participation in media and political participation with level of education and has shown the meaningfulness of this relationship statistically. After this correlation, he organized the mentioned variables based on priority. In other words, conception of a participative society is dependent on the following four pre conditions:

I-City Dwell Ship: City dwell ship is the first step in creating a participative society and includes transfer of population from internal scattered lands to city centers that creates needs and conditions for leaping towards wide participation (Ebrahim, 2005).

II-Education: In the second step, education is both an index and a factor. For expansion of use of city productions beyond city perimeters, education is a useful tool. Expansion of education leads to extension of media-mediated production and use. Education leads to growth of media which in turn leads to growth in education.

III-Media participation: Mechanisms of new interests and providing for them form the third step in renovation (participatory society) which is called media participation. When people are equipped for use of new experiences resulting from movement (by way of movement towards the city) and apply new experiences produced by the media by way of their education, at this point they are after provision of needs that unifies this skill.

IV-Political participation: with growth of participatory sectors, activity in various sections of society and subsequently empathy are increased and this empathy leads to understanding of others' emotions and capabilities and is followed with political and social participation. Lerner (1964) has used the concept of empathy for evaluation of the level of participation and considers it one of the main factors of participation. Empathy or the power of transfer of thoughts has two aspects: First is extrusion which refers to the power by which humans can imagine themselves in the framework of

whatever is estranged and intrusion which is relating indices of whatever is estranged to oneself (Ebrahim, 2005).

3-The theory of political participation of Weiner (1974) "Weiner" in his book "Renovation of society" studied the factors effective on political participation and its relevancies in developing countries. He states that "In developing countries, level of participation of people in political matters is low and in most cases the governments themselves prevent people's participation." (Weiner, 1974). Contrary to announcements by governments, the reality is that few countries that have newly become independent encourage political participation of their people or permit them to get involved with politics. (Sadeghi and Safiri, 2009).

 4-The Theory of Political Participation by Huntington (1987) The theory of political participation was presented by "Nelson" and "Huntington" in 1976. In their work, political participation has been studied as an objective issue and separate from mental views of individuals. According to their definition "political participation is the activity of private citizens with the purpose of affecting the process of decision making by governments." Huntington (1987). The overall theory of Huntington and Nelson is that the process of economic and social advancement via two pathways can eventually lead to growth of political and social participation.

5. The participation theory of Lipset (1965) "Robert Doze" and "Seymour Martin Lipset" are considered two well-known theoreticians in the arena of political matters in America. The two in their analysis of participative behavior of people in the countries of America, Canada, Great Britain and Australia emphasize factors and variables that are effective on political participation. Yet, the degree and model of this effectiveness is not constant.

6-The theory of social interaction and participation culture of Parsons (1963) The concept of participation culture has widely been researched and discussed in the theory of social interaction of "Parsons". Based on the theory of social interaction, personality is a product of internalization of situations that have a role and basis, because an individual in society has different roles in different situations.

7-The participation theory of Almond and Powell (1978) They have emphasized the role of individual's self-reliance in modernism and participation of citizens. In their opinion a "modernist" is an aware and participative citizen that in addition to trust in oneself acts independently regarding decision makings related to his or her life and is receptive to new ideas and thoughts.

8-The theory of participation of Millbrath (1981) Numerous documents and evidence exist that show political participation at all levels differs based on socio-economic status, education, occupation, gender, nationality, age, religion, place of residence, personality, political environment or the background in which participation occurs.

4. METHOD

This research was performed in 2013 as a field study and using questionnaires. From 9 counties in the province of Ardabil, the counties of Ardabil, Meshginshahr and Parsabad were selected for this study. Study sample consisted of 398 women 18 years of age and above in the mentioned counties who were selected by multi-stage cluster sampling. The method of sample selection was as follows. The postal map of the counties was used. From among 136 postal

regions, 25 percent, 29 regions were selected randomly. Next, in each postal region, in accord with the number of households, one or few postal areas were randomly selected. Subsequently, with the help of the Kerjcie-Morgan table, sample size in each postal area was determined. In the last stage, points of blocks present in each postal area were randomly selected and the households present in them were included in the sample. Questionnaire preparation was performed with use of indices mentioned in previous research. The most credible indices were selected from among criteria in previously tested questionnaires. Validity was assessed by experts in sociology and after their judgment of acceptable content validity the questionnaire was used in this research. To assess reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used that had a value of 85%. The information collected was analyzed with the SPSS software using statistical methods such as distribution, percentage, mean, standard deviation and regression test.

