Human rights awareness and cultural socialization: Patterns and prospects

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Over the last hundred years, there have been howling changes in societies both how they see women and what women can do as men. It has been related to the subject of global alteration of human rights across countries and societies have been affected from this changes. Governments tried to serve the better conditions for women by either transforming the status of women from cultural and socio-economic views or abolishing patriarchy. I would like to address the women’s movement in Turkey by examining the question of whether changes in culture over years with re-shaping the law and regulations and also how these rules have brought into force. How has the ratification of United Nations Declerations manipulated women’s life in Turkey? The articles aims to contrue the achievements of women’s so far within the movement of empowerment, cultural and social alterations.

Key words: Women’s rights, human rights, social movements, cultural alteration, female labor.

JEL Classification: H55, J01, J41, J83, K31

INTRODUCTION

The role of women in culture and societies

The culture as a concept is defined in many different ways. It can be either defined from social studies perspective or from Arts approach. But the common definition of culture indeed is transforming the ideas, ideologies, ethics and norms from one generation to next and generally the changes are very slow. But in some cases, the periods of changes are rapid like the relationship between social structure of a socitey and culture. On the other hand, culture affects peoples’ ideas, choices and their life inevitably. The traditional way of defining culture is the measurements of value like what is worthy and/or unworthy, what is good and/or bad for that society. Notwithstanding, there are some other issues in this concept. Although culture is seen as a vlaue of ideas, ideas and choices, production, technology, materials and also all other activities within a society can be acquiesced as culture.

Clyde (1951) stated that culture represented the different ways of life of a group of people in the society. Harrries (1971) who is an American anthologist opined that cultures of societies summarized the major ways of what a population thought, felt, preferred and behaved. Asimalafe (1983) did not think in the same line of Harrries definition, instead defined culture as the ways of life of people which helped them to think, to promote, to shape and to predict their destiny as a whole. So in other perspective, culture is what people learn and share together and in this process, it can be renewed or mutilated one another due to the changing global conditions, not rapidly but slowly.

But there is something that must be accepted that in some societies, still culture ranging from its norms, values, beliefs to marriage, economy, politics, religion and music are thought and done by man. So it is assigned to sexes in different forms. In some cultures, duty or job is suitable for women whilst other culture may assign the same position only to men. But in some cultures, that duty can be equally performed by both men and women. The most common example of division is child bearing. In industrial countries it is done by both gender while in pre-industrialized countries still it is in its own norms that child bearing is the constant duty of women. But with this duty, women become less active in the labor force therefore instead of performing in the labor market, they keep doing the house duties like house keeping, needlework, weaving and knitting. Likewise, in some cultures, all the family members are living together in a house. So women have to look after father-in-law and mother-in-law if they are alive. All of these inevitable jobs for women put much more
responsibilities on their daily life which will affect their position in active labor market directly and negatively. Therefore, encouraging women’s participation both in cultural and social life must be swapped among these necessities.

Moreover culture is more than this for different societies and gender. It is a part of framework of each country and people living in that country. So it shapes peoples’ understanding of why it happens and/or why it should. In World Conference on Cultural Policies (1982), culture was denoted as distinctive characteristics like emotional, spiritual and intellectual that shaped people in society by characterizing individuals human rights, life styles, value systems, customs and traditions, ideologies, beliefs and expectation from life.

The results of social change on societal development come through technological improvements, class coincidences and political acts. Each social development is subject to the national class structures, a regional environment and the influences of global system. So no prime changes in social context occurs outside of the world context (Chase-Dunn, 1998) (Figure 1).

When women’s position in Turkish culture is examined, they are involved in one of the group of women in the world that have had a historical experience of gaining an equal place in the society by the modifications in the legal system under the reforms introduced by Atatürk. They gained equality in legal rights as divorce, owning properties, custody of children, political representations in the parliament, having a part in the workforce. All those reforms gave more power to the women and changed their life styles and living conditions. Unfortunately, the balance of the last sixty years shows that reforms made on laws have only changed partially their status and roles in the society. Revolutionary reforms have not able to make essential changes on national inequalities. Divergences between rural and urban regions endure. Generally they exist in spouse selection, heritage, marriage, divorce, bride price, violence and harassment against women. Because power and authority are still in the hands of men. When women try to get their power, a conflict starts. So this becomes a contemporary problem that Turkey faces.

However, more policies and efforts are needed to be...
taken into consideration to be able to make sustainable development in Turkish socio-economic scene. Not only being at home and could not find a place in the labor market, also taking care of children and doing domestic works are inevitable for women, especially in rural parts. From the past experiences women faced, they are classified by religious, ethnic, identity and class. However there are some tremendous movements in institutionalization like Women’s Rights Organizations recent years. But these organizations have different purposes, beliefs, ideologies and policies that they specify on divergent issues. The struggle against discrimination for women can be solved only if government makes equable gender amendments to the Turkish Civil and Penal Code. What the Convention on the Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) tried to endeavor was to make pressure on government about these matters. The result of this struggle gave a success and the rules within the new law require municipalities to provide shelters for women who are suffering from domestic violence. Also in the new Turkish Panel Code, someone who makes any violence against women will be punished seriously.

