Article by ʿAlī-Akbar Saʿīdī Sīrjānī
Published: December 15, 1992
Last Updated: May 4, 2017

CLOTHING XI. IN THE PAHLAVI AND POST-PAHLAVI PERIODS

CLOTHING

xi. In the Pahlavi and post-Pahlavi periods

Pahlavi period. The clothing of Persians during the early years of the Pahlavi dynasty was generally similar to that of the Qajar period, reflecting differences among tribes, villages, and regions, as well as among classes. In the late 19th century there had been some effort to reform the dress, most notably of government officials (Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, p. 154; Ādamīyat, pp. 451-52; see x, above). Particularly after the Constitutional Revolution (1324-27/1906-09) many Persian men who had traveled abroad had begun to adopt European dress, wearing suits, neckties, and bow ties. Most of these men lived in the capital and a few large cities in the north and northwest; they did not constitute a large group (see Frontispiece to Volume V). On 29 Bahman (Dalw) 1301 Š./18 February 1923 parliament ratified a bill requiring all civil servants, cabinet members, and parliamentary deputies to wear Persian-made clothing during business hours (see Frontispiece to Volume V). This dress requirement was extended on 1 Mīzān 1302 Š./23 September 1923 by the order of the minister of war Sardār-e Sepah (later Reżā Shah), to include military personnel as well (Yaḡmāʾī, pp. 326-27, 557; Masʿūdī, p. 44; Šafā, I, pp. 23,

26-27).

Office workers and other urban residents who favored modernity gradually adopted the *sardārī* (a frock coat reaching below the knees), trousers, and even on occasion Western suits. Among Europeans photographed at the ceremonies inaugurating telegraph service (*bīsīm-e Pahlavī*) in Tehran on 5 Ordībehešt 1305 Š./26 April 1926 were women wearing jackets, skirts, and hats and engineers wearing brimmed hats (Maḥbūbī, *Moʾassasāt* II, p. 231; Yaḡmāʾī, p. 216). The Persians attending the ceremony wore the *sardārī*, European trousers, and brimless hats of ovoid profile (*kolāh-e toḵm-e morḡī* "egg-shaped hat"); no one appeared wearing a traditional *ʿabāʾ*.

On 4 Mehr 1307 Š./26 September 1928 the cabinet resolved that all male Persians dress uniformly in Western style. Traditional outer garments like shawls (*šāl*), cloaks (*qabā*), *sardārī*s, *labbāda*s/*lobbāda*s (quilted or felt coats), and *ʿabāʾ*s were to be replaced by coats; trousers (*tonbān*) traditionally made from black twill (*dabīt*) or similar fabric and tied at the waist with a cord (*band-e tonbān*, *nīfa*) by Western trousers and belts; footwear like *gīva*, *malakī* (kinds of cloth slippers), and *čāroq* (hide sandals) by leather shoes with heels. All government workers, as well as schoolboys, were to wear cylindrical hats with bills (known as *kolāh-e pahlavī*, "Pahlavi cap"; plate cxxvi) instead of the customary fur hats, turbans, or ovoid hats. Only the clergy, including instructors at religious seminaries, and leaders of other officially recognized religions were exempt from this decree, which went into effect on 1 Farvardīn 1308 Š./21 March 1929 in the towns and a year later in villages and rural areas (Adīb Heravī, p. 262; Yaḡmāʾī, p. 558).

The imposition of the Pahlavi cap and the prohibition of traditional headgear aroused strong opposition, especially among two groups. The first included traditionalists, who considered turbans a sign of distinction, and tribesmen, who identified themselves by the styles and colors of their headgear. The second comprised the proprietors of textile factories, who were brought to the brink of bankruptcy by the new regulations. Furthermore, trained jurists and similarly educated men objected to the new regulations on the ground that punishments stipulated by the cabinet for noncompliance, including cash fines and detention for up to a week, were unconstitutional. As a result, on 6 Day 1307 Š./27 December 1928 the seventh parliament passed a law ratifying the cabinet decree and making the clothing regulations both legal and compulsory (Masʿūdī, pp. 43, 44; Šafā, I, p. 73).

Gradually men became accustomed to the Pahlavi cap, though opposition continued to be voiced, mainly by the Muslim clergy, particularly among the lower and less educated ranks, whose members, as local religious leaders, often wielded substantial influence in local affairs. Eventually, however, the state managed to win the consent of the high-ranking clerics in Qom, arguing that the honor and pride associated with the turban should not be endangered by permitting illiterate or unworthy individuals to wear it (Hedāyat, p. 382).

