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EDUCATION VII. GENERAL SURVEY OF MODERN EDUCATION

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A modern system of national education emerged in Persia in the 1920s and 1930s, after the Pahlavi state had been founded; during this period the influence of the religious establishment was minimized, and the government gained control over schools, expanding enrollment at all levels.

The beginnings of modern education.

The 19th century. Foreign military advisers and religious institutions were the main conduits of modern educational thinking in Persia in the 19th century. The crown prince ʿAbbās Mīrzā and his vizier, Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsem Qāʾem-maqām, initiated a series of military reforms in the 1810s-20s, in order to strengthen resistance to Russian expansionist schemes. They invited French and British military training missions and began to send sons of notables to European countries to learn modern technology, a practice that continued for some decades. The first modern Persian school was Dār al-fonūn, the polytechnic college founded in 1268/1851 by Mīrzā Taqī Khan Amīr Kabīr, the

reforming grand vizier of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (1264-1313/1848-96), to educate the sons of notables for military and medical services. In 1275/1858 a military school was founded in Tabrīz, and similar schools were established in Isfahan (Madrasa-ye homāyūnī) in 1300/1882 and in Tehran (Madrasa-ye neẓāmī) in 1302/1884 (Maḥ-būbī, *Moʾassasāt* I, pp. 366-67). In the same period a number of schools were established by Christian missionaries, the Alliance Israélite Universelle, and secular educators in Tehran and provincial towns (see xv, below).

Constitutionalists and modern education. In the late 19th century some reforming intellectuals believed that the expansion of modern education was a prerequisite for social and political progress. A new phase thus began at about the turn of the 20th century, when a number of modern elementary and secondary schools for middle- and lower-class children were established in Tehran and other major cities. One of the first of them, Madrasa-ye Rošdīya, was founded in 1315/1898 by Mīrzā Ḥasan Rošdīya. Under the patronage of the grand vizier Mīrzā ʿAlī Khan Amīn-al-Dawla; this institution became a model for other modern schools. Meanwhile, Anjoman-e maʿāref (Council on Education) founded and supervised a number of private modern schools on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution (see xi, below). The Faculty of political science (Madrasa-ye ʿolūm-e sīāsī) was founded in Tehran in 1317/1899 with the aim of preparing the sons of notables for foreign service. A faculty of agronomy (Madrasa-ye falāḥat-e moẓaffarī) was established near Tehran in 1318/1900.

The postconstitutional period. Articles 18 and 19 of the Constitution of 1324/1907 (see CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION iii) provided for public education and decreed that the government should establish and administer schools through the Ministry of Education (Wezārat-e maʿāref). It was not until 1328/1910, however, that the organization of the ministry was outlined in administrative law (Qānūn-e edārī-e Wezārat-e maʿāref wa ṣanāyeʿ-e mostaẓrafa wa awqāf). It provided the Supreme Council of Education (Šūrā-ye ʿālī-e maʿāref) with broad powers in many areas (“Tārīḵča,” p. 531). In 1329/1911 the Majles ratified the fundamental law for education (Qānūn-e asāsī-e maʿāref), the provisions of which called for universal primary schooling for children aged seven years and over (“Tārīḵča,” p. 532; Arasteh, pp. 221-36). Nevertheless, ensuing political instability, clerical opposition, inadequate funds, and insufficient numbers of qualified teachers posed serious obstacles to the expansion of modern education. As a result,

enrollment in primary schools was about 10,500 and in secondary schools and institutions of higher education only about 150 each (Table 1).

In 1336-37/1918-19 the cabinet of Mīrzā Ḥasan Khan Woṯūq-al-Dawla opened forty primary schools and eight secondary schools in Tehran and a number in provincial towns. Furthermore, a normal school was opened, the department of medicine at Dār al-fonūn was expanded and made semi-independent, and a law school and a school of dentistry were established (Ṣadīq, p. 369). In the period 1396-98/1918-20 enrollment in elementary schools rose from 24,000 to 28,600 and in secondary schools from 2,400 to 2,900 (Markaz-e āmār, p. 40).

From the beginning the religious authorities (*ʿolamāʾ*) resisted modern secular education, fearing that it would undermine traditional religious values, shift control of education from the religious establishment to the state, and deprive religious teachers of an important source of income. Only a powerful centralized state could counter this clerical opposition (Dawlatābādī, *Ḥayāt-e Yaḥyā* I, pp. 50-55, 195, 207; Rāzī, I, pp. 28-53; Akhavi, pp. 40-55; Menashri, pp. 27-65).

