

THE MOVEMENTS OF KURDISH WOMEN'S FEMINISM IN IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the populations of mobilized civilian for accessing decisions, actions of politicians and government have significant situations in supporting their political projects and international drama toward democratic state. An essential element in the mobilization refers to gender and gap spaces between women and men for adjustment at the local level. Among the Kurdish societies, women have particular positions that are historically played as significant roles toward the Kurdish policies, independence and autonomy. Since 1992, Kurdish women have been one of the most considerable social groups toward autonomy in the Kurdistan of Iraq. This paper investigates and reviews various activities, strategies and objectives of Iraqi Kurdish women activists and their achievements.

Keywords: Iraq, Kurds, Feminism, Women's movement, Civil rights

1. INTRODUCTION

The movements support women's rights which are known as feminism. Since the past times, male and female are human beings that are dissimilar to the other creatures with endowment of thinking capacity. Such a feature enables them to protect and achieve their lives, environments, inventions to create new things and develop new civilizations and cultures. Hence, men have more dominated than women in all spheres (public and private) because men have been symbol of strengths, powers and prosperities; therefore, the exploits of women result from quenching them by the reflection of ideas of the physically weak among them. Subsequently, men can lead and control society all over the world.

According to gender politics in the olden days, women are required to occupy a secondary situation in the world. Educational and social traditions are confirmed and imposed this secondary position. Thus, owing to male domination, women are kept away and limited from important positions in the society. Men's duties are such as working and earning money and women are confined to the private sphere, household duties like washing clothes, cleaning utensils, cooking food, sweeping the house, maternal duties, and sexual pleasure. The tradition denied to access women education throughout the world. But some educated women are perceived the severity of the male domination; afterwards, they write books and projects to reveal the problems of their lives.

After the First World War, the first movement commenced toward women empowerment. Since 20th century, women were given rights to work and earn salary. During 1960s and 1970s, the women liberation movement caused some level of women freedom. In the 21st century, a new aspect has been penetrated in world policies which have known as feminism. In 1872, the words 'Feminism' and 'Feminist' emerged in France, Netherlands for the first time. Next, in Great Britain (1890) and in the United States of America (1910) appeared. But, the Oxford English Dictionary mentioned the word of feminist in first time appearing in 1894 and 1895 as the word feminism. Feminism is advocated on behalf of women by identifying injustices to women in society and social status.

2. WHAT IS FEMINISM?

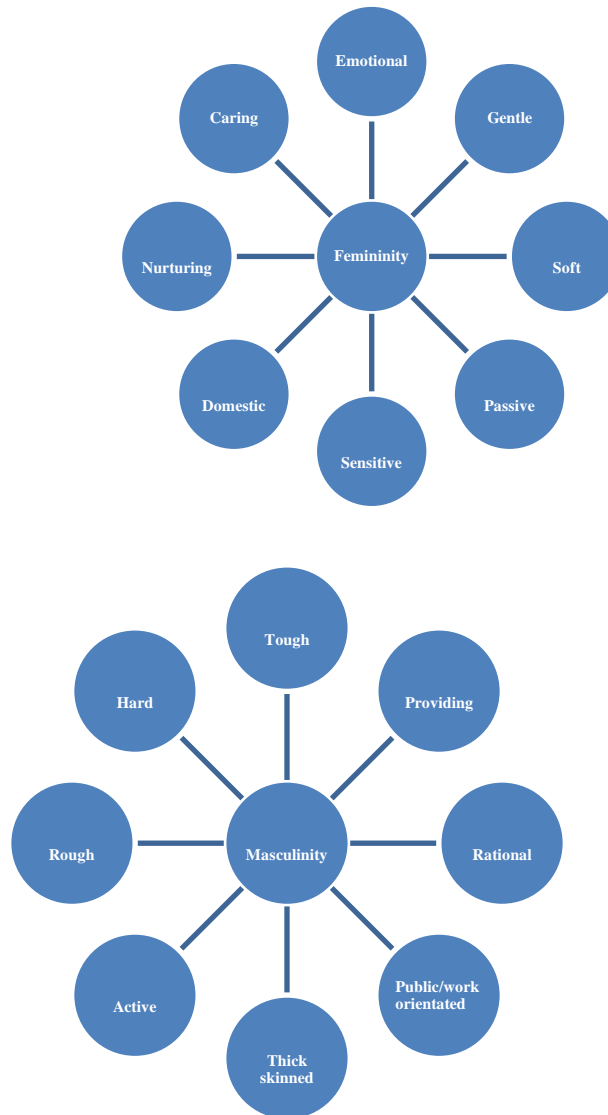
Feminist Theory is a result of the general movement to women's universal empowerments. It follows the equality of sexes in social, political, and economic situations. Feminism is the struggle and critique of male's supremacy in society. Thus, they struggle for the equality of women and argue that the opportunities of society must be equally shared between women and men. They are pursued to the achievements of their own goals which are included as follows:

