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EDUCATION XVII. HIGHER EDUCATION

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Higher education in the modern sense was first introduced in Persia under the Pahlavis (1925-78) and through a continuing process of reform played a central role in social change in the country.

After a government initiative at the beginning of the 19th century, when Persians were sent abroad to complete their studies, a few modern institutions of higher education were established in Persia: Dār al-fonūn (q.v.) in 1268/1851 and such specialized schools as the faculty of political science (q.v.) in 1317/1899, the Moẓaffarī school of agronomy (see FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE) in 1279/1900, and the Faculty of Law (q.v.) in 1337/1918. Despite insufficient capacity and qualitative shortcomings, they were the building blocks for a new system of higher education. Significantly, these institutions were not limited to the military or narrowly technological features of Western training (Ṭayyeb, pp. 28-40; Menashri, pp. 46-65).

The reign of Reżā Shah (1925-41). Reżā Shah considered a modern system of higher education vital to achieving his goals of nationalization, secularization, and westernization, as well as perpetuation of his dynasty. Through the universities he sought to train a professional class that would help to promote

his policies and the stability and development of the state (Menashri, pp. 123-24; Arasteh, 1963-64, pp. 330-31).

Initially his government, like the Qajar government before it, encouraged aspiring professionals to study abroad, but, while urging them to absorb practical elements of Western culture, he also warned them to reject "harmful" influences and preserve their own national identity (Wilber, p. 135; Menashri, pp. 105-06). In practice, however, the experience of a century showed that students often absorbed Western ideas that were perceived as detrimental to the rulers' aims. Upon their return many adapted to the old realities and learned to work within the existing system, but some were active, at least intermittently, in political opposition, even though many of them had received financial assistance from the state. The shah complained of students "whom we sent abroad with a heart full of hope" that they would return and serve their homeland but who instead "brought us bolshevism in their saddlebags" (Ḥekmat, 1976, pp. 227-28).

In the late 1920s educators like ʿAlī-Akbar Sīāsī, ʿAlī-Aṣḡar Ḥekmat, and ʿĪsā Ṣadīq, who had themselves studied in Europe, argued strongly for the introduction of Western-style education in Persia. No practical steps were taken, however, until the shah had been persuaded. Because of political tendencies among students, the cost of sending them abroad, and the impossibility of sending enough to meet the country's needs, he decided to establish the first university in Persia (Menashri, pp. 144-48).

On 13 March 1934 Ḥekmat introduced in the parliament (Majles) a law establishing "an independent legal entity," that is, a university, in Tehran; the university was to be administratively and financially independent, though under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Education (Wezārat-e maʿāref; art. 7). The term chosen for the new institution was *dānešgāh* (lit., "place of knowledge"). *Jāmeʿ* was rejected because of its religious connotations and *dār al-fonūn* because it implied that only science and technology would be taught.

Tehran University was inaugurated on 4 February 1935. The aim was to provide a campus where all branches of knowledge could be furthered, through research, as well as teaching. The law provided that the university was initially to have six faculties. In four instances existing specialized institutions were incorporated as independent faculties: law, political science, and economics (*ḥoqūq o ʿolūm-e sīāsī* ʾo eqteṣādī); letters (*adabīyāt*); sciences (*ʿolūm*); and medicine (*pezeškī*). In addition, two new faculties, of theology

(*maʿqūl o manqūl*, later *elāhīyāt*) and engineering (*fannī*), were established. The initial challenge was to develop a suitable infrastructure in order to unify these different faculties and to organize teaching and to a lesser degree research in each of them. Initially a French model was adopted: The university consisted of independent faculties with predetermined curricula for each academic year, leaving no room for course selection by students (Ṣadīq, 1347 Š./1968, pp. 374-75).

Of the 1,043 students originally admitted to the university most had previously been enrolled in the component institutions. By 1941 enrollment had almost doubled. The teaching staff consisted mainly of Persian graduates of Western universities. Persian-educated faculty taught mainly law, political science, theology, Arabic, Persian history, geography, and Persian literature. Some foreigners were also engaged, mainly for the schools of medicine and engineering (Menashri, p. 152; Banani, p. 99; Ṣadīq, 1347 Š./1968, p. 372). Despite the language of the law, the nature of the Pahlavi regime imposed considerable limitations on the independence of Tehran University. In fact, it was tightly controlled by the ministry and subject to shifting government policies. This control and uncritical borrowing from French theories and methods "prevented the university from attaining a high academic standing" (Banani, p. 100) and becoming a center of intellectual activity; rather, it promoted intellectual conformity, focused on ideological legitimation and support for the shah (Pahlavi, 1961, p. 242). Owing to these factors, according to the American firm Overseas Consultants, Inc., the university, although successful in producing "a distinguished intellectual elite" and an instrument for manipulating thought and action, "failed to meet the needs of modern Iran" (I, p. 20, II, pp. 82-84). In the very short time remaining of the shah's reign and with insufficient resources, the university failed to reach the masses, among whom religious sentiment continued to eclipse other loyalties. Nevertheless, the quantitative expansion of higher education and its impact upon the elite and emerging middle classes were significant both professionally and politically.

