



IN SEARCH OF FEMALE AUTHORITY IN ISLAM: A CONTEMPORARY SHI'A MOJTAHEDE¹

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Abstract Muslim women of all centuries have striven for religious knowledge at various levels. Historically women have had a prominent role in transmission of *hadith*, they have been teachers and Imams, and they have given *khutba* (religious sermons) at mosques. However, contemporary Islam has failed to produce prominent female religious authorities. This paper introduces a female Shi'a *mojtahede*. It aims to problematize the questioning of the concept of female religious authority within the framework of Islam. One religious scholar who came close to achieving such a position is known as *Banooy-e Irani*, the Iranian lady. In a time when Iranian women were becoming increasingly active in professions such as teaching, engineering, and medicine, as well as writing and designing, this religious scholar used a pseudonym to publish her multi-volume interpretation of the Qur'an. She established a high level of religious authority especially within Isfahan. Is religious authority measured by legacy, and if so what is the legacy of *Banooye Irani*?

Keywords: Religious authority, *ejtehad*, Shi'a jurisprudence, liberation, self-marginalization.