- To demonstrate the importance of women;
- To reveal that women have been subordinate to men historically; and
- To bring about gender equity.

Social and cultural norms demonstrate the imbalance of power such as women have recognized as lower status in society, poorly paid work, childcare, nursing, and teaching. But men are encouraged for higher status, Influential roles, well-paid jobs, political leadership. Feminists are particularly contributed with the media to dominate the society about gender equally. They attempt to explain that sex is related to biological and gender refers to culture. The mass media is supplied as a crucial role in

socialization and distributed modified culture and social norms then promote gender equality. Feminists are greatly prepared progress in eroding stereotypes which are common in our society. Such fundamental stereotypes which are common in all society have been given in the following:

Gender Stereotypes in social norms



3. THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN THE KURDISTAN OF IRAQ

The feminist movement in the Kurdistan of Iraq is impacted through the political policies of Iraqi regime. Iraq is a unique country since the wrong policies of Saddam Hussein dominated in that country that cased to down upon himself: for example, Iraq-Iran war in 1980-1988, killing thousands of Kurds people by attacking of Halabjah (Kurdish town) with poison gas in 1988 March, the invasion of Kuwait

which led to massive US military campaign and forced them to withdraw in 1990- 1991, southern Shia and northern Kurdish populations united against Saddam Hussein in 1991 March, all Iraqi military activities in northern were prohibited by UN-approved safe-haven in 1991 April, a no-fly zone established in southern Iraq in 1992 August, Oil-for-food programme by United Nations Security Council (Resolution 986) in 1995 April, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Since 1991, de facto Kurdish state has arisen in northern Iraq with protection of the U.S. and the United Nations provided thirteen percent of the Iraqi money from oil sales to northern. The power in northern divided among two main Iraqi Kurdish parties Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic party (KDP) and Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). They fought a nasty civil war (in 1994 –1998) for more power. However, the situation of de facto state remained precarious and it was difficult to recognize it. Because if the Iraqi Kurds declared their independence, this impact in the Kurdish populations in other areas. Since the creation of Iraq, the U.S supports the Iraqi Kurds.

All elements in above have main impacts on the status of Kurds in Iraq. It also leads to shocking in women's life. The Ba'ath party legislation in Iraq adhered for the most part to Shari'a legal principles regarding to the women rights. The establishments of the safe have made possible the nascent women's rights movement in Iraqi Kurdistan. Women's right movement in Iraqi Kurdistan was successfully lobbied to head households spatially within the internally displaced persons (IDPs) population. In most of the social norms substituted like the matriarchal households replaced patriarchal. This had a direct result of Ba'ath regime policies, and the Anfal and related campaigns. With regards to the women rights, Saddam policies in Iraq were once held by the west as a beacon of liberalism in the Middle East. In 1993, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported women in Iraq have the full rights of citizenship, and has a major role to fulfill in building the country, practicing high political positions, and have professional careers in labor and social services. The Constitution declared the equality of all citizens before the law, and guaranteed equal opportunities without discrimination by sex in 1970. Women were achieved the right to vote and hold office in 1980. Constitution approved education free of charges at all levels in 1974, and in 1979-1980, constitution announced that it was compulsory during the age of twelve for females and males. Such legal bases encouraged women's education, health, labour, and social welfare to support and develop them in society.

Many sociologists argue that Saddam Hussein's regime was as a brutal dictatorship, in his draconian laws framework afforded to destructive family life. Arguably, the formation of the safe haven significantly raised the position of Kurdish women in Iraq. Though, since 1992, women and children formed the majority of internally displaced person (IDPs), and were impoverished and socially

marginalized due to the mass executions of the Anfal campaigns. With the loss of head of households, they led families and became the head of households. They suffered from the shortage of living space, education, health care, high rates of illiteracy, and the lack of any regular employment.

