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A BIOGRAPHY OF DR. FARROUKHROU PARSAZ: AN ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EDUCATION IN IRAN

The American University

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A BIOGRAPHY OF DR. FARROUKHROU PARSAY: AN ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EDUCATION IN IRAN

By

Fahimeh Mortazavi

submitted to the

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The Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Counseling and Student Development

Signatures of Committee:
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A BIOGRAPHY OF DR. FARROUKHROU PARSAZ: AN ADVOCATE
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ABSTRACT

The history of women in Iran, their status in society, and their role in education was insignificant before the late 1800s. Only a very few and women who were members of the highest economic strata were able to break out of the mold in which society placed them.

As the economic conditions in Iran began to change and trade with foreign countries expanded, so did the opportunities for women. A need for a larger, skilled work force provided the first impetus for women to enter into education and the work force. This economic expansion beginning in the 1890s and continuing until 1978 led to expanding educational opportunities for women. The women's role in modern education was initially nominal, but as wealth in Iran increased along with the driving efforts of a few select persons, so did the number of women in education. Once educated, the women became equipped to participate in the political process. By the late 1970s, although inequality still existed, women had been
integrated into all levels of the political process, except kingship.

The key feature of this study is the examination of these events in the form of a biography. The person chosen, Dr. Farroukhrou Parsay, represented the emergence of education and women. Throughout her life, she held positions at all levels of the educational system, from teacher to the Minister of Education in the Cabinet of Iran. She also retained positions in the women's movement, from the lowest grass-roots level to the president of several of the most prominent women's societies in Iran in the twentieth century.

This study is unique because it documents information regarding the role of women in society and their education that has not been documented before. It draws on information gained through many interviews with persons who were actively involved in education and women's rights during Dr. Parsay's life. This study is a historical examination of the emergence of women and education in Iran from a perspective that has not before been documented: from a biography of Dr. Parsay, the first woman ever to achieve a Ministerial post in the Cabinet of Iran.
This dissertation examines the life of Dr. Farroukhrou Parsay (1922-1980), the Minister of Education in Iran in the late Pahlavi dynasty, in the context of the development of education and women's rights in Iran. Her biography was chosen because her life mirrors the progress and achievements of education and women in a country that has been traditionally male dominated. Mrs. Parsay was the first woman ever to ascend to the position of Minister in Iran. Her rise to this post was demonstrative of a new chapter in Iranian women's struggle for freedom and emancipation that began at the turn of the twentieth century and was halted abruptly with her execution in post-revolutionary Iran.

Undoubtedly, the subject matter of this dissertation can be probed in a variety of ways from different perspectives depending on one's disciplinary and ideological interests. I found it useful and practical to study it from the historical point of view, and my objective was to include and evaluate the most relevant issues in the context of this dissertation. However, I do not claim to have covered all the relevant issues concerning
Dr. Parsay's biography, as many of them fall outside the scope of this dissertation.

Very few studies have been undertaken on the women's movement and education in Iran in the twentieth century. This paper documents an era of educational and social history in the context of Dr. Parsay's life that otherwise might have not been possible, given the fact that most of the remaining information is resident only in the minds of those who lived during this time period. Considering that most of the sources available are in Iran, it was extremely difficult to gain access to reliable information and gather data. I obtained my data mostly through literature research, family documents, and personal interviews; over fifty persons were interviewed. Most of the interviewees who held high positions within the Shah's administration wished to remain anonymous for reasons of either personal or official secrecy. Therefore, in this paper many declarations are made that are attributed to unidentified sources. All those documents and interviews that were in Farsi were translated by the author.

In completing this research, I owe much to many individuals. First, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Bernard Hodinko, who as chairman of my committee and advisor was always available and supportive. I also wish to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Carmen Neuberger, Dr. Roberta Rubenstein,
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This project would have been impossible without the assistance and cooperation of the individuals who gave generously of themselves for personal interviews to provide me with information.

I am especially indebted for the encouragement, advice, and motivating confidence of Dr. Zari Mayville. I am grateful to my friend Mr. Paul Cooke, without whose direction and editing this dissertation could not have been produced.

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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION AND WOMEN IN IRAN

Introduction

It is unique that in a country which is in many ways diverse (ethnic composition) and also coherent (religion) that the national level educational system has been a prominent part and parcel of the cultural backdrop of the society for the last 2,500 years. Education is tied to, among other things, religion and politics and cannot be studied in isolation. The impact of social forces—political, religious, economic, industrial, domestic, national, and international—upon educational policies and practices is significant and ought to be given consideration. As a social institution, the Iranian educational system has served the society out of which it has sprung; it reflects the nature, philosophy, and the direction of the social system surrounding it. As a function of the state in modern times, education reflects through its aims, purposes, contents, and methods, the character of the
political system of the country and the social forces that
give rise to that political system.¹

Iran is a country in southwest Asia stretching
north and south between the Caspian Sea and the Persian
Gulf and east and west from Afghanistan and Pakistan to
Iraq and Turkey. Its former name was Persia.² The country
covers 1.65 million km² and a border that stretches over
5,300 km. Fifty-one percent of the country is desert,
waste, or urban, while 30 percent is arable, 16 percent
being irrigated. Eleven percent of the country is covered
by forest, and the remainder is semi-arid. As of 1984,
there were 48.83 million people living in Iran (Given the
Iran-Iraq war, this estimate probably still remains good
for 1986). Of that 48.83 million, 93 percent are Shia
Moslems, and 5 percent Sunni Moslems; the remaining 2
percent are Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i.³

The population of Iran is made up of several
different ethnic groups. Persians make up the majority
with 63 percent, 18 percent are Turkic, 13 percent are from

¹E. Mashari, "Dependency and Education: An Analysis
of the Development of Iranian Education Since World War II"

²Ali A. Paydarfar, Social Changes in the Southern
Province of Iran (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University

³All statistics up to this point were derived from:
Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook 1984 (unclassi­
1985).
lesser tribes (Bakhtiaris, Lurs, Baluchis, etc.), and 6 percent are Kurdish or Arabic. The people are dominantly rural: 70 percent live outside urban and industrial centers, and 10 percent are nomadic. Only 20 percent reside in cities.

For centuries, influential Iranians favored the Shia sect of Islam and for four and a half centuries it has been the state religion (as it is today). Religion is the very essence of life in Iran. All law in present-day Iran is based on the Islamic holy book, the Koran. Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian state, is not President but rather "Guardian Jurisprudent." Three out of every four of the highest governmental leaders are members of the clergy.

Modern Iran is basically an outgrowth of the impact of the West on the traditional society of Iran. This contact dates back several centuries. As late as the

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4Ibid.


6The concept of Guardian Jurisprudent is unique to Islam. It means that omnipotent and divine power is bestowed upon a single individual to benevolently guide the Islamic community. The person has power to create and dissolve governments, create and veto any law, and guide the society in religious tradition.

fourteenth century, this contact remained on equal ground; neither the West nor Iran wanted or had the ability to influence each other on the matters of religion, politics, or customs. In the more recent centuries, however, the new world order was shaped in Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution and began to influence the society and politics of Iran. Russia, in the nineteenth century, with strong imperial drives for expansion beyond their frontiers, transformed the pattern and the nature of Iran-West relationships.

Russian pressure on Iran forced the Iranians onto the defensive. This brought about increasing foreign influence in Iran in the midst of Anglo-Russian great power rivalry in the Near East and South Asia.

A glance at Iran's long history of education reveals that the constantly shifting balance of politics and religion has always influenced the educational practices during any given era during the last 2,500 years of Iranian history. The educational system is derived from and reflects the kind and amount of control the political system imposes on society. In a totalitarian state where the power is centralized, the educational system tends to be operated directly or indirectly by the

\[^{Sadiq Issakhan, Modern Persia and Her Educational System (New York: Columbia University, 1931), pp. 32-33.}\]
government; achievement of the State's goals is the educator's objective.

On the other hand, within a democratic society, where power is decentralized, the educational system is less responsive to the demands of the State and is much more apt to influence the course of history on its own. Yet both the totalitarian and democratic systems, even though they differ in the extent of academic freedom allowed (for the most part), serve the society in which they exist.\(^9\)

"It is axiomatic that the range and nature of education in a nation emerges from its history, basic philosophy, and commitments.\(^{10}\) Iran, having twenty-five hundred years of written history and being located in one of the strategic zones of the world, which has been witness to numerous diverse cultural invasions, was the first country to recognize human rights and promote the institution of education. The interplay of human rights and, at times tumultuous, politico-socio-religious history on the development of education has created an educational history that is unique and worthy of intensive study.

\(^{9}\)Mashari, p. 1.

This study, using as a medium the biography of Dr. Farroukhrou Parsay, the first woman to serve in the Iranian Cabinet as Minister of Education, will explore the role of women and education in Iran. Specifically, it will analyze the social mores and women's roles as they related to the evolutionary changes in the educational system in Iran between 1922 and 1980.

In May 1980, Dr. Esfand Farroukhrou Parsay was executed after a trial at which no defense attorney was permitted, no appeal possible, and the defendant had been officially declared guilty of all charges before the proceedings began. She was charged with "expansion of prostitution, corruption on earth, and warring against God." Aware of the hopelessness of her case, she delivered a reasoned, courageous defense of her career decisions, among them a directive to free female school children from having to wear a veil and the establishment of a commission for revising textbooks to present a non-sexist image of women. Three days after sentence was pronounced, she was wrapped in a burlap sack and shot to death.


