



TĀJ-AL-SALTĀNA

TĀJ-al-SALTĀNA (b. 5 or 6 Rabi' II 1301/ 3 or 4 February 1884 in Tehran; d. probably 1936 in Tehran), one of the daughters of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96) and the author of memoirs (*kāterāt*) which have raised much controversy since their first partial publication in 1969 (FIGURE 1).

The Memoirs. Tāj-al-Saltāna is one of the best known daughters of the Qajar king, largely because of what we have come to learn about her life through her *Ḳāterāt*. The controversy about their authenticity defines the ways in which we could (or could not) use the memoirs as a source about the princess' life.

Shortly after the publication of selections from Tāj-al-Saltāna's memoirs (*Kāzemiya*), Ebrāhim Ṣafā'i suggested that the work could not be but a malicious fabrication ("moğrežāna o sākṭegi," p. 682). He disagreed with Tāj-al-Saltāna's attribution of her father's assassination as instigated by the court minister [Amin-al-Solṭān](#) (d. 1882-83), and argued that (1) Tāj-al-Saltāna was too young at the time of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah's assassination to have any notion of what was going on around her; (2) her education was too rudimentary to enable her to narrate in such a prose; and (3) the style of her writing was closer to contemporary times than to the presumed time of its writing. Abbas Amanat's introductory essay in the memoirs' English translation is by far the most extensive socio-cultural reading and historical contextualization of the memoirs to date, and he fully elaborates on the life and education of Tāj-al-Saltāna to lay to rest these issues. More recently Iraj Afshar (2001; 2004) and Sirius Sa'dvandiān (2001) have nonetheless cast doubt on the memoirs' authenticity on the basis of internal inconsistencies.



Some of the internal consistencies relate to attempts at dating the time of the memoirs' writing from internal evidence. These may indicate that the work, which is only preserved in an incomplete copy (Kāẓemiya, p. 340; cf. *Kāẓerāt*, p. xvi; tr., pp. 335-36), was written over a period of time, though the cases of internal inconsistency are no more, in depth or breath, than those which are documented in several other Qajar memoirs, whose authenticity is not challenged. One possible ground for the heightened suspicion with which these memoirs have been scrutinized may be indeed the tone of Tāj-al-Salṭana's prose because her "memoirs are unusually self-revealing" (Amanat, p. 12). The princess "stands out for having crossed the formidable barriers of self-censorship" (ibid.), and her prose combines "the candid language of the womenfolk, the cultivated as well as the common" (ibid.) with that which she had learned from European romanticism. Both in style and content, her memoirs stand apart from other Qajar memoirs. This, however, may have to do more with the gender of their author, as so far Tāj-al-Salṭana is the only royal woman whose memoirs have come to light. Since women's reshaping of their writing interests and style took a distinct route compared to those of modernist men, it is not possible to judge the authenticity of Tāj-al-Salṭana's memoirs based on her style or self-representation until other memoirs by women from this period become available.

Early Childhood. Tāj-al-Salṭana's mother was the princess Maryam Turān-al-Salṭana, a daughter of Solaymān Khan Qājār Mo'tazed-al-Dawla ('Ayn-al-Salṭana, III, p. 2010). Her early years were shaped through the practices of the royal *andarun*. The girl's care was entrusted to a wet-nurse (*dāya*), a governess (*dada*), and a tutor (*lala*), and she was separated from her mother whom she saw twice a day. Whenever her father was in Tehran, she was taken to visit him, usually once a day. In 1914, when Tāj-al-Salṭana was writing her memoirs, she is bitter and critical of her early childhood (*Kāẓerāt*, pp. 7-10; tr., pp. 109-16; cf. Amanat, pp. 14-45). The dominant discourse on modern childrearing focused on the importance of mothers for the proper upbringing of children, including the importance of breast-feeding one's own children. The reformist press, such as the monthly *Bahār* and, more critically, the burgeoning women's press, such as *Dāneš*, *Šokufa*, and *Zabān-e zanān*, regularly ran articles about new child-rearing concepts. Tāj-al-Salṭana was clearly familiar with these writings, in which it was argued over and over again why women should take care of their own infants and how for the physical and emotional health of their children, as well as for the sake of bringing up modern patriotic citizens, old habits of entrusting infants to wet-

nurses and others should be replaced by scientific mothering practices (Najmabadi, 1998). Sections of her memoirs echo articles published in *Irān-e now* and *Bahār* on these topics (*Kāṭerāt*, pp. 10-11, 16, 22, 100-102; tr. pp. 115-18, 125-27, 137-40, 288-94).

