A Comparative Analysis on the Contemporary Woman's Social Participation: Multi-cultural Aspects of Middle East*

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The purpose of this study is to explore what "Islamization" has meant to the social status of women in Iran and Middle East countries in the past and present and will stress a theme within Sunni and Shia societies and north Africa. And also discuss the gradual and important facts and process of women's empowerment in the Middle East with variations.

To discuss what "Islamization" has meant to the social status of women in Iran and Middle East countries in the present, we stress a theme within Sunni and Shia societies and north Africa. And also discuss the gradual and important facts and process of women's empowerment in the Middle East with variations. We choose four prominent countries, Iran of Shia Society and Saudi Arabia within Sunni Tradition to evaluate of status of women in the Gulf region with variations and Tunisia of Jasmine Revolution. All the four above-mentioned countries share one feature, the emergence of Islam extremist parties on top of the political heap, and a marked attempt to Islamize their states, particularly in laws dealing with women's social and legal rights.

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As these revolutions unfolded in the Arab world,

[Key Words : Iran, Saudi, Tunisia, Egypt, Islamic Culture, Social Participation]

I. Introduction

The subject of women’s social activity is a large one to write about it briefly a challenge neither in Iran nor in the Middle East, Iranian women played a central role in the Islamic Revolution in the year of 1979 (Persian: انقلاب إسلامي, Enghelābe Eslāmi) and they knew what they want and begun to think about how they can achieve their goals. It is essential to understand women's activities in the modern Iran Islamic society, because without it, they will not be able to achieve their place in the future of Muslim Society. Women helped spark the Arab Spring protests in several countries and actively participated in all of them. Some women's rights activists fear that the new Islamist-led governments (Renaissance Party or Nahda’ (Arabic: حزب النهضة, Hizb al-Nahda, En Nahda party) in Tunisia will curtail women's rights. In Tunisia, the pursuit of feminist politics is all the more necessary since it is the main support to the good image of the country. Many women's rights activists in Egypt hoped the revolutions would lead to more democracy and thereby more women's rights. However, they did not explicitly push for women's rights during any of the demonstrations. In January 2013, women in Saudi Arabia were allowed to sit on the ‘Saudi Shura’ (Saudi Consultative Assembly, Arabic: مجلس الشورى السعودي Majlis al-Shūrā al-Saʿūdīyy) council if they are committed to Islamic Shariah disciplines without any violations and must be restrained by the religious veil. And women are allowed to vote and stand in municipal elections.1)
This objective of this paper is to discuss what "Islamization" has meant to the social status of women in Iran and Middle East countries in the past and present and will stress a theme within Sunni and Shia societies and north Africa. And also discuss the gradual and important facts and process of women's empowerment in the Middle East with variations. We choose four prominent countries, Iran of Shia Society and Saudi Arabia within Sunni Tradition to evaluate of status of women in the Gulf region with variations and Tunisia of Jasmine Revolution and Egypt of Arab Civil Revolt after the "Arab Spring" in North Africa. Finally, we will figure out the effect of the new awakening among the women in the Islamic world and the out look for the future scenarios.

II. Status of Women in the Gulf Region with Variations

The status of women in Muslim society is an entity of faith or a symbol and thus has implications for the religion of Islam as a whole and the situation of women has gone through many changes in the past century and in recent years has been experiencing rapid industrial growth and socio-economic and political development. Concomitant with this change has been the higher social, economic, and political status achieved by many women. It has been 33 years since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, however, Western media still has a slew of various features looking at Islam in the subject of many features of women’s social participants. The common themes in these stories are that Muslim women

1) Women in Saudi Arabia would have the right to join the all-appointed Shura (consultative) Council, women will have the right to run in municipal elections and to choose candidates, according to Islamic principles. This enfranchise women in the conservative kingdom, will participate in the Shura Council as members (Announcement of King, 25 Sep 2011).
have made some progress, but still face hurdles for more progress to social participation. As a consequence, people think of women in the Middle Eastern countries as generally sequestered and hidden behind veils, having no role in society or commerce.

1. Iran of Shia Society

1) Pre Islamic Revolution

Iran a Shi'a Muslim country, underwent many political changes, with the years 1905-1014 dominated by a constitutional revolution and then Russo British control. Though neutral during the World War I, Iran became a battlefield for foreign forces and emerged from the war devastated. The Bolsheviles renounced concessions and unequal rights in Iran and elsewhere, leaving the British as the influential foreign power. Iran's leading ministers agreed to an abortive Anglo Iranian 1919 Treaty that would have made Iran a protectorate. In early 1921 in a military coup, led by Reza Khan, Most nationalists and feminists supported him until near the end, while many opposed his brutality. After a short campaign for a Republic on the Turkish model, he had a constituent assembly depose the Qajar dynasty in 1925 and crowned himself Shah(King) of the new Pahlavi Dynasty. From 1906 through the early Reza Shah period there were independent

2) The Iranian Constitutional Revolution (Mashrutiyyat or Enghelab e Mashruteh) (also known as the Constitutional Revolution of Iran) took place between 1905 and 1907. The revolution led to the establishment of a parliament in Persia (Iran).

3) The Bolshevik Revolution also known as the Great October Socialist Revolution, Red October, the October Uprising was a seizure of state power instrumental in the larger Russian Revolution of 1917. The revolution was led by the Bolsheviks, who used their influence in the Petrograd Soviet to organize the armed forces.

4) The Anglo-Persian Agreement was a document involving Great Britain and Persia and centered around drilling rights of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. It was never ratified by the Majlis. This "agreement" was issued by British Foreign Secretary Earl Curzon to the Persian government in August 1919.
women's organizations and publications, and opposition to women's activities came more from religious conservatives than from the government.

Iranian women's autonomous political activities began during the 1906-11 revolution. The first women's newspaper was published in 1911 and independent women's groups emphasized on establishing girls school. In 1918, the government extended public education to women, and public girl's school were opened. From 1917 to 1927 several new women's newspaper and organization were created. The leading woman in this activity was Sediqeh Dolatabadi.\(^5\)

Reza Khan's 1921 coup did not immediately have a great impact on women, but later extended public education, including university education for boys and girls and also created boys and girls scout movements. He asked women to contribute to building Iran, both via informed motherhood and in appropriate jobs, like teaching. Reza Khan visited Turkey in 1934 and was impressed by the role of women in Ataturk's centralizing and modernizing reforms. In 1935, University of Tehran opened and some women attended from 1936. In 1936, he decreed unveiling for all women. In some cities this was enforced by Army’s, pulling off women's chador.

