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Transition to a Democratic Family in Iran: A Socio-Philosophical Investigation

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Abstract

Democratic family, as a new phenomenon in Iran, is based on some fundamental principles such as liberty, equality, rule of law, and tolerance. In this article, some of the important aspects of a democratic family in Iran will be explained and evaluated by applying conceptual analysis and critical evaluation. The family, which is characterized by middle class, rights, population and urbanization, marriage and divorce, violence, and nuclear family, lead to reasonable decision-making through dialogue and cooperation. The patriarchal mode of management in Iranian family has gradually changed into a collective decision-making, in which, the role of boys and girls are significant. These characteristics indicate that Iranian democratic family is a transitional process of social and political development in Iran.

Keywords: Democracy; Development; Education; Family; Marriage; Iran.

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Introduction

The subject matter of this article is to examine an important aspect of the current situation in Iranian family. My understanding is that Iranian family is in transition to a democratic one. By democratic, I mean the family which is established on democratic values, such as freedom, equality, pluralism, neutrality, peace, and toleration. The current paper intends to deal with the following questions:

1. With respect to democratic norms, what are the characteristics of Iranian family?
2. Which social class is the origin of democratic family in Iran?
3. How progressive is the process of transition of Iranian family to democracy?

Regarding these three inquiries, I try to examine my hypothesis as follows: Iranian families are being transmitted to a democratic sphere in which the authority of parents is waning.

The method used in this research is the socio-philosophical one based on conceptual analyses and critical evaluation (Horton, 1986: 117, Mahmoudi, 2014: 13-34, Mahmoudi, 2008: 29-36). The concept of democratic family is unique in Iranian social and political literature. Although, the article applies up to date facts and statistics, nevertheless different limitations in doing research on this important and sensitive subject are to be considered.

Here, first I will sketch a historic-philosophical background regarding the development of family in ancient and modern times; second, the main characteristics of Iranian democratic family will be discussed; third, the development of current transition of a democratic family in Iran will be evaluated followed with a conclusion.

Family: A Historic-Philosophical Context

Throughout the history of mankind, the concept of family has developed from patriarchal in ancient times to nuclear in the modern world. Tracing this challenging and complicated development is a long story, but to put in a nutshell, I sketch a historic-philosophical background as follows.

1. Ancient Conception of Family

A family is called a social institution, which includes mother, father and children. It is a set of relations which create persons with different societies. As Michel Walzer points out in his *Spheres of Justice*: "in early modern political thought, the family is often described as a 'little state' within which children are taught the virtue of obedience and prepared for citizenship (or, more often, subjection) in the large state, the political community as a whole" (Walzer, 1983: 232). In this brief description, one can examine the trace of ancient conception of family in which father is a 'little king' who governs the family by making decisions.

This patriarchal perspective is reflected in Plato's *The Republic*, while he describes the nature and the fabric of family. In Plato's view, men should be educated 'like watchdogs guarding a flock'. He asked:

- "Ought female watchdogs to perform the same guard- duties as male, and watch and hunt and so on with them? Or ought they to stay at home on the grounds that the bearing and rearing of their puppies incapacitates them from other duties, so that the whole burden of the care of the flocks falls on the males?"

- "They should share all duties, though we should treat the females as the weaker, the males as the stronger" (Plato, 1988: 228-229). In Plato's account, since, men and women are used 'for the same purposes',

they should be taught the same things (Plato, 1988: 229). They must physically and mentally be educated and trained for war equally. Plato prescribes for women to be treated 'the same way as men' (Plato, 1988: 229). He also makes it clear that: "... it is natural for women to take part in all occupations as men, nonetheless, he immediately adds that: "though in all, women will be weaker partners" (Plato, 1988: 235). Therefore, Plato's judgment is that women 'in all' their roles are weaker than men, and must 'stay at home' (Plato, 1988: 228). This examination about the talents and capacities of women is unrealistic and discriminatory suffering from absolutism.

