

PLSJ

Persian Literary Studies Journal (PLSJ)

Vol. 8, No. 14, 2019

ISSN: 2322-2557, Online ISSN: 2717-2848

DOI:10.22099/JPS.2022.33692.1101, pp. 19-44

The Image of Iranian Women in the Poetry of Constitutional Era

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Abstract

The Constitutional Revolution in Iran provided grounds for both the realization of women's personal and social rights and their entrance into the literature and literary discussions of that important era. In fact, women's sociocultural status became one of the major subject matters of the poetry of the Constitutional Revolution era. It soon became so central to this poetry that few poets could ignore the themes of women's freedom and rights. Equality, freedom, education, women's social functions, critique of gender discrimination against women and blaming the perceptions of women as sex-objects are among the main themes reflected in the poetry of Constitutional Revolution. Among the outstanding poets of the time, Bahar and Nassim Shomal hold more traditional and temperate stances towards the subject of women's rights, while others such as Iraj Mirza, Lahooti, Eshghi and Aref Ghazvini have more radical positions in this respect. They have sometimes even rejected Hijab for women. The present study aims at closely depicting the views of six poets about women and finding out the extent to which their special images of women can be analytically explained based on a theoretical framework. Results from this study show that feminist theories can be applied to justify and clarify the poets' views of women's rights and status in Constitutional Revolution time in many respects.

Keywords: Constitutional Revolution poetry, Iraj Mirza, Bahar, Nassim Shomal, Arref, Eshghi, Lahooti

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Received: 11/05/2021

Accepted: 18/04/2022

1. Introduction

Regardless of the occasional cases where women's virtues were noted and with the rare exceptions of such works as Firdausi's grand epic, *Shahnameh*, where women like Rudabeh, Tahmineh, and Gordaffarid, are actively involved in the deeds of great man and mythological heroes, Persian classical literature shows women negatively as ignorant, and faithless betrayers (Nafisi, 2003). The sources of stories against women in such works should, however, be taken into consideration because many of them originated from either ancient Iranian or Indian legends. This has greatly affected the content of the poems either for or against women. Occasionally also, affected by the traditionally established beliefs and customs of the society, the poets and writers have presented stereotypical misconceptions about women. For instance, influenced by the wrong views of Arabs before Islam about burying the newly-born girls and feigned hadiths such as «¹موت البنات من المكرمات» and «²نعم الخنن القبر», a great poet like Khaghani who has composed one of the best elegies in Persian literature on his wife's death, feels sad and sorrowful about the birth of his daughter and wishes her death:

As she is so then, God grant her death³
 As "death is a better husband" and "burial the best"
 "The best husband" saying, If have not you read, go and read it,
 "Burial of girls", if you have not seen, go and see it.
 How do they give me tidings of a daughter,

¹ . death of girls is a good thing

² . grave is the best husband [for girls]

³ . All poems have been translated by the Abbas Goudarzi.

When fain would I like not to have been born my own mother⁴?
(Khaghani, 1996, vol. 2: 256-212).

Sometimes, such perceptions of women appear in the severest forms of misogyny in some of the classical poems and stories of Persian literature. In masterpieces such as *Kalila wa Dimna*, *Leyli and Majnoon*, *Khosrow and Shirin* and Saadi's *Bustan*, for example, women are accused of being faithless witches. This sort of presentation in Persian classical literature is critically depicted under "critique of women's images" in feminist literary theories.

Women in the Era of Constitutional Revolution

The history of misogyny and discrimination against women goes back to ancient Greece and Aristotle. Misconceptions and oppressive measures against women have prevailed on the history of human thought throughout the world and patriarchy has become established and grown as a mental and intellectual archetype affecting even many of the greatest thinkers and scientists (Hosseini, 2014, p.17). Misogyny and the stereotypically negative towards women were prevalent in Iran up to the Qajar dynasty before which there was no mention of women's rights and freedom. Thus, it was the Constitutional Revolution which provided the grounds and impetus for women's participation in revolutionary

۴. اگرچه هست بدین سان خداهش مرگدهاد

اگر نخواندی «نعم الختن» برو برخوان

مرا به زادن دختر چه تهنیت گویند

که «گور بهتر داماد» و «دفن اولی تر»

وگر ندیدی «دفن البنات» شو بنگر

که کاش مادر من هم نژادی از مادر

councils and their courageous actions for achieving freedom. In one of his articles, Ivanov, a Russian Orientalist, writes: “In January 20, 1907, some women in Tehran held a meeting in which ten articles related to women’s rights and requests were passed among which were such cases as founding schools for the girls, and reduction of and discount on the dowry” (in Arianpour, 2002, p.6). In his book, *The History of Constitutional Iran*, Kasravi also writes: “In the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, women were actively involved. We have got a picture of 60 women wearing hijab while carrying shotguns in their hands. They are guarding a stronghold in Tabriz” (1986, p.285).