The Civil Service was opened to women and the civil code completed in 1931, made few changes in Shari' Laws relating to women, but did establish minimum marriage ages of fifteen for girls and eighteen for boys and as in most Muslim countries could follow their own personal status laws, by a 1937 law, all marriages, divorces, birth and deaths had to be registered with the state.

After the CIA engineered coup d'etete of 1955, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahalvi\(^6\), the eldest son of Reza Khan who was educated in Switzerland and returned to Iran in 1935, began to assert his power and maintained a pro western foreign

\(^5\) Sediqeh Dolatabadi (1882, Isfahan — July 30, 1961) was a Persian feminist activist and journalist and one of the pioneering figures in Persian women's movement. Sediqeh Dolatabadi in 1919 published the first women gazette in Isfahan called Zaban-e Zanan.

\(^6\) born in oct 26, 1919 and died in July 27, 1980 by cancer in Cairo, Egypt.
policy and fostered economic development in Iran. In Sept 1941, by taking an oath in front of the Iranian Parliament succeeded his father as the King of Iran. He was the king of Iran from Sept 1941 and overthrow by the Islamic Revolution in Iran on Feb 1979. He was the last king of Iran. Under the Mohammad Reza Shah the successor of Reza Shah, many more significant reforms were introduced. For instance in 1963, women were elected to the Parliament and the upper house and appointed as judges and ministers in the cabinet. In 1967 Iranian family law, which was included in the civil code, was also reformed which improved the position of women in the society and was designed to protect wives, children and female divorcees,(Banafsheh, 2010; 77) The general thrust of the reforms were to promote equality between men and women in the society and Shah encouraged the process by rewarding non veiled women with positions in the new expanding government bureaucracy as well as in Health care and Education.

Oil revenues financed the expansion of health and education and many women particularly of urban upper and middle class backgrounds entered the labor force(Fred Halliday, 1970; 191-3). Moreover, the King granted women the right to vote and counted on their support. But for the majority of women who lived in rural areas and for the working class and poor urban dwellers, the gains of women that resulted from the King's reforms were marginal. While Upper and Middle class women became ambassadress.7) Furthermore, the King's liberation of women accompanied overall political repression and exacerbated income disparity. Even so many educated middle class women the tradeoff was not always worthwhile, and especially students were highly critical of the regime. Women have come a long way in Iran. The 1979 revolution provided an opportunity millions of women had long been waiting for. Some may be puzzled by the fact that women who gained so much under him, ended up opposing him.

7) 1976 – Mehrangiz Dowlatshahi becomes Iran’s first female head of a diplomatic mission when she was appointed as an ambassadress to Denmark.
so bitterly, Iranians wanted to be in charge of their own destiny and did not want their natural resources to be under the control of foreign countries. Finally he left Iran on Jan 1979 and with the referendum of 30 March 1979, the new state form of an Islamic Republic founded in April 1979.

2) Post Islamic revolution

The situation of women in Iran has gone through many changes in the past century and Iranian women have endured a long and struggling roller coaster ride filled with inequality, segregation,(Amini, 2001; 23) By the late 1970's, the citizens of Iran were unhappy with the way their government was being run, Mohammed Reza Shah had lost all credibility and corruption was running rampant, There were several main reasons leading to the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism, most a direct result of the inept rule of the Pahlavi regime. For one, Iranians were tired of the widespread fraudulence characterizing the Pahlavi regime, Additionally, the Shah's iron control of the state didn't allow for any freedom or independent action. The Shah expected to throw out the entire ideological foundation and to suppress any of the people's discontent. The revolution appealed to many as a return to authenticity, an assertion of the Iranian identity.(Aa'zam, 1993; 45)

The disgruntled atmosphere aided Ayatollah Khomeini8) in his plan to retake Iran, Khomeini had started to garner support as far back as the 1960's and his popularity began to grow in earnest with his opposition to the White Revolution9) and gender equality. On his initiative, nine of the top clergymen issued

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8) Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini( 24 September 1902 – 3 June 1989), was an Iranian religious leader and politician, and leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution which saw the overthrow of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran,
9) The White Revolution in Persian (Enghelāb-e Sefid) was a far-reaching series of reforms in Iran launched in 1963 by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza Shah’s reform program was built especially to strengthen those classes that supported the traditional system,
communiqués denouncing women's enfranchisement in 1963.

Demonstrations became more frequent and people became increasingly fearless and enthusiastic in the face of death. The demonstrations began to take on more socioeconomic tones. More than one million people in Tehran alone gathered to mark the death of Imam Hossein.10) During these demonstrations a resolution was passed calling for the overthrow of the Shah and for Khomeini to lead Iran.

There is no doubt that women played a very important role in the triumph of the Islamic Revolution happened in 1979 and that they offered unparalleled support in every aspect of the movement. In 1980 women working at government offices were ordered to observe the Islamic dress code. The family protection law was abolished by a declaration from Imam Khomeini in April and by March women were barred from becoming judges, 217 members were elected to the First Majlis(Iran Parliament), 3 were women among them and now there are 290 members and 9 seats for women is available in Iran Majlis.11) Iranian women have substantially increased levels of Education, Economic power, Political Awareness and Participation, and overall presence in public space.

