



FEMINIST MOVEMENTS I. INTRODUCTION, II. IN THE LATE QAJAR PERIOD

FEMINIST MOVEMENTS in Persia. The struggle for women's rights that began in the mid-19th century and, more specifically, on the eve of the 1905-09 Constitutional Revolution (q.v.) and continued to the present time has been one of the main forces for democratic change in the 20th century Persia.

i. *Introduction.*

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i. INTRODUCTION

The principle concerns of the women's rights movement in Persia have been equal access to modern education; improvements in health and hygiene; removal of the veil and other changes in traditional gender roles and



household relations; greater employment opportunities for women, specifically in the professional arena; greater participation in different spheres, including women's suffrage and political representation; and changes in marriage and family laws. Many of these goals were generally achieved and maintained with the help of the state, while others became the subject of heated political debates in the past decades.

The women's rights movement in Persia has been influenced by the interplay of adaptive and reactive responses of important social and political forces to modernity in the 20th century. The adaptive secular response to modernity includes the liberal-nationalist orientation of the Constitutionalists, the authoritarian-developmental outlook of the Pahlavi state, and the radical vision of left-wing organizations. Also included in the adaptive response to modernity are the liberal and left-wing religious forces who often have a women's rights agenda similar to their counterparts in the secular camp couched in their own religious and political discourse. While the adaptive response to modernity helped the enhancement of women's rights, the reactive response of religious conservatives and fundamentalists (see FUNDAMENTALISM) has remained the main obstacle to the improvement of women's rights and life conditions in Persia.

Persia of the 20th century saw a number of popular, often small and short-lived, women's rights activities which had been mobilized by liberal and left wing authors, journalists, and political organizations in the 1900s-1920s and again in the 1940s-50s. Engrossed in modern state building, social mobilization, and economic development at the expense of civil society and political participation, the Pahlavi state adopted and implemented programs related to women with minimum participation by independent women's associations. Through these programs, the state prepared the foundation for considerable improvement of women's rights and life conditions in the 1960-70s, including development in women's education, equal employment opportunities, welfare programs, family protection law, and grant of suffrage to women. All these, however, were realized without much grass roots participation by women's associations and popular political organizations, a factor which had important reverberations and implications for the long-term survival of these reforms under new circumstances and a different regime. Nevertheless, the preservation and enhancement of women's rights in certain spheres which had become established in the Pahlavi period also became part of the agenda of women's struggles in the postrevolutionary Persia of the



1980s-90s.

(EIr.)

ii. IN THE LATE QAJAR PERIOD

The history of the women's rights movement in Qajar Persia was intimately linked to other social, religious and intellectual movements of the era such as liberalism, nationalism, social democracy, and Babism (q.v.). An early manifestation of feminism took place in June 1848 in Badašt, a village on the border of Māzandarān and Khorasan, where Qorrat-al-'Ayn (1814-1852), the outspoken Babi woman leader, removed her veil before a bewildered audience. European liberal ideas, as well as social reforms taking place in Turkey, Transcaucasia, Egypt, and India, also influenced late 19th century intellectuals who condemned the practices of veiling and other forms of women's oppression. Mīrzā Fath-'Alī Akūndzāda (q.v.; 1812-1878), noted for both his polemical writings and plays, spoke of the need for women's education and an end to polygamy. Mīrzā Yūsof Khan Āštiānī E'tešāmī, E'tešām-al-Molk (q.v.; 1874-1938), editor of *Bahār* (q.v.) in Tabrīz, translated *Tahrīr al-mar'a*, the classic work of the Egyptian reformist Qāsem Amīn, into Persian as *Tarbīat-e neswān* (Tabrīz, 1900). Bibī Kānom Astarābādī (1858-1920) wrote *Ma'āyeb al-rejāl* (Vices of men), the most extensive feminist text to have survived from this period. Written in the style of advice manuals (*andarz-nāmas*), it was a response to *Ta'dīb al-neswān*, an earlier treatise by an anonymous Qajar aristocrat. Bibī Kānom penned an angry denunciation of contemporary educated men with a double standard. She pointed out that these men wrote admiringly of the relative freedom enjoyed by urban middle class European women, while at the same time they upheld traditional patriarchal relations at home. Persian journals published abroad, including *Aktar* (q.v.; published in Istanbul), *Ḥabl al-matīn* (q.v.; published in Calcutta), as well as *Torayyā* and *Parvareš* (published in Egypt), devoted editorials and articles to women's education and advocated their greater participation in society.