The first associations of women were also established in that time. “Women’s Freedom Association” is one which was formally launched in 1906 right after the passage of the constitution through the parliament. It aimed at achieving equality of rights for women. Two daughters of the Qajar king, Naser al-Din Shah (1831 –1896) were also among the active members of this association (Dejam, 2005, p.85). Also, new newspapers and magazines published by women during the years 1906 to 1921 in Tehran and other major cities of Iran attest to the important and extensive presence of women in the society and their vigilance for the sociocultural events of the time. The magazines *Danesh* (Knowledge), *Allam-e-Nesvan* (Women’s Cosmos) and *Jahan-e-Zanan* (The World of Women), along with such newspapers as *Shokofeh* (Blooms) and *Zaban-e-Zanan* (the Language of Women) are among the prominent ones (Arianpour, 2003, p.9).

Generally, women’s social presence in the time of Qajar dynasty can be divided into two periods. In the first period, because of the sociopolitical discontents, the women followed the lead of men in the major social movements against both the tyrannous government of the country and the foreign colonialist nations which fed on the weakness of the central government. They had no special desire of themselves and defended such causes as Constitutional revolution and Tobacco movement. In the second period, however, women gained knowledge and awareness on their special rights and fought for them.

Their actions involved publishing magazines and newspapers, raising awareness about the inequality of men and women in the society and the need for establishing schools and other pedagogical centers for girls (Nafisi, 1982, p. 129).

Thus, because of the Constitutional Revolution and the awareness that it raised, the status of Iranian women was greatly enhanced and along with the traditional beliefs about women, new ideas were also proposed in which criticism was directed at women's social conditions while emphasizing the necessity of freedom, suffrage and other rights for women. As one critic rightly suggests: "In that age, the question of woman and her education became a central theme for the written and oral discussions as "womanhood" became an important subject matter for the poetry of time. There is almost no poet who has not devoted at least some of their poems to the praise of woman's values or defending her rights" (Shaffie Kadkani, 2011: 86).

Bahar, the poet laureate, Nassim Shomal, Mirzadeh Eshghi, Iraj Mirza, Arref Ghazvini and Abolghasem Lahooti are among the prominent poets of the era of Constitutional Revolution who have seriously concerned the question of woman. Although they do not share similar views about woman, her hijab and freedom, these poets all agree on realizing the importance of the personal and social rights of women. And such a positive position toward woman was a highly advanced stance and a great and revolutionary idea in the patriarchal society of the era and in many respects, reminiscent of feminist theories of the woman's movements of the present time.

The present study, thus, aims at critically investigating the thoughts and ideas of the innovative poets of the Constitutional Revolution era about women and their rights and conditions. The researchers want to find contiguity between the attitudes of these poets toward woman and feminist ideas of contemporary literary theories. We argue whether the ideas and beliefs of the given poets conform to those of feminists and the propagators of woman's movements. It is

not, however, suggested that the poetry of this historical epoch closely represents all the major feminist parameters. Rather this study wants to trace how innovative and advanced thoughts about woman affected the poetry of the Constitutional Revolution era, or how along with feminist movements in the Western countries, similar views were being born and followed in Iran.

Review of Literature

About the status of woman in the poetry of Constitutional Revolution era many articles have been written none of which have ever looked at the question of woman's conditions from a theoretical viewpoint such as feminism. This study is, thus, different from the previous ones as it intends to highlight the situation of the women as reflected in the poetry of that historical epoch in the light of a semi-feminist approach. However, a few of more relevant articles are presented here. "The Status of Woman in the Poetry of Abolghasem Lahooti, Iraj Mirza, and Arref Ghazvini" (2012) by Said Hattami and Parvaneh Saffai is a study of such cases as hijab, rights and freedom of the women in that era. The writers conclude that because of their lack of understanding of the profound teachings of Islam and simply based on their personal and insufficient perceptions of religious percepts and of their being affected by Western cultures, the three poets have given a defect image of the women. They also believe that the poets have fought against and defiantly contradicted religion because of which their ideas are not thoroughly valid and just. Another similar study is by Eynalilou (2013) considers the oppressions against women in the time of the Constitutional Revolution and studies the efforts of some of the poets of that era for raising awareness among the people regarding the rights of women and the need for reviving those rights. A more recent study by Abbaszadeh and Shabihzadeh (2016) has considered the image and presentation of women's situation in the poetry of the Constitutional Revolution era, especially that of Seyyed Ashrafoddin Qazvini (Nasim Shomal). It concludes that a new awareness about women's rights and virtues was raised in that time along with a change in

people's outlook toward them. The change is reflected in the poetry of that era where women are not looked upon as mere objects of love and tenderness but their rationality, character and humanity are noted and amply dealt with.