As a result of Ba'ath regime policies cased Kurdish migrant to neighboring countries or Europe and America educated there and desired to society modification with equal opportunity toward human rights standards. The 1992 elections in Iraqi Kurdistan was changed oppressive aspects of Ba'athist family law. Before the elections reformed three key areas of family law legislation regarding to women (marriage, divorce and inheritance) by parliamentarians, main political parties and women committee charged with the alternative legislation.¹ They reduced the two wives from four wives, abolished the verbally divorce², equal treatment in adultery cases for both men and women. In 2002, the Kurdish parliament in Erbil was amended divorcing from Shari'a law and in honour killings and its loophole. In 1998, since the signing of the Washington Agreement³, women's groups, NGOs⁴ and charities have emerged in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Women's organizations found with local Kurdish, non-politically and poorly funded. Such organizations were governed by local volunteers toward improvement of health, hygiene and women's literacy. Some of NGOs challenge to the prevalence of child labour, especially Anfal⁵ widows who are headed of households. The organization was influential in the KRG⁶ to reform legislation divorcing Shari'a law from the civil code relating to gender-oriented issues like custody and inheritance laws, and increased the penalty for perpetrators of honour killings to 25 years, or death.

¹ One of the most important in Kurdish women issues was the Iraqi government policies. They were encouraged Arab men to marry Kurdish women as part of the regime's Arabisation policies in the north. So, women confused from different roles in marriage, divorce and inheritance.

² Man can divorce his wife by repeating thrice 'I divorce you'.

³ In the mid-1990s, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) engaged in civil war. In September 1998, Barzani the head of KDP and Talabani the head of PUK signed a formal peace treaty in Washington by the mediated of the U.S., the two parties agreed to distribute revenue and power. This peace agreement is eminent as a Washington Agreement.

⁴ Non-governmental organization.

⁵ Anfal refer to Kurdish genocide and gendecide was applied by Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein.

⁶ Kurdistan Regional Government.

4. KURDISH FEMINISM MOVEMENT

Kurds have a very beautiful culture involving many fascinating traditions, cuisines, ideals and customs. Kurdish ways of lives are cherished with the sanctity of family life, high respect for elders and from an early age learning important social codes. Unfortunately, just like any other ethnic group, the significant division of genders and dominant the men are seen in Kurdish society and need to work on.

Women's disenfranchisement in Kurdistan in Iraq mostly began with the lack of access to wealth, income generation opportunities, and managing household finances. They increased awareness on the importance of knowledge as a way to achieve professional careers and participate in political process. Another form of women empowerment emerged from the feminist movement in Kurdistan in Iraq which began to shun all social, cultural or religious barriers to the advancement of women. Feminist leaders, through their writings, conferences, meetings, and training workshops, generated a cadre of new generation of women who became followers of women's liberation. Kurdish women are largely focused on autonomy historically; they recognized the Kurds identities in the world, and human rights for the Kurdish people. In 1991, the new Kurdish women movements were initiated in form of political organizations. In the first step, they were returned to previous-exiled Kurds. The most important goals were supported by women rights. So, they were presented in the parliament 1992 elections and obtained five sit among 105 sit.

Between 1991 and 2003, Kurdish women had difficulty in significant matters in Kurdistan region. According to the Iraqi government policies toward Arabisation, most of Kurdish women lost their male families and became widowed, displaced, unemployed, poorer, uneducated and violated daily. Since 1992, after incorporating tribal leaders, women's activities were frequently influenced by conservative Kurdish male political actors. Subsequently, with civil war in 1994-1999 among two powerful parties (the PUK and KDP), the Kurdish region in Iraqi was divided among them and hundreds of Kurds was death and increased orphans and widows. Other elements that had impacts on women movement was the Kurdish Islamist groups desire to expand Islamization in Kurdish society. They were traditionally argued women relating to privet life and sphere.

Kurdish women were demanded peace and rights. During such problems, Kurdish women are engaged under the political parties for supporting their activities. In 2000, Kurdish women's rights activists were succeeded to reform the Iraqi penal code about honor crimes or other forms of discrimination, so legally penalized for the murder of women (honor). Also, they were amended the Iraqi

personal status code about the regulation of polygamy⁷. In general, all Kurdish women activities were accentuated in issues as follows:

- Responses to the constitution, as well as the relationship between Iraqi-Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq.
- Cooperated with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).
- Measuring progress in achieving gender equality.
- Human rights
- Promoting status of women in Kurdish region such struggle to tradition and others obstacles that push women to far from their rights, helping to Anfal family, etc.