In Ḵordāḏ-Tīr 1313 Š./June-July 1934 Reżā Shah visited Turkey, where he was much impressed by Kemal Atatürk's programs for modernization. He became determined that Persians, too, should dress as Europeans did (Hedāyat, p. 407; Kāẓemī, p. 343), and, while still in Turkey, he issued an order to the prime minister that all Persian workers were thenceforth to wear European-style brimmed hats. His express justification was that the full brim of the hat would protect outdoor laborers from sunburn. On 16 Tīr 1314 Š/8 July 1935 a cabinet decree made wearing of this hat obligatory for all men, thus replacing the Pahlavi cap. The change, which was rigorously enforced, aroused considerable resistance, particularly in the provinces. In a famous incident a group of Muslims, led by an outspoken mullah named Shaikh Taqī Bohlūl, took refuge (*bast*) in the Gowharšād mosque in Mašhad, where they were attacked by security forces and a number of people were killed (Adīb Heravī, pp. 261ff. Dawlatābādī, *Ḥayāt-e Yaḥyā* IV, p. 431; Ṣadīq, pp. 307-08; Wilber, pp. 160, 166-67; Šafā, I, pp. 127-28). Such resistance only increased the shah's resolve (Masʿūdī, p. 139). Although the brimmed hat continued to be worn until the last years of Reżā Shah's reign, Persian men gradually gave up wearing headgear altogether, despite the traditional Persian view that it is unseemly to appear in public uncovered (for the Qajar period, see, e.g., Šahrī, pp. 228-29). Among urban men only military personnel and clerics, who consider that covering the head is encouraged by Islam, continued to wear headgear.

Before the Gowharšād incident Reżā Shah had not personally stressed the necessity for change in women's dress. Some educated women had already begun to appear at private functions wearing hats, rather than the veil (*čādor*; Dawlatābādī, *Ḥayāt-e Yaḥyā* IV, pp. 432-34; Masʿūdī, pp. 145-46). Some members of the court who had been educated abroad favored abolishing the veil entirely and endorsed the participation of women in social gatherings. One proponent of such views was the powerful court minister ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Teymūrtāš, who, in a cabinet meeting in 1312 Š./1933, proposed that importation of ladies' hats from abroad be legalized (Hedāyat, pp. 379, 407).

Eventually, in 1314 Š./1936, Reżā Shah did abolish the veil, the first ruler in the region to do so (Atatürk had not banned the veil; see Keddie, pp. 108-09). Once confident of his power after the crushing of Shaikh Bohlūl's rebellion, the shah appeared with his wife and daughters unveiled at a graduation ceremony at the government normal school (Dāneš-sarā-ye moqaddamātī) on 17 Day 1314 Š./8 January 1936. In a speech addressed to the predominantly female audience, which had been ordered to attend unveiled, he ordered all women to dress thenceforth in the European manner (Hedāyat, p. 408; Ṣadīq, pp. 310-14; Wilber, pp. 173-74; Šafā, I, pp. 131-32; Savory, pp. 97-98). The occasion was celebrated in every city but particularly in Tehran, and all military and civilian government personnel were ordered to appear with their wives, unveiled, at the celebrations.

These measures also met with resistance and the use of force. The great majority of Persian women had been brought up to consider the veil indispensable and to believe that exposing the head and neck was a sin. Furthermore, Persian men considered abandonment of the veil outright evidence of unchastity. Among men literacy was limited to the privileged elite and the clergy, whereas among women illiteracy was almost universal; even the few who had attended traditional schools (*maktab*s) knew only how to recite prayers and the Qurʾān and could hardly write at all. Such a traditional and highly patriarchal society was ill prepared for a sudden ban on the time-honored *čādor*, and coercion by the police was the inevitable result. Women were beaten, their *čādor*s and headscarves torn off, and even their homes forcibly searched (Fāṭemī, p. 178). Often, on the pretext of enforcing this law, officials harassed and extorted money from the public. Gradually, however, popular resistance was overcome, and by the last three or four years of Reżā Shah's reign women appeared in public wearing plain long dresses (or jackets and skirts in Tehran), thick stockings, and full-brimmed straw hats. In some villages and small towns, however, women simply did not leave their houses until Reżā Shah was forced to abdicate in Šahrīvar 1320 Š./September 1941.

After the abdication many women resumed the veil, but most of the educated did not; in fact, encouraged by the extensive presence of foreigners in Persia and closer ties with the outside world, they actively followed the Western fashions of the day, particularly during the last two decades of the reign of Moḥammad-Reżā Shah Pahlavi (1320-58 Š./1941-79). Furthermore, as prosperity increased with the oil boom, men also began to adopt Western styles more eagerly, and a large proportion of family income was thus spent

on fashionable clothing.

