



## ESKANDARĪ, MOḤTARAM

**ESKANDARĪ, MOḤTARAM**, a pioneer advocate of women's rights in Persia (1274-1303 Š./1895-1925; [Figure 1](#)) and the founder and leader of the first women's association in Persia, namely Jam'iyat-e taraqqī-e neswān, later Jam'iyat-e neswān-e waṭankvāh (Society of Patriotic Women). She was born into a liberal family, whose members were actively involved in politics. Her father, Moḥammad-'Alī Mīrzā Khan Qajar, known as Šāzda 'Alī Khan, who taught at Dār al-fonūn (q.v.), paid particular attention to his daughter's education, which included Persian literature and French. She later married her private tutor, Mīrzā 'Alī-Moḥammad Khan Moḥaqqaqī. Moḥtaram often accompanied her father to the Anjoman-e ādamīyat, which was secretly active on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution (q.v.); reportedly, she took part in discussions with the Anjoman's members, such as Mīrzā Ṭāher Tonokābonī (Bāmdād, tr., p. 65). While she was the director of the state school number 5 for girls, her disappointment with the results of the revolution for women led her to establish in 1301 Š./1922 the Jam'iyat-e taraqqī-e neswān, with a well-defined platform to launch and lead a serious campaign for the advancement of women's rights. It had an official organ called *Neswān-e waṭankvāh*, organized conferences and debates, and ran educational classes for adult women (Qawīmī, p. 117). It also daringly brought on stage the play *Ādam o Ḥawwā* (Adam and Eve; Report), the proceeds of which was to fund the classes for adult women. The play was, however, disrupted by the mob. An important activity of the Jam'iyat was to encourage Persians to consume domestic goods in lieu of those imported. Thus tea-houses were exhorted to use raisins instead of sugar, which was an imported commodity, and the Ministry of Education



(Wezārat-e ma‘āref) was persuaded to issue a circular stressing the necessity of wearing at school garments made of cloth produced in the country.

Moḥtaram Eskandarī also took part in collecting and burning in Tehran’s central square copies of a pamphlet called *Makr-e zanān* (Craftiness of women) that she found offensive to women (Bāmdād, tr., p. 64; Interview with Moḥtaram’s nieces). She died at the age of twenty-nine in consequence of an operation performed on a back injury she had suffered in childhood (Bāmdād, p. 46; Qawīmī, p. 118). The society she had founded for the advancement of women in Persia was led by her successor, Mastūra Afšār, at least until 1312 Š./1933. In 1932 this society organized the Congress of Eastern Women (including delegates from Arab countries, Turkey, and Australia) which left an impact on public opinion (Bāmdād, tr., p. 77; interview with Moḥtaram’s nieces). Upon the founding of the Women’s Center (Kānūn-e bānovān) in 1935, many of the society’s members still wishing to be socially active joined the new organization.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Archives of ‘Effat-al-Molūk K̄vājanūrī including: A. membership list of Jam‘īyat-e neswān-e waṭank̄vāh in 1303 Š./1924; B. membership applications of the Jam‘īyat, including one belonging to Moḥtaram, dated 1301 Š./1922; C. the platform (*marām-nāma*), bylaws (*nezām-nāma*), and declarations (*e‘lāmīyas*) of the Jam‘īyat. B. Bāmdād, *Zan-e īrānī az enqelāb-e mašrūṭīyat tā enqelāb-e safīd*, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968; tr. F. R. Bagley as *From Darkness into Light: Women’s Emancipation in Iran*, Hicksville, NY, 1977.

Interviews with Nūr-al-Hodā Mangana, Zīnat Amīn, ‘Effet-al-Molūk K̄vājanūrī, Nozhat-al-Molūk Jahāngīr, and Homā Maḥmūdī, and Moḥtaram’s nieces (daughters of ‘Abbās Eskandarī).

F. Qawīmī, *Kār-nāma-ye zanān-e mašhūr-e Īrān az qabl az Eslām tā ‘aṣr-e ḥāẓer*, Tehran, 1352 Š./1973, pp. 116-18.



Report on Mohtaram Eskandarī by Manūčehr and Zahrā Eskandarī to Ministry of Information (Wezārat-e eṭṭelā'āt), unpublished and undated.