The national school system.

The 1920s-1930s. Under Reżā Shah (1925-41) the Persian national state was consolidated, modern technology and industry were introduced, and the first steps were taken toward building a secular society. The government made systematic efforts to quell religious resistance and to expand modern education (Matthee; Rāzī, I, pp. 28-53; Akhavi, pp. 40-55; Menashri, pp. 87-110). In February-March 1922 a new education law (Qānūn-e Šūrā-ye ʿālī-e maʿāref) was ratified by the Majles; thenceforth all educational matters were entrusted to Šūra-ye ʿālī-e maʿāref (Supreme Council on Education). In 1927 the budget of the Ministry of Education was doubled; expenditures on education rose from 10.4 million rials, 4 percent of total government outlays in 1926, to more than 20.8 million, 5.9 percent in 1929, and to 195 million rials, 4.5 percent in 1941 (Markaz-e āmār, pp. 309-11). As a result, in the same period enrollment at all levels increased substantially (Table 2).

Tehran University was opened on 4 February 1935 with about 1,000 students, a number that had doubled by 1941 (*Taʿlīm o tarbīat* 6/4, 1315 Š./1936, pp. 249-60; Menashri, p. 216). In addition, in the interwar years approximately 1,500 students from upper- and middle-class backgrounds were sent by the government for education abroad, mainly to France, Germany, Switzerland,

Sweden, and Great Britain (Elwell-Sutton, p. 138). On their return these graduates constituted an elite core and played an important part in modernizing the country and its educational system.

In the 1930s Persia integrated and centralized education; established a national, tuition-free, and modern school system; founded a university; promoted women's education; and initiated an adult-education program. Nevertheless, the modern educational system remained small, urban, formalistic, and elitist; it was barely able to meet the qualitative and quantitative needs of a modernizing economy (Overseas Consultants, II, pp. 83-84; Menashri, pp. 122-24).

The 1940s-1980s. In the early 1940s enrollment in elementary schools declined, and that in secondary schools was stagnant, but after World War II growth resumed. From the 1950s through the 1970s a number of universities were founded in Tehran and provincial towns, though there was sometimes a gap of few years before they were fully opened to students (see xvii, below): Āḏarābādegān in Tabrīz, Ferdowsī in Mašhad, Pahlavī in Shiraz (all 1949), Isfahan (1950), Jondīšāpūr in Ahvāz (1954), Mellī in Tehran (1957), Āryāmehr (now Šarīf) in Tehran (1962), Bū-ʿAlī Sīnā in Hamadān and Āzād in Tehran (both 1972), Reżā Shah Kabīr in Bābolsar and Balūčestān in Zāhedān (both 1973), and Gīlān in Rašt and Kermān in the city of Kermān (both 1974). Dānešgāh-e tarbīat-e moʿallem, originally founded as a teachers' college in 1928 (see xix, below), was expanded and granted university status in 1973. In 1968 the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (Wezārat-e ʿolūm o āmūzeš-e ʿālī) was established, and by 1975 all institutions of higher education were supported by government funding. Three years later there were nineteen universities, fifty-one colleges, and a score of institutes of technology, health, welfare, nursing, and the like (Samii et al., pp. 4-7). Concomitantly the percentage of the relevant age group enrolled in higher education rose from 1.2 in 1966-67 to 3.8 in 1976-77 (Table 2, above).

Women's access to education was also expanded in this period. The proportion of females in elementary schools rose from 21 percent of total enrollment in 1926-27 to 38 percent in 1976-77 and to 44 percent in 1986-87; in secondary schools from 5.7 percent to 35 and 40 percent respectively; and in universities from almost zero to 28 and 29 percent respectively (see xxvi, below).

Despite the enactment of a compulsory-education law in 1943, the government did not possess the necessary resources to implement it fully until the period

1956-92, when elementary education expanded in both urban and rural areas; eventually almost all children of appropriate age were attending primary schools. The adult-literacy program, which was introduced in 1936, grew sluggishly until the 1960s, when a more systematic effort was made to expand it, including establishment of a literacy corps (*sepāh-e dāneš*) in rural and tribal areas (see xiii, below).