The history of gender inequality continued for many centuries in the world. In Britain and the United States, for instance, the notion of covertures in the Common Law, deprived women of fundamental rights on marriage. The state gave permission and authorized husbands over property of wives. There was no room for women to divorce or even to separate their lives from their husbands (Molar Okin, 1991: 42). "Until very recently, the state reinforced the patriarchal structure of marriage by denying women rights routinely exercised by men in the sphere of work, marketplace, and politics, on the grounds that the exercise of such rights would interfere with women's performance of their domestic responsibilities" (Molar Okin, 1991: 42).

2. Modern Critical Reflections

The gender inequality and discriminatory policies, imposed on women by the state, drew serious attentions of some philosophers and thinkers on the crucial desperate situation of women. One of the

prominent thinkers who focused on this matter is John Stuart Mill. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill brings up a solemn discussion in differing women rights as individuals. At the beginning of his treatise, Mill explicitly rejects the legal relations of sexes in his time. He writes: "The existing social relations between the two sexes - the legal subordination of one sex to the other - is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other" (Mill, 1987: 427).

Mill assumes that any society exists with a government. If in a family, as in a small state, someone must act as a ruler, while disagreement occurs between wife and husband, who should make decision? It is not possible that each of them has their way. A final decision must be made, one way or the other (Mill, 1987: 472). Mill's response is that holding absolute power in all voluntary association, between two persons is not true. Also, it is not acceptable that the law determines who shall beforehand be the master (Mill, 1987: 472). To cope with the problem, Mill's solution is that: "The natural arrangement is a division of power between the two; each being absolute in the executive branch of their own department, and any change of system and principle requiring the consent of both" (Mill, 1987: 473). The solution is democratic, for Mill assumes that a family is a political community in which 'a division of power' between wife and husband should be arranged. In this voluntary community, each holds absolute power; but if the existence of the community requires change of principle or change of system, both wife and husband need to achieve consent. The consent will not be

achieved unless the two come to a reasonable and convincing conclusion through an equal dialogue which is a precondition of a democratic process. The fruit of such a process is a consent based on freedom and equality.

In my view, while a family is a small political community which in Mill's writing holds conceptions such as 'division of power', 'executive branch', 'department', 'system', and 'consent', the essence of this community is homogeneous to a state that its management is complicated and delicate. It can be arranged freely, equally, and peacefully, and conversely, it can fall in a state of despotism, inequality and war. In the state of war, there will be insecurity and anarchy in which wife is against husband, and husband is against wife; no liberty, no equality, no moral behavior, and no tolerance. Therefore, a family is either democratic based on democratic values, among which human rights are fundamental, or despotic which suffers from inequality, lack of mutual understanding, and immoral behavior. No doubt, the level of democracy and despotism in a family is a matter of degree.

The origin of society is a family. Among different standpoints on democratic family as a foundation of a democratic society, Virginia Held's expression is considerable. She writes: "The family is a set of relations creating human persons. Societies are composed of families. And a family is a small society" (Held, 1998:195). She then asks: "Could a transformed relation between man and woman provide a model for a transformed society?" She answers: "Certainly it is not hard to argue that the relation between man and woman is the key social relation, and that if genuine mutuality of concern and respect did characterize this

relation, the effects on the rest of the society would be extraordinary" (Held, 1998: 206). In Held's thought, first, family is creator of human persons; second, since it is a 'small society' it holds political essence, and therefore, like a political community requires dialogue, decision-making, and interaction; third, mutual concern and respect in family relations, make remarkable effects in society relations. Therefore, it is not a matter of exaggeration if one calls a democratic family as the origin of a democratic society. Hence, as much as a family is well-educated, well-skilled and mature, it can help for the creation of an open and democratic society. In conformity with feminists, Held desires that 'mutuality between lovers and friends and genuine caring between parents and children', 'will eventually affect relations between persons at the levels of nations and continents in beneficial ways' (Held, 1998: 214).

The ordering and management of a family will be so complicated when a community of wife and husband extent by bearing a child or children. While in a liberal democratic state, individuals are morally and legally entitled to choose their own conception of the good in private and public spheres, members of liberal democratic family including parents and children are expected to follow the same direction. As far as the matter of children is concerned, achieving maturity through education, skill, experience, and so forth are preconditions of making decision on their conception of the good.