At the age of seven Tāj-al-Saltāna began a rudimentary education in the royal school, but it was cut short by her betrothal in 1893 (*Kāṭerāt*, pp. 26-29; tr. pp. 147-52). In later years she had private tutors, several of whom she discusses at some length in the memoirs (*Kāṭerāt*, pp. 6, 109; tr. pp. 108-9, 308-9). Her familiarity with Persian and European literature and history is indicated through the style of her prose and the contents of her memoirs. She also learnt to play the piano and the *tār*, as well as painting and embroidery (*Kāṭerāt*, pp. 12, 80, 92; tr. 120, 250, 274).

The First Marriage. Several attempts were made to arrange Tāj-al-Saltāna's marriage at the age of eight (*Kāṭerāt*, pp. 22-25, tr. pp. 138-43). Some she resisted, others did not work out. She mentions that for many years Ġolam-ʿAli Khan ʿAziz-al-Solṭān (1879-1940), her father's favorite 'adopted' boy was infatuated with her (*Kāṭerāt*, pp. 29-31, 36-41, 42-43, tr. pp. 152-53, 163-73, 174-76) and that his infatuation continued even after he had been married to her sister Akṭar-al-Dawla, an older daughter of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah. In his own memoirs ʿAziz-al-Solṭān reports many details about Tāj-al-Saltāna, such as her visits to his wife, her divorces, and re-marriages. Though he paid much attention to her life, even in these later years, there is not any indication of an actual affair.

In early 1893, at the age of nine, she was betrothed (*širini kuvrān*) to Ḥasan Khan Sardār Šojāʿ-al-Saltāna (*Ayn-al-Saltāna*, I, p. 511), and in December of that year the wedding contract (*ʿaqd*) was signed (*Eʿtemad al-Saltāna*, p. 1053). The groom was almost as young as the bride, "perhaps eleven or twelve years of age," as a contemporary source put it (*Ayn-al-Saltāna*, I, p. 511). The couple did not celebrate their wedding (*ʿarusi*) until 1897, a year after Nāṣer-al-Din Shah's assassination, when Tāj-al-Saltāna was thirteen years old (*Afzal-al-Molk*, pp. 74-75). The recently published travelogue of an anonymous woman (*Ruz-nāma-ye safar-nāma-ye ḥājj*) corroborates some details in Tāj-al-Saltāna's memoirs, such as the betrothal ceremony and the signing of the wedding contract. On her return from the holy cities in Iraq the woman pilgrim stayed from mid-December 1893 until late June 1894 in Tehran, and her rich narrative of women's lives at the royal court corresponds with Tāj-al-Saltāna's descriptions of the *andarun* practices.



All marriages of royal women, as Tāj-al-Salṭana (*Kāṭerāt*, p. 28; tr. pp. 148-40) herself bitterly reflects, were a ‘trade’ in royal women. The benefits of a royal marriage would ensure the loyalty of an influential man—her father-in-law Sardār Akram was from an old military family—as well as that of his entourage. Nevertheless, at the time Tāj-al-Salṭana (*Kāṭerāt*, p. 73; tr. p. 237) looked forward to her marriage largely as a means of leaving her sequestered life and gaining the relative autonomy of a married woman. After her father’s assassination all royal wives with children had been moved to Sarvestān, the residence of Sorur-al-Dawla, the mother of Kāmṛān Mirzā Nā’eb-al-Salṭana (1855-1927), and there Tāj-al-Salṭana felt almost like a prisoner.

Tāj al-Salṭana’s reflections on her first marriage are expressive of the reformist discourse on marriage (*Kāṭerāt*, pp. 99-102; tr. pp. 286-292) during the 1910s. She argues for a marriage based on love and understood as the commitment to a life-long monogamous companionship, while strongly criticizing arranged marriages, especially if the couple’s well-being is not taken into consideration. She remembers that in her early years of marriage she and her husband were both young adolescents who played childhood games, and yet she remains deeply resentful of her husband’s neglect, which began almost immediately after their wedding night. Ḥasan Khan, like most men of Qajar elite families, took many other lovers, male and female, and Tāj-al-Salṭana (*Kāṭerāt*, pp. 84-85; pp. 256-58) explains her own flirtatious relations and amorous affairs as revenge against her husband’s neglect and infidelity (Mahdavi). Most famous among the men she mentioned in her memoirs is the poet and musician ‘Aref Qazvini (ca. 1882-1934).