As a result of these efforts, the literate population six years of age and older increased sharply from about 15 percent in 1956 to approximately 62 percent in 1986. There were, however, significant differences among gender and age groups, urban and rural populations, and various regions in the country (Table 3).For example, although more than 80 percent of the urban male population was reported to be literate in 1986, only about 37 percent of the rural female population was able to read and write. The age group ten-to-fourteen years, with a literacy rate of 82.6 percent (95.8 percent for urban males), ranked highest. Those aged sixty-five years and older ranked lowest, with a literacy rate of 15.1 percent (*Sāl-nāma1371*, p. 126). As a result of the rapid growth of elementary and secondary schools after the early 1950s and the extension of modern education into rural areas,the severe regional inequalities that had prevailed began to diminish (Table 4), but this trend will have to continue for some time before a genuinely equal distribution of literacy can be achieved. The regions of Persia can be categorized in four groups by literacy rate, ranging from 70-79 percent, 60-69 percent, 50-59 percent, and 38-49 percent (Table 5).

Beginning in the 19th century private, foreign, and missionary schools had been preferred by the middle and upper classes, who perceived the newly established public schools as inadequate. In the 20th century there were thus schools for the masses and schools for the elite, the latter providing easier access to higher education. Nevertheless, in the period 1920-92 proportional enrollment in private schools gradually declined as the numbers of students attending public schools increased. For example, in 1924-25 about 38 percent of elementary-school and 66 percent of secondary-school students were in private institutions, whereas by 1940-41 the pecentages were 22 and 38 respectively. In the 1950s-1970s less than 10 percent of elementary-school and less than 20 percent of secondary-school students were enrolled in private institutions, most of them in Tehran and major provincial cities (Table 6).

In order to provide equal educational opportunities for various groups and regions, in the mid-1970s the government adopted a policy of free education at

all levels and free meals for elementary-school pupils. As a result, total government expenditure on education leaped from 23 billion rials (9.6 percent of total government expenditure and 2.9 percent of gross national product) in 1970 to 260 billion rials (14.1 percent of total government expenditure and 5.7 percent of GNP) in 1976. In the postrevolutionary period it continued to grow, reaching 22.4 percent of total expenditure in 1990, though at the same time the proportion of GNP declined to 4.1 percent (Table 7). Because of the inflationary trend in Persia in the 1970s, which accelerated in the 1980s, the figures on expenditure presented in Table 7 do not reflect real growth; in Table 8 the total and per capita expenditure on education is presented in constant 1974 prices. In 1971-78 both current and capital expenditures almost quadrupled, and expenditure per student nearly tripled. In 1981-89 current and capital expenditures declined by 29 percent and per capita expenditure by more than half.

Structure of the system.

In the 1920s-1990s the structure and organization of Persian education changed significantly, transformed from a version of a French pattern that had long since been abandoned in France to a version of one American system recommended by a group of American and Persian advisers. The highly centralized administrative and supervisory structure remained virtually intact, however. The central bureaucracy of the Ministries of Education and of Higher Education, established in the 1920s and the late 1960s respectively, has determined the content and organization of education at all levels, taking responsibility for planning and developing curricula, preparing textbooks, training teachers, administering examinations, and supervising grading. Attempts to develop a semiautonomous regional school system in the 1970s were unsuccessful, and after the revolution the educational bureaucracy became even more centralized (Redjali, pp. 2700-01).

1920s-1950s. In this period the French-style curricula were, in the opinion of some educators, overloaded with academic requirements, to the detriment of extracurricular activities, physical education, and the arts (Ṣadīq, 1347 Š./1968, pp. 374-75). The course of study consisted of a six-year primary program followed by lower and upper secondary programs, each of three years. Until 1938 the subjects of study in the upper secondary-school program in academic schools were literature and science; in vocational schools they were more varied. During the period 1938-55 the final three years in academic secondary schools consisted of two years of general education and a final year in which

the subjects were literature, science, and mathematics, though in 1956-65 the program was restored to its earlier format while the three subjects were retained. The system was rigid and formalistic, and the teachers were seldom adequate in numbers or in competence. One result was a high dropout rate.

Higher education was also based on an earlier French system; independent faculties constituted the basic units of the university structure, and the curriculum for each academic year was predetermined, leaving no room for course selection by students (Ṣadīq, 1347 Š./1968, pp. 374-75).