12"Parsay and Ansary Trial Goes to Deliberation," Ete-la-at, 5 May 1980.
Dr. Parsay, whose mother had been exiled for her position on women's rights and her opposition to the veil, was a medical doctor but chose to serve as a teacher and a principal in a school. She was elected to Parliament in 1964, became the first woman to serve as an Undersecretary in the Iranian Cabinet and was appointed to be the Minister of Education in 1968. At the time of her death she was sixty-eight years old and had been retired four years.\(^{13}\)

In order to fully appreciate the significance of women's roles and achievements in Iran in modern times, it is crucial to understand the historical background of Iranian education and women's participation in the evolution of that system from its earliest days to the present. It is also necessary to review and analyze the factors that played a significant role in male Iranian perceptions of the proper role for women and the women's perception of their own role in society. The study of the literature indicates that there were three major factors: religion, education, and politics, that contributed to the women's movement and the consequent change in status for women in Iran.

This chapter includes a historical overview of the Iranian educational system and the role of women in the society. Divided into four major areas, this background

\(^{13}\)There are several published dates of birth. The most used is 1922. See chapter III for more information.
will provide a framework in which to understand the life of Dr. Parsay: (1) Education and Women in Pre-Islamic Iran; (2) Education and Women in the Islamic Period; (3) Education and Women in the nineteenth century; and (4) Education and Women in twentieth century Iran.

**Education and Women in Pre-Islamic Iran**

Flourishing education and instruction were a significant feature in the society of ancient Iran. Education's goals of socialization, personal development, and training have been rooted in Iranian culture from the earliest days down to the present. The fabric of society was ingrained with a deep-seated sense of responsibility for the education of its children; both the public and private sectors of education worked in complementary fashion to raise literacy and knowledge. This cohesiveness tended to create patterns of good citizenship and produced young Iranians who were considered by their elders to be moral, patriotic, and upstanding. The process of education was respected at all levels of the social strata, because its final aim was to build a nation and a great civilization. The children and young adults (both men and women) were considered a vital part of society, and their parents

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as well as the surrounding community formally and informally participated in the educational process.

The Mudds, until the seventh century B.C., were the first people who ruled over the area of what is present-day Iran. Their reign continued until the rise of Cyrus the Great. Several Greek historians have stated that women in that period enjoyed a number of legal and social freedoms and were held in high esteem by the Persians. These rights seem to have been continued during the Hakhamaneshian Dynasty established by Cyrus. A Greek historian has written that Persian women fought alongside men in the battlefields and participated equally in social affairs.

Persian society was formed on religious principles, and its education was based on religious traditions. The Zoroastrian religion and Avesta scriptures (the Zoroastrian equivalent of the Bible) laid the foundation of the Persian educational system. The basic aim of education, as


\[16\text{Pari Shaikhulislami, Zanan Ruznamehnegar va Andishmand Iran (Tehran: The Women Journalists and Intellectuals, 1972), p. 63.}\]

\[17\text{Sadiq, p. 32.}\]
proscribed by the Avesta, was "a synthesis of piety with healthy and useful citizenship."18

There were three places for educating the youth. First the square next to the Royal Palace was used for the sons of nobility and the affluent. Second, the schools of the provincial towns were close to the governor's house and were primarily for the children of the well-to-do government officials and businessmen. Finally, in other towns, public buildings were used for schools for those who could afford to attend. The schools were always geographically separated from the business districts to keep the students away from the corruption of city life.19

The children remained under their mother's care until the age of five. From the age of five to sixteen, they received formal instruction provided by the state. During this period of formal education, the child received instruction in reading, writing, and good habits such as honesty, piety, and sportsmanship. From the age of sixteen, the students received ten more years of training in statesmanship. At the age of twenty-five or twenty-six, the men began their military training, and hence, were prepared to begin working in an official capacity for the


19 Ibid., pp. 46-47.
government or serve the empire on the battlefield.\textsuperscript{20} The young child's education was essentially the responsibility of the parents. However, as the child grew older, sources other than family contributed to his development. Religious instructions were provided by Zoroastrian priests, and sportsmanship, military training, and statesmanship were provided by the state.\textsuperscript{21}

The curriculum consisted of religious and practical training at the elementary level. The secondary and higher education curriculum consisted of subjects such as physical training, law, medicine, arithmetic, geography, music, and astronomy.\textsuperscript{22}

Women were ruled by men, who set the standards of propriety for women's behavior and role in society. This male dominance of women was symbolized by women's seclusion and wearing of the veil. Seclusion was enforced outside the home, to ensure the separation of the world of men and women. Social practices of the separation of men and women at social gatherings, at meal time, and during religious ceremonies were evidence of the exclusion of women from the mainstream of social life. Contrary to the general belief

\textsuperscript{20}Nakhosteen, p. 46.


\textsuperscript{22}Nakhosteen, pp. 46-47.
among Westerners and Muslims that seclusion was established by Islam, this practice was the outgrowth of the economic and social conditions of the pre-Islamic region rather than Koranic law. A closer look shows that it was largely the social practices of the pre-Islamic Sassanian Empire (A.D. 208-A.D. 651) which were adopted and incorporated into Islam later that influenced the position of women in the Islamic society.23

The most important era of the pre-Islamic time period is that delineated by the Sassanian Empire. This empire was the cradle of the legal and judicial development of present-day Iran. Contrary to the fact that two women reigned briefly in the Sassanian era, women did not yet enjoy full political and social rights.24 The succession of women to the throne was not a recognition of women's political rights; rather it was a matter of expediency and simplicity during two short periods of regency.25

In the Sassanian Empire, social norms required women to be totally obedient and subservient to their husbands and devoted to the raising of children. Women were considered to be inferior to men and were assumed to

24Ibid., p. 8.
lack wisdom. As evidence of this, women's testimony in a court of law was not recognized.26 The laws of marriage and divorce were fabricated for the man's convenience, and men were allowed to marry as many women as they could afford. However, women could only marry once, and had no right to divorce.27

Some type of veiling and segregation of women was practiced as a matter of tradition.28 The role of women in Sassanian Iran had derived from even earlier practices in the region. Women's lower status was partly caused by childbearing, which handicapped them and tied them to the home while men's relative freedom allowed them to develop their abilities as hunters and fighters. This mobility resulted in enabling men to assume an important role in controlling the economy, the allocation of resources, and the fruits of their labor.29 This economic condition created a situation in which women gradually became dependent on men for economic survival and did not provide women a means for developing independence. With the gradual seclusion of women, certain male attitudes toward

26Nashat, p. 9.


28Ibid.

29Nashat, p. 9.
women emerged. More value was placed by society on men's work, and they were viewed as more intelligent than women. In the expanding urban areas, it was less costly and therefore easier to confine women to the home than in the rural areas. Urban women were not needed to perform the lighter, but necessary, farm work that rural women had to, to survive. As women became more confined, their dependency grew, therefore enabling men to bring more pressure on women and treat them as property.30

Men controlled the resources of the society and devised the moral code regarding sexuality and the relationship between men and women. These attitudes toward women and the role they should play in society developed in Mesopotamia over several millennia, and then spread to the rest of the region. Because society's attitudes toward women had resulted from social and economic factors peculiar to the region, the rise and fall of indigenous dynasties and the invasion of foreign powers did not touch the foundation of the male-female relationship. When the Sassanians came to power, these attitudes toward women were well established and survived the Sassanian downfall and the arrival of the Arab Muslim conquerors.31

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30 Ibid., p. 10.
31 Ibid.
Islam has been the religion of Iran for over thirteen centuries. The Arab invasion of A.D. 642 brought into Iran a considerable change in policies and practices. Iran was affected by the Arab language, laws, and traditions. The Arabs had a significant impact on the existing Iranian educational system. Education was transformed into Islamic education based on the Koran, with the family and community remaining the primary institutions for training the youth.

However, rural Iranians were not immediately affected by the Islamic influence. Persian cultural heritage and values have been preserved throughout the history of Iran. Islamic ethics and norms failed to penetrate the social structure, cultural patterns, and even the language of Iran. The Arab conquerors, because they lacked their own administrative talent, became culturally dependent on the Greeks and Persians. They also adopted


34Jundi Shapur University, Education in Iran: From Ancient Iran to Now (Ahwaz, Iran, 1971), pp. 18-20.

the satrap system and the tax laws of the pre-Islamic Persians.36

The Arab invasion of Iran and the conversions of Persian Zoroastrians to Islam took a considerable number of years.37 For several centuries before the Arab invasion, the traditional beliefs and the cultural heritage of the Iranians had been heavily influenced by the Greeks. Grecian schools of thought, philosophy, and science remained the most influential in the Persian education and culture in the early Arab occupation. Yet, the intellectual and artistic life in Persia never lost its continuity.38 Many Persians, in rural areas in particular, remained faithful to their religious heritage which controlled their religious institutions, Zoroastrianism.39

The Zoroastrian doctrine of morality, similar to the Islamic morality, was a great influence on the educational system of Iran. The foundation of Islamic thought is embodied in and most frequently derived from intensive studies of the Shariah, the sacred law of Islam, and the Koran. The sole educational authorities were the Moslem

37 Jundi Shapur University, pp. 18-20.
39 Jundi Shapur University, pp. 18-20.
clergymen. Those who had mastered Arabic would teach and educate others in Koranic studies. The teaching of the Koran was the primary purpose of the institutions in the early Islamic period. However, after the ninth century, other subjects began to gain ascendance in the curriculum. The Sunni-Shia split between A.D. 640 and A.D. 670 led to differing educational and religious practices among the two sects.

The Islamic faith preached by Mohammad was primitive and simple. The mosque was not only a place of worship but also a judicial court and the headquarters for the military command. The mixture of the Grecian and Persian cultures caused Islam to develop into a highly complex religion in Iran. For many centuries, the Islamic clergy developed distinct educational institutions to carry on formal instruction and control of the educational enterprise. Two levels of schooling were established, the Maktabs (Islamic primary schools) and Madresehs (Islamic secondary schools). Religion and moral training was emphasized at all levels and ages.

40Afzal, pp. 69-70.


42Armajani, p. 53.