As a consequence, people think of Persian women as generally sequestered and hidden behind veils, having no role in society or commerce. As of early 2007, nearly 70% of Iran's science and engineering students were women. Furthermore according to UNESCO world survey, Iran has the highest female to male ratio at primary level of enrollment in the world among sovereign nations. Women make up more than 60 percent of Iranian university students. The opportunities for women education in Iran has grown exponentially after the

10) Al-Hussein ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib (13 January 626 CE - 13 October 680 CE) was the son of Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib and Fatimah Zahra, Hussein is an important figure in Islam as he is a member of the Ahl al-Bayt (the household of Muhammad) and Ahl al-Kisa, as well as being the third Shi ‘a Imam.
11) women in national parliaments http://www.ipu.org
Table 1. Number of Female Graduates by sector and study levels 12) (2003~2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study level</th>
<th>female Public</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Female non public</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Female Total</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>17130</td>
<td>43866</td>
<td>23100</td>
<td>48477</td>
<td>40230</td>
<td>92343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>40205</td>
<td>74430</td>
<td>43066</td>
<td>92342</td>
<td>83271</td>
<td>166772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>2210</td>
<td>8454</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>2636</td>
<td>3004</td>
<td>11090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Doctorate</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>4669</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>1239</td>
<td>2560</td>
<td>5908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph. D</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>2263</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>2304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62044</td>
<td>133682</td>
<td>67581</td>
<td>144735</td>
<td>129625</td>
<td>278417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Center for Women and Family Affairs, IRAN, p.22.

The percentage of female university graduates rose from 28.6% in 1976 to 50.3% in 2006, an increase of 75.9%. There was a noticeable decline of 30% in the percentage of men during the same period. The percentage of male and female university students was approximately equal in 2005. The percentage of women accepted into Universities and Higher Education Institutions rose from 32.5% in 1976 to 59.9% in 2007 - a rise of more than 80%. The percentage amongst men fell during the same period by more than 38%. After the Islamic revolution women have significant participation in the political and social sphere, in particular on the following. Women have the right to participate in politics, and in fact must participate in decision-making. Islam is a political religion. Everything in it is political, even religious practice. (Imam Khomeini, 15/9/1980)13) All this must be done within the limits of the hijab.14)

12) The female share of the total is 46.5% at masters and Ph. D level is 24~27%, for professional doctorates it is 41.6% (Ministry of Science, Research & Technology (2003,P.74)
Table 2. The number of university graduates (1976–2010)\(^{15}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976–77</td>
<td>32163</td>
<td>12884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982–83</td>
<td>3513</td>
<td>2280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986–87</td>
<td>18488</td>
<td>8439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994–95</td>
<td>35777</td>
<td>16576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996–97</td>
<td>55521</td>
<td>28361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–02</td>
<td>71080</td>
<td>56037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005–06</td>
<td>168947</td>
<td>171299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–09</td>
<td>228650</td>
<td>315748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009–10</td>
<td>195573</td>
<td>281432</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Aryan, K. 2012, p. 46

Note: the number of 2008–2010 is estimated.

We are strengthened when our women, both the elderly and the youth, those old and young, enter the cultural, economic and military spheres and move forward alongside men along the path of religious perfection and towards the great aims which the Noble Quran has prescribed.\(^{16}\) The Iranian Constitution says: "Members of the Iranian people, both men and women, are protected equally by the Law and enjoy all the same humanitarian, political, economic and cultural rights under the protection of our system of Islamic principles."

Some of these rights are specifically confirmed in the Treaty of Women’s Rights and Responsibilities, such as the right to freedom of thought, protection from objections to the right to enjoy social equality when implementing the law without consideration of gender (male or female), the right to acquire knowledge and the right to establish parties, participate in elections and stand for parliament

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13) Islamic history has witnessed women owning and selling their own property, and being present in important political and social circles. "Believing women come to you [the Prophet] to swear allegiance, so long as they do not commit idolatry against Allah."
15) Statistics are cited from the statistics center of the Islamic republic of Iran, 2009.
(Clauses 3-11 Section One, and Clauses 112 and 115 Section Four).

Table 3. Literacy Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Male(%)</th>
<th>Female(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>over 6</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 - 24</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>over 6</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 - 24</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>over 6</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 - 24</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>94.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>over 6</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 - 24</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>96.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Iranian women are better educated and more politically sophisticated than many of their Muslim neighbors. The United Nations educational, scientific and cultural organization reports that the literacy rate of Iranian women is 70 percent, compared with an average 46.2 percent in the Middle East.

Table 4. Female and Male Members of the Iranian Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Seats</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forth</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics Center of Iran, 2009.
Women have held posts as ministerial advisors on women's affairs in forty ministries and government bodies, and have acted as advisors on women's affairs in 31 provinces. Some 250 women have held advisory posts for women's affairs on town councils and 400 women have take up positions of responsibility in villages and the countryside. The number of women active in the countryside has increased during the past two decades by 156%. Chronology of Female Evolution in the ministers job in Iran since 2000 up to now are as follows:

- 2005-09 Vice-President and Head of the Environmental Protection Organization, Fatemeh VaezJavadi.
- 2005-09 Cabinet Member and Director of the Center for Women’s Participation and Presidential Advisor on Women’s Affairs.
- 2009- Vice-President for Science and Technology, Dr. Nasrin Soltankhah, She is the Member of the Tehran City Council since 2003.
- 2009-12 Minister of Health, Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, She was the first female cabinet minister since 1979.
- 2009- Vice-President for Legal Affairs and a top advisor to Former President of Iran (Mahmoud Ahmandinejad), Mrs. Fatemeh Bodaghi.
- 2009(Dec.) In a decree issued by Dr. Mahmoud Ahmandinejad, Ms. Maryam Mojtabizadeh has been appointed as the Advisor to the President, and President of Center for Women and Family Affairs.
- 2009-Vice-President and Head of National Youth Organization, Farahnaz Torkestani.
- 2013(Aug) Vice President for Legal Affairs in the cabinet of Hassan Rouhani, New President of Iran, Dr. Elham Aminzadeh.
- 2013- First spokeswoman of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, Marzih Alikham.

17) Dr. Aminzadeh holds a PhD in law from Univ. of Glasgow in 97, Prof of law in Tehran Univ., Univ. of the Ministry of Foregin Affairs, Univ. of Allameh and Univ. of Imam Sadeqh. She served at the 7th term of the Majlis as a lawmaker from 2004-2008, She was the deputy head of the Majlis’s national security and foreign policy committee,
18) She served as Foreign Ministry’s Director General for information and press and also served as a Foreign Ministry’s Director General for Public Diplomacy under former foreign minister of Iran, Ali Akbar Salehi.
27.1% of the ministers in government are women (ranks 23rd out of 125 countries) and 3.4% are parliamentarians (140th out of 157 countries).19)

Robert D. Kaplan20) has commented on the less traditional attitude of many women in Iran compared to other Middle Eastern countries, "In Iran, you could point a camera at a woman and she would smile" in contrast to other more conservative places where women may mind this. Women liberation is always a welcome sign and the Middle East is definitely not lacking behind. In Tehran, the capital of Iran, women taxi drivers are becoming very popular. There are around 700 women cab drivers in Iran who work for taxi services run by women, for women, and no male passengers are allowed.