However, the progress of the women's movements and civil society organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan are frequently dependent on the financial and political support and protection of the main political parties, principally the KDP and the PUK. Recently, Kurdish women who linked to the main political party have less tension, but more tension are formed within government, parliament, and civil society organizations. They believe that the political parties are played important roles in developing their rights in women's educations, encouraging working and politics in Iraqi Kurdistan. They are blamed religious and tribal practices and backward cultural approach as the major obstacle to women's rights. The Ministry of Women's Affairs was established against gender-based violence and supportive of women's rights in Kurdistan Regional Government.

In 1952, Union of Kurdish Women established as one of the biggest unions of Kurdistan. Union of Kurdish women work on concerning women's rights and activities. This union was established for the improvement of the situation of the women. It was among the first union in the Middle East which operated in all the social, economic and political spheres. Geographically, there are unions which exist in Kurdistan in any region and big and small towns. Such unions intend to help improve the social status of women and follow three major goals:

- To heighten the awareness level and ability of women or the empowerment of women.
- To defend the fulfillment of women's rights.
- To create the necessary circumstances for increasing the partnership of women in the political, economic and social arenas.

⁷ Punished who taking more than one wife by up to three years in prison and a fine of up to 10,000 dinars.

Such unions are parts of non-governmental organizations and Democratic Party of Kurdistan is a direct partner with unions and it is one of the helpers and financial supporters of them. The unions are directly connected to the government and are promoted the laws and affairs regarding women.

5. CONCLUSION

Feminism movements in the Kurdistan of Iraq have various problems such as nasty policies, war, etc. which are made women aware of their rights, like other social movements. Kurdish feminism ideology supports the idea of a larger share of scarce resources which are allocated to women. Women should enjoy the same rights in society as men and society's opportunities should share equity among gender. The Kurdish government must attempt to give a voice to women and female perspective. They generally believe that sexism and discrimination exist in nearly all social institutions. Religion is a long time perpetuator of gender inequality. During the Anfal campaign in 1988, Kurdish people were kept in concentration camps. The Iraqi government due to gendercide policies punished Kurdish women by rape. In 1994, from Sulaymaniyah to Erbil, Kurdish women marched for peace and protested against the civil war in Iraqi Kurdistan. After the establishment of KRG, women organizations were formed. The first female judge in Middle East was a Kurdish woman named Zakiyya Hakki. She was appointed by Abd al-Karim Qasim. She later became part of the leadership of KDP. Several women appointed ministers in the cabinet of local government. In 2003, Nasrin Berwari was appointed for minister of municipalities and public works. As the top Iraqi official in charge of municipal and environmental affairs, Berwari is considered as one of the most important figures in the Iraqi civil administration.

According to my interview with Dr Vian Soliman, the head of Kurdistan Women Association regarding to women rights, she explained from 1992 -which was named as the freedom spring- till now, we have advanced a lot in the women's affairs. For example, 13 female ministers and 34 female managers could be seen since then. In 1997, there were women judges. In the government, special laws are made for women. Some certain management initiatives exist in police which have appointed given police for the women's affairs. Therefore, if a woman has difficulty in her family, she can go to such people in the police force to complain and police can take the necessary actions. Since 1992, government has cooperated considerably with regards to the illiteracy of women. In 2009, 36% people in Kurdistan were illiterate, 24% of them were women and now they are 18% of the population. Kurdistan government has provided the salary for the widows in recent years. Widows receive monthly payments from the government of Kurdistan. In 2005, a system was for women's rights. In 2007, the ministry of women was founded. In Kurdistan, seven ministries exist which are connected to women's union. In some countries, men have the right to beat women but it is a crime in Kurdistan. In 2001, such

laws were removed from Kurdistan. In Jordan, such a thing is not a crime. In Kurdistan, honor killing is considered to be a deliberate murder. If there is no man in the family, mother is the guardian. In Jordan, it is permitted to have second wife but in Kurdistan there are conditions for that. From 1000 men, one man can have second wife provided that he has received the permission of the first wife. In all the Islamic governments, women do not have the right to bear witness but in our civil laws, women have their rights and there is no difference between male and female witness.

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