To compare and make assessment for women living in different societies, six dimensions of women’s status were adopted by Janet Giele which was quite close to the major subjects of CEDAW. This will help to sort out women’s positions in and across the societies. It also defines the status of women in Turkey. These dimensions are:

- Political expression: What rights do women have in the law? Can they own property in and can they express their political opinions and make social movements?
- Work and mobility: How do women succeed in the labor force? How mobile are they and they are paid? In which jobs they can work and is it possible to get a promotion like men?
- Family: What is the age of marriage? Can they choose their own spouse? Can they divorce easily? How society behave to single women or widows?
- Education: Do they have a chance to get education and how many of them attain? Is the curriculum the same for them as for men?
- Health and sexual control: What is women’s mortality, the most common illnesses and stresses (physical and mental) they are subjected to and control methods they use for their fertility?
- Cultural expression: The widespread image and place of women in the society and how far this image reflects the reality? Does culture make some significant chances to overcome those problems?

With these clear and well defined dimensions, the remarkable policies can easily be specified and the changes can be specified through strengths and weaknesses about women’s social status in the society and economy. These statements give solutions to provide better status for women not focusing on religion, culture and race. So it can be applied widely. With this in mind, the tendency towards women must be taken into special consideration especially to the women where they are suffering more from physical or sexual violence, harrassment, inactive targets and unadopted policies. Because they are sharing the same percentage as with men to make the social changes in the society. It is more preceived in developing countries like Turkey.

**HUMAN RIGHTS FOR WOMEN**

The adoption of Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 states the fundamental problems of people as slavery, equal and legal justice, equally, freedom for religion, education and rights to have social security at work. It ensures all these rights will be applied to all equally and confidentially without distinction like race, color, sex, religion and Language (Art 2). In this respect, definition of human rights can be more applicable to women. Meantime social, economic, cultural and political interests through prejudgment and value judgments have a negative effect on the main definitions of human rights and to put women into lower status in regarding to human rights attitude. If the policies are enforced carefully, that will make a reflection of gender inequity in the world and changes women’s lives tremendously.

The definition of women’s human rights is indeed a product of a global movement to improve women’s status and position. In the past forty years, women have tried to get back their lives and change the problems they have been facing everyday in economic, political and social environment. So this definition is generally used for political purposes and to develop new political strategies across burdens instead of achieving its own meaning. Between 1975 and 1990, United Nation encouraged women from many countries, regions, race, religion, class, ethnic and diversity to improve their status. It gave sponsorships and moral support for women to organize conferences and seminars like Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Thailand in 1990. The aim of the conferences were to develop strategies for improvement of their status. The outcome of the conferences was to make a multicultural women group in the meeting and yield them to see the differences between each other by cultural, economical, social, political and ethnicity. So it would be easier to extinguish the bridges and to initiate a global action together with the same rules, policies, regulations and language. Due to Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the definition of human rights is to be universal.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines human rights as universal, unnegotiable, unalienable and unitary. So it can be understood that human rights
are applied to everyone on equal terms. Likewise, human rights are universal which reflects that women can not be limited with cultural ideas, norms and beliefs in the society from the definition of itself. Noone can deny other individuals human rights. The most important attempt was performed in the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993. The Assembly passed the United Nations Declaration Against Violence Against Women which gave power to justify their rights in case of conflict in their cultural or religious implementations. In the past, women faced problems in their civil and political rights, there were limitations in social, economic and cultural activities and many of them experienced hierarchical arrangements. To overcome those problems, to be discernible in economic and social rights, to indicate themselves in political or civil life and also to gain more respect in the society, their status have to be retained. A Sustainable development without a women can not be thought and all those processes must be applied simultaneously.

HUMAN RIGHTS FOR TURKISH WOMEN

The constraints women faces in human rights are not an issue that happen in recent years, indeed it has been dating back to the Ottoman Empire. When Tanzimat reforms between 1839-1876 are examined cleary, women could not take parts in economic and political areas and it has been a concerning impediment for the Empire to become modern compared to Europe (Gündüz, 2004). Reforms were designed after the foundation of Turkish Republic in 1923 to equalize the position of women with men. In the earlier years of Turkish Republic, they gained their first political right to vote in 1930 and national elections in 1934 followed this. In public sector, there was a reform in both men and women Islamic dress and they gave a fabulous effort to spirit them into new modern life. This was followed by encouraging women to get involved in the new nation state's economic and social life. In 1924, also family reforms were re-shaped in regarding to secularism and modernized regulations in marriage, divorce and fertility were modified. The only thing Turkey missed in this process was the United Nations Declarations for women and their rights. It ratified the assembly in 1985. Eventhough ratification was approved, there were many problems to sort out such as low level of literacy, representation in politics and labor force participation with high violence against women and high level of cast system.