Iran in a way is distinct in the Middle East because women can pursue higher education, are permitted to drive, make a living, unlike Saudi Arabia where women lead a repressed life. But in Iran they are free to go out on their own, drive their own vehicles, take taxis driven by men if they like. It definitely is considering that women don’t sit at home and are given the freedom to explore fields which are otherwise male dominated. A service like this creates a safer travel environment for women, who otherwise would be wary of traveling alone in a cab with an unknown guy driving. Tehran is also the only place in the Middle East to have female Fire fighters. It is far more liberal place for women then actually portrayed.21)

20) Robert David Kaplan (born 23 June 1952 in New York) is an American journalist, currently a National Correspondent for The Atlantic magazine and a writer for Startor. In 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates appointed Kaplan to the Defense Policy Board, a federal advisory committee to the United States Department of Defense; In 2011, Foreign Policy magazine named Kaplan as one of the world’s "top 100 global thinkers."
21) Youtube women driving in Iran http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JhMcoIAxPc
women bus driver in Iran http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_jiL4aKrW
2) Saudi Arabia within Sunni tradition

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which occupies most of the Arabian Peninsula, is the world’s leading oil producer and exporter and is a Monarchy that has been ruled by the Al-Saud Family since the country’s unification in 1931 with a consultative assembly (Shura) of lawmakers appointed by the King. Saudi Arabia follows its own state-sponsored version of Sunni Islam, known as Wahhabism, which is considered one of the most conservative interpretations of the faith.

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has made some progress in Women’s Education and employment, however women’s access to employment opportunities is limited. Women are legally prohibited from participating in any public decision-making bodies. Neither men nor women have the right to vote in Saudi Arabia, and political parties are forbidden. In Saudi Arabia, all women, regardless of age, are required to have a male guardian. Women cannot vote or be elected to high political positions. However, on Sept 25, King Abdullah announced that women would be able to vote in municipal elections in 2015 and be appointed to the Consultative Assembly. King said that he wants women to drive when the society is ready for it.

“I believe strongly in the rights of women, I believe the day will come when women will drive. In fact if you look at the areas of Saudi Arabia, the desert, and in the rural areas, you will find that women do drive. The issue will require patience, In time I believe that it will be possible, I believe that patience is a virtue.”

The government continued to exclude women as voters or candidates in the September 2011 municipal elections, despite a two-year delay to allow for

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22) Wahhabism is a movement of Islam named after Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703-1792).
23) She is a Saudi women’s rights activist and journalist in Saudi Arabia from fully participating in public life, as compared to countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
24) Saudi King, “Women will be allowed to vote and run for office” PBS, September 26, 2011.
logistical preparations to include women. In March 2011 women activists launched the Baladi (My Country) campaign in protest, trying—unsuccessfully—to register to vote. In the first municipal elections in 2005, authorities said that election workers could not verify a woman’s identity since many did not have identity cards. However, the Interior Ministry began issuing identity cards to women over 22 years old in 2000. The king also promised to appoint women as full members of the Shura Council. The World Economic Forum 2009 Global Gender Gap Report World Economic ranked Saudi Arabia 130th out of 134 countries for gender parity. It was the only country to score a zero in the category of political empowerment.

Saudi women constitute 17% of the country’s native workforce. Girls and women of all ages are forbidden from traveling, studying, or working without permission from their male guardians. Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that prohibits women from driving. On June 17 around 40 women with international drivers’ licenses participated in a "Women2drive" campaign. No law bars women from driving, but senior government clerics have ruled against the practice. According to king Abdullah’s announcement on September 2011, women can now be appointed to the Consultative Assembly. 26) Women first joined the Consultative Assembly in 2013, occupying thirty seats. 27) Furthermore, that year three women were named as deputy chairpersons of three committees, Dr. Thurayya Obeid was named Deputy Chairwoman of the Human Rights and Petitions Committee, Dr. Zainab Abu Talib, Deputy Chairwoman of the Information and Cultural Committee, and Dr. Lubna Al-Ansari, Deputy Chairwoman of the Health Affairs and Environment Committee. 28) Women are allowed to hold positions on boards of chambers of commerce.

26) Saudi King, "Women will be allowed to vote and run for office". PBS. September 26, 2011
27) Wagner, Rob L. (23 April 2010), "Saudis Debate Gender Segregation "News Tilt"
In 2008, two women were elected to the board of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry. There are no women on the High Court or the Supreme Judicial Council. There is one woman in a cabinet-level position, as deputy minister for women's education.\(^{29}\) In 2010, the Saudi government announced female lawyers would be allowed to represent women in family cases.\(^{30}\) In 2013, Saudi Arabia registered its first female trainee lawyer, Arwa al-Hujaili.\(^{31}\)

Table 5. The Trend of Numbers of Elementary School Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Government School</th>
<th>Private School</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Reappear in Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1445858</td>
<td>1467285</td>
<td>101697</td>
<td>158967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1465774</td>
<td>1485146</td>
<td>97021</td>
<td>163446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1471907</td>
<td>1495339</td>
<td>111470</td>
<td>176527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1508614</td>
<td>1507471</td>
<td>121345</td>
<td>183636</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Saudi Statistics

Also in 2013, Aisha Jaafari became the first Saudi woman to attain an aircraft dispatcher license and in 2013, Saudi women were first allowed to ride bicycles, although only around parks and other "recreational areas." They must also be dressed in full Islamic body coverings and be accompanied by a male relative. Some of the recently appointed female advisors to Shurah (parliament) believe slow reform is effective. According to Dr. Nora Al Yousif of at Qassim University, in Saudi Arabia, "The Saudi leadership is working hard on reform and supporting women." Seventy years ago we were completely isolated from the world. The changes which are taking place are unmistakable, and we have finally started


\(^{31}\) http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58013
opening up, (Asmaa, 2010)" Dr. Maha Almuneef (32) says, "There are small steps now. There are giant steps coming. But most Saudis have been taught the traditional ways. You can't just change the social order all at once; (UNDP, 2013: 156).