Experimentation in the 1950s. In the 1950s Persian educators and particularly American advisers were strongly critical of the Persian educational system. Robert Hall, head of the education unit of Overseas Consultants Incorporated, published an initial evaluation, emphasizing that the principal point of weakness was not quantitative shortcomings but an educational philosophy intended "to produce a distinguished intellectual elite and to establish an instrument by which the thought and action of the common people might be efficiently manipulated." As a result, the curriculum was based on a core of knowledge thought essential for all citizens, "with little or no relevance for originality or modifications to meet local needs" (Overseas Consultants, p. 83). Early in the decade education became one of the major areas of American technical assistance. In July 1951 the educational division of the Point Four Program in Tehran was established by Hoyt J. B. Turner and was soon staffed by eight American advisers. In the following years American educators were present in all Persian ministries active in education. According to Clarence Hendershot, "Every aspect of education felt the influence of the American educators," who brought about significant changes in the 1950s and 1960s (Hendershot, pp. 13-15, 329; Warne, pp. 170-82; Amuzegar, pp. 13-14). They pushed hard for expansion of education in urban, as well as in rural, areas and introduced new teaching methods through a number of experimental projects, which laid the foundations for educational reforms in the 1960s (Baldwin, pp. 145-47). Among the experiments were in-service teacher training in the provinces, industrial and tribal education, audiovisual programs, home-economics courses, development of teaching materials, and education conferences. In evaluating the in-service training program, Turner observed "For the first time these summer students broke away from the traditional lecture type method of instruction and became active participants in discussion, demonstrations and role playing types of teaching procedures" (Hendershot, p. 25).

Reforms in the 1960s and 1970s. The educational reforms of 1966-78 gradually transformed the Persian school system into one patterned on American advisers' ideas, though it resembled American public education in only minor aspects. It was designed to meet the needs of a rapidly developing economy and rising demand for technicians and skilled labor. Schooling was to be divided into three phases, the first two compulsory: a five-year course for pupils aged six to eleven years, aimed at mastery of basic skills and knowledge; a three-year middle phase for ages eleven to fourteen years, a period focused on general education, in which teachers attempted to assess aptitudes and academic potential; and four years of secondary school for ages fourteen to eighteen years, during which after one or two years of general education students were to specialize among diverse programs. In the 1970s educational planners mobilized available resources to develop a sound curriculum and appropriate textbooks for the first two phases (see xvi, below; for the curricula developed for these two phases, see Table 9); in the second phase vocational and technical training and European languages were introduced, and Persian language and arts and crafts were curtailed. In the third phase students could choose either an academic curriculum, preparatory to higher education, or vocational training, preparatory to employment as technicians. The complete academic curriculum, which was not available in all schools, consisted of two years of general education followed by two years in which students could choose to specialize in social studies, humanities (including history, geography, and the like), literature and the arts, experimental sciences, or mathematics and physics. In the vocational program the first two years were to be spent in training for skilled work, and it was planned that the latter two years would involve training as foremen. There were also secondary-school programs for training teachers (see xviii, below). It was expected that under the new structure more than 40 percent of middle-school graduates would continue at vocational schools (Menashri, p. 197), but vocational-school enrollment rose to only 7.4 percent of total secondary-school enrollment in 1976 and to 18 percent in 1986; it dropped to 15 percent in 1991.

In the 1960s an American structure of course credits, a two-semester calendar, and organization into departments was adopted for Persian institutions of higher education. In practice, however, the old French university structure was blended with the newer one, and universities were organized into schools and departments that were more self-contained than their American counterparts. As many universities offered complete programs of study, there was considerable duplication in courses offered from one to another.

The postrevolutionary period. The reformed structure and organization of the Persian educational system have remained virtually intact since 1979. The main additional goal of planners has been to shape students' behavior according to Islamic tenets by modifying the curricula and textbooks. As a result, "a significant portion of pre-collegiate education in Iran now consists of religious studies, Islamic ethics, Arabic, and the study of Qurān" (Mehran, 1992, p. 11). Immediately after the revolution all coeducational schools were converted to single-sex institutions, and Islamic dress codes were imposed (Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari, p. 17). The program in academic secondary schools was altered, so that only the first year consisted of general education and in the remaining three students specialized in one of four subjects: social studies, literature and the arts, experimental sciences, and mathematics and physics. Vocational schools included agricultural, business, and technical schools. A major recent innovation, introduced in 1992, is a pilot project for restructuring secondary education, reducing it from a four-year to a three-year course of ninety-six credits. In both academic and vocational schools the three years are divided between general education and professional education (focusing on practical work-related skills, *kār o dāneš*). Those graduates who pass a special examination are admitted to a fourth-year (thirty-two credit) college-preparatory program (Wezārat-e āmūzeš, 1372 Š./1993).