Like many women of her generation and thereafter, Tāj-al-Salṭana’s expectation of her marriage was adjusted to accommodating her husband’s sexual liaisons and taking comfort in her children and in her intimate bonds with sisters and friends. In her memoirs (*Kāṭerāt*, pp. 90, 92; tr. pp. 268, 273) she records three surviving children, two daughters and a son, while another son died as an infant. But she also mentions a dangerous abortion, which she underwent after she became aware of her husband’s venereal disease, gonorrhoea or more likely syphilis (*Kāṭerāt*, p. 105; tr. p. 300; cf. Amanat, p. 49). Ironically, she observes, the ensuing damage, both physical and emotional, was diagnosed as hysteria, a diagnosis that granted her the freedom to leave her house and go sight-seeing (*Kāṭerāt*, p. 105: “aṭebbā’ marā gardeš tajwiz kardand. ... az dawlat-e marž ‘histeri’ mā az kāna-nešini o ḥabsi yek andāza āzād šoda budim;” tr., p. 301: “Doctors prescribed going outdoors for airings. ...

by virtue of the malady of ‘hysteria,’ I obtained some relief from confinement to the house”). In later years, along with several of her sisters, Tāj-al-Saltāna became active in the era’s constitutional and feminist activities. She also shared her contemporaries’ interest in Europe, and wrote in her memoirs “I madly desired to go to Europe” (*Kāṭerāt*, p. 110: “man divānavār mayl-e raftan Orupā-rā dāštam;” tr., p. 310). But unlike some of the royal women, such as her sister Aḳtar-al-Dawla and Malaka-ye Irān, the wife of Ṣahir-al-Dawla, she never traveled to Europe. When she was writing her memoirs in 1914, she had attempted suicide three times (*Kāṭerāt*, p. 109; tr. p. 308).

Divorce and Remarriage. The rocky first marriage eventually ended in divorce in December 1907 (‘Aziz al-Solṭān, II, p. 1086). Tāj-al-Saltāna does not discuss any subsequent marriages in her memoirs, but, as already mentioned, its manuscript is incomplete. Her free socializing with men and her romantic, if not sexually involved, affairs gave her the reputation of a ‘loose woman’ (e.g., she is considered a *fāḥeša*, lit. prostitute, by ‘Ayn-al-Saltāna, III, p. 2322; IV, p. 2805).

In March 1908, Tāj-al-Saltāna’s married Qullār-Āqābāši (‘Aziz-al-Solṭān, II, p. 1180; ‘Ayn-al-Saltāna, III, p. 2010), a nephew of Ḥosayn Pāšā Khan Amir Bahādor Jang (ca. 1855-ca. 1918; see [BAHĀDOR JANG](#)). The marriage lasted only a few months, and she was divorced in July 1908 (‘Aziz-al-Solṭān, II, p. 1250). Amir Bahādor had been very angered by the marriage, and pressured his nephew into the divorce (‘Ayn-al-Saltāna, III, p. 2201) because he had been told that women active in the Women’s Association (*Anjoman-e nesvān* or *Anjoman-e ḥorriyat-e nesvān*) had arranged this marriage. Tāj-al-Saltāna, together with several other royal women, was a member of this organization, which was one of the many women’s associations of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11 (‘Ayn-al-Saltāna, III, p. 2009; cf. Bāmdād, II, pp. 7-12).

In 1909, Tāj al-Saltāna married Rokn-al-Saltāna (‘Ayn al-Saltāna, IV, p. 2805), but we do not know what became of this marriage. In 1921 she describes herself as a single, unmarried woman (Sa’dvaniān, p. 199). Her memoirs reveal a deeply unhappy life until 1914, and the series of letters that she wrote to various prime ministers in the early 1920s to have her pension reinstated suggests that she faced financial hardships (Sa’dvaniān). In 1922 she accompanied one of her daughters to Baghdad where her son-in-law, Aḥmad Jalā’i Kaṭir, an employee of the Foreign Ministry, had been assigned to consular services. She died in obscurity, probably in Tehran in 1936. Sirius Sa’dvaniān is currently working on a detailed study that may shed more light



on Tāj-al-Salṭana's life and writings.

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