Many believe slow change is the only kind possible, Hatoon Al-Fassi (History Prof.) says recent campaigns for women's rights have opened up public discourse on topics such as child marriage and rape, "It's an exaggeration to call it a women's movement. But we are proud to say that something is going on in Saudi Arabia. We are not really free, but it is possible for women to express themselves as never before."

Nonetheless, she says Westerners do not understand Saudi culture and how potentially traumatic change can be: "People had lived their whole lives doing one thing and believing one thing, and suddenly the king and the major clerics were saying that mixing was O.K. You can't begin to imagine the potential impact that the ban on mixing has on our lives and what lifting this ban would mean. (Zoepf, 2010)"

Women's freedom of movement in Saudi Arabia is limited through a combination of legal and social controls and religiously sanctioned local practices.

Education in Saudi Arabia is free at all levels. Female students at the pre-college level have access to the same courses as male students, except that, until 2003, girls were not allowed to take gym or a course entitled "Civics." While a high rate of illiteracy characterizes the population above age 15 (30.5 percent for women and 15.9 percent for men), the figures drop considerably for the younger population aged 15 to 24 (9.7 percent for women and 5.1 percent for men), although the gender disparity remains. At the elementary level, only 56 percent of school-aged girls are enrolled, which would suggest a possible parental gender bias when it comes to sending daughters to school, except that,

32) Executive officer of the National Family Safety Program (NFSP)
by comparison, only 60 percent of elementary school-aged boys are in school.

Table 6. Female Students against Male Public Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years and Sex</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stages of Education</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>1562795</td>
<td>1648592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>709173</td>
<td>740508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>626662</td>
<td>711751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2898630</td>
<td>3100851</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Saudi Statistics

Women comprise an estimated 56 percent of the nearly 32,000 students in higher education institutions. However, women are not allowed to study engineering and are not admitted to the King Fahad University for Oil and Minerals in Dhahran, on the grounds that they would not be allowed to work in the profession for which they would be trained. All Saudi universities that admit women have separate and interior facilities for their female students. When King Saud University, the largest university in the kingdom, was built as a state-of-the-art institution in the early 1980s to accommodate 25,000 male students, women were moved to the old male campus of Riyadh University, which had no useful library. Nevertheless, gender discrimination in higher education is changing. A new campus for women is under construction in Riyadh, and there is a private college for girls in Jeddah, the first in Saudi Arabia designed to follow an American curriculum.
III. Arab Spring and the Liberation in North Africa

The Arab Spring\(^{34}\) (Arabic: اربيع العربيّ, ar-rabī‘al-‘arabī) is a term for the revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests (both non-violent and violent), riots, and civil wars in the Arab world that began on 18 December 2010. To date, rulers have been forced from power in Tunisia, Egypt, and to gulf area include in Saudi Arabia.

1. Tunisia of Jasmine Revolution

Jasmine Revolution which refers to The December-January mass uprising in Tunisia that overthrew president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 15, was sparked off by the self-immolation of vegetable vendor Mohamed Bouazizi an unemployed university graduate, who was humiliated by a policewoman who confiscated his vegetable vendor. He doused himself with a flammable liquid and set himself on fire on December 17, 2010. Finally on Jan 4, 2011 he died in the hospital. The Middle East and the entire globe were shocked by this tragedy. Following the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in SidiBouzid, a series of increasingly violent street demonstrations through December 2010 ultimately led to the ousting of longtime President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011. The demonstrations were preceded by high unemployment, food inflation, lack of freedom, and poor living conditions. The protests constituted the most dramatic wave of social and political unrest in Tunisia in three decades, and have resulted in scores of deaths and injuries, most of which were the result of action.

\(^{34}\) The term "Arab Spring" is an allusion to the Revolutions of 1848, which is sometimes referred to as "Springtime of the People", and the Prague Spring in 1968. In the aftermath of the Iraq war it was used by various commentators who anticipated a major Arab movement toward social changes.
by police and security forces against demonstrators, Ben Ali fled into exile in Saudi Arabia, ending his 23 years in power. This immolation and the subsequent heavy-handed response by the police to peaceful marchers caused riots the next day went largely unnoticed, although social media sites such as Facebook and You Tube featured images of police dispersing youths who attacked shop windows and damaged cars. The protests against corruption and unemployment that swept the country in January featured women prominently, much to the surprise of many international observers.

Table 7. Women’s Education and Social Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy: females as a % of males 2011</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment ratios: 2008–2011, Primary GER</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival rate of primary: 2008–2011</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antenatal care (%) 2007–2012</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery care (%) 2007–2012</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery care (%) 2007–2012, C-section</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal mortality ratio, 2010, Adjusted</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>860</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics admin, data, Ministry of High Education, Tunisia

Women from all walks of life, age groups and regions of Tunisia took to the streets: they were on the front lines of the struggle and protesters, journalists, tweeter, bloggers and workers. Women were standing face to face with armed security forces and shouting and singing pro democracy slogans. Female bloggers, journalists, Tweeters and demonstrators flooded the streets of the capital and outlying cities. Yet this sort of public demonstration should not be considered remarkable for Tunisia, a country where women’s rights have been part of the political and social agenda since independence. According to Souhayr
Belhassen 35) Women massively participated in the ‘Jasmine’ uprising to make sure their demands would be taken into account, that they would get to be represented in post-revolutionary political institutions.” Since the 2011 Revolution in Tunisia and protests across North Africa and the Middle East Region began, many articles have been published discussing the unprecedented role of women in the Protests. Tunisian women were among the first in the Arab world to obtain the right to vote, shortly after independence in 1956. Polygamy is banned, marriage conditional on female consent and miniskirts as common a sight as the Muslim head scarf in Tunisia’s cityscape.