As seen Table 1, to improve women's status and their place in the society, governments’ endorsed CEDAW's bids by being a member in the European Community (Berik, 1990). But Turkey signed this declaration, but enacted in 1986.

After adoption to CEDAW, civil society associations started to activate with new existing activism. Because domestic pressure played a very important role in application of the international norms. Yet despite Turkey adopted the women's rights by law and regulations, it did not give special effort to formalize them and it could not change the patriarchy system in both social and cultural society. Although equality tried to be served as an acceptable behavior and division of power, with the continuing power of patriarchy, how far can gender inequality be minimized and the rules be performed? First of all, the idea of "women's place is in home and her job is doing housework" must be removed from men’s minds. Otherwise, working women at home would increase inevitably. The privilege of being dominant for men must not be reigned. M. K. Atatürk stressed the importance of

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women's participation both in social and political life as men. One of in his speeches in Izmir, he stated:

“We have to believe that everything in the world is the result, directly or indirectly, of the work of women.. If a society is content that only part of its population move with the times, then more than half of that society is doomed to be weak.. The weakness in our society lies in our indifference towards the status of women.. If our nation now needs science and knowledge, men and women must share them equally.. Domestic duties are not necessarily the most important of a woman's responsibilities.” (Atatürk, 1923).

Indeed, the concept of human rights was settled in Turkey in the early 1920s whilst most of western countries were still criticizing the self-righteous treatments for women and abused the equality. Actually, reforms had an important effect on some Turkish women, especially living in urban regions, but patriarchy still remained unchanged. Regarding to Arat (1994), the new nation pursued to define women in traditional ways and gave special attention to child care which was the primary role of women. But this imposed a meaning to women of being a symbol. As a result of this, although they got equal civil and political rights with men in 1920s, cause of the cultural norms they were restrained. In short, there is no incompatibility in basis of women rights as human rights. The only reforms have to be conducted are to eliminate the discrimination of all forms against women.

To achieve this, Women for Women’s Human Rights (WWHR) was founded in 1993 as a Non-governmental Organization in Turkey to perform on global basis. The mission of the WWHR is to support women’s rights. It has achieved many legal reforms by improving changes in networking and trying to equalize the women's rights in United Nations level. Likewise, KADER (Association for Supporting and Training Women Candidates) was emerged to fight against discrimination to women in social and political action in 1997. Cause “men's job” culture and thoughts are still conceived by men politicians in the society. Its main mission is to increase the women representatives in the assembly and discard the attitudes of discrimination towards women.

The lives of many women still today are discriminated by both social and religious traditions although many regulations are re-designed so far in Civil Code. Not only in Turkey, but developed countries suffer from this progress. Progresses have been made on Women’s rights in legislation and also in Civil Code in Turkey but still there is a problem needs to be taken into consideration. The people attitudes towards women. Otherwise, the regulations made would be meaningless as long as the environment to those regulations are not composed. Since women are still suffering problems in education, labor market, political representation as well as domestic violence at home and in society. Despite all the political changes to promote gender equality on paper, it will be pointless if it is not enforced into the society. To overcome this gender earthquake in the society, effective corporation among social institutions by adopting effective programs must be hold and also a strong legislation policies have to support those programs. Likewise, women have to be informed about these changes. That is a very common and necessary measurement to give information what those rights mean and how they are important. However, to stop discrimination at work place, Government must take anti-discriminating policies and organize women both in formal and informal sector such as child care responsibilities, social security, pregnancy and promotions. 52% of Turkish population is made up of women, so at least they deserve those changes and to live in a more democratic environment. The empowerment of just one part is not be a good division so long as it is not solved.

Conclusion

In Turkish society, special efforts are given to integrating women into social and political life. The major aim is to make them full citizen as representatives in the society and to evoke them valuable and important. Not only government have ratificated the declaration of United Nations and taken special Programmes to modify the laws and regulations, also non-governmental organizations were established to justify women’s status and rights in the society. The major aim is to dispose patriarchy and enhance women’s participation both in social and political area.

Due to United Nations, governments that ratified and signed Declaration of Human Rights have an obligation to protect their citizens from any violence, discrimination of religion, ethic, race, sex and language.

It is believed that the new re-shaped regulations and laws will make further improvements and redound the success of women politically and socially. This public awareness and sensitivity to women issues will solve the problems of society and bring a brighter future for women. That is what is expected.

REFERENCES