43Reza Arasteh, Education and Social Awakening in Iran, p. 8.
Scientific inquiry and scholarship was supported by the clergy, and interest was shown in developing educational institutions and intellectual centers. The Abbasid Dynasty (A.D. 750) supported and devoted resources to the development of arts and sciences. Persian, Hebrew, and Syriac books were translated into Arabic. Thus, continuous growth of the arts and sciences contributed to the growth of the golden era of Islamic civilization.\(^4^4\)

The traditional educational system in Iran continued to be the dominant type of formal primary education. In the nineteenth century, this system reflected the economic, social, political, and cultural pillars of the society and helped pass these on from one generation to the next. Four institutions of formal education existed: Maktab, Madraseh, Masjid, and Khaneghah. The first two were popular; Maktabs provided primary education, and Madraseh provided higher education, while the other two were primarily religious. Outside these formal educational institutions, some boys of the elite received private tutoring.\(^4^5\)

Maktabs were single classroom schools, generally located in the teacher's home. The neighborhood boys, usually at the age of six or seven, were sent to the Maktab

\(^{4^4}\)Afzal, pp. 54-56.

\(^{4^5}\)Arasteh, *Educational and Social Awakening*, p. 8.
to learn reading and writing at the elementary level.\textsuperscript{46} Maktabs served two functions: (1) preparation for higher levels of education, and (2) socialization into the Islamic way of life. Some Maktabs were exclusively for the teaching of religion and the reading of the Koran; others included classical Persian texts, piety, elementary arithmetic, grammar, manners, and calligraphy.\textsuperscript{47} Daughters of the upper class were taught at home by either tutors or parents. On rare occasions, girls attended special Maktabs taught by women.\textsuperscript{48} However, very few women received any instruction at all.

The teacher, known as the Maktabdar, did not have to meet any professional requirements.\textsuperscript{49} The Maktabdar, usually a Moslem clergyman, performed the teaching duties, and either charged a small fee or taught simply as an act of charity. Some Maktabs received endowments from Islamic religious organizations, and the tuition fees were established on an individual basis.

The teachers in those Maktabs founded by religious endowments were carefully selected and hired by the founders of the Maktabs. The instructors received super-

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., p. 8.


\textsuperscript{48}Arasteh, \textit{Education and Social Awakening}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{49}Afzal, p. 70.
vision and guidance resulting in higher quality education.\textsuperscript{50} The belief that wrongdoing was the nature of a child was a predominant influence on the instructional methods; physical punishment was considered to be effective.

Emphasis on authority and the value of intimidation in learning was significant in producing both negative and positive effects. It strengthened the society by universalizing the goals of the society instilled in the students; however, it also prevented the natural creativity of the young unbiased children from developing, so that Iran as a nation could emerge successfully into the twentieth century. The main characteristic of early childhood education was the level of severity imposed on the students to instill both discipline and conformity in an Islamic context.\textsuperscript{51}

In the beginning of the eleventh century, the first Madrasehs were established in Iran. Their number was few and their organization was simple. During the first half of the eleventh century, the first Madraseh was built in

\textsuperscript{50}Arasteh, \textit{Education and Social Awakening}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{51}Afzal, p. 70.
Naishapour. It is a landmark in the educational history of Iran.  

The conventional schoolhouse of the Madraseh was a large quadrangular building with a courtyard in the center and a large library. Some also had a hospital and a pharmacy. The Madrasehs were either privately endowed or religiously endowed schools. There were different academic levels within the schools; some performed at the level of the western secondary schools, whereas others operated at a higher level, as an institution of advanced academic studies.  

While the course of studies was well established in each school, the administrative organization in the schools was very relaxed. No organized educational rules existed in the system. There was no formal graduation, and the period of study was not fixed. The teachers tended to be selected on the basis of their character, piety, industry, and proven scholastics, and their style was primarily lecturing. The Mudarris (instructors) lectured without notes or lesson plan, though they frequently referred to passages in the Koran as the students took notes. The

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53Dodge, pp. 20-21.

curriculum was comprehensive and consisted of jurisprudence, liberal arts, and the sciences. Discussion and argument were encouraged.

Though information on Madrasehs during the eleventh century is severely limited, it is clear that during this period the numbers of the schools increased dramatically and they became fairly widespread. Also during this period the curriculum expanded to include the arts and sciences, as well as Koranic teachings. Some Madrasehs became major intellectual centers of the time.

By the fifteenth century, the Madraseh's curriculum in Iran had become, in essence, Islamic theology based on logic. As studies in dialectics developed, the Madrasehs gradually became strongholds of Islamic teaching, defending Islam against any non-conformity. Under the establishment of the Safavid Dynasty, the Shia sect became the official religion of Iran. During this period, the Madraseh's objectives, to the exclusion of other academic fields, became the teaching of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence.

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56 Ibid.
It was in the Madraseh that Islamic theology rose to its zenith.\textsuperscript{58}

Unlike other areas of the world conquered by the Islamic armies, Iran had no previously established places of worship, like Christian churches, that could be converted to mosques. As soon as Islam spread over the area now known as Iran, in the seventh century, mosques began to be erected. In the early days of Islam, mosques (Masjids) were used as places of worship and religious teaching. Within the environment of the mosque, the reading of the Koran, linguistics, and Islamic traditions (Sunnat) were emphasized. Classes met in the corners of the mosque where the learned man sat in the center and the interested people sat around him, forming a teaching circle.\textsuperscript{59}

Instruction in the Masjid was strictly oral. However, texts came into use in individual studies. Masjids often had libraries dating from the eighth century when there was access to books translated from Aramaic, Greek, and Persian. Residential quarters for both teachers and students also existed in the Masjid.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{58}Afzal, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., p. 83.
\textsuperscript{60}Afzal, pp. 71-72.
The Maktabs and Madresehs were confined and limited to the individuals from the upper echelon of society who could afford to pursue an education. Therefore, only a small minority who had graduated from the Madraseh continued on to one of the two universities, either one in Baghdad or in Naishabur. The traditional economy in Iran did not require a skilled supply of labor; it only required people who had a fundamental knowledge in agricultural production. This requirement was fulfilled through practical work experience on the farms. The family passed on its knowledge from one generation to the next. Therefore, in this early period, though formal education was established, the vast majority of people neither could afford formal education nor needed it to subsist.

In the fifteenth century, schools of art had become well established in Shiraz and Herat. By the sixteenth century, the capital founded by the Safavids, Isfahan, had a population of about 600,000 with one hundred Maktabs, forty-six colleges of theology, and fifty-seven Madrasehs.

Between 1500-1600, the political disputes between Iran and the Ottoman Empire and the eastward movement of

62 Mashari, p. 45.
63 Wilber, *Contemporary Iran*, p. 4.
western traders increased contact between Iran and Europe. In spite of the economic contacts with Europe during the 1500s, cultural interactions remained weak, primarily because contacts were only at the governmental level and very little was imported into Iran. In addition, the religious differences caused a barrier between Iran and the West. Catholic monks, who represented the majority of the Europeans in Iran, opposed the religious orthodoxy of Islam. The Portuguese were permitted to trade in the Persian Gulf by treaty in 1508. A Portuguese-Persian treaty in the early 1500s included mutual military aid against the Ottomans. The British, to gain privileges in using the northern trade routes through Iran, sent representatives to Persia. In the late 1500s, the ruling class of Iran wanted to purchase muskets and artillery for the army and to broaden trade with the west through accelerated efforts to increase contacts in Europe. In 1581, Dutch merchants began to purchase silk in Iran to satisfy the booming 'silk market' in Europe. In 1599, the Iranian government, to become acquainted with Europeans, sent a group of representatives to the major capitals of Europe. In Iran, investment incentives were provided to foreign

64 Armajani, Iran, pp. 98-100.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
merchants for the purpose of attracting foreign exchange, goods, and military materials.

The expansion of urban life in the early centuries of the Islamic period led to the confinement of women. The seclusion of women and use of the veil was encouraged by the early practices of Arab conquerors, who treated women as war "booty." Over the years, these social developments easily became part of Islamic Iranian law. By the beginning of the tenth century, a whole body of religious laws governing women's activities and their role in society was established and declared ordained by God. For women, seclusion, the veil, marriage, and motherhood were the essential manifestations of the Islamic way of life.

The societal norms demanding the seclusion of women rendered useless the opportunities Islam provided to women. While there were no laws against women engaging in trade and in education, the economics of agrarian life and a history of societal development precluded their participation. Only a very few women were able to break out of the mold to accomplish a great deal. Both the community tradition and culture as well as religion have had many discriminatory rules against women; however, culture and religion are so intermixed that it is difficult to separate the two and affix blame.

67Nashat, p. 11.
The role of women before the Arab conquest was affected by Zoroastrianism's holy book, the Avesta. The Avesta asserts the primacy of the parents, because they symbolized the continuation of the race. Daughters were loved and admired, even though they were not considered useful. Both sexes were encouraged to marry only for religious purposes.

Polygamy is not mentioned in the Avesta. If polygamy were present in the Zoroastrian community, it is because the Moslems or Hindus are believed to have been the promoters of it in those communities. The minimum marriage age of both sexes was fifteen. Occasionally, the youth would make their own choice of partners independent of their parents' opinion. However the advice of their parents played an important role in their choice of partners.