Table 8. Participation to Education in Tunisia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth (15–24 years) literacy rate (%) 2007–2011</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number per 100 population 2011, mobile phones</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school participation, (%) 2008–2011</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school participation, (%) 2007–2011</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school participation, Survival rate to last primary grade (%), 2008–2011</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics admin, data, Ministry of High Education, Tunisia

Women in Tunisia enjoy freedom and rights now a days and the condition of Tunisia's women, by contrast, is unmatched in the Arab world. The literacy rate for women in Tunisia is now over 70%36), though only 27% of the labour force is female, Women make up nearly two-thirds of university students. Women also participated in large numbers in the October 2011 National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections as candidates and campaigners, encouraged by the country’s

35) Former VP of the Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH) and current president of the International Federation for human rights.
new electoral law requiring gender parity on political party candidate lists. Since the revolution, women have also played active roles in civil society and in political parties in the hope of contributing to the emerging political transition. Yet Tunisian women increasingly voice concerns that conventional gender relations and stereotypes are reemerging despite the solidarity among women and men during the revolution. The gender parity for the NCA elections, for example, did not guarantee equal representation of elected women because most political parties did not nominate women as heads of candidate lists. As a result, women members hold 24 percent of NCA seats. During previous focus group research conducted by NDI, Tunisian women spoke about their struggles to participate in political life. Women expressed the belief that politicians make decisions on their behalf without consultation, as well as concerns over the commitment of NCA members to preserve women’s rights. (Tunisian Government, 2012) Since the Tunisian democratic transition began, women have increasingly voiced concerns over the reemergence of conventional gender relations and stereotypes despite the solidarity among women and men during the 2011 uprising. The Arab spring seemed to hold the key to bringing women’s freedoms to the forefront of a new political agenda. The present social situation in Tunisia indicates that from the people’s point of view neither the Islamic, nor the secular or leftist parties have the capability to propose a solution for the crisis in this country, particularly in the economic sector. Even the Tunisian General Labor Union has lost the power and influence it had always had after the independence (1956), when the labor forces rejected the invitation of this union for public strikes.
2. Egypt of Arab Spring within Revolt

1) Egypt's Revolution

Inspired by the uprising in Tunisia and prior to his entry as a central figure in Egyptian politics, no doubt that Egypt's revolution has opened the space for the people to express their grievances and preferences and potential presidential candidate Mohamed El Baradei warned of a "Tunisia-style explosion" in Egypt. Protests in Egypt began on 25 January 2011 and ran for 18 days. Beginning around midnight on 28 January, the Egyptian government attempted, somewhat successfully, to eliminate the nation's Internet access, in order to inhibit the protesters' ability use media activism to organize through social media. Hosni Mubarak dismissed his government, later appointing a new cabinet. Mubarak also appointed the first Vice President in almost 30 years.

It is acknowledged that the uprisings known as the Arab Spring began with a Tunisian Vegetable and fruit vendor setting himself on fire to protest official mistreatment and finally mass protests led to the ouster of Tunisia's dictatorial president. Inspired by these protests, young Egyptians organized their own demonstrations and succeeded in driving Hosni Mubarak from power. Egypt also put President Mubarak on trial for his tyranny against his people and Muslim Brotherhood has appeared to take great caution in their recent movements. Revolt spread to Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Algeria and other countries. So far, though only the uprising in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have succeeded in dislodging the old regimes.

Egypt's first democratically-elected parliament in over half a century met on...
Jan 2013, for the first time, while thousands of demonstrators celebrated and protested outside. In a June run-off election, Mohammed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood’s candidate, won the presidency but deposed a year later through a combination of mass anti-government protest and a military coup. It is obvious that the reason behind the protests and coup is the economic mismanagement. The military has installed an interim government that will lead the process of drafting a new constitution and preparing for fresh elections. Elections are expected in early 2014, but the situation is highly unpredictable. With no constitution and no parliament, there’s no consensus on the basic "rules of the game".

After two years since the downfall of Mubarak’s totalitarian regime, Egypt is still faced with serious difficulties to achieve calm and peace and the establishment of a democratic government. The circle of sustainable violence among Morsi’s opponents within the framework of a non-Islamic movement and the government’s inability to respond to people’s demands particularly in the economic field has caused even some of the former supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood to accuse Morsi of having contradictions in his behavior and words and there are reports of the appearance of a new dialogue in the Islamist front under the title of the Liberal Muslim Brotherhood.

The Muslim Brotherhood has condemned Morsi’s overthrow as a coup, and refuses to recognize the new regime. Secular parties have backed the military, and are pressing for a timely transition back to civilian rule, but they are also divided and have no common strategy. The revolutionary youth groups that had spearheaded the pro-democracy protests since 2011, worry that the generals might use their power to protect the old order and quash the gains of the 2011 uprising.

To limit women’s contact with men as tradition, practices such as veiling and gender segregation at schools, work, and recreation have become common,
Furthermore, lower-class families, especially in Upper Egypt, have tended to withdraw females from school as they reached puberty to minimize their interaction with males. Lower-class men frequently preferred marriage to women who had been secluded rather than to those who had worked or attended secondary school.

The rule of modern Egypt government was characterized by the policy of stridently advocating women’s rights through welfare-state policies, labeled as state feminism. Women were guaranteed the right to vote and equality of opportunity was explicitly stated in the 1956 Egyptian constitution, forbidding gender-based discrimination. Labor laws were changed to ensure women’s standing in the work force and maternity leave was legally protected. At the same time, the state repressed independent feminist organizations, leaving a dearth of female political representation.

In place of policies to economically support women during pregnancy, women were encouraged to leave work entirely or work part-time. Last 20 years were marked by further erosion of the role of women. Preserved parliamentary seats for women and the 1979 personal status law were repealed in 1987, a new watered-down law taking its place that allowed less power for women in cases of divorce. The migration of a large number of Egyptians, mostly men, has also had an impact on the status of Egyptian women. A study by the International Organization for Migration found that two-thirds of migrant household interviewed were headed by a woman in the absence of the male migrant (husband/father). For these households, remittances represented an important source of income, accounting for 43% of their total income. 52% of wives of the migrants independently decided how to spend the money received. In the remaining cases, the head of the household enjoyed a fair deal of autonomy as the decision on how to use the remittance money was reached through mutual consultation between the migrant and the head of the household and only in a
few cases (11%) did the migrant decide alone.