The period of Moḥammad-Reżā Shah (1941-78). Higher education in Persia continued to expand quantitatively through the 1940s and at an accelerated pace for the next three decades (Table 1). Four new colleges were opened, in Tabrīz (1947), Mašhad, Shiraz (both 1949), and Isfahan (1950); all were later upgraded to university status. Despite the shah's uneasiness over political currents among students following the crisis of the early 1950s, three new

universities were opened in the next decade, in Ahvāz (Jondīšāpūr, 1955) and Tehran (Mellī, the first private university, 1960; Āryāmehr, 1966; Wezārat-e āmūzeš, 1356 Š./1977).

In 1967 a new Ministry of Sciences and Higher Education (Wezārat-e ʿolūm o āmūzeš-e ʿālī) was founded, in order to expand facilities for higher education; the noted educator Majīd Rahnemā was the first minister. The ministry opened additional new universities, though demand for places still outstripped capacity. By the mid-1970s they included Āzād Open University in Tehran (opened 1972), Tarbīat-e moʿallem in Tehran, Sepāh-e dāneš in Varāmīn (both 1974), Faraḥ Pahlavī in Tehran and Balūčestān in Zāhedān (both 1975), Bū-ʿAlī Sīnā in Hamadān, Farābī in Tehran, Gīlān in Rašt, Kermān in Kermān, Rāzī in Kermānšāh, and Reżā Šāh Kabīr in Bābolsar (all 1976). Tarbīat-e moʿallem, Faraḥ Pahlavī, and Sepāh-e dāneš were older colleges upgraded to university status. In 1977 the new universities had a combined total of 4,786 students, only 7 percent of total university enrollment (Samii et al., p. 7; cf. Menashri, p. 213).

In the same period the number of four-year and two-year colleges grew rapidly. Eighty-six of the 231 colleges existing in 1976 offered academic degrees, and a few (e.g., ʿElm o ṣanʿat and Dāneškada-ye ṣanʿatī-e polīteknīk, both in Tehran) enjoyed considerable prestige, comparable to university faculties. Many were private institutions, ninety of them in Tehran, which seemed to offer profitable investments in a context of growing demand for education; they remained unattractive to most students, however (Naṣafat, pp. 31-32). Most offered two-year courses and granted associate degrees (*fawq-e dīplom*) in fields like accounting, translation, music, teaching, and social work.

In the 1960s there was an attempt to move away from the French model of university organization to an American model, with course credits, a two-semester calendar, and organization into departments. In practice, however, the two structures were blended.

During the White Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s Moḥammad-Reżā Shah sought to propel Persia to more rapid technological advancement. Three educational progams were emphasized: the literacy corps (see xiii, above, xx, below), a series of systemic reforms (art. 11), and free public schooling (see vii, ix, above). Like his father, the shah saw such programs as both instruments of modernization and sources of support for the monarchy (Pahlavi, 1354-56 Š./1975-77, II, p. 2084). For educators, however, the focus was on students,

rather than on the state; indeed, most Persians viewed education as the best means of securing the future for their children. Such perceptions generated rapidly escalating demand and stimulated an enormous expansion of the school system. They also produced heightened expectations, which the regime found difficult to meet. Despite burgeoning elementary- and secondary-school facilities, only a small, and constantly diminishing, percentage of aspirants to higher education was able to achieve it.

In response to these problems the shah initiated his "educational revolution" in 1967, embodying a shift in emphasis to higher education. Political stability, economic development, and dynastic interest contributed to the advancement of higher education, but the pace was too slow and the level of quality too low to satisfy either popular expectations or the country's needs. Under Reżā Shah most secondary-school graduates had been sent abroad or admitted to Tehran University; the remainder were qualified by their *dīplom*s to obtain white-collar jobs in government, with accompanying status. In the mid-1950s 50 percent of secondary-school graduates went on to Persian universities, but by 1978 only 12 percent found places. In each of the three last years of the shah's rule 250,000-300,000 graduates applied for university places, but, even at their peak, in 1978, admissions did not quite reach 30,000.