In the Avesta, the concept of separate but almost equal fits the description of women. Both sexes were equal, while socially each had a special role. In general, women and mothers were particularly respected.68

It is argued that Islam is responsible for the low status of women in Iran and the Middle East. Some of Mohammed's reforms in Arabia might have improved the status of women there. But in Iran they reduced the relatively

68Mohebi, pp. 20-21.
high position of women, even though some of the positive reforms of Islam such as the abolition of incestuous marriages, the respectful treatment of widows, and the right of widows to remarry are recognized. Some claim that Islam has been the major force in perpetuating the low status of women because of its tendency to set two separate moral principles for women and men.\textsuperscript{69}

However, most Iranians argue that no other religion has given more of an equal status to women than Islam. Islam has recognized the need for active involvement of women in social and political affairs, and any inequality and mistreatment of women's rights must not be blamed on religion, but rather on the interpreters of Islam.\textsuperscript{70}

Still others argue that the status of women has been dependent on two variables: community practices and Islamic perceptions. Whether religion or the community is to be blamed, it is true that both perpetuate the low social position of women—the low status and demeaning role accorded to Moslem women down through history is cultural rather than Islamic.

Islam does not differentiate between men and women in the matter of education or work, though traditional culture does. The objection placed on women playing an

\textsuperscript{69}Ibid., p. 22.

\textsuperscript{70}Shaikhulislami, pp. 23-24.
active role in society is attributed to the mentality of the traditional eastern man who likes to feel superior and "responsible" for the welfare of his women. Therefore, it is the norms of extra-Islamic culture that cause this behavior and not the religion of Islam.\textsuperscript{71} To argue that Islam has been the major cause of the low status of women is as much a generalization as the counter argument: community practice is the reason for women's inferiority in Iranian society. Whichever of the two arguments is true, by the thirteenth century the veil and seclusion of women had spread to rural areas. Complete separation of the social life of men and women had come about.\textsuperscript{72}

The Turk-Mongol societies accord their women equal treatment. However, neither the gradual arrival of the Turks beginning in the ninth century, nor the invasion of the Mongols in the thirteenth century had any impact on the position of women in Iran. They who settled in towns adopted the lifestyle of the sedentary population. On the other hand, among nomads the women continued to be active in communal and commercial life. Women of the Turk-Mongol ruling class retained some of the higher status they had

\textsuperscript{71}Mahebi, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{72}Nashat, p. 12.
accorded them during their nomadic past. Consequently, nomadic attitudes survived among the elite.\textsuperscript{73}

During the Safavid Period (1501-1729), the present Iranian judicial and legal system emerged. The founder of the dynasty imposed Shiism as the state religion on the largely Sunni population. The introduction of Shiism melded many popular folk beliefs into a religion peculiar only to Iran. Thus, the practices regarding women that had seemed too alien to the spirit of early Islam to be acceptable began to appear in Shia religious works. Due to heavy reliance of the Safavid Dynasty on Turkish Tribal elements, only rarely were women able to have great influence on national affairs.\textsuperscript{74}

Islam's holy text, the Koran, refers to women only in relation to their legal status, especially as it pertains to marriage and women's rights to inheritance. The essential distinction in the Koran is that between believers and non-believers (Kafar), otherwise all are equal before Allah. However, there are chapters in the Koran about women concerning marriage, child bearing, and patrimony, which in modern times defines men's ascendance over women only in the realms of economics and finance. "Men have authority because men spent their worldly goods

\textsuperscript{73}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{74}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 13.
on their wives"; inversely, men have authority because their wives have no economic power. Generally, the Koran strengthened women's economic position, but local custom had weakened that position by its insistence that women must work within the home. Thus, the Islamic women's economic activities have been suppressed throughout the centuries by the customs of seclusion and social segregation.

Education and Women in Nineteenth Century Iran

The nineteenth century requires extensive analysis and is considered a pivotal period in the changing role of women and the introduction of modern education into Iran. In the mid-nineteenth century, Iran was forced to transform itself from a traditional society into a modern society. The central government placed emphasis on Iran becoming militarily more powerful largely due to pressures placed on her by foreign powers. In this period, the government established schools, for example, Dar al-Funun in 1851 in

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75 Koran, 38.34. Koran is the sacred book of the Moslems; its contents are reported revelations made to Mohammed by Allah.

76 Mohebi, p. 22.

Tehran, which was modeled after the European schools. During the Qajar era (1794-1925), as a result of Iran's greater involvement with the West and also the tribal influence on the dynasty, women of the ruling class became more visible and played a larger role in society. The women admired the European civilization and began emulating the West. This brought about changes in life style, attitudes, and beliefs of the affluent social groups. One of these changes was in the treatment of women, who, in emulating their western counterparts, became more visible in social circles and made their first inroads into education. Moreover, an increasing number of men became advocates of modern education for both sexes.

These gains for women, while substantial for some, were very limited to the upper class. The girls were taught at home because there were no formal girls' schools. It was not until the twentieth century that sanctioned schools for girls were established. Although the number of educated women was few, most of them became pioneers of Western education for women in the twentieth century. Women of the higher classes were taught reading, writing, and poetical works in their first language, Farsi, as well as the art of reading the Koran in Arabic. Calligraphy was regarded in


aristocratic families as an appropriate accomplishment for girls.\textsuperscript{80} However, the custom of early marriage, often between the ages of nine and twelve, tended to end formal education in its infancy. A woman's life still centered on marriage and maintaining her husband's satisfaction.\textsuperscript{81}

By the turn of the twentieth century, a considerable number of Iranian women gained the knowledge of modern civilization through travels or contacts with the wives of foreign representatives in Iran in a more direct fashion than education. Although the number of Europeans was limited and the contacts were few, interpersonal contact was important, because the Iranian women who gained this intimate knowledge of European life were of the upper class and were trend-setters in the society. These elite women also believed the European life to be superior and tried to emulate it.\textsuperscript{82}

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the elite women began to emerge from the seclusion that had been forced on them by society for hundreds of years. One of the reasons for this emergence was the need for Iran to stay competitive in the international marketplace. Iran


\textsuperscript{81}Nashat, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{82}Ibid.
needed greater productivity, and to do so required a greater amount of available labor, which the women provided. However, they still retained much of their former duties as mothers and wives. Because of the strong tribal influence in the upper class and ruling elite, women of those classes were given greater autonomy outside the home.\(^{83}\)

Women were generally responsible for the activities within the home. Women, for the most part, did not go to the stores or markets; servants were sent instead, or the women would purchase their goods from door-to-door vendors. While this was certainly true for most of the upper class, the lower classes still retained the freedom to travel to the market. In general, when outside the home, women were required to be covered with a complete veil, from head to toe. Women in nomadic tribes, on the other hand, would have been unable to perform their duties in such restrictive clothing and, therefore, were not required socially to cover completely.\(^{84}\)

The growth of the Iran-West relationship in this period occurred within the context of Western expansion. In the early nineteenth century, Napoleon sought an alliance with Iran that would help France in countering the

\(^{83}\)Ibid., p. 16.

\(^{84}\)Ibid., p. 20.
growth of British India. Napoleon was successful in negotiating a treaty with Iran, and a French military mission in 1807 of seventy military instructors was sent to Iran to modernize Iran's army. They trained the Royal Iranian Army and instructed them in the making of cannons and other weapons. At that time, Russia was considered to be a threat to Iran, and the government of the King looked to improving his military position vis-à-vis the Russian Empire.

The Iranians were playing both sides of the fence in the Anglo-Russo-French great power rivalry. In 1808, Iran signed a treaty of alliance with the British against France and Russia. Napoleon sought the friendship of Russia. This treaty resulted in the expansion of the British mission to Tehran.85

In 1828, Iran was soundly defeated by the Russians on the battlefield. Britain, who viewed her interest in the region threatened, joined Russia in obtaining concessions from Iran and imposing treaties. The conditions created in Iran as a consequence of the great power rivalry were: (1) deteriorating domestic economics and (2) disintegrating social mores. The necessity for reorganization and modernization of the army and the creation of a new government bureaucracy and new institutions were the

85Zonis, p. 167.
context in which Iran found itself in the early 1800s.\textsuperscript{86} Thus, educational modernization came about as threats from outside powers increased the need for the military and political reorganization and modernization.

While Iran's contacts with the West were mostly political in the nineteenth century, this is the crucial turning point in Iran's educational system. With the advent of missionary schools (the first modern schools in Iran), there began an increasing awareness at the governmental level to improve educational opportunities in the country. The first schools were founded by western religious sects establishing missions in Iran. Once an awareness that a modern education for Iranians might prove useful emerged, the government began to sponsor students for education abroad. This awareness of the benefits of modern education led to the establishment of the first indigenous modern schools in Iran.

As early as 1320, the Dominicans and other Catholic orders established missions among the Armenians in Iran. Given the tribal nature of the Armenians, early penetration was not initially successful. New missions came to Iran as Iranian interest in interaction with Europe grew over the centuries. Until the establishment of the first missionary schools, there was no formal and structured Western

\textsuperscript{86}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 167-170.
educational system in Iran. No primary or secondary schools existed. In 1833, the Basal Mission Society established a school in Tabriz. In 1836, the American mission established the first American boys school in Urumiah, north of Iran, with seven students. The enrollment increased to fifty-five during the first ten years. Also, the American mission, in 1838, with four pupils, established a school for girls. By 1851, the enrollment grew to fifty-eight. The American missionaries founded schools in other parts of the country in 1872, 1873, 1881, 1883. For the most part, these organized schools were one room institutions and operated four to six months a year.87 In 1840, a mission of French Lazarites established a school in Urumiah, and later expanded in Tehran, Tabriz, and Isfahan. The Alliance Francaise established its schools beginning in 1899. The British missionaries opened schools in Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd, and Kerman. In 1926 there were over forty-five mission schools in operation.88

The traditional educational centers of the towns and cities ignored the style of education being taught in the new missionary schools; they still adhered to the study

87Ibid., p. 173.
88Sadiq Issakhan, Modern Persia, p. 18.
of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence, and the study of other disciplines was not encouraged.89

Between 1811 and 1815, the first Iranian students supported financially by the government were sent to England to study. These seven students studied in the fields of medicine, military arts, chemistry, language, and engineering. In 1845, a group of five students was sent to study mining, medicine, and military sciences in Paris. Up to 1852, twenty-nine students studied abroad, primarily at the expense of the government. These students returned to Iran with knowledge in modern societal concepts and western politics.90

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Iranian government continued to sponsor students abroad. In 1861, forty-two members of the first graduating class of Dar al-Funun were sent to France. After returning to Iran, they were all awarded with important governmental jobs in the Ministry of Education, in particular.91

Dar al-Funun, the first modern school established indigenously, opened its doors in 1851. Its main objective was to train the government's future civil and military leaders in bureaucratic procedures and policy. It was a

89Armajani, Iran, pp. 118-120.
90Ibid.
91Ibid.
European-style polytechnical college patterned and modeled after the French schools. The faculty was drawn from foreign universities and some Iranian educators who had studied in France or in England. Its curriculum and instructional language were French. Students who attended Dar al-Funun received scholarships from the central government, and uniforms, meals, and the prestige of attendance made the school attractive to many who had attended the Madrasehs.92

The missionaries, by the turn of the twentieth century, had expanded their activities into all major cities, including the capital. The American Presbyterian Mission, in 1878, opened a school for Christian Armenian boys in Tehran. English was the instructional language. The school offered ten grades in 1902 and by 1913 had expanded to become a full high school. The school later admitted children of other minorities as well as Assyrians and Jews. The last to be admitted were those who adhered to Islam.