A 2010 Pew Research Center poll showed that 45% of Egyptian men and 76% of women supported gender equality while 11% of men and 36% of women completely agreed that women should be able to work outside the home. Polls taken in 2010 and 2011 show that 39% considered gender equality "very important" to Egypt's future post-revolution and 54% of Egyptians supported sex segregation in the workplace. In a 2008 survey of 1,010 women by the Egyptian Center for Women's rights, 98% of foreign women and 83% of native women said they had been sexually harassed in Egypt and two-thirds of men said that they had harassed women. (Estrin, 2011) Women who wore conservative attire, an Islamic headscarf or niqab, were also targeted. In 2013, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women reported that 99.3% of Egyptian women had experienced some form of harassment. (United Nation, 2013) Human Rights Watch reported 91 sexual assaults in four days from 30 June 2013 during the Tahrir Square protests, as well as 19 cases of mob sexual assaults in January. The deputy Middle East director at HRW said that the attacks were "holding women back from participating fully in the public life of Egypt at a critical point in the country's development." Speaking in practical terms, if the ruling party tries to maintain the old system by simply switching to a new name, no doubt that the citizens will gather again.

The important thing is that more and more states in MENA are acknowledging the fact that inclusion of women in official policy and their integration into nation building is the guarantee of future prosperity for their nations. (Shanhande, 2012; 87-89)

38) The Pew Research Center is an American think tank organization based in Washington that provides information.
2) Education condition of woman in power

In the education field, Egypt has the largest overall education system in the Middle East and North Africa and has grown rapidly since the early 1990s. According to the Human Development Index, Egypt is ranked 123 in the HDI and 7 in the lowest 10 HDI countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa, in 2009. The current overall expenditure on education is about 12.6 percent as of 2007 as table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population (1,000)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool age</td>
<td>3,316</td>
<td>1,691</td>
<td>1,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school age</td>
<td>9,466</td>
<td>4,830</td>
<td>4,636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school age</td>
<td>9,457</td>
<td>4,818</td>
<td>4,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population, all ages</td>
<td>75,498</td>
<td>37,790</td>
<td>37,708</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The President instructed the government and called on political parties, and national bodies to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to take active measures to increase women’s active participation in the decision making and in political life. To this end, a number of steps to enhance women’s active participation have been taken: 1) The appointment of the First Woman Judge in January 2003, followed by the appointment of 3 other women judges shortly afterward, 2) The appointment of more women in higher decision making positions reaching 34.6% in 2002, compared to only 15.3% in 1996. 3) Building a cadre of politically and technically qualified women with knowledge and experiences to be able to run for the parliamentarian elections in 2005 and the local councils elections in 2006. The latter is being implemented through the
establishment of the Center for the Political Empowerment of Women initiated by the NCW, (UNICEF, 2008)

Despite the fact that a woman holds the position of Deputy Speaker for the People's Assembly, women's representation in the national legislative bodies still range from 2.2%-5.7%. It reveals that there are constraints, many of which are hard to overcome. Also despite a marked increase in the rate of females appointed to higher decision-making positions, which nearly doubled from 15% in 1996 to 34% in 2002, women representation in the political spheres is still lagging behind. In 1999, only 621 women (3 percent) were elected to trade union committees in all governorates, while one woman finally succeeded in being elected to the General Federation of Trade Unions in the last election. Even in NGOs, where women's membership is close 35%, women's participation on boards remains in the range of 15-18 percent, with a high of 42% in family planning associations, and a low of 8% in scientific and religious associations.

IV. Multi-cultural Aspects of Women's Social Life

1. Muslim Women's Social Life in the Past

Throughout history, most societies held women in an inferior status compared to that of men. This was often justified as being the natural result of biological differences between the sexes. Historically, social, political and economical factors have influenced the roles of women in ancient and modern societies, As

39) The percentage of registered voters reached 37.4% in 2003. In some governorates it approached 65%, while in others it was as low as 23%. Women's participation in syndicates constitutes 17% of the total participation. Female participation in syndicates varies, ranging form a high of 77% in the Nursing Syndicate to a low of 5% in the Applied Arts Syndicate. Women have also not fared well in trade unions.
an outcome, the roles of women have varied across time and in different places. Many different societies have viewed women in various ways, some believed their role was only at home and others allowed them more freedom. However, women have always played an important role in Muslim societies.

In many societies, for example, people believed women to be more emotional and less decisive than men. Women were also viewed to be less intelligent and less creative by nature in Muslim society. However, research shows that women and men have the same range of emotional, intellectual, and creative characteristics. Many sociologists and anthropologists maintain that various multi-cultural aspects found in their taught girls to behave according to negative stereotypes (images) of femininity, thus keeping alive the idea that women are naturally inferior (this has always been the case in male-dominated societies) according to the different region in the Middle Eastern area.

Impressive progress in women’s education can be found in former chapter, the following developments are worthy of note that Literacy of the regions are up from 16.6(1970) to 52.2% in 2000, and average years of schooling up from 0.5% (1950) to 4.5%(2000). The Gender disparity in enrollment and (nine girls attend for every ten boys) and Girls tertiary education doubled since 1980(now 14%of girls versus 20% of boys go to the university). These trends are illustrated by the following two tables.

