

Shirin Ebadi's Perspective on Women's Human Rights Activism and Islam

Shirin Ebadi is a prominent Iranian political thinker, lawyer, women's rights activist, and a winner of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize. In her acceptance speech, the activist emphasized the compatibility of human rights principles and Islam. Also, she urged the international community to eliminate neo-imperialist and secular-inspired labels and stereotypes about the inherent illiberality and patriarchy of Islam and Iranian society (Ebadi, 2003). In Ebadi's opinion, the infringement of women's rights in Islamic countries is rooted in discriminatory politics and patriarchal environment and not in religion (Sameh, 2019). On the contrary, during her lifelong political and civic activism, Ebadi strived to promote democratic values and women's human rights in the Islamic world and Iran in particular.

Ebadi's standing regarding the distinction between international human rights and a separate "Islamic Path" is complex and multifaceted. In her *Deutsche Welle* article, the Nobel Peace Prize winner points out that illiberal regimes, which attempt to formulate counterstatements on human rights, often violate internationally recognized principles. The author also calls for the globalization of justice while noting that the latter can bring positive results if it is designed according to the legal principles of the given community (Ebadi, 2018). Therefore, although the application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights cannot be allowed to serve as an instrument in the political gambit of authoritarian regimes, it should be applied according to the socio-cultural realities of the community.

Ebadi pays special attention to the lack of performance of the United Nations and the hypocritical policies of Western democracies in promoting human rights. In her speech, the Nobel Prize winner explicitly criticizes the militaristic and anti-humane policies of Iran and the

United States as examples of how governments are instrumentalizing the human rights agenda. Specifically, the activist addresses the human rights abuses in Guantanamo in the name of universal safety and security as the case for such political hypocrisy. Additionally, she stresses the need for Iranian feminists to raise their voices to develop a nonviolent indigenous movement that fits within the socio-cultural framework of Islam (Sameh, 2019). As an Iranian feminist reformist, Ebadi has repeatedly advocated decolonizing the discourse on women's rights and liberating it from the West-centric ideology of transnational feminism. Like a number of other Islamic women's rights activists, Ebadi seeks to decolonize the fight for human rights in the Islamic world. Additionally, the activist highlights the need to build a new indigenously informed discourse on human rights that would contribute to the diversity and pluralism of women's experiences.

In summary, it is worth noting that Shirin Ebadi's self-identity as an Iranian woman and a Muslim empowers her experience and perspective in women's rights activism. She seeks to show the compatibility of the principles of Islam and democracy, as well as to free religion from charges of its ingrained patriarchy. Her position on human rights is focused, on the one hand, on criticizing the universalist dogmatism of Western feminists that only their struggle is true. On the other, Ebadi seeks to gain the support and sympathy of the international community for women's reformism in Iran. I tend to agree with Ebadi's assertion that human rights principles should not become instruments in the hands of authoritarian and tyrannical regimes. However, I also believe that the universalist principles of human rights should be applied, taking into account the socio-cultural realities of local communities.

References

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