A few non-missionary foreign schools were also established in Iran; the Russians opened several schools in lesser cities, including a commercial school in Tabriz.

92Zonis, p. 173.
Alliance Française and Alliance Israelite were established in 1898.93

By the turn of the twentieth century, the government interest in education had developed significantly. However, the private sector participated more actively in the development of girls' schools than did the government. The existing schools remained at the service of the upper class.

In 1900, the "Society for the Establishment of Private Schools in Iran" was established by liberal merchants. Together with government sponsorship and subsidization of the society, it founded ten private schools in Tehran, helping to initiate the development of modern schools. In 1911, the total number of schools had risen to 123, with an enrollment of 8,344 students.94 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs opened the School of Political Science in 1901 in an effort to westernize higher education in Iran. The Ministry of National Economy established the College of Agriculture in Karaj in 1902 for much the same purpose. The School of Medicine was established in 1898 in Tehran.95 In 1855, the First Ministry of Education was founded. However, the essential form of the present modern

93Afzal, pp. 163-164.

94Arasteh, Education and Social Awakening in Iran, p. 22.

95Szyliowicz, p. 173.
educational system dates not from the establishment of the Ministry but rather from the establishment of an Educational Council in 1897.96

**Education and Women in Twentieth Century Iran**

The twentieth century marks the most significant era for Iranian women's achievements in the social, political, and educational arena. While in this period a significant interest in education continued to develop and the state had taken a direct role in supporting its emergence prior to 1906, it was not until 1907 that the Constitution gave full responsibility of education to the state.97 It was in the civil war which broke out after the ratification of the Constitution in December 1906 that women first became socially and politically active.98

The dissatisfaction of the educated and enlightened class with the political, social, and economic decay under the Qajar Dynasty, together with the clergy's absolute opposition to the western influence and the popular opposition created a nationalistic movement against the whole socio-political structure of the society. Thus, the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 was inevitable, resulting in a change in government from absolute monarchy

96Wilber, *Iran: Past and Present*, p.204.
97Szyliowicz, pp. 175-176.
98Bamdad, p. 29.
to constitutional monarchy. Shiism was proclaimed the state religion by the new constitution.99

During these critical years, a small group of women from upper-and upper-middle class families, including wives and daughters of several prominent clergymen, became actively involved and supported the constitutionalists. It was hoped that the changing political environment would produce benefits for the women of Iran. Using their veils as protection, they acted as couriers, and transferred arms and messages between the revolutionary hide-outs. They formed several secret societies, the two most effective being: (1) Women's Freedom Movement and (2) The National Ladies Society, each with a membership of sixty women.100

The most important change in Iran's approach to education that was a result of the Constitutional Revolution: the enactment of the Fundamental Law of 1911. This law laid down the foundation of an educational system which remained in practice until 1979. Article 19 of the Supplementary Fundamental Law, enacted in 1907, granted the Ministry of Science and Arts the responsibility to carry out the educational charge of the government.101

99Ibid., p. 25.
100Ibid., p. 29.
101Ministry of Science and Arts was changed to Ministry of Education.
Ministry of Science and Arts was chartered to establish schools at its own expense and to conduct the supervision and control of the administration and instructors of all the schools in Iran. Article 3 of the Fundamental Law of Education of 1911 made primary education compulsory.102 Article 16 of the same act gave the Ministry of Science and Arts legal authority to develop a standard curriculum for all levels of Iranian education and forbade the use of textbooks that would be offensive to the morals and religion of the students.103

The influence of the clergy in the Parliament, because of their efforts, support, and contributions to the Constitutional Revolution, is apparent in the provisions which were subsequently passed by the Parliament. This influence is also manifested in the educational laws. Article 18 of the same act proscribes the teaching of "religious essentials" in the curriculum of both the elementary and secondary schools. The Law (Article 22) also distinguished between private (non-free) and public (free) schools. The economically well-to-do families had

102Parents could either choose to educate their children at home or send them to school; in either case education was compulsory.

103Sadiq, Modern Persia, pp. 33-34.
to pay tuition for the education of their children, while the poor could attend government free schools.104

After the Constitutional Revolution, primary schools experienced a fairly rapid growth, while the Maktabs and Madrasehs experienced a decline in number and enrollment. However, no great changes occurred for some time after the Revolution. Within ten years after the Revolution, Iran was occupied as a result of World War I. The Iranian economy and political systems began to lose power and control as the country began sliding toward anarchy. However, schools continued to be built. The enrollment in schools rose to 170,129 in 1934-1935, compared to 55,960 in 1924 and 10,531 in 1911.105

In 1918, the Ministry of Education founded eight high schools. Also, the first public primary school for girls was established.106 By 1924, fifty-six private, public, and missionary high schools with a combined enrollment of 3,366 was still less than the number and enrollment of the Madrasehs (4,980 students) but continued to rise. By 1935, the number of students in modern high

104Ibid.
105Arasteh, Education and Social Awakening, p. 79.
106Bamdad, p. 19.
schools increased to 16,200, and the number in Madrasehs declined to 2,900.107

Educational opportunities for girls were still extremely limited, even though education was considered compulsory and opportunities began to be provided for female education. Co-education was non-existent, and the men's schools drew the best instructors and resources.108 The basic objective of education for women in this early period was to train other women to be teachers. The Teacher Training Institute in 1918 and Tehran Teacher Training College in 1928 were established by the Government.109

The curriculum of the private and missionary schools was patterned after the French system. The liberal arts, sciences, and religious studies were the core of the curriculum.110 The compulsory education law was never enforced, due to the lack of qualified and competent teachers. Extremely limited higher educational opportunities prevailed. The main focus of education was to train

107Zonis, p. 33.
108Sadiq, Modern Persia, p. 41.
109For more information, see chapter 2.
110Sadiq, Modern Persia, pp. 40-41.
the children (males) of the upper classes for military and governmental positions.111

Despite its neutrality, during World War I Iran was invaded by the armies of various countries. Its society was seriously disrupted. Political disorder was rampant; anarchy, chaos, and the fear by the central government of separatism was widespread. Fear of the country's disintegration prepared the people for the coup d'etat of February 1921, which brought Reza Khan to power. The Parliament in 1925 pronounced him Shah (King), thus initiating the Pahlavi Dynasty after the fall of the Qajar Dynasty.112

Reza Shah initiated a series of reforms designed to redefine woman's status in society. He was a modernizer who pursued and emulated the western/secular patterns in Europe in all aspects of society, culture, and religion. The clergy were adamantly against the new western influence at the highest level in government and the emerging western/secular economic and social developmental policies of the new Shah. Reza Shah suppressed any opposition by the clergy, because he felt they were a hindrance to modernization.113

111Ibid., p. 36.

112Szyliowicz, Education and Modernization in the Middle East, p. 230.

After Reza Shah consolidated his power, he used oil revenues to build an army which he used to centralize the government and improve its efficiency over that of the Qajar's government. A westernized state began to emerge with western laws, civil service, and regulations. The educational system also underwent modernization.

To operate this new system, a trained and educated group in modern bureaucratic skills and modern secular ideology was necessary. This need was met gradually through the slow expansion of the education system, and the recruitment of teachers who had been educated abroad or came from the upper class. Education expanded under Reza Shah. In 1928, a law was passed by the government which authorized the Ministry of Education to send a minimum of one hundred students each year to Europe or the U.S. during the following six years.

The students sent by the government enrolled in schools in France, England, the United States, Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland. Their fields of study were determined by the Council of Ministries, which specialized in education. These fields were engineering, finance, law,

\[\text{114}\text{Ibid.}\]

administration, medicine, agriculture, and education.\textsuperscript{116} Other Ministries also sent students abroad, but on a much smaller scale. The children of well-to-do families were also sent abroad to study where the family could support the tuition fees. During this period, the total number of students studying abroad is estimated at two thousand. These students, upon their return, became their country's nucleus of governmental educational leaders. One third of those who returned accepted professorships at Iranian universities.\textsuperscript{117}

During the reign of Reza Shah, higher education, because of the need for well-trained government managers, was emphasized. College-level education tended to consume most of the educational resources and attention of the government, to the neglect of primary and secondary education, especially in the rural and outlying areas. The ultimate result of this skewed application of resources was the growing elitism in educational circles.\textsuperscript{118}

In 1918, the Ministry of Education established two Normal Schools and initiated its own program of teacher training for men and women, located in Tehran. The school had two divisions, one for elementary and the other for

\textsuperscript{116}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{117}Afzal, pp. 176, 230.