The Qajar era provided several examples of powerful women who influenced court politics through sheer force of character and connections with the royal harem. Among them were Mahd-e 'Olyā, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's mother, and Fakr-al-Dawla, Mozzafar-al-Dīn Shah's daughter (and wife of Amīn-al-Dawla), who later reportedly won even Rezā Shah's grudging admiration for her



entrepreneurial skills. The activities of these women often stemmed from personal and family motivations. An early incident of nationalist protest occurred during the episode of the Tobacco Régie when royal women in the harem of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah joined the tobacco boycott and, much to the shah's chagrin, refused to smoke. During the Constitutional Revolution of 1324-29/1906-11 (q.v.), women's participation in the nationalist movement developed a mass character and eventually addressed concerns specific to women.

Women joined the boycott of foreign textiles and contributed to the national bank project (Kasrawī, 1978; Nāhīd). Constitutionalist men, who spoke against autocracy, poverty, lawlessness, and immorality, appealed to the collective sense of honor among men in urging them to join the movement and protect women. The Tiflis-based social democratic journal, *Mollā Naṣr-al-Dīn* (Browne, *Press and Poetry*, p. 16) written in Azeri Turkish, and many leading Persian social democrats associated with the *Ejtemā'iyūn-e 'āmmīyūn* (q.v.), became vocal advocates of women's rights, raising the debate to a new level. Soon activist women, many from the upper classes, began specifically to address women's concerns. Despite their small numbers, they organized themselves into societies and *anjomans* and established new girls schools, adult education classes, health clinics, and orphanages. Meanwhile the new government refused to extend suffrage to women in the electoral laws of September 1906. The issue of women's *anjomans* was debated in the First Majles, with the support of men such as the social democrat Sayyed Ḥasan Taqīzāda, Ḥājj Shaikh Tāqī, and Wakīl-al-Ra'āyā who publicly called for women's suffrage in the Second Majles in the summer of 1911. Women's organizations were permitted to continue their activities, though they received no other backing from the Majles. Between August 1906 and April 1910, fifty girls schools were opened in Tehran and a women's congress on education had taken place. All these schools relied on private contributions and none received government funding (Afary, 1996, pp. 182-83). Bibī Kānom Astarābādī opened one of the first elementary schools for Muslim girls, *Dabestān-e dušīzagān* (Tarqī and Najmābādī, 1995, p. 2). In 1907, the *Anjoman-e āzādī-e zanān* (also known as *Anjoman-e ḥorriyat-e zanān*, or Association for the Freedom of Women) included in its ranks two daughters of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah, Tāj-al-Salṭana and Efteḵār-al-Salṭana. Mary Park Jordan and her colleague Annie Stocking Boyce, two American Presbyterian missionaries, also participated in this association. *Anjoman-e moḳaddarāt-e waṭan* (Association of the Ladies of the Homeland), formed in 1910, included wives, mothers, and daughters of many prominent



constitutionalists (Bāmdād, 1977, p. 34). Şadīqa Dawlatābādī (q.v.), whose father was the leader of the Azalī Babi community of Persia, was both a member of the Association for the Freedom of Women, and the Association of the Ladies of the Homeland. She became a leading feminist during Reżā Shah's era (see ii. below). A few other notable women should be mentioned, such as the Armenian educator Malekiān, Dorrat-al-Ma'ālī (q.v.), Homā Maḥmūdī, Māhroḳ Gowharšenās (1872-1938), Şams-al-Molūk Jawāher-kalām, Ṭübā Azmūda (1878-1936), Āgā Beygom Najmābādī, Şafīya Yazdī, and the wives of such prominent constitutionalists as Malek-al-Motakallemīn and Ep'rem Khan (q.v.; Bāmdād, 1977, p. 34; Qawīmī, p. 178; Şayḳ-al-Eslāmī, pp. 88-99).