The conception of free and democratic family has reflected in different discussions, by some contemporary liberal and libertarian thinkers. John Rawls, for instance, while discussing 'The Morality of Authority' in his *A Theory of Justice*, writes:

“In any event, it is characteristic of the child’s situation that he is not in a position to assess the validity of precepts and injunctions addressed to him by those in power in their case his parents. He lacks both the knowledge and the understanding on the basis of which, their guidance can be challenged. Indeed, the child lacks the concept of justification altogether, this being acquired much later. Therefore, he cannot, with reason, doubt the priority of parental injunctions” (Rawls, 1986: 463). In this direction, Bruce A. Ackerman points out that: “We have no right to look upon future citizens as if we were master gardeners who can tell the difference between lives that could be theirs- so that, as they approach maturity, they have the cultural materials available to build lives equal to their evolving conceptions of the good” (Ackerman, 1980: 139). Therefore, Ackerman’s judgment on the freedom of children to choose their conception of the good is conditional. Provided that children have not achieved maturity through a democratic education and training, they are not capable enough to make decisions in choosing the plan of their life. Ackerman makes clear that: “Before he [the child] can begin to participate in liberal dialogue, the child must develop an awesome series of cognitive, linguistic, and behavioral skills. The simple question “why should *you* get it rather than *I*?” requires the child to recognize that ‘you’ are not merely a part of ‘I’ (Ackerman, 1980: 140).

Robert Nozick, as a libertarian philosopher, talks about the responsibility of parents to their children. In *The Examined Life*, Nozick talks about the necessary rule of parents for their children’s management: “When, it is the task of parents to manage the relationship, to monitor it and keep it

continuing on a somewhat even keel” (Nozick, 1990: 29).

I can hitherto conclude that although in modern time liberal philosophers have seriously challenged ancient conception of family- which was based on a paternalistic discriminatory perception-, nevertheless they are cautious in this regard. In their standpoint, family in modern time is a social association which comprises political essence. This socio-political association should be regulated and managed on the basis of democratic value, such as freedom, equality tolerance, peaceful dialogue, and joint and rational decision making. Therefore, these philosophers are fully in favor of ruling democratic regulations in the family; but in their assessment, democratic relations within the family including parents and children are connected to the level of maturity of children which requires democratic education through which they achieve cognitive, moral and behavioral skills. As much as the children’s maturity improves, they can enter into the realm of more independence and freedom. Children in the family learn, practice, and promote their social skills to become capable enough to actively enter a democratic society.

Characteristics of Iranian Democratic Family

Although the concept of civil society used in Iran (Bashirieh, 2004: 689-706) during the Iranian Reform Movement (1997-2005), modern conceptions such as liberty, equality, human rights, democracy and toleration had been used by Iranian elites before that period of time. They reflected and discussed these terms in their writings, translations, and speeches. The Iranian society heard their voices at different levels. Mass media, internet and satellite played

effective role in this process. Therefore, Iranian families, more or less, were familiar with fundamental principles of good governance and modern lifestyle, among which I should mention pluralism, freedom and equality¹. From the reform era till now, there have been considerable dialogue and even challenges between members of Iranian families around vital questions such as: What is pluralism? What is freedom? What is equality? What are human rights? And so on.

Here, I want to discuss the main features of Iranian democratic family based on some social and sociological studies. I try to make clear how considerable changes could occur in Iranian family, and what would be their consequences. The main purpose is to explain connections between democratic family in Iran and characteristics such as the role of middle class, family rights, status of population and urbanization, status of marriage and divorce, struggle against violence, and nuclear family. Subsequently, indications of aforementioned features to the establishment of a democratic family in Iran will be examined.

1. The Role of Middle Class

Middle class, as defined by the World Bank, includes people who earn money between 10 and 100 U.S. dollars per day (http://www.ilo.org/brussels/press/press-releases/WCMS_214739/lang--

¹.Hossein Bashirieh (2004) has analyzed modern development during the Iranian Reform Movement in two articles: “[Presidential] Election of 1997 from Class Struggle Perspective in Iran”, 749-787, and “Political Participation Crisis and 1997 [Presidential] Election”, 755-762.

