



DORRAT-AL-MA'ĀLĪ

DORRAT-AL-MA'ĀLĪ, FAṬEMA (b. Tehran, 1295/1873, d. Tehran, Šahrīvar 1344=1303 Š./1924), pioneer in female education in Persia. Her father, Sayyed 'Alī Ḥakīm Šams-al-Ma'ālī, was a physician in the service of Nāšer-al-Dīn Shah, but, as was typical of the period, no information on her mother was recorded. Dorrat al-Ma'ālī was educated at home, at first by her father and then by a series of tutors.

Dorrat-al-Ma'ālī and her sister, whose name is not given in the sources, founded several schools for girls in Tehran: Dabestān-e moḵaddarāt-e eslāmīya in 1323/1905, Dabestān-e pardagīān, Mastūrāt, Ḳawātīn, and finally Dorrat-al-madāres in 1342/1923 (*Īrān-e now*, 29 Ša'bān 1327/15 September 1909; 3 Rabī' I 1328/16 March 1910; Qawīmī, pp. 128-31). She also established adult literacy classes and opened a reading room for women (Qerā't-ḵāna-ye neswān; Īraj Mīrzā, p. lii). In a letter written to *Īrān-e now* on 29 Ša'bān 1327 Dorrat-al-Ma'ālī and her sister explained their motivation for establishing the first two schools mentioned above: "We were seeking a way to take a step to serve the children of our homeland. . . . [Women] are the first teachers of children. The first words are taught by mothers to children. Children mirror their mothers' manners and morals. . . . Thus [we thought] we had best establish [schools] for the girls of our homeland, so that in future every household may be headed by a learned lady well versed in home management, child education, sewing, cooking, and cleaning and from whose breast may flow the milk of patriotism into the mouths of the newborn, who, when necessary, will prove worthy of serving and sacrificing [themselves for]



the country.”

Opening schools for girls gained impetus after the constitutionalist victory over Moḥammad-‘Alī Shah (1324-27/1907-1909; see [CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION ii](#)). A number of women’s associations were formed to support the new government and to involve women more actively in the social and political life of the country. In the spring of 1910 Dorrat-al-Ma‘ālī, together with other principals of girls’ schools and other women activists, held a number of meetings (*Īrān-e now*, 3 Rabī I 1328/16 March 1910, 4 Rabī I 1328/17 March 1910, 18 Rabī I 1328/30 March 1910; Bāmdād, II, pp. 13-14) that led to formation of Anjoman-e etteḥādīya-ye moḳad-darāt-e waṭan (Association of women of the homeland), in which she played an important role. In its initial declaration the association declared “At this dreadful juncture it is incumbent upon every Iranian to strive and [even] to offer his/her life to preserve the country’s independence and to perpetuate Iranianism and the nation’s honor.” It was proposed that women should deposit contributions in the Bānk-e šāhī (Imperial bank; see [BANKING IN IRAN](#)) and that the association keep a record of all such donations; the association was to “report the result of its campaign to the sacred National Consultative Assembly and will ask the assembly what to do with the funds” (*Īrān-e now*, 21 Rabī I 1328/2 April 1910). Members of the association were active in promoting consumption of Persian goods like textiles and sugar and campaigned for a boycott of imported products (Qawīmī, p. 129).

Several of Dorrat-al-Ma‘ālī’s letters were published in *Šokūfa*, a women’s journal (1330-33/1912-15) edited by the educator Mozayyen-al-Saṭāna. These letters reflect their shared concern that the new schools for girls should come under greater scrutiny and tighter supervision of the Ministry of education (Wezārat-e ma‘āref), lest they become tainted by accusations of morally corrupting influences or, even worse, become in fact places of moral corruption (*Šokūfa*, 10 Ramažān 1332/2 August 1914, pp. 2-3).

In 1303 Š./1924 Dorrat-al-Ma‘ālī and one Nadīm-al-Molūk headed a delegation of principals of girls’ schools that welcomed the poet Īraj Mīrzā upon his return to Tehran from Khorasan. The delegation presented him with a poem and a letter, along with a silver vase and cigarette box, in appreciation of his public support of women’s causes. He thanked them in turn in a poem entitled “Do hadīya” (Two gifts; pp. 198-99; Āryanpūr, *Az Šabā tā Nīmā* II, pp. 388-89). After Dorrat-al-Ma‘ālī’s death from a heart attack he composed two elegies for her, both entitled “Dar retā‘-e Dorrat-al-Ma‘ālī” (Īraj Mīrzā, pp. 5, 219).



Dorrat-al-Ma‘ālī had two daughters, Šams-al-Nahār Mahdawī and Šams-al-Žoḥā Kāqānī, and two sons, ‘Alī-Rezā Hūšī Filsūf-al-Dawla and Moḥammad Hūšī (Qawīmī, p. 131).

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