Post-Pahlavi period. The situation was abruptly transformed by the Revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79. At first the revolutionary forces considered smart—or even clean—clothing a sign of *estekbār* (ostentation) and neckties an indication of religious laxity. Unshaven members of Ḥezb-Allāh (party of God) wearing soiled shirts with open collars and rubber slippers harassed men dressed in Western style in the street. Some even adopted the headband (*ʿeqāl*) in imitation of leftist Arabs, but it was unpopular, and they soon abandoned it.

For women the situation was far more difficult. In the mid-1970s many rural families had migrated to the major cities, particularly Tehran, in search of employment. Most were unskilled, uneducated, and traditional in their outlook and convictions. After the Revolution, encouraged by religious leaders who had become government officials, women from this group harassed women who were not wearing the veil in public. Many educated women, particularly university students, had adopted traditional dress associated with Islam as a symbol of opposition to the Pahlavi regime, and the mass demonstrations during the Revolution had included large numbers of such women wearing black *čādor*s (plate cxxvii). But they had not expected to be forced to wear them after the Revolution; they staged a few brief protests, which, however, were met with insults and physical threats. As the state gradually consolidated its power, all women were forced to adopt the "Islamic" mode of dress in public. It consists of a loose gown covering the entire body in such a way that all curves, including the breasts, waist, and calves, are hidden. Only the hands, from fingertips to wrists, and the face are not covered by this garment. The head and neck are to be entirely covered either by a black *čādor* or a thick scarf (*meqnaʿa*). If the distance between the ground and the hem of the dress is greater than ten inches the calves of the legs, already swathed in thick black stockings, must be further hidden under full trousers. These requirements have been met with the same reluctance and resistance that greeted Reżā Shah's enforced ban on the same kind of clothing.

Many men still wear jackets and trousers, though most omit neckties.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

F. Ādamīyat, *Andīša-ye tarraqī wa ḥokūmat-e qānūn. ʿAṣr-e Sepahsālār*, Tehran, 1351 Š./1973.

ʿA. Āḏarī, ed., *Tārīḵ-e moṣawwar-e Reżā Šāh-e kabīr*, Tehran, 1345 Š./1976 (useful for illustrations).

M.-Ḥ. Adīb Heravī, *Ḥadīqat al-rażawīya*, Mašhad, 1327 Š./1948.

Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, *Čehel sāl tārīḵ-e Īrān dar dawra-ye pādšāhī-e Nāṣer-al-Dīn Šāh* I. *al-Maʾāṯer wa'l-āṯār*, ed. Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 1363 Š./1984.

M. Farroḵ (Moʿtaṣem-al-Salṭana), *Ḵāṭerāt-e sīāsī-e Farroḵ*, ed. P. Lavāšānī, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968, pp. 388, 391, 395.

N. Sayfpūr Fāṭemī, "Reżā Šāh wa kūdetā-ye 1299," *Rahāvard* 7/23, 1368 Š./1989, pp. 160-80.

M. Moḵber-al-Salṭana Hedāyat, *Ḵāṭerāt o ḵaṭarāt*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1344 Š./1965, p. 407. M. Kāẓemī, *Rūzgār o andīšahā*, Tehran, 1350 Š./1971.

N. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution. An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*, New Haven, Conn., 1981.

ʿA. Masʿūdī, *Eṭṭelāʿāt dar yak robʿ-e qarn*, Tehran, 1950 Š./1971.

ʿĪ. Ṣadīq, *Yādgār-e ʿomr* II, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966.

Š. Šafā, *Gāh-nāma-ye panjāh sāl šāhanšāhī-e Pahlavī* I, n.p., n.d.

J. Šahrī, *Gūša-ī az tārīḵ-e ejtemāʿī-e Tehrān-e qadīm* I, Tehran, 1357 Š./1978.

R. M. Savory, "Social Development in Iran during the Pahlavi Era," in G. Lenczowski, ed., *Iran under the Pahlavis*, Stanford, Calif., 1978, pp. 85-127.

F. Stark, *The Valley of the Assassins*, London, 1934, tr. ʿA.-M. Sākī as *Safar-nāma-ye Alamūt, Lorestān wa Īlām*, Tehran, 1364 Š./1985.

D. Wilber, *Riza Shah Pahlavi, The Resurrection and Reconstruction of Iran*,

Hicksville, N.Y., 1975.

E. Yaḡmāʾī, *Kār-nāma-ye Reżā Šāh-e kabīr*, Tehran, 2535 = 1355 Š./1976, pp. 170, 178, 216, 499.

E. Žozef, “Rokn-al-Dīn Moḵtāṛ . . . ,” *Rahāvard* 7/23, 1368 Š./1989, pp. 274-75.