\textsuperscript{118}Szyliowicz, p. 239.
secondary education. Candidates for primary teachers had a minimum requirement of a full primary education, followed by a three-year program at the Normal School. Candidates for secondary school teachers had at least a ninth-grade education and received a four-year training program. In 1925, the Normal School for physical education was established and began training primary and secondary teachers in physical education. In 1928, the Normal School for Boys reorganized into a teacher's college with a faculty of science and a faculty of arts.\footnote{Afzal, p. 179.} Five years later, the department of Physical Education and Scouting was established under the chairmanship of Reza Shah. (The scouting program was similar to the Boy Scouts of America program in the United States.) Later, scouting became compulsory for all students.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 176-177.}

In 1934, the Teacher's Training Act required the creation and expansion of Normal Schools in all cities. Thirty-six such schools were in operation by 1941.\footnote{A. Banani, The Modernization of Iran: 1921-41 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 94.}

Reza Shah's most noteworthy and significant legislative achievement that impacted on the course of education in the twentieth century was the passage of the Act of Establishment of the University of Tehran in June
With the ground breaking in the following year, Reza Shah established Iran's first modern university. The seven existing colleges of law, medicine, arts and sciences, military, agriculture, theology, and veterinary medicine were incorporated into the university in the following years. Later the University added departments of engineering, dentistry, education, literature, and pharmacology.

Until 1943, the University was wholly dependent on the Ministry of Education. In 1946, the University was able to gain administrative independence but still relied on government subsidies. The requirement for admission was a high school diploma and a high score on the Konkur (similar to the Scholastic Aptitude Test). By 1944, enrollment reached 3,087 students. Two years after the University opened its doors, women were admitted to the programs in a co-educational setting. They could pursue studies in all fields being taught at the school, regardless of the male student population.

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122 Arasteh, Education and Social Awakening in Iran, p. 37.
123 Afzal, p. 179.
124 Arasteh, Education and Social Awakening in Iran, pp. 34-35.
125 Ibid., p. 37.
Throughout this period, though, primary and secondary schools remained stagnant. Improvement and growth, if any, was imperceptible, and impetus for improving lower education was not forthcoming from the government. A shortage of teachers, qualified administrators, textbooks, and school buildings compounded these difficulties.

To combat this problem, the central government made only a few, not strongly supported, attempts to improve lower education. In 1925, a special Department of Public Education within the Ministry of Education was founded. This department hired professional administrators to supervise primary, secondary, and adult education. The staff also published textbooks and curricular material and hired teachers.\textsuperscript{127}

The curriculum developed was highly theoretical, and its employment was designed to centralize all policy decisions in education at the federal level. Given the relative autonomy of most schools at the time and the teaching of practical knowledge rather than theoretical knowledge, it took several years before improvements began to become apparent. Elementary school was to be six years in length, as was the secondary school, with a common curriculum for both men and women. The secondary school

\textsuperscript{127}Arasteh, p. 77.
was divided into two three-year cycles, the first of which was compulsory distributive requirements. The second cycle allowed students, both men and women, the choice of what field in which to begin to specialize. The methods of learning were rote-memorization of books and lecturing. The students were required to be indoctrinated in theoretical mathematics, foreign languages, sciences, history, and religion. Research and creative thinking as styles of education were not adopted by the Department of Public Education. 128

During the early years of Reza Shah's rule, several technical schools were established in order to train specialists in certain fields. These included: the School of Post and Telegraph, Railway Technical Schools, and the Abdan Technical School for the development of the Iranian oil resources. 129

The emergence of modern education in Iran was paralleled by several attempts by women activists to improve their status in society and to equalize the unequal distribution of national resources dedicated to education. Their attempts met with some success and some failure. While the women's educational status did steadily improve over the years, their status in society fluctuated signifi-

128 Szyliowicz, p. 235.
129 Mashari, p. 88.
cantly. Reza Khan was determined to be a modernizer, and in pursuit of this he attempted to emancipate women. Many dramatic improvements were made over the years of his rule; however, lack of social and economic conditions that could have sustained his policies doomed his efforts. At the end of his reign, those improvements made were quickly swept away in the turmoil of World War II and a new King.

The Constitutional Revolution and the ensuing nationalism were the primary factors in pulling women out of their domestic environment and the seclusion which had for many centuries suppressed them. That suppression gradually weakened as women began to take an active part in the struggles against dominating foreign powers. It was primarily the Secret Women's Society and the clergy who led this movement to oust foreign interventionists. Though the number of women activists was extremely limited, those who were able to pursue their cause did so in any way that was possible. These women believed in the necessity of a democratic government and felt secularism and modernism essential to make Iran a strong and independent country in the rapidly changing world environment. They fully understood their low economic power and civil rights and began to advocate reforms. Both men and women who supported constitutionalism, except the clergy and other tradition-

130 Bamdad, p. 25.
alists, supported the efforts towards improving women's social status.131

In the early years of Reza Shah, the government encouraged the education of women and the expansion of programs to fulfill this objective. However, there was only limited success due to the lack of women teachers. All the available instructors were employed by boys' schools. Society, while it felt that both women and men should be formally educated, had not yet decided that it was appropriate for women to be taught by men. Thirteen years after the revolution ended, in 1934, Parliament finally recognized this problem and established several teachers' colleges strictly for women both in the private arena and in the public. While the number of teachers expanded, the resulting growth of girls' schools was not on a par with the growth of boys' schools; it remained about four times less. This consistency was primarily the result of a continuing belief by many at the highest levels of government, and by most throughout society, that the male was still the primary economic asset of the country and also played the primary role in its defense against foreign governments and companies that were expanding their grip on the Iranian economy and government. It was firmly believed

131Mohebi, p. 63.
that the males should receive the finest education available.

What growth there was in the girls' schools can be attributed to both the men and women who felt that equal education for men and women was essential to the survival of the nation. In 1936, the first women enrolled at Tehran University to prepare for at least token jobs in the civil service and in teaching. The first group of women to enroll numbered twelve, eleven Iranian and one Indian.

Another major and well-publicized reform taken by Reza Shah in 1934 was the abolition of the veil in Iran. However he did not issue the proclamation until February 1936. Under the new law, even wearing a scarf was not permitted, and for several years the law was strictly enforced. The unveiling of women was an attempt by Reza Shah to represent to the rest of the world a westernized modern Iranian woman. The women's movement, on the other hand, opposed the veil because they viewed it as a symbolic representation of the low status of women. Several groups

132Ibid., p. 67.
133Bamdad, p. 39.
134Ibid.
135Ibid., pp. 92-95.
of women even attempted to unveil themselves before Reza Shah's law, but were suppressed by the government.

During the years in which women were officially unveiled, there was a lack of education as to the objective of the unveiling. The elder women, firmly grounded in the reasoning for veiling, equated lack of the veil as nudity and refused to leave their homes. The clergy was equally uneducated as to the purpose of the unveiling. Because they were ideologically opposed to such a move, more likely than not any education at all would have fallen on at least semi-deaf ears. It was because of the clerical opposition to the unveiling that Reza Shah delayed the law for two years.\textsuperscript{136} What initial gains were made by this unveiling were lost because there was insufficient support among the police force, government, and society to enforce the law. The 1936 law was highly symbolic in the emergence of women into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{137}

Another step by Reza Shah toward reform was the changes made in marriage and divorce laws. Marriage contracts, permanent and temporary, were required to be registered in the civil courts (Ministry of Justice), which had replaced the religious courts. The parties were allowed to put any conditions they chose into their

\textsuperscript{136}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{137}Ibid.
contracts. This protected both men and women. The contracts prevented the man from leaving his wife destitute and accorded the woman an equal status before the civil law. Through the issues of polygamy and child marriage were not addressed officially, provisions in the contracts could be drawn up, if wanted.138

Although the policies of Reza Shah helped a small number of women living in liberal homes, they failed to gain the support and interest of the majority, because they were not in step with the needs and realities of Iranian society at the time. The lack of social and economic conditions that could support these policies insured that once the force that supported the policies was removed they would be abandoned. After Reza Shah's abdication, a counter current to modernization almost destroyed the slight gains made by women during the previous decades. Women voluntarily returned to the veil in 1941. This setback was led by the clergy, who were suppressed by the Reza Shah and had lost much of their influence in society over the previous decades.

The British and Russians occupied Iran in World War II for two reasons: (1) Iran had shown sympathy to the Germans and (2) an open logistics route between Western and Eastern Europe. The Russians occupied all of Azerbaijan

138Mohebi, pp. 64-65.
and a little more and the British occupied the rest. Both powers forced Reza Shah into abdication and exile. He died in Mauritius in 1944. Mohammed Reza, his son, ascended to the throne in 1941 despite foreign occupation and the halt in economic production.139

World War II and the presence of Allied forces in Iran (who had total control over the affairs of the country), together with the dramatic change in the political and social attitudes of the government after the abdication of Reza Shah created a new environment in which women strove to assert themselves.