The major event in Persian higher education in the 1980s was the cultural revolution (*enqelāb-e farhangī*); a little over a year after the revolution the government closed all universities and appointed a committee, Headquarters of the Cultural Revolution (Setād-e enqelāb-e farhangī), to prepare a program of reforms in accordance with "Islamic values." The universities reopened in October 1981, with University *Jehād* (Jehād-e dānešgāhī) and other Islamic groups in control of university affairs. They were responsible for purging approximately 8,000 professors, about half the total university faculty members in Persia (Wezārat-e farhang, 1373 Š./1994, p. 269). Following disputes between University *Jehād* and the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (Šūrā-ye ʿālī-e enqelāb-e farhangī) was founded in 1984 to supervise reconstruction of the universities (*Dānešgāh-e enqelāb*, Esfand 1363 Š./March 1985, pp. 4-6, 60-61).

Major changes included establishment of a number of new universities in provincial towns, in order to improve regional access to higher education. Dānešgāh-e tarbīat-e modarres (Teachers'-Training University) was established in 1982 in order to train instructors for colleges and universities

(*Dānešgāh-e enqelāb*, Mehr 1363 Š./October 1984, pp. 54-57; see xix, below). Furthermore, in order to meet increasing demands for health-care workers, in 1985 medical schools were detached from universities and incorporated into the Ministry of Health (Wezārat-e behdāšt, darmān wa āmūzeš-e pezeškī). The most important change, however, was the formation in 1981 of the privately operated Open Islamic University (Dānešgāh-e āzād-e eslāmī), with dozens of branches throughout the country, in order to meet increasing demands of secondary-school graduates for college education. Upon payment of fairly high tuition and other fees, it accepts all those who apply. It has been reported that more than 380,000 students were enrolled in the Open University in 1993-94 (Moʾassasa-ye pažūheš, p. *hejdah*).

In 1992-93 there were three kinds of officially recognized institutions of higher education in Persia. Government-sponsored colleges (13), universities (74), and other institutions (49 technical schools and training centers) accredited by the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education accounted for 375,000 students. A large number of technical, vocational, and teacher's-training schools (primarily two-year junior colleges), administered by the Ministry of Education and other government agencies, had 120,000 students. Of the students enrolled in government-sponsored institutions 35.4 percent were in the humanities, 22 percent in medical fields, 20 percent in technical studies and engineering, 15.5 percent in the sciences, 5 percent in agriculture, and 2 percent in the arts. Twelve percent of the total were in two-year programs (*kārdānī*), 70.6 percent in bachelor programs (*kār-šenāsī*), 5 percent in master's programs (*kār-šenāsī-e aršad*), and 12.4 percent in doctoral programs (*doktorā*). More than 16,000 full-time faculty members served in these institutions, of whom 54 percent held doctorates, 40 percent M.A. degrees, and 6 percent B.A. degrees (Wezārat-e farhang, 1373 Š./1994, pp. r.-š., 5, 45-49, 237-38).

A comparative perspective.

In the period 1965-91 the percentage of relevant age groups enrolled in schools increased substantially not only in Persia but also in the Middle East as a whole and in North Africa. The overall ratio of enrollment in primary schools rose from 61 to 98 percent of the relevant age group, in secondary schools from 17 to 56 percent, and in higher education from 3 to 15 percent. Enrollment ratios in Persian elementary and secondary schools were slightly above the regional average but enrollment in higher education, including the probably inflated figure for the Open University, 3 percent below (Table 10).

Educational planners in Persia and other Middle Eastern countries have largely achieved their quantitative targets for general education. School enrollments and literacy rates have risen substantially since 1965. Gender equality and regional access to educational facilities have also improved, but planners have been less successful in attaining their qualitative goals. Public schools have suffered from crowded classrooms, split shifts, shortages of qualified teachers, and high dropout rates. Furthermore, inadequate textbooks and curricula, rote learning and memorization, lecture-centered instruction, undue stress on examinations, and emphasis on obedience and authority, with low levels of independent judgment and creativity, still characterize Persian and other Middle Eastern educational systems. The Persian system also suffers from an extremely centralized administration, low rates of enrollment and genuine interest in vocational schools, and insufficient capacity of institutions of higher learning for the number of secondary-school graduates who wish to attend.

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