Theoretical Background

Against gender discriminations, women's movements have all risen with the aim of gaining equality, freedom and social rights such as suffrage for women. They have also emphasized the importance of social, economic and political reformations. Such movements have preceded the birth of more organized movement called feminism. Feminism actually developed in the late 1960s in Europe and America to be soon taken in as an active tool by the literary studies and criticism. It was greatly indebted to the prowess and efforts of such pre-instigators as Virginia Woolf (1941-1982) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) (Sage and Smith, 1993, p. 92). Later on, feminism as an established movement, found its greatest theorists and propagators such as Elaine Showalter, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray. They emphasized the deep difference between men and women's writings, absence of the female subject in the patriarchal system and language and the need for re-presenting the true feminine sexuality and womanliness in the male-dominated writings (Selden & Widdowson, 200, p. 271- 281).

Feminists first believe that women have not been truly and sufficiently represented in the history of Western literatures and have been denigrated. Next, they also suggest the works of women have never been ranked with the same level of significance as those of men by the designers of literary history-- also predominantly male. And thirdly, they protest that women presented as characters by the dominant male writers are either marginalized or deformedly presented from a patriarchal viewpoint. In his *Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams gives certain characteristics for feminism which we can summarize as

follows: 1- feminists believe that the Western civilization is under patriarchy, formed and controlled by men in which men are subordinated to the male domination in all the sociocultural aspects of their lives, 2- most of the feminists believe that the concept of gender which is constructed by the patriarchal civilization. As Simone de Beauvoir has succinctly put it “woman is not born but formed into woman” because of this misconception, male is often represented by such features as active, dominant, brave and sane, while female is repressed by such stereotypical terms as passive, submissive, timid, sensitive and subdued, and 3- feminists claim that patriarchal thought has always prevailed over the literary works which have presented male heroes oppressing the marginalized female characters (Abrams, 1993, p. 234-35).

Despite the disparity of feminist approaches and the plethora of theories which are not often in agreement with each other in this field, a survey of these of feminist theorist can generally come up with two main trends in this critical stance; “representations of women” and “gynocriticism”. The branch which concerns representations of women studies how the women as characters are represented in literary works especially those written by men. That is to say, how and under what stereotypical roles they are represented to the reader. The followers of this branch of feminism believe that the images of women as represented in the works of male-dominated literature match only the precepts and exigencies of the patriarchal society and basically reproduce the values of that dominant culture. In gynocriticism, however, whose main instigator is Showalter, woman is dealt with as a writer (Payandeh, 2002, p.142-3). Showalter writes “the purpose of gynocriticism is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories” (Showalter 131 Showalter, Elaine. “Toward a Feminist Poetics”). In short, “gynocritics” want to find a way into the inner world of women and to identify true female emotions, feelings and experiences in the works of female writers.

New images of and conceptions about women in the poetry of the Constitutional Revolution

In the poetry of Bahar, Iraj, Eshghi, Lahooti and Nassim Shomal, woman is represented positively. These poets seek to revive the true status and identity of Iranian women which they believed, had been repressed and misrepresented by the thoughts and beliefs of patriarchal society. Such specific cases as equality of the rights of men and women, freedom, education and hijab for women, and considering woman as sex-object are coped with in the poetries of these poets. In holding such innovative views, they accord with the feminist percepts whose affinity we would go on to highlight by bringing evidence from the poems under study.

Critique of the Sexual and Instrumental Perceptions of Woman

Deeming the woman in terms of sexual and instrumental perceptions is one of the topics that feminists have criticized. In societies dominated by patriarchy, woman is considered as the second sex and has no identity independent of the general practices prescribed by the male. This outlook is the underlying concept of woman in many works in Persian classical literature in which women are at best endowed with negative stereotypical roles whose identities are determined by their sexual aspects. Based on this misconception, the women are either angelic and pious or—more often—wicked seducers whose sole intention is to deceive men. This view shows the historical and social archetypal images that men have wrought about women. Constructed based on the male and patriarchal traditions of the society, these stereotypical roles of the woman present her as a passive, susceptible, and dependent being whose identity is determined in a subordinated relation to man. Such conception of woman reduces her to a sex-object (Green and Lebbihan, 1996: 334). As Elaine Showalter has rightly put it: “If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited

roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be” (Showlater, 1988, p.296).