A strong sense of patriotism developed due to the occupation and Iran's government nationalizing the foreign oil interests. Sensing an opportunity to press the government for concessions, political groups, the Communist Tudeh for instance, began openly lobbying to the government. Social and intellectual groups also began pressing for changes in the laws and attempting to influence the expenditure of government funds on needed projects. The experience of the 1940s and 1950s helped to shape the future pattern of Iranian development in politics, education, and society.140

139 Wilber, Iran, p. 102.

In the post-World War II period, the interest in development created the demand for growth in educational opportunities and the expansion of educational facilities at all levels. Between 1940 and 1951, the number of primary students more than doubled. However, this growth was still not sufficient to meet the objective of the 1943 law, compulsory education. It was the rural education improvement plans that suffered neglect and expanded at a much slower pace than urban education. To accommodate more students, the schools in the outlying areas introduced half-day programs. In 1949, several colleges and universities were established in the country. College enrollment increased from 3,385 in 1940 to 5,502 in 1951. Between 1950 and 1965, the United States of America conducted numerous technical and educational assistance projects, mostly through the U.S.A.I.D. program. One of the projects, Point IV, was implemented in conjunction with a United Nations plan to improve the living conditions, education, and productivity of rural areas. Fifteen years after World War II, however, lack of teachers, textbooks,

141 Szyliowicz, p. 396.
142 Ibid., pp. 387-389.
143 George B. Baldwin, Planning and Development in Iran (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 34.
and funds slowed the pace of many of these broad-scoped programs to improve education.\textsuperscript{144}

The country's slow educational development in this early post-war period was due to at least two major factors: the foreign occupation and the change in government and loss of centralized authority. In April 1946, the government was attempting to get its feet on the ground through the creation of the Commission for drafting Plans for Development of the Country within the Ministry of Finance. The initial draft plan produced by this commission the following summer became the Seven Year Plan Law three years later.\textsuperscript{145} This law provided for increased funding for the national level educational system and the purchasing of schools, texts, and the hiring of instructors. This law was engineered by the Iranian government with the instrumental advice of the American Embassy and the World Bank.\textsuperscript{146}

From 1949 to 1978, five development plans were successively enacted. Plan I (1949-1955), Plan II (1956-1962), and Plan III (1962-1966) are discussed in this chapter. Plans IV and V (1968-1972) and (1973-1978) respectively, are discussed in chapter III.

\textsuperscript{144}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{145}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{146}Ibid., pp. 25-26.
Plan I

The Plans Organization was established in 1949 with the enactment of the Seven Year Plan Law. This organization served as the chief planning agency for the country, and for the implementation of those plans at the national level.\textsuperscript{147} The Plans Organization's budget was not part of the national budget, since it was financed outside the government's normal revenues and as such was free from many of the government's normal regulations for expenditures. The money spent was in large part developmental funds allocated to Iran by international organizations and foreign governments.

The oil nationalization movement combined with financial and administrative problems at all levels of the government to paralyze Plan I. It was during this period, 1953-1961, that the new Shah consolidated his power and undertook the necessary structural and bureaucratic changes on which future socio-economic changes could be founded. He felt that only through a highly centralized government could he insure the success of the Development Plans. In 1953, the United States, which had not previously played a significant role in Iran, began to emerge as the dominant power influence, replacing Great Britain. The American

\textsuperscript{147}Ibid., p. 24.
Point IV plan was implemented, and assistance began to flow into the country.\textsuperscript{148}

While Plan I did not include provisions for education, education rapidly began to expand in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The number of primary students increased from 287,245 to 769,166 in 1955. Secondary students grew from 28,196 in 1940 to 112,675 in 1955, and the students of advanced education grew from 3,395 in 1940 to 10,097 in 1955.\textsuperscript{149}

\textbf{Plan II}

In 1955, the second plan was adopted. This plan, like the preceding, again did not address educational development planning. Establishment of private schools, therefore, was encouraged by the Ministry of Education. To assist the growth of these schools, governmental subsidies were provided. By 1962, eighty-six vocational schools with an enrollment of over 9,000 had been established. As with governmental schools, teachers were in shortage and money to buy textbooks and provide facilities was seriously lacking, stunting the growth of the vocational and technical schools.\textsuperscript{150}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{148}Jacqz, p. 39.\\
\textsuperscript{149}Mashari, p. 161.\\
\textsuperscript{150}Szyliowicz, p. 392-394.
\end{flushright}
Plan III

The growth of enrollment at all levels of education and the desperate need for education in the rural areas forced the Plans Organization to include education in its next Developmental Plan. In Plan III, for the first time, a comprehensive program to improve the quality and scope of education was adopted by the central government that would be required to affect those in primary and secondary education and especially those in the rural areas. The goals of the plan were to improve the quality of the education provided, balance rural and urban educational opportunities, and decentralize the finance and administration of the educational system. Literacy rate was to be used as the measure of effectiveness of the new Developmental Plan. A target was an increase of 50 percent.151

The qualitative improvement of primary education was the focal point of the long-term goals of this Plan. This Plan was the most significant in that it initiated an effort that lasted twenty years to improve the educational opportunities of women. The Plan was designed to create sexual equality in education. While emphasis on qualitative improvement for women concentrated at the university level, the Plan did provide a step in the right direction for all the educational needs of the country.

151Baldwin, p. 155.
Areas that needed prompt attention were the upgrading of teachers' qualifications, the expansion of the numbers of teachers, and development of a curriculum. Achievement of free and compulsory education for all was a primary goal of the new Plan. Moreover, it was decided to phase out the French method of instruction, the rote memorization of information and the absolute reliance for that information on the professor in lectures and in speeches. Lower level education was modified, and began to stress vocational and technical studies rather than the preparation for college or the university. The projected number of students attending primary school by the end of the Plan's seven years was 2.25 million students. The budget for the primary schools was 61 percent of the total national education budget.

The qualitative goals of the Plan had to be postponed due to the increase in the number of students seeking admission to secondary schools. The quality of secondary education dropped because of the large number of students and the lack of adequate facilities and resources to instruct the students. The number of secondary students increased by 68 percent between 1961 and 1965. The growth in the number of teachers, on the other hand, was only 34.5


153Szyliowicz, p. 398.
percent over the same period. At the time, the number of secondary schools only increased by 31 percent.154

While emphasis was placed on qualitative improvements, due to the rapidly increasing number of students, Plan III's objectives were doomed to failure. Some of the areas that did see some achievements, though, were in programmed changes in making teaching a full-time profession rather than part-time, as it had been up until this Plan, expansion of Bachelor's programs from three years to four years, the education of teachers, and providing libraries and new facilities.155

The Plan had provisions to reduce the high illiteracy, 85 percent, in the rural areas. To reach these areas, in 1962, the Literacy Corps was founded, conscripted by the Army. This organization was founded under the Provisions of the White Revolution.156 By the end of the program, about 35,000 corpsmen had taught 238,000 primary school students and 106,600 adults each year of the program to read and write.157 Yet, the success of this program did not meet the hopes of its planners. The old problems of poor administration, lack of well-educated instructors, and

154Ibid., pp. 339-440.
155Ibid.
156Jacqz, p. 39. The White Revolution will be elaborated upon in chapter III.
157Szyliowicz, p. 413.
a paucity of modernized curricula inhibited major gains, though the program was still considered successful. This program met resistance to modern education in the rural areas primarily because of the strong religious tradition that was opposed to change and modernization.

Over the centuries of education in Iran, spanning the years from the Avesta to the Development Plan III, Iran has seen a remarkable expansion and modernization of education. Yet even in the 1960s, education still suffered problems that have plagued educators for centuries: lack of adequate textbooks, lack of educated instructors, a predisposition in the rural areas to religious rather than secular curricula, and the defacto separation and inequality in men's and women's education. However, although these problems did exist and were serious, more people in the 1960s were literate than in any previous year, more students were enrolled in education, and more women were being taught alongside men in the schools than ever before. This trend continued into the 1970s, when the process of education improved dramatically.
CHAPTER II

ORIGIN AND FAMILY HISTORY

Fakher-Afagh Parsay

Though the idea of Nehzat Hevdah Day, 1 February 1936, was originated by Reza Shah, the true credit belongs to the women who through years of hard work, struggle, and courageous efforts made this dream a reality and paved the way for such a change to occur. Nehzat Hevdah Day freed the Iranian women from the veil, opening formerly closed doors to advancement and new opportunities.1 This was an unprecedented symbolic achievement.

The fight for women's rights in the late nineteenth century began with the power of the pen. A small number of women writers, with the aid of their fathers, brothers, and husbands who also disapproved of the existing situation, pushed for change. Without the help of their male confidants, the women probably would have been unable to break out of the shell in which society had placed them. Through the medium of journals and newspapers, they tried to illuminate women's deprivation, concentrating on the disparity of the educational opportunities for women as

opposed to men. Only later did they strongly write about women's equal rights and the abandonment of the veil, the symbol of the second class citizen. One of these women was Fakher-Afagh Parsay, born in 1896, mother of four sons and two daughters, of whom one (Farroukhrou) achieved the highest position in the Cabinet of Iran, as the Minister of Education.

**Education**

Mrs. Parsay wrote:

I was born in a family where both my parents were uneducated and I had to study without my father's knowledge. My grandfather had encouraged me to study under Mola-Bajy Shemirony (a maktabdar) because I was his only granddaughter and he wanted me to be educated. At age five, I had finished my Koranic studies and entered Doshi-i Zagan Vatan (Girls of the Nation), a school located next door to our house. Without my father's knowledge, I would go to school from early morning until late afternoon. My mother also secretly taught sewing in the same school. I was a very good student and every three months would advance a grade. When I was studying for the compulsory nationwide test in the sixth grade, my father saw the light on in my room and came in and asked, 'Why is the light on?' I replied that I was studying. Being surprised, he asked, 'What are you studying?' I told him the Koran and religious studies. He replied, 'These are good, you may study all you wish, but the minute I discover you are going to seek a sixth grade certificate, even though you are my daughter, I shall kill you with a bullet.' My father felt that if girls learned writing, they would write love letters to boys. I didn't show up the next day to take the nationwide exam; he never allowed me to get a certificate.

Still, I continued to study French, Farsi, and Arabic at home and with the help of a Tehranian
neighbor, I was able to informally complete the ninth grade.\(^2\)

Until the constitutional period, only two modern schools for girls existed. These American missionary schools were opened in Riza'iyeh in 1835 and in Tehran in 1875.\(^3\) Due to the Iranian government's stipulation that no Muslim girls were allowed to enroll in these schools, they essentially became Christian Iranian girls' schools. However, by the late 1890s, a small number of Muslim girls had quietly been enrolled. Mr. Richard,\(^4\) an Iranian of French origin who taught at Dar-i Funun, established the first school that was devoted to Muslim girls, in Tehran in 1906.\(^5\) In 1907, Mrs. Tuba Azmudeh founded a similar school in Tehran, the Namus School.\(^6\) She also started an adult women's education program at the school. Hiring qualified women to teach at these schools was a very difficult task, because properly educated women were simply not available. Hiring of male instructors was also out of the question due to the moral and religious implications which would have


\(^3\) Bamdad, pp. 41-43.