Table 10, Female Enrollment in education of 4 countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th></th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNICEF, Statistics and Monitoring Section, www.childinfo.org,
Table 11. Women as a share of university Enrollment in selected countries (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNICEF, Statistics and Monitoring Section, www.childinfo.org,

Iran and Tunisia are the progressive ones where there are lots of women’s organizations voicing their views on a variety of issues of concern to the populace. A study of 19 developing countries, including Egypt and Tunisia has concluded that country’s long term economic growth increases by 3.7% every year as the adult population's average level of schooling rises. (John, 2008) Actually 10% increase in girls primary school enrollment has been shown to decrease infant morality by 4.1% deaths per 1000 live births, while a 10% rise in secondary enrollment decreases infant mortality by another 5.1% deaths per 1000 live births. (Stein, 2008)

Islam has done a great service to women in Tunisia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It not only put an end to the absolute control of the fathers, but gave women freedom, a personality and independence of thinking and opinion. Including half a part of the society’ s human force, women posses a particular stance in educating every society’ s resources, i.e. children and would-be useful members of society. When a woman, besides educating children and satisfying her husband’ s needs, manages to achieve social and scientific fulfillments, she can play a more successful role in children’ s education and pedagogy, through relying on her experiences and knowledge so far. That is why, aiming satisfies all needs of human beings, and Islam attaches a great significance to this sort of progressive society. In another words, Women's natural rights has been officially recognized in past.
2. Future Scenarios of Women's Social Participation

Women in the Middle East have often suffered from very sensitive and complicated political, social, and cultural conditions that in the past have restricted their ability to easily engage in the society. In addition to the limitations, women have suffered and MENA region has gone through a rapid change, becoming more pluralistic and improved dramatically over the past decades. The empowerment of women in the MENA region has been labeled as a vehicle of change in the area, bringing about a new Middle East and beside that, women have played a crucial role in the struggle for democracy.

A movement is needed in which women should spring directly form the teachings of Islam and based on the deep and logical study of the Muslim society. We need a movement for women's liberation in Iran and Middle East, but what we need is a clean Islamic White Movement\(^{40}\) and not an exotic brand movement. Through examining the many spheres that surround women's lives in Iran, it's apparent that the changes enacted by the Islamic Republic were not nearly as oppressive as perceived. The changes that were made to the constitution were not all that dramatic they just didn't mask their rules in modernity, like the Pahlavi regime had. Some theorists believe that the huge number of women participating in revolutionary demonstrations and activities did facilitate and prepare the ground for the Islamic Revolution in that women included half of the society’s population and were playing a significant role during the revolution,(Bina, 2002: 16) The sensitivity of women’s role is due to their deep influence on all arenas of life.

The participation of women in Middle Eastern societies elevated by receiving better education, and gradually attaining higher status in the employment.

\(^{40}\) Islamic movement for women's liberation was white, it was neither black, nor red, neither blue nor violet, (Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, Women and her rights in Islam.)
Empowerment must not be translated as women being "liberated" from their societies and adopting western orientation. In actual fact, the empowerment of women in the Middle East has come hand in hand with the surge of nationalism and patriotic sentiments now ever more widespread among the population in the region.

Great challenges lie ahead. If it took women months to depose dictators, it might take years to overcome the predominant male-dominated mentalities in the Arab world. Women must unite not to be excluded from the decision-making process, counter radical Muslims' mounting pressure to push them back into traditional roles and call for a cabinet reshuffle in countries that neglect their role. Islamist parties will also have to appeal to women in order to stay in power, as they are undeniable economic actors.

The Arab Spring, which motto is the political, social and cultural transformation of unfair societies shall not be over until it benefits both men and women. The current movement in the Middle East is a wake-up call to all governments to listen to the aspirations of their people. An advanced society is a society in which women are well-educated and trained in line with progress and development. Woman is not a secondary side-factor in society; but she is the central axis of the society. Imam Khomeini considered women as the origin and commencement of Iran's revolutionary evolutions. With the advent of Islam, things began to change and it was the prophet who said- Education is necessary for Muslims both men and women.

Overall, it should be acknowledged that in order to make changes in the wrong views towards women and tackle the barriers obstructing their social and political participations, there should be first a transformation in women's own views. So far, they should escape passivism and indifference and revolutionize themselves in order to reduce the distance between the status qua and their desired condition. Nobody can stop the process of social change, Iranian women
have used the educational opportunities afforded by the government to gain the knowledge and skills with which to better their situation and that of their families. Many structures and institutions must be changed according to women's needs and demands not in the Middle East but the whole world and try to remove the obstacles in their way and like many of their counterparts throughout the world, women should continue their struggle.

V. Conclusion

The revolutions succeeded in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya and regimes crumbled. In these mass movements that swept the Arab world, there were no specific demands for improving the status of women or for legal gender equality. However, the women who came out into the streets were hoping for an expansion of their rights. Some experts believe that in the Arab Spring countries, the people toppled the dictators but they have been replaced by public anarchy and these countries are faced with chaos more than ever before. Tunisia is one of these countries where, considering its cultural structure, its proximity to Europe and the dominating French culture in this country, the presence of more than one million Tunisians in France, the considerable percentage of whom are educated elites, the pressure exerted upon its ruling government is more tangible. Two years after the onset of popular uprisings in several Arab countries known as the Arab Spring, it can now be clearly seen that this spring, unfortunately has never come, or it has reached its autumn. What we should keep in mind and is the most important problem of all of these revolutions was that there was and is no charismatic leader in any of them. The other problem was that these revolutions were stopped on their path when they were confronted with the army and the security apparatus. This by itself opened the way for the
intervention of foreign powers, which had secret and expanded relations with the armies and security organizations of these countries, Middle East is embracing change and a new era reminiscent of its past glory is now in the wings. The social intervention of woman that spread throughout the Middle Eastern Countries not only singular moments, but showed the recent each nations history, and the change that was to come. Through social participation of woman, the ideals of feminism, as well as the current situations in each country received international attention.

No one can stop the process of social change and many structures and institutions must be changed according to women's needs and demands. It should be acknowledged that in order to make changes, there should first be changes in the wrong views towards women and tackle the barri ers obstructing their social and political participations, there should be first a transformation in women's own views, too. So to speak, women should be conscious of their capabilities and potentialities and with self confidence and by relaying on themselves, take firm steps in their self actualization.

It is still debated whether or not social participation of Muslim woman acted as a primary catalyst for the Arab Spring to gain momentum and become an internationally recognized situation. Regardless, it has still played a crucial role in the movement. All the four above-mentioned countries share one feature, the emergence of Islam extremist parties on top of the political heap, and a marked attempt to Islamize their states, particularly in laws dealing with women's social and legal rights. As these revolutions unfolded in the Arab world, Iranian women were watching and eager to see the outcome and the rhythm of it. Women struggling against violation of women's rights need to work on few items such as engagement in national, regional and global dialogues, intellectual and political support, institutionalization of their deeds and concerns and development of strategies of change.
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