Some of the poets of the Constitutional Revolution era have condemned sexual view of woman and the unjust sociocultural beliefs about her. Arref Ghazvini, for example, in a short poem, “Kitchen Maid” criticizes the sexual and instrumental perceptions of the women and rejects the reduction of the women’s status to a mere sexual object. Such a limiting view of woman which likes her only as a sexual partner is actualized in a proverb which attests to the same concept in the prevalent cultural formations and which Arref disdains;

They said that robbers once raided
A caravan on its way to Mashhad;
Besides the old and ugly women
They took along the beautiful and young maiden.
The boss thus then unto his serf said
With no mistress how the night to spend?
In response the serf did say “Oh, Sir!
Know the kitchen maid, if no other is here”⁵ (2010: 430-38)

Denigrating women as the possession and property of men and measuring her along with gold and other precious objects in the following couplet is another example of the same restrictive look at women:

Aliens have seized my land; my pain it is,

یک قافله را به راه مشهد	گفتند که دزد ترکمن زد
بردند بتان و مشک مویان	جز پیرزنان و زشت رویان
بی یار چگونه شب توان خفت	مخدوم به خادمش چنین گفت
باشنو مثلی نکو در این باب:	او گفت به پاسخش که ارباب
دریاب کنیز مطبخی را	بردند چو ماه خلّخی را

Many are happy that they possess land, gold and wives⁶ (ibid 77).

In her book, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf, while considering the social and historical context of literary production of the women, suggested that women had always faced socioeconomic barriers to their literary innovations and ambitions (Selden and Widdoson, 2005, p.257). That is why Woolf in this and other works of hers has always asked for “freedom, money and scope” for the women so that they could write and express their personal feelings freely, and more importantly, redefine their mental consciousness of the social values (Welleck, 2004, p.154).

Besides obstacles against and restrictions on women's literary ambitions which, according to Woolf, are the result of financial and economic problems, such problems could also cause other sociocultural burdens for them among which is women's dependence on men in financial matters. This problem has in many cases led to women's subordination and complete submission to the will of the male, and has been criticized by Marxist and Socialist feminists who accuse the Capitalist economic systems of oppressing the women. Another consequence of the economic dependence of the women, their being deprived from the world of literature and arts, and their subordination to the male was that many of them are forced into early marriages which they sought in the hope of gaining financial support. In a patriarchal society, this often led to even more intense oppression and abuse of them. The most regretful form of this oppression happened when the poor women were sold to a rich boss or governor as worthless goods. This is the subject of criticism in the poetry of Lahooti and Eshghi who believe that destitute is the main cause of sexual oppression against women:

Are not you ashamed of Arabs' creed,
When out of passion, they wed daughters nine of age or kid?

⁶ . اجنبی صاحب ایران شد و این است غم آن یکی شاد که املاک و زر و زن دارد

The cult thus makes the boss over serf so hard dominant
That girls are given as bribe to rulers and masters wicked⁷. (Lahooti, 1980:
1455-1459)

Poverty-stricken, a girl then hoped to marry a young man
Learnt and handsome; but money and means he had not in hand.
At last an old wicked man came by, a rich wood seller,
Who talked of wood and charcoal, while taking out gold.
Her mother he saw and the girl did buy with money spent;
Destitute thus wed black hair and white beard unkempt.
Oh need, oh need! This was your deed⁸. (Eshghi, 1972: 876- 883)

Equality of men and women's rights

Feminists believe that as women suffer from injustice and inequality in patriarchal societies, equality of rights is one of their most urgent pursuits. They also propose that gender is a social formation, constructed out political, economic and historical conditions. Simone de Beauvoir holds that "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine" (1949, p.330). In fact, "Making the crucial distinction between 'being female' and being constructed as 'a woman', de Beauvoir can posit the

^۷ . هیچ شرمت ناید از رسم عرب کز روی شهوت
خواجه را بر رنجبر آن سان مسلط کرده این دین
^۸ . بی بضاعت دخترتری، علامه عهد جدید
لیک چون بیچاره زر در کیسه اش بد ناپدید
کز زغال کنده دایم دم زدی، وز چوب بید
مادرش را دید و دختر را به زور زر خرید

از تو شد این نا مناسب ازدواج ، احتیاج ای احتیاج

destruction of patriarchy if women will only break out of their objectification” (Selden and Widdowson, 2005, p.132).