\(^4\) Mr. Richard's first name is not recorded or available.

\(^5\) Bamdad, pp. 41-43.

\(^6\) Ibid.
resulted in the closure of the schools. Mrs. Azmudeh, with the aid of her husband, sought the service of elderly married male scholars who covertly taught the girls for the compulsory nationwide exam at her home.\(^7\)

Another pioneer in women's education was Mrs. Safiyeh Yazdi, a constitutionalist and wife to one of the five highest ranking clergy in Iran. Her husband supported her activities, unusual for the time because of the clergy's predisposition to oppose women's education. In 1910, Mrs. Yazdi opened Effatiyeh School in Tehran.\(^8\) However, her husband opposed her progressive disposition. She had hidden the school from him for two years before he discovered her secret. Upon discovery he complained that his wife had disgraced his family and her father's family respectability by engaging in unwholesome and sinful anti-religious activities.\(^9\)

While a small minority of Iranians accepted the need for girl's education, the great majority of the people held on to their traditional values. Although the founders of girl's schools were Muslims and they emphasized religion in their teaching curricula, these women unfortunately became the object of harassment by the clergy. The

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 46.
\(^8\)Ibid.
\(^9\)Ibid.
clergymen, in their sermons, would denounce the women who founded the girls' schools and girls who attended and asked the government for aid in the closure of these schools because, they claimed, they were turning innocent Muslims into Kafar.

By World War I, a few other girls' schools had opened in Tehran, Shiraz, and Isfahan. By 1918, the idea of education had become widely accepted but not commonly practiced by the majority of the society, and certainly not necessary from an economic viewpoint. In 1918, the first public school for girls was established in Tehran.10

Marriage and Career

Mrs. Fakher-Afagh Parsay wrote:

I was sixteen in 1912, when I married Mr. Farouk-dyn Parsay, then Principal of the Doshi-i-Zagan Vatan. My husband was a journalist and worked for the 'Rad,' a newspaper. He was not a passive writer and would question and criticize all governmental policies and actions. . . He was also Editor-in-Chief of the 'Morning Ete-la-at,' and contributed to other periodicals. Later he started his own paper called, 'Asser.' He wanted me to become a journalist as himself, to get me interested in writing. He was a free spirited man and believed in women's equality in education and social rights. He perceived the veil as a symbol of women's inferiority in politics and economics and felt that it was an obstacle to the development of the society in the emerging order of world economics.11

Even though I had no formal education, through the efforts of my husband I became both an effective writer and journalist. My articles began to be published in a

10Ibid., pp. 45-47.

11Piernia, "We Broke Out of Prison," p. 4. (Translation.)
newspaper of which my husband was the editor and owner, 'Ershad.'

My husband wore the am-ma-meh, the religious headdress of the clergy, as a religious leader for a short time. Without revealing why, he abandoned his am-ma-meh and religious leadership.  

Mr. Parsay encouraged his wife to become involved in the women's movement. As a couple they challenged traditional societal norms and what they felt to be unjust laws. On the coronation day of Ahmad Shah Qajar, Mr. and Mrs. Parsay rode in their carriage, a crime punishable by fine, to the theater. She also chose to go unveiled.  

After the birth of her second child in 1922, the Parsays moved to Mashad, the capital of Khorasan Province. Mrs. Fakher-Afagh Parsay entered into teaching at the Forough School for Girls founded by Princess Forough al-Saltaneh. This first job was frustrating for Mrs. Parsay. The women of Mashad were drilled in the acceptability of the second class values society accorded to women and the extent of the knowledge was bounded by the city limits. If there were any women in Mashad upon their arrival who desired a career or women's rights and wanted to work to achieve them, they did not make themselves known to the Parsays.  

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12Shaikhulislami, p. 103. (Translation.)
13Interview with Jafar Saedi, Los Angeles, 17 July 1986.
14Piernia, "We Broke Out of Prison," p. 4.
Nevertheless, in 1923, Afagh Parsay, with the help of her husband, managed to get a license to print and distribute one of the first magazines for women by women called *Jahan Zanan, Women's World*.15 By this time, Reza Khan had risen to become the Minister of War and had just begun to bring influence on changes in all aspects of Iranian society. However, he, too, believed it was too early to formally recognize the women's movement. The clergy was the primary obstacle, and Reza Khan did not think the timing was appropriate with the ensuing fall of the Qajar Dynasty and the change in power, along with Reza Shah's belief that society was not prepared for such a change. Even though he did not publicly support the movement, he privately encouraged it, yet he emphasized the importance of discretion in their actions.16 Fakher-Afagh, in order not to offend the public, carefully and meticulously chose topics which were not distasteful. Expository articles on health, family relations, and the principles of family life began to appear under her by-line.

Mrs. Parsay recalled: "I had only published four issues of my magazine when my husband was exiled for forty days to Tehran. In the fourth issue I wrote two articles which caused an uproar in the religious community and among

15 Ibid., p. 8.
16 Shaikhulislami, p. 113.
the conservative readers."¹⁷ Those articles were titled: "The Mental Suffering of Our Women and the Need to Examine the Marital Status," and "The Need to Educate Women." These columns caused an outcry among the community. Letters of complaint were filed, neighbors were abusive, and threats of physical violence were pronounced. In fear of her safety and the safety of her children, she took refuge at a relative's house for anonymity.¹⁸

Imagine, for the first time in Iran a woman publishing a magazine. At that time it took enormous courage and sacrifice to write about issues of such great political sensitivity. . . I remember Mr. Parsay telling me, 'They had published 10,000 issues of the first edition funded by him and other liberal men and women. It was distributed all over the country for sale.'¹⁹

Mrs. Parsay recounted:

While I was in hiding, Ghovam al-Saltaneh [Prime Minister at the time] sent for my husband and told him, 'you should take your wife and go away, some place far away.' My husband replied, 'I will never tell my wife to leave her home and her life. You can write her yourself.' A few days later we were given 200 Tomans and sent into exile to Arak. On our way my daughter Farroukhrou was born.²⁰

En route to Arak, the Parsays learned that the truth of her experience with Jahan Zanan had been distorted and people were now calling her an enemy of the Prophet.

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¹⁷Piernia, "We Broke Out of Prison," p. 4. (Translation.)

¹⁸Ibid. (Translation.)

¹⁹Jafar Saedi, interview. (Translation.)

²⁰Piernia, "We Broke Out of Prison," p. 4. (Translation.)
When they learned that in Arak several people had been killed on suspicion of burning the Koran, they chose to stop short of their original destination, in Qom.  

After several letters to the central government asking about their ultimate fate in exile and several cursory replies, the Parsays were finally allowed to return to Tehran. By the date of their return, the newspapers of Tehran had developed a democratic slant. If not publicly supportive, several news organizations in Tehran privately were supportive of the Parsays' stance on women's education and women's rights. A warm reception by the media highlighted their return.

**Farouk-Dyn Parsay**

Farouk-dyn Parsay, husband to Fakher-Afagh Parsay, came from a traditional family. His great-great-great grandfather, Mola Ahmad Naraghy, was a prominent clergyman. Mr. Parsay was brought up in a religious household and was schooled in the Koran. Yet, he was a modern thinker and involved himself in politically progressive activities, the foremost of which was the women's movement. He influenced

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21Shaikhulislami, p. 111.

22Exact date of their return is unavailable, but their stay in Qom is believed to have been several years in length.

23Piernia, "We Broke Out of Prison," p. 4.
his wife's activism and served as the primary role model for his daughter Farroukhrou Parsay.

Mr. Parsay was among the first group of men who supported and fought actively for women's rights during Iran's constitutional period. He completed his primary schooling in Efte-ta-hieh, Sharaf, and Adab in Tehran. Upon completion, his grandmother, who was also his tutor, convinced him to pursue a religious education. He first went to Karbala for studies in Arabic and Islamic jurisprudence and then went to Najaf (both are holy cities in the Mesopotamian region) as an acolyte. He studied under the famous religious leaders Yazdi and Khorasani.

In 1907, at eighteen, he returned to Tehran and accepted a teaching position in a primary school. He continued his studies in Islam. On the advice of his supervisor, he joined the Jahan Geer Committee and entered political life pursuing constitutionalism.

Mr. Parsay believed that violence and war were not appropriate means to an end, and rather than pursuing a career opportunity in the Mojahideen Army, he chose to enter into communications. His first position was as a reporter for the Iranian Police, a newspaper that later changed its name to Ershad. During this same period, he

\[^{24}\text{A political group with a constitutionalist platform.}\]
also reported for No Bahar (in Mashad), Rah Nejat (in Isfahan), Mozafari (in Boshehr), and Kamal (in Hamadan).

In 1926, Mr. Parsay was drawn into the government and accepted the post of Director of the Treasury of the Ministry of Roads in Mazandaran. Eighteen months later, he accepted a position as the Director of Road Planning in Tehran. Not long after he left the government for good and pursued education and communications, he founded his first newspaper, Assr.25

**Jahan Zanan [Woman's World]**

The first issue of this magazine was published on 4 February 1921. The subscription cost was 30 Rials per year or 18 Rials for six months, 40 Rials for international, and each issue was 2 Rials. This magazine was published twice a month. The material it contained concerned women's issues. The table of contents published on the cover page included the following articles: "Action and Wishes," "The Women of the World," "The Need for Educating Women," "Child Care," "Famous Women," "