5. FINDINGS OF INFERENTIAL STATISTICS

Inferential statistical findings in this study are shown in the following tables which include analysis of hypotheses using regression coefficients.

-Hypothesis: women's political awareness affects their level of social activity.

Table-1. Summary of the Regression Model

Correlation Coefficient	Determination Coefficient	Adjusted Determination Coefficient
0.763	0.582	0.579

According to Table (1), the correlation coefficient between political awareness and social participation of women is equal to 0.76 and the determination coefficient is equal to 0.58.

Table-2. Results of Univariate Regression Coefficient

Predicting variable	Nonstandard coefficients		Standard coefficients	T	P
	B	SE	BETA		
Constant value	49.42	6.45		7.66	0.001
Political awareness	7.90	0.507	0.763	15.57	0.001

According to Table (2) and considering that the meaningful level of the test error is less than 0.001, it can be stated that the hypothesis is confirmed and women's political awareness has positive and meaningful effect on social participation and political awareness predicts 0.76 of changes in social participation of women.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the results of the research, mean of all social activities of women in the province of Ardabil is less than 50%. In other words, women's social activities in the province of Ardabil is at a relatively low level. The women's social activities is more focused on traditional participation

which has existed from distant past based on the culture of the Iranian society. Re-analysis of the most important findings of the study shows that the women of the province of Ardabil have not entered the clear state of transfer from tradition to modernity and are at the initial stages of this process. The results of this study show that:

1. With increased political awareness of women, their social activity increases. Therefore, there is a positive and meaningful correlation between women's political awareness and their social activities. In other words, high level of participation by women in presidential elections, congressional elections, elections of councils and guild elections is correlated with high levels of political awareness in them. The theory of cultural renovation and participation of Inglehart is in accord with his opinion regarding increased political awareness being affective on women's participation.

2.Lipset and Doze in their studies reached the conclusion that level of social participation is higher among individuals with political awareness and higher education which agrees with the results of our research.

3.Huntington also shows a meaningful correlation between the variable of political awareness and information and level of participation which agrees with our results.

4.Lerner in his studies has confirmed the correlation between level of use of the media (radio, television, newspapers, cinema, …), social status and level of education of individuals with their degree of political participation and political affiliation which agrees with our findings.

5.Based on the findings of this study, mean civil and political participation of women in the Ardabil province (membership and participation in public organizations, parties and groups, centers and societies, guild associations, cooperatives and …) is very low compared to most provinces in the country which agrees with the study by Mohseni (2005). The latter finding can be explained by the fact that presence of special religious and traditional atmosphere in the province of Ardabil is resistive to rapid admittance of women to the modern world and areas of civil and political participation and this cultural situation can change with increased awareness.

6.In the relationship between levels of participation of women in elections, the results show that most of them participate in various elections which shows high social activity by women in this regard Tavassoli (2003) in his study has reached the conclusion that women students compared to men have higher social responsibility acceptance.7.Regarding level of participation of women in elections, the results showed that most of them participate in various elections which shows high activity of women in this area. To explain the latter, it can be stated that considering the political weave and cultural atmosphere of the Ardabil province and high religious-revolutionary beliefs in people of this province, their active participation in election activities is not far from expectation or surprising. The results of the study by Shaditalab (2002) confirms this issue has reached the conclusion in his research that girl students have higher responsibility taking in social activities compared to boy students.

7. SUGGESTIONS

1.By referring to the research by Huntington and Nelson, it can be noted that among status variables, level of literacy and education of individuals has the highest effect on political awareness

and participation which is itself a part of social participation. Therefore, it is suggested that the government and even nongovernmental organizations endeavor to provide the grounds for increased literacy and education level in women.

2.Regarding increased social participation of women, serious actions should be taken to increase their awareness and provide them with the necessary trainings in areas such as political law, sociology, citizenship, family, empowerment, life skills, psychological health and etc.

3.To promote social participation by women, action needs to be taken regarding their easy and rapid accessibility to progressive and up to date group media and public communication instruments such as the internet.

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