Naturally, feminists regard sexual inequality a consequence of patriarchal systems based which men and women are assigned certain social roles. They reject these delimiting roles and wish for a social system which excludes sexual differentiations and allows the women enough space for social activity. Comparing women’s status in Iran and Western countries, Iraj Mirza asks for their participating in social scenes:

In other countries, women help the men
Here they are a burden to men,
There women co-work with men,
Here men alone shall work to death⁹ (1974: 569-573)

Protesting the inequality and misogyny against women, Areff Ghazvini encourages women to demand their rights. He assumes himself the role of leader of the women in their fight against the inequalities and wishes for the downfall of oppressive and patriarchal systems:

If women take back their rights, I then
Have thousand armies of them.¹⁰ (2010: 425-27)

Abolghasem Lahooti is another poet who upholds women’s rights upon knowing about the cultures and societies of other western and eastern countries. Comprising half of the population, he believes that women shall enjoy equal scope for social and economic activity:

Everywhere women must equal men
None may remain jobless and others’ burden. (1979: 533-35)

⁹. در اقطار دگر زن یار مرد است
به هر جا زن بود هم پیشه با مرد
در این محنت سرا سربار مرد است
در اینجا مرد باید جان کند فرد
در این میان من و صد دشت زن سپاه من است
¹⁰. حقوق خویش ز مردان اگر زنان گیرند

Or

Women are equal with men everywhere,
Do Iranian girls know this? No, they never¹¹. (ibid, 631-2)

Marxist feminism maintains that women's subordination to men stems from economic problems and their financial dependence on men that begins in the family in which unequal working positions first are forged (Badami, 2010, p.195). Thus, same as Marxist feminists, Lahooti encourages women to work and gain their financial independence from men. Not only does he believe that women should do businesses and work for their independence, he also proposes that they must have equal rights with men in pursuing political and governmental posts and activities:

Let free girls also
Take part in state offices¹² (Lahooti, 1980:606).

In an Ode "O Women", Bahar, the poet laureate, praises women's status, calls upon them to learn knowledge, recognizes women as half of human society in which they must have every right to take part and finally suggests that women's social deprivation is the paralysis of half of society:

Alas O women, if with such wisdom
You may descend more in ignorance!
Be it not that your absence
Paralyze the country in half¹³. (2009: 2466-2470)

Like a feminist, Bahar believes in the equality of women's rights with men in society, and he even gives them a more important position than men:

As the important member of society is she;

¹¹ . باید همه جا قرین شود زن با مرد
زن بود در خاک شورا با همه مردان برابر
¹² . بگذار که دختران آزاد
شرکت بکنند در حکومت
¹³ . دریغا گر تو با این هوش و ادراک
به جهل از این فزون تر پایی ای زن
به نیمه تن فلج فرمایی ای زن
دریغا کز حساب خود وطن را

He presence in it is good; so it be!¹⁴ (ibid, 2943-45)

In his play, *The Black Shroud*, Mirzadeh Eshghi has defended women's rights. As gender differentiations are more strongly felt in patriarchal societies and male is characterized with such traits as active, strong, brave and wise, while female are defined with being passive, weak, timid and sentimental, Eshghi rises against this paradigm and refers to the equality of men and women in their creation and their social rights:

What shame! Man is God's servant, so is woman;
What has she done to be shameful to men?¹⁵ (1971: 1189-1191)

The right to access education and educational facilities is another case which the poets have emphasized and for which they have demanded equality between men and women. Iraj Mirza, for example, believes that women enlightened by knowledge and insight would be safeguarded against the pains of sexual frailties:

Upon being learnt in knowledge, women
Their souls with insight would enlighten;
Nothing then would turn her from chastity,
No storm ever would endanger her safety¹⁶. (1975: 2647- 2651)

Nassim Shomal also holds that women's redemption from oppressions is learning and education:

O my daughter, in knowledge and literacy lies your redemption;

¹⁴. چون که عضو مهم جامعه اوست بودنش عضو اجتماع، نکوست

¹⁵. شرم چه؟ مرد یکی بنده و زن یک بنده زن چه کرده است که از مرد شود شرمنده؟

¹⁶. چو زن تعلیم دید و دانش آموخت رواق جان به نور بپوش افروخت

به هیچ افسون ز عصمت برنگردد به دریا گر بیفتد تر نگردد

They are to your worth as all foundation.¹⁷ (1984: 645-57)

Lahooti warns women against illiteracy and ignorance:

In such progressive time, my dear mistress,

It's not suitable to be ignorant of all science¹⁸. (1979: 1675-77)

Bahar, in his turn, encourages women to pursue studies and art:

Seek the arts and science and be grateful

That is such great time you now are living.

Today be chaste and gain knowledge,

As tomorrow you are mother to those coming¹⁹. (2009: 3870- 74)

Freedom and Independent Identity of Women

In her famous book, *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir criticizes all the biological, psychological and economic discrimination against women and writes that women are attached to men in an imbalanced relationship, they are defined and through such relationship with the male. Man is the "One" and woman is the "Other". She maintains that "woman [. . .] finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the position of the Other" (p.322). This kind of ideology, upheld in patriarchal societies, shows woman's lack of identity and dependence on man. It also posits that woman is weak and tries to keep her restricted and dependent. Thus, one of the most urgent measures that feminists like to effect is to break through the limitations that a patriarchal system has imposed on women. They want such emancipation from the restriction to help women retrieve their independent identity.