Almost immediately, conservative members of the 'olamā' began to oppose the educational reform movement. Shaikh Fażl-Allāh Nūrī and Sayyed 'Alī Şūštārī issued a *fatwā* (q.v.) against girls schools (Qawīmī, p. 132). The young students and their teachers were often physically attacked on the streets and accused of immoral behavior. Activist women responded by publishing letters of protest in major newspapers and by denouncing conservative clerics. They quoted religious texts that called for women's equal treatment, appealed to male constitutionalists' sense of honor and shame, and cited statistics related to women's education in Japan, China, and Europe. They also spent their dowry and inheritance money to further their cause, and even used their connections in the royal harem (Shuster, pp. 193-97; Afary, 1996, pp. 178-90). Among their male supporters were 'Alī-Akbar Dehḳoda (q.v.) who used his biting satire to mock superstition and patriarchal traditions in *Şūr-e Esrāfil* (1907-9); Īraj Mīrzā (q.v.), who derided the veil in a bawdy, satirical poem; and Majles representative Wakīl-al-Ra'āyā. Editors of other journals such as *Mosāwāt* (1907-9), *Ḥabl al-matīn*, and *Īrān-e now* (q.v.; 1909-11) also encouraged women to write letters, and devoted editorials to the subject. Of particular interest are the essays by Ṭāyera 'Eşmat Ṭehrānī (1869-1911), published in 1909 in the social democratic *Īrān-e now*. Ṭāyera was a Bahai woman writer and a leading advocate of women's rights, who had suffered much abuse at the hands of her husband because of her conversion to the Baha'i faith. Two women's journals, *Dāneş* (q.v., 1910-11) edited by a female oculist Dr. Kaḥḥāl (daughter of Mīrzā Moḥammad Ḥakīm-bāşī Jadīd-al-Eslām), wife of Ḥosayn Khan Kaḥḥāl (*Dāneş*, no. 1, p. 2, and *Dāneş* no. 2, p. 8), and *Şekūfa* (1912-17), edited by Maryam ('Amīd) Mozayyan-al-Salṭana, appeared in this period. Both focused on health, hygiene, family concerns, and domestic life. Women's activities continued after the closing of the Majles in 1911. Tāj-al-Salṭana (1884-1936) revealed many intimate details of her life in her memoirs *Kāterāt-e Tāj-al-Salṭana*.



Other women continued to publish newspapers and organize women's associations, despite vehement opposition by conservative clerics. Šadiqa Dawlatābādī's *Zabān-e zanān* (1919) in Isfahan, Šahrzād Āzād's *Nāma-ye bānovān* in Tehran and Āfāq Pārsā's *Jahān-e zanān* in Mašhad were all forcibly closed down in 1920. *Ālam-e neswān*, founded in 1920 lasted through the early 1930s because it was published by graduates of the American Girls School and was backed by the Presbyterian missionary Annie Stocking Boyce. Communist and other left-wing intellectuals would also play a crucial role during the 1920s in advocating for unveiling and women's economic independence. Among them were the poets M oḡammad-Rezā 'Ešqī (q.v.; 1839-1924) whose poem "Kafan-e Sīāh" (The Black shroud) called for "death to the men who bury women alive" and Abu'l-Qāsem Lāhūti (1882-1953). Women's organizations such as Jam'iyat-e neswān-e waṭankvāh (1922) in Tehran, founded by Moḡtaram Eskandarī (q.v.; 1895-1925) and Peyk-e sa'ādat-e neswān (1927), in Rašt combined leftist politics with demands for women's rights. These grassroots activities were halted in the early 1930s as Rezā Shah co-opted the women's rights movement and banned all independent organizations.

Plate I. Membership card in the Jam'iat-e taraqqī-e neswān (which later became the Jam'iyat-e neswān-e waṭankvāh #155;h), with signature of Moḡtaram Eskandarī (q.v.), dated 3 Dālv 1301/ 23 January 1923. Courtesy of Mehrangīz Dawlatšāhī.

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