Education was an important determinant of status in Persia, yet a rigid social structure limited mobility (Bill, pp. 41-54). The elite sought to ensure the social status of their children by sending them to distinguished institutions of higher education and even for advanced degrees in respected fields. For people who were lower on the social scale higher education was the chief means of achieving status and power, thrown into relief by the persisting high rate of illiteracy in Persia as a whole. For example, all but one of the ministers in the last government of Amīr ʿAbbās Hoveydā held university degrees. Among the members of the last Majles under the Pahlavis 80 percent held degrees, and of them half had Ph.D. or M.D. degrees. Among those listed in the Persian equivalent of *Who's Who* in 1976 three-quarters held university degrees and nearly a third doctorates; almost half had studied in the West. Yet the percentage of university graduates in the total population over twenty years old was only 1.8 for men, 0.5 for women. For a small but growing number of youngsters education was thus the most important single avenue for upward mobility, but the decade between the "educational revolution" and the fall of the shah was not enough time to produce the desired results. "Equal opportunity" was still far in the future (Menashri, pp. 269-81).

Educational planners were aware of the political implications of this situation. At a 1976 conference on education the committee for secondary education warned of deterioration in quality and "youngsters' dissatisfaction," which promoted "tendencies toward rebelliousness" among those who failed to gain university admission (Wezārat-e ʿolūm, 1355 Š./1976). ʿAbbās Ṣafavīān, president of Mellī University, addressed the conference: "We have placed all the youngsters . . . behind a huge dam with a very narrow breach through which only a few can steer their course into the universities" (*Keyhān*, 16 Šahrīvar 1355 Š./7 September 1976). Because of the absence of practical education in secondary schools and the weakness of vocational programs, higher education remained the main path to successful careers. The pent-up frustrations of students to whom this path was closed were among the components of the turbulence that brought down the shah.

Before the formation of the Ministry of Sciences and Higher Education in 1967 educational planning—and to a degree implementation as well—had been divided among several bodies (the Plan and Budget Organization [Sāzmān-e barnāma o būdja], the Ministry of Education, and individual universities), with little coordination among them. Social and economic change in Persia was so rapid that plans quickly became outdated and development took a different course from what had been foreseen. The most important long-term planning body within the ministry was the Institute for Research and Planning in Science and Education (Moʾassasa-ye taḥqīqāt o barnāma-rīzī–e ʿelmī o āmūzešī, created in 1969). In the meantime annual education conferences were to formulate immediate policy, and the Central Council on Education (Šūrā-ye markazī-e āmūzeš) was to devise methods of implementation.

In addition to difficulties in planning for rapid economic and social change, there was also a problem with implementation. For example, under the fourth development plan (1968-73) enrollment in higher education was to grow by 60 percent, reaching 60,000 by 1973. This figure was taken as "desirable," not as a minimum, but in fact in the target year the figure topped 115,000. Moreover, the planners had estimated that by 1973 55 percent of college and university students would be in the sciences, engineering, and technical fields, but the actual figure was around 48 percent. They had also allowed for a total of 56,420 graduates in the entire five-year period; the actual figure was 81,952, with surpluses of 19,000 in the humanities and 8,000 in the sciences but deficits of 8,000 in engineering, 4,600 in agriculture, and 1,100 in medicine. The Royal Institute for Research on Education (Moʾassasa-ye šāhanšāhī-e

taḥqīqāt-e āmūzešī) concluded in a report that the estimates reflected "baseless assumptions," rather than scientific forecasting (Ṭayyeb, pp. 12-14). The Ministry of Sciences and Higher Education was dissolved in 1977, an admission of failure. Responsibility for the educational system was shifted to the Ministry of Education, in order to ensure "comprehensive planning" (*Keyhān*, 18 Mordād 1356 Š./9 August 1977, p. 28), the same justification offered ten years earlier for establishment of the Ministry of Sciences.

In periods of government weakness (e.g., 1941-46, 1951-53, 1961-63, 1977-80) university communities enjoyed brief interludes of greater academic freedom. Most of the time, however, they were under strict government control, and fear, frustration, and insecurity hampered intellectual activity and prevented a Persian cultural revival in a modern mold. The strangling of academic freedom similarly prevented the emergence of a nucleus of liberal intellectuals strong enough to secure greater influence for moderate elements in Persia after the fall of the shah.

Rapid expansion of higher education in an atmosphere of social and economic change militated against amelioration of inherent flaws in the system. It was difficult to focus on improving quality and coordinating education with social and economic realities. As a result, overdependence on government exposed universities to frequent political shifts; the absence of academic freedom forestalled intellectual activity, and indeed research was neglected; and planners generally failed to coordinate the system with the needs of the country.

Nevertheless, despite vehement initial clerical opposition to the new education, it continues to flourish. Under the Pahlavis the *ʿolamāʾ* lost their monopoly over schooling; a new, Western-inspired structure generally replaced traditional *maktab*s at the elementary and secondary levels and overshadowed (but did not quite dislodge) the *madrasa* in higher education. Despite initial hesitation and slow progress, rapid expansion occurred under Persia's "educational revolution." So thoroughly established is the new system of higher education that Islamic revolutionary leaders, while introducing significant changes in style and content, have not sought to uproot it. Education has thus been one of the most important social instruments shaping modern Persia.

For higher education in the postrevolutionary period, see vii, above; xxiv, below.

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