Iraj Mirza announces himself as the champion of women's freedom:

I would rather want the boys in bound

¹⁷ شاهد به مقام درجات تو بود علم

دلبری چون تو ز آرایش دانش به کنار

که در این دوره والایی ای زن

که مام مردم فردایی ای زن

¹⁸ ای دختر من راه نجات تو بود علم

¹⁸ اندرین دور تمدن صنما لایق نیست

¹⁹ سوی علم و هنر بشتاب و کن شکر

به کار علم و عفت کوش امروز

As I insist on women's freedom²⁰. (1974: 435-36)

Woman's adherence to man in social affairs and considering her as the second sex would lead to the creation of stereotypical misconceptions in people's mind based on which woman is considered inferior to man in intelligence and insight as well. Iraj Mirza cannot bear this insult and condemns it:

Is no woman among us humans?

Is not she able to know good from bad?²¹ (ibid: 546-48)

Nassim Shomal has also attested to the independent identity of women and, more innovatively perhaps, has even disdained children's being named after their fathers' surname name while ignoring mother's name. The feminists have likewise protested to married women's taking their husbands' surnames as a further sign of the hegemonic and domineering presence of men over the women in patriarchal societies.

All now take their father's name and surname,

Mother not mentioned the least of the same.

Is not poor mother part of creation; also human?

Is not mother's pedigree one's background, too?

Is not a man attached to his mother, too?

Why women's names are less frequent?

Why their rights have been so often absent?²² (1984: 1263-1270)

²⁰. کاش قید پسران خواستمی پیش از وقت
²¹. مگر زن در میان این بشر نیست
²². به اسم و رسم پدرها لقب نهاده تمام
من که اصرار به آزادی نسوان دارم
مگر زن در تمیز خیر و شر نیست
ولی نبرده ز مادر به هیچ وجهی نام
مگر که مادر بیچاره نسل آدم نیست
مگر که سلسله مادری نسب نبود
مگر به مادر خود، مرد منتسب نبود
چه شد که اسم نسا کمتر از رجال شده
حقوق مادر بیچاره پایمال شده

It is interesting to note that Shomal, whose real name was Seyed Ashraf, actually practiced this belief when he took his Seyed from his mother. This was objected to by many people especially his brother who severely scolded him for that. To his objection, Nassim Shomal said: "I have nothing to do with my father; is not my mother a Seyed? I take my name from her" (Noormohamadi, 2005, p. 41).

Lahooti also asks for women's freedom:

Iranian girls heard of freedom

Was wet with sweat but nothing said²³. (1979: 775-77)

He considers women as men's slaves and wants them to try for getting released from misogynic rules and customs in society:

In west women are in office working,

You are enslaved by eastern men still.

Slave and captive for sure you are,

As you believe not in revolt still²⁴. (ibid: 1360- 64)

The case of Hijab

Hijab has always been a challenge to feminist theories, because feminists consider it a barrier which bars women's way toward achieving their freedom and real identity. Liberal feminists posit women's right over their bodies, and personal freedom in the choice of dress. They want the women to have control over their own bodies and do not let the ideals of patriarchal society about chastity and beauty be used as means for exploiting them. Feminist theorists maintain that observing hijab as a rule in Islamic states hinders the formation of an independent identity for women. They believe that wearing the veil, especially chador, is a pre-Islamic and courtly tradition which had been used for keeping

²³. شنید دختر ایران خبر ز آزادی عرق ز هر سر مویش چکید و هیچ نگفت

²⁴. زن های غرب در سر کار حکومتند در دست مرد شرق تو چون برده ای هنوز

البته هم اسیری و هم برده ای از آنک ایمان به انقلاب نیاورده ای هنوز

the patriarchal order in place, and preventing the women from getting out of the mechanisms of such order (Toohidi, 2002, p.162).