[fr/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/brussels/press/press-releases/WCMS_214739/lang--fr/index.htm)). In Guy Ryder’s assessment, as director general of the International Labor Organization (ILO), the process of decline and weakening of the middle class has accelerated in many world countries. The main reason is recession of the market and long-term unemployment of youth and active population of the countries (http://www.ilo.org/brussels/press/press-releases/WCMS_214739/lang--fr/index.htm). According to a research done by ILO, there is a direct connection between economic growth of countries and the income of the middle class. Whenever the level of the middle class income has decreased in a country, the economic growth there has declined (http://www.ilo.org/brussels/press/press-releases/WCMS_214739/lang--fr/index.htm).

The origin of democratic family in Iran is middle class that like other countries contains three main economic, social, and cultural aspects. Based on a research entitled “Situation of the Middle Class in Iran”, by some academic bases in Iran, relatively, about 7 percent of Iranian population is in upper class, about 60 percent in middle class, and about 30 percent in lower class (Iranian Sociology Association, 2014: www.isa.ir). The main indicators of the assessment of middle class in Iran include: economic ability; human development such as education, health, and cultural consumption; motivation for social and political changes; critique of political power; creation of new ideas; and consuming mass production of industrial commodities (Ranani, 2014). Therefore, the middle class population, who carry out such characteristics, can be categorized as middle class with economic, social, and cultural identities. Consequently, only a small portion of middle class in Iran, from an

estimated 60 percent of population, can be recognized as middle class with a comprehensive characteristic (Ranani, 2014). The hard core of middle class in Iran consists of small and medium range of bourgeoisie, intellectuals, scientists, technologists, artists, lawyers, consultants, and so on.

We witness that middle class in Iran has shrunk from 2007 to 2008, and afterwards, from 2011 to 2012. The main reason is the effect of fast growing inflation rate over population with fixed incomes. This process continued with similar intensity in 2012 and 2013 to the degree that to the end of 2013, purchasing power of 40 to 50 percent of Iranian population reduced between 40 and 50 percent (Leylaz, 2015: 13:87-88). An academic researcher in Iran concludes that: "A sharp drop in economic middle class together with the exit of vast portion of high- income population which has caused either exit of financial capitals or exodus of human capitals, have weakened Iranian middle class. Nevertheless, middle class in Iran has insisted of its beliefs, and has demonstrated that any time it is weakened, apparently it has appeared more powerful than before in the scene" (Athari, 2015: 13: 2-3). He then emphasized that: "The activity of Iranian middle class is high amongst classes of countries which have entered in the sphere of development [...] but middle class in Iran was not suppressed by populism (Athari, 2015: 13: 2-3) during 2005 and 2012, rather, it was capable enough to reduce the danger of populism of other classes through tolerance and choosing the government of President Hassan Rouhani as a best possible alternative to protect Iran from anarchy" (Athari, 2015: 13: 2-3).

Although, during the past ten years, middle class in Iran was being weakened due

to economic and political reasons, the middle class severely struggled for their identity and responsibility. Some members of middle class may have economically fallen down to lower middle class, but they their position intact culturally. Even lower middle class youth culturally changed their positions, as a result of circulation of information on democratic literature through mass media and other social networks. Many such youth are university students and sit, side by side, to middle class students in classrooms and seminars.

I want to emphasis that the Iranian middle class, like those in other countries, believe in rationality, individuality, and utilitarianism. They try to be rational, for example, in decision making, in lifestyle, and in family planning. Regarding individuality, middle class would like to demonstrate its individual identity. For instance, propositions such as: *I think; I choose; I agree; I disagree; I decide about my lifestyle; I vote in the election; I do not vote in the election, and so forth*, are perceived from the Iranian middle class. These kinds of propositions can be seen in people's social networks like weblogs and Facebook pages.

In addition to rationality and individuality, middle class in Iran is utilitarian. In this article, my purpose is not to discuss utilitarianism as one of the schools of moral philosophy (Mulhall and Swift, 1005: 206-226). I just want to say that the Iranian middle class evaluates important cases in their life on the basis of cost/benefit, even though some of them do not hold theoretical knowledge behind such terms. Consequently, with regard to such specifications, middle class in Iran can be considered as the source and cornerstone of democratic family. Despite of its economic and political limitations, the Iranian middle

class is mainly well-educated, thoughtful, experienced, and capable enough to understand essential democratic values like liberty, equality, moral behavior, tolerance, and civil relationship. Hence, middle class in Iran is apt to gradually shape and promote a democratic family.