Iranian society has, however, always been a deeply religious one in which especially after the great Islamic Revolution of the 1970s, hijab was welcome by the majority of social classes without any governmental or repressive measure. Yet, the poets as revolutionary westernized intellectuals took their examples from overseas of which they had a limited knowledge. Thus, along with the western feminists, the poets proposed that hijab was a restriction on women from the traditionally patriarchal society. This is among the most radical beliefs of the poets of Constitutional Revolutionary era, and has led them to even the verge of open contradiction and fight against hijab. Among the poets, Iraj Mirza has the most overtly pronounced resentment of hijab and sees it as an obstacle against gaining consciousness for the women:

Veil over her face bars the door to truth
Where a hand of will is to open it loose?²⁵ (1974: 223-25)

Women's rights activists believe that restricting women in the veil for the sake of chastity is a constructed notion of male and patriarchal systems. For Iraj, what keeps woman from abuses is chastity and virtue not hijab:

Oh God! How long shall men be dormant?
How long shall women by Hijab be kept?
Women need to be virtuous and chaste;
Not veiled and scarf to put over face.
Veiled women are not of their times aware,
Theater and bar are not against their honor²⁶. (ibid: 485-491)

²⁵. نقاب بر رخ زن سدّ باب معرفت است
کجاست دست حقیقت که فتح باب کند
²⁶. خدایا تا کی این مردان به خوابند
زنان تا کی گرفتار حجابند
زنان را عصمت و عفت ضرورست
نه چادر لازم و نه چاقچور است

In his poetry, Iraj always criticizes hijab and one of his most utterly repugnant critiques is expressed, in a humorous tone, in the famous piece of “The Image of a Woman” (“Over the gate of a caravansary/ Image of a woman was drawn in chalk”) in which even the image of naked woman is a source of sin for pious people. And finally he is most radically outspoken against hijab in the following lines:

All corruption is due to women’s hijab;
Of this hijab is all Iran corrupt.²⁷ (1974: 1322-26)

This position is clearly reminiscent of the avant-garde feminist notions in contradiction to restricting women with the veil. Feminists believe that in male-dominated societies, women are supposed to remain at home, wear hijab and do housework. They should forget about going out and indulging in politics and other social activities. Under such social orders, men posit that women’s being at home and away from the social scene is in their interests and a means for providing their happiness and security (de Beauvoir, 2009, p.670).

Aref Ghazvini also openly asks women to let go of hijab and he disregard the words of those preaching it:

Put away the veil, Oh mistress mine!
Heed not the sermon of preachers fine.²⁸ (2010: 3248-3250)

The same as other poets, Lahooti also in his poem “To the Sun’s Daughter” asks the Iranian girls to put away hijab, be present at the social scene and pursue their studies:

Oh honorable girls of Iran take off your hijab
Like those from other nations, leave the veil and the book pick up!²⁹ (1979: 3865-67)

تئاتر و رستوران ناموس‌کش نیست
حجاب است آنکه ایران زو خراب است
در گوش، وعظ واعظ بی آبرو مگیر
از روی خود این حجاب بردار

زن رو بسته را ادراک و هُش نیست
²⁷ تمام این مفاسد از حجاب است
²⁸ ترک حجاب بایدت ای ماهرو دگر
²⁹ ای دختر نامسدار ایران

For Lahooti the covered face of women is shameful and a means for the power-holders to deceive and control them. This notion is also similar to those of radical feminists who consider the veil a means for repressing and dominating the women and result of sexual look at them:

This black veil no longer you wear;
No longer shame us before those who care.
Shame is that still you're in cover
So do hurry and give it over.
You the naïve one, he the cunning sheik;
Never heed for what he says for your sake³⁰. (ibid: 3966-3972)

In his "The Black Shroud", Mirzadeh Eshghi criticizes hijab as a black shroud which covers half of the society—the women—in death, as it keeps them from social affairs:

If not a shroud, tell me what is this cover for the face?
Death to those who put you alive in graves!
With me if others also this express,
Soon everywhere thus, happens awareness.
With that awareness woman's face opens;
She takes off this shame and honored becomes.
Society then feels the delight in life,
For as long as women are in shroud covered,

چادر بنه و کتاب بردار!
ما را میان جامعه، بی آبرو مکن
جانا، ز باز کردن رو، هیچ رو مکن
هیچ اعتنا به گفته این زشت خو مکن

چون دخترکان ازبکستان
۳۰. زین بیش این نقاب سیه را به رو مکن
شرم آور این بود که تو در پرده‌ای هنوز
تو ساده‌ای و شیخ بد اخلاق حیلہ‌گر

Half of the nation is for sure dead³¹. (1971: 1293-1302)

Likewise, Bahar opposes hijab and regards it as a kind of shroud:

This gentle being as is now woman

How long shall remain in shroud hidden?³² (2009: 4832- 36)

He holds that the veil cannot preserve the women from debauchery if they are not endowed with piety and virtue from within:

Will not be these customs ever forgotten

As long as women are in veils hidden;

Heaven cannot keep our honor, Bahar,

For free women are all above that far³³. (ibid: 2369- 73)

However, the position of Nassim Shomal about hijab differs from those of other poets. He emphasizes piety and virtuousness of women for whom, he suggests, real freedom and happiness lie under the cover of hijab. This way, his views conform to those of Islamic feminists who propose that the veil is not an obstacle hindering women's freedom, rather a means for preserving their true identities and a defense against the sexual and instrumental exploitation of them:

If they want to rank with angels in beauty,

³¹. گر کفن نیست بگو چیست پس این روبنده

مرده باد آنکه زنان زنده به گور افکنده

با من ار یک دو سه گوینده هم آواز شود

کم کم این زمزمه در جامعه آغاز شود

با همین زمزمه‌ها روی زنان باز شود

زن کند جامه شرم آر و سرافراز شود

لذت زندگی از جامعه احراز شود

ورنه تا زن به کفن سر برده

نیمی از ملت ایران مرده

³². وین وجود لطیف یعنی زن تا به کی زندگی کند به کفن

³³. نشود منقطع از کشور ما این حرکات تا که زن بسته و پیچیده به چادر باشد

حفظ ناموس ز معجز نتوان خواست بهار که زن آزادتر اندر پس معجز باشد

Girls shall keep their face from laity.
For them best guardian is chastity;
Best glory in life is for them piety³⁴. (1984: 1534- 38)

Therefore, in the poetry of the Constitutional Revolution era—as represented by the poets mentioned—the personal and social rights of women are realized as an established norm and this shows the positive conception of women’s presence as opposed to the previous eras. Yet, one may not ignore the fact that growing in the starkly patriarchal society of those times in which the historical and cultural stereotypes concerning gender roles assigned a lower position to the women, some of these poets have also sometimes reflected the same internalized stance toward the women, though in less frequent and overt instances. Aref, Nassim Shomal and Bahar, for example, have used the words “effeminate” and “effeminacy” as pejorative terms against those they want to disparage:

Iran as a house is full of women,
Intrude not, neighbor, the house is without men³⁵. (Areff, 2010: 765-67)
Every traitor would be found out;
Many a man becomes woman and peters out³⁶. (Nassim Shomal, 1983: 343-45)

Where is the one who in this effeminate age
Was as great men endowed with courage?³⁷ (Bahar, 2009: 5466-68)
And finally, in his poem, “The Nature of Women”, Bahar has a sexually disdainful conception of women:

³⁴. دختر ار خواهد که در خوبی قرین حور باد باید از هر اجنبی رخساره‌اش مستور باد
دیده نامحرمان از روی خویش دور باد روز و شب زین شعر شیرین خاطرش مسرور باد
³⁵. ببین که خانه ایران پر است مستی زن میا تو سر زده همسایه، خانه خالی نیست
³⁶. هر خیانتکار تکلیفش معین می‌شود ای بسا مردی که روز امتحان زن می‌شود
³⁷. آنکه در دهر زن طبیعت، داشت خویِ مردانِ نامدار، کجاست؟

Truly women are mysterious;
 In many layers, they hide the truth,
 They just wear make-up and beside rearing,
 Know nothing but childbearing.³⁸ (Bahar: 2009: 1124-28)

These few lines among those numberless ones which glorify women's status are exceptions which can be ignored. We take them as evidence of the fact that the repressive force of a dominant paradigm cannot be easily put off and it may affect the mind of even most consciously dissident outlooks. This fact also explains the paradoxical position of a great classic poet such as Khaghani towards women. He, who has written one of the greatest and most moving elegies in Persian literature on the death of his wife, is happy for the death of his daughter and feels sad of her birth!

Conclusion

What is most clearly evident from the above discussion is that the poets of Constitutional Revolution of Iran have positive attitudes towards women and believe in their personal and social rights. Their positions in this regard conform to feminist principles which, although variously held, generally ask for freedom, equal rights and social opportunities for the women. The poets under study here commonly agree that women shall have equal rights as men, they must have the same educational facilities as men, and women should have the right to take part in social and political activities. They also criticize the sexual and instrumental views on women and believe in the personal freedom and the independent identity of the women. About hijab also, although Iraj, Lahooti, Aref and Eshghi do not agree with mandatory hijab and have, sometimes, radical views against it, it should be noted that they were against the face-covering or veil only not the

³⁸. راست خواهی زنان معمایند
 بیچ در بیچ و لای بر لایند
 نیست زن پایند هیچ اصول
 بجز از اصل فاعل و مفعول
 خویش را صد قلم بزک کردن
 غایتش زادن است و پروردن

chador. And although Bahar welcomes Reza Khan's fight against the veil, he has a more moderate position towards it than his contemporary poets. Only Nassin Shomal has never refuted hijab and despite the fact that he also emphasizes the necessity of freedom and social presence for the women, agrees with the importance of the veil and chastity.

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