2. Promotion of Family Rights

The concept of right in family gradually draws the attention of middle class in Iran. Among the fundamental rights, they have focused on the rights of occupation, education, fostering, age of daughter's marriage, and rights of parents regarding the marriage of their daughter, the right of bringing children, and the right of women to get wages for their work at home (Abdi, 2014: 117). Concerning education, the situation of women in Iran has relatively developed. For instance, "Female literacy rose from 36 percent in 1976 to 72 percent in 1996, a level comparable to Turkey and over doubles that in Pakistan-and is still rising. Although textbooks mostly show women in traditional family roles, there has been some reform in such depictions. There is also an effective adult literacy program" (Keddie, 2003: 287). In addition to increasing literacy among young males and females, their percentage for university admissions increased about 66 percent by 2003 (Keddie, 2003: 286) nevertheless; according to the Statistical Center of Iran (www.amar.org) -which is improved by head and other officials of the Literary Movement Organization of Iran (www.savad.org) -, in 2011 about 10 million Iranians were illiterate, that is, they were incapable of reading and writing (www.Jamaran.ir and www.amar.org).

The latest General Census of Population and Housing of Iran² in 2016 declared by the Statistical Centre of Iran on March 13, 2017 affirms that the literacy rate (of persons aged six and above) in 1976 was a little more than 65 percent, while in 2016 it was increased a little more than 87 percent. It should be noted that currently the literacy (of persons aged 10 to 49 years) has been increased close to 94 percent.

Dominant values separating roles of man and woman are gradually changing in favor of gender equality. According to a measurement in 2005 approval of respondents on the occupations and activities of women are relatively high. Between the respondents, 37 percent agree that women hold the position of presidency, 55/4 percent to take police job, 54/6 percent to work as a mayor, and 67/4 percent to be as a head of a company (Abdi, 2014: 104). Therefore, promotion of family rights has given knowledge and capability to members of Iranian family to realize their spheres of freedom, equality, individuality and autonomy. Furthermore, development of education in different levels from school to university, has given necessary grounds to the members of family especially girls and women to advance their self- awareness and motivation towards a civil and democratic life.

3. Status of Population, Urbanization, and Extent of Cities

In the first decade of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the policy of government was based on increasing the rate of population.

²The General Census of Population and Housing of Iran' was carried out by 'Statistic Centre of Iran' from September 24 to October 16, 2016 (www.amar.org).

Since this policy was irrelevant with Iranian social realities, the government's policy changed and consequently the rate of population decreased. The government used no punishment policy, and exercised no pressure in this regard. As a result of this policy, the rate of population considerably decreased from 3.9 percent during 1976-1977 to 1.5 percent during 1991-1996 (Abdi, 2014: 86). Nikki R. Keddie has reflected in *Modern Iran, Roots and Results of Revolution* that: "Regarding family planning the government did an amazing U-turn at the end of the 1980s. Although birth control was never outlawed, the emphasis of the Islamic Republic from 1979 to 1988 was on population growth. As mortality rates declined, population increased, with no employment in sight for many. There was an abrupt turnaround in policies of the Islamic Republic from 1979 to 1988 so that, by learning from other countries and adding the endorsement of most leading Muslim clergies, Iran developed one of the world's most effective programs" (Keddie, 2003:287). It is worth mentioning that from 1985 to 1997, maternal mortality rates considerably decreased from 140 to 37 per 100,000 births. (Keddie, 2003: 287). Obviously, low birth rate gives opportunity to women to get job and work in the market.

Since the rapid decrease of population has made concern for the government regarding the future of Iranian population, the government has changed its previous policy from 2012 by abrogating 'laws of regulation' and replaced it with 'encouraging regulation' for increasing population. Decreasing population is due to decrease in the birth rate. Although the number of marriages increased to 2.6 percent during 25 years from 1986 to 2011, the number of childbearing decreased about

40 percent (Abdi, 2014:86-87). According to the latest General Census of Population and Housing of Iran, the rate of population in years (2012-2016) decreased comparing with previous five years (2006-2011). It reached to its minimum over the past sixty years. Now the rate is 1.2 percent. Such development is due to changes in life style, economic situation, urbanization and increasing literacy.

Since increasing the number of children has no remarkable benefit for Iranian families; they prefer at most one or two children. Not only in middle class families, but also in lower middle, the numbers of children is decreasing. Nowadays, more children in Iranian families are not considered as a source of power or glory, and having fewer children is a value (Abdi, 2014: 88). Consequently, decreasing population especially limitation of children in Iranian family to one or two, reasonably decreases expenditure of family budget and gives a chance to parents to make a suitable program for their family based on a higher financial capacity. Such a circumstance increases the possibility of a comprehensive and qualitative education for children, including knowledgeable and methodic studies, moral and civil awareness, training talents and skills and so forth. Furthermore, decreasing number of family gives opportunities to women to achieve higher education and increase their personal and social capabilities to actively involve themselves in social, political and cultural activities and also join to the markets.

In accordance with the recent General Census of Population and Housing, urbanization in Iran was 31 percent in 1976. It increased to 47 percent compared to the years ending the Pahlavi regime and the rise of the Islamic Revolution. Now it is raised to

74 percent. Additionally, the number of cities in Iran has expanded from 201 in 1956 to 1243 in 2016. Expansion of the scope of urbanization has affected Iranian family as a basic social structure; hidden jobs have converted to wage on labor outside the family. In consequence, women labor leaves step by step foundation of family and settles within the society. Therefore, decreasing population, urbanization and expansion of cities in Iran, have relatively accelerated achievement of a new way of life.

4. Status of Marriage and Divorce

Currently, marriage in Iran is a personal matter between wife and husband, whereas in the past, it depended on the views of adults in the family and the relatives. There was no chance for a couple to decide about their engagement. Even in some families, the adults decided for the marriage of girls and boys, before they reach to maturity. In recent decades, marriage has gradually left to the choice of girls and boys through dialogue, interaction, and communication for a reasonable period of time. Although parents are consulted by girls and boys for their final choice, nonetheless, girls and boys make final decision on this matter (Abdi, 2014: 89-90). In Keddie's account: "Marriage has now become a matter of negotiation between parents and children. It is no longer simply imposed; girls discuss marriage with their parents and play an active role in it" (Keddie, 2003: 297). Comparing with the past, weddings are simple and free-standing, but marriage anniversaries are celebrated and wives and husbands present gifts to each other, for they consider such a deed as a matter of independence and interaction (Abdi, 2014: 90).

Separation between wife and husband is another sign of change in Iranian family. In

2000, about 40 percent of divorces were requested by women, while men's requests had been 35 percent. The percentage of divorce in urban areas and in big cities in particular is high. In urban areas of Tehran province, for instance, from 100 registered marriages, about 18 cases ended in divorce in 2002, while from 100 registered marriage, about 31 cases led to divorce in 2011. It is worth mentioning that this figure in urban areas of Baluchestan and Sistan province had been about 4.1 percent in 2002 (Abdi, 2014:95). In recent years, divorce has been on the rise in Iran, either in urban areas or in big cities (Abdi, 2014:95-96).

Current situation of marriage and divorce in Iran should be understood with regard to some substantial social changes in the country. Concerning marriage, as it is explained above; couples have achieved opportunity and capability for decision making. Conversely, the power of parents to impose their will in this regard is almost vanished. Hence girls and boys feel free to choose their partners through consultation with their parents, some relatives and friends. Concerning divorce, women have realized their fundamental rights, freedom and equality in particular. In their understanding, marriage is a contract between wife and husband, and both should hold responsibility to carry out their civil commitments. On this ground, there is no room for husband and wife to arbitrarily impose their will on each other. Obviously, the breakdown of marriage shall end to divorce as a final possible solution.

Evolution in two key concepts of marriage and divorce in the Iranian society indicates realization of the members of family to their basic rights and their vital commitment to enforce it, under the shadow

of free will, individuality, autonomy and other democratic values.

5. Reaction against Violence

It goes without saying that condemnation of violence in all of its forms and manifestations is one of the fundamental values of a democratic society. Apparently, it always makes attempt to promote culture of peace and respect within the family as well as society. Violence in Iranian families is more prevalent in lower middle class, but educated women have much more sensibility about it. According to a survey completed in 1997, educated women more than other persons refer to welfare consultative centers in Tehran to raise the problem of violence perpetrated by their husbands. About half of these women (49 percent) had held diploma degree or higher (Abdi, 2014: 111). It is worth mentioning that 44 percent of these women had been practitioner (Ibid: 112). Therefore, one can conclude that promotion of women education and also their occupation, more than increasing violence against women by men, has probably caused more sensitivity and reaction against violence.

In fact, the perception of violence especially by women as an inhuman, immoral and illegal function within the family is a positive sign of the realization and condemnation of a brutal behavior. Violence is not tolerable for people who believe in humanity, culture of peace, civil order, human rights and democracy. One can trace in Iranian society a negative attitude towards different form of violence, especially in the family.

6. Nuclear Family

Nuclear family consists of a couple and their children (one or more). It is in contrast with

“extended family” which means the family and their relatives. One of the most precise definitions of a nuclear family put forward by George Peter Murdock. He writes: “The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It contains adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults” (Murdock, 1965: 1). In brief, he mentions in his definition to different characteristics of nuclear family among which ‘social group’, ‘common residence’, ‘economic cooperation and reproduction’, and ‘one or more children’ are substantial.

In Iranian family, there are interconnections that have caused considerable change for different reasons. Based on the nuclear family concept, the dimensions of family have become smaller, together with children’s education, development on methods and instrument of leisure, and mass media, satellite and internet in particular. All these elements have caused change and development and put effects on relations between family members. Based on individuality, gradually rooms in houses are being separated: room for parents, room for children, up to economic capacity. Therefore, family relations have qualitatively become more democratic, and little by little dialogue and consultation replace father’s authority to mother and children on the one hand, and mother to children on the other. According to a measurement, only 20 percent of Iranian families have said that the main decision maker in the family is father, while 75 percent have declared that they favor participatory decision making (Abdi, 2014: 111). Gender domination has decreased, and

boys have moderated their authoritative eyes toward girls. In some cases, one can observe domination of children over father's or mother's will; in other words, a child-centered trend. Therefore, as far as Iranian experience is concerned, small dimension of family, qualified education, autonomy of family members which reflects, for instance, in separate rooms for children, individuality through understanding of self-awareness, motivation, decision making, and perception of privacy and so forth, all are different aspects of a nuclear family.

In sum, taking into account different evidences, statistics, explanations and analysis concerning six above-mentioned characteristics, transition to a democratic family in Iran can be realized as a new phenomenon.

Critical Evaluation

Development in the Iranian middle class through relative economic improvement, qualified education, struggle for equal rights, and promotion of lifestyle (Bashirieh, 2004: 813-8) has opened room for a capable democratic family. In recent decades, gradually patriarchal model of family management -which reminds us of the ancient perspective-, has tremendously changed Iranian family, in general, and in middle class families, in particular. Therefore, as explained earlier, we witness a transfer from a patriarchal family to a democratic one in Iran: inequalities between women and men have considerably decreased, equalities are improving, girls and boys enjoy more freedom to have their own choices with regard to education, lifestyle, marriage, career, and so forth. They get support of their family especially in economic aspect and consultation wise. Democratic family relatively enjoys a

qualified education in schools and universities. They try to improve their knowledge and skills in foreign language, literature, art, computer, and so on. To take advantage of equal opportunity, they engage themselves, to some extent, in social, economic and cultural activities. In general, violence is a negative concept in Iranian families. In a democratic family, there is struggle against violence through moral dialogue and legal procedure. Traditional family has developed to nuclear one, that is, a small family with few members including mother, father, and one or two children. Rational calculation teaches them: "less children, a better life"!

Most of Iranian democratic families are Muslim, believe in one God and respect religious values. Members of the family love Iran as the Persian Motherland and respect Iranian culture and civilization. Some of them understand the difference between "right" and "good" (Mahmoudi, 2014: 112-125), that is, everybody must respect the right of citizens and do not invade them on the one hand, and follow freely her/ his conception of the good on the other. They believe that the government should safeguard the rights of citizens on the basis of law, but should not intervene in the sphere in which citizens choose and enjoy their conception of the good and lifestyle. They also believe in separation between religious organizations and government; although a small part of them think that there should be a separation of religion and politics. It is worth noting that realizing such beliefs do not mean that the whole democratic family in Iran, like many in the world, is aware of theoretical foundations of such complicated subjects.

As explained above, liberal philosophers such as John Rawls and Bruce A. Ackerman,

and even libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick have expressed that children are not in a position to choose their conception of the good, unless they attain to maturity, that is, to be able to make reasonable decisions through developing linguistic, cognitive, and behavioral skills. Therefore, children's decision making depends on their capacity and ability in practice. Provided that children have not been educated and their talents have not been improved to enable them to manage their work independently, they are not apt to choose their conception of the good.

My assessment is that the youth and children in an Iranian democratic family more or less suffering from unrealistic approach on equality and independence. They probably suppose since they grow up and go to high school; they are able to autonomously make decision. It is self-evidence that in the absence of 'the concept of justification', as Rawls reminds us, children are not able to make hard decisions. Indeed some judgments made by these types of youth and children in Iran, are amazing for educational experts who are mostly teachers or trainers, and for academics and theorists who work in the fields of sociology and philosophy. This unreasonable approach is due to the lack of profound and concrete knowledge on liberalism and democratic values in the Iranian education system, especially in high schools and universities. The problem has made unreliable and imaginary pictures in youth and children's minds, on the conceptions such as liberty, equality, and independence. As much as parents, youth and children of democratic family in Iran have access to reliable sources on democracy

and liberalism together with its critique- which are mostly reflected in communitarians works- (Mulhall and Awift, 1005:37-164); they will be able to successfully advance the process of transition of a democratic family in Iran

Conclusion

Democratic family in Iran is a new phenomenon which is growing step by step through Iranian transition to democracy. It takes advantage of some principles and experiences in modern time among which freedom, equality, respect, neutrality, and tolerance are crucial. Furthermore, it enjoys growing democratic relations between family members and witness's gradual decline of the culture and functions of paternalism. The main characteristics of Iranian democratic family are the role of middle class, promotion of family rights, status of population, urbanization and extent of cities, status of marriage and divorce, reaction against violence, and nuclear family. These positive characteristics are encouraging but democratic family in Iran needs to clarify for itself conceptions such as freedom and independence, in decision making to achieve more reasonable and effective function.

Democratic family in Iran which has emerged from middle class is the cornerstone of Iranian transition to democracy through peaceful changes and reform. It increases the power of democratic culture and promotes social capital for the engineer of social and political development, while gradually it is wreaking the authority of parents and consequently the chronic disease of paternalism in Iran.

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گذار به خانواده دموکراتیک در ایران جستاری اجتماعی-فلسفی

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چکیده

خانواده دموکراتیک به عنوان پدیده‌ای نوین در ایران، بر پایه شماری از اصول بنیادین همانند آزادی، برابری، قانون‌گرایی، و مدارا استوار است. در این مقاله، با بهره‌گیری از روش تحلیل مفهومی و ارزیابی انتقادی، جنبه‌های مهم خانواده دموکراتیک در ایران، تبیین و ارزیابی می‌شود. این خانواده که ویژگی‌های آن عبارت است از طبقه متوسط، حقوق خانواده، جمعیت و شهرنشینی، ازدواج و طلاق، و خانواده هسته‌ای، از رهگذر گفت و گو و همکاری، به سوی تصمیم‌گیری عقلانی رهنمون می‌شود. مدیریت پدرسالارانه در خانواده‌های ایرانی، به تدریج به تصمیم‌گیری دسته‌جمعی تغییر یافته است که در آن، نقش پسران و دختران قابل ملاحظه است. این ویژگی‌ها نشان از آن دارد که خانواده دموکراتیک ایرانی، فرایندی انتقالی مبتنی بر توسعه اجتماعی و سیاسی در ایران است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: آموزش، ازدواج، ایران، توسعه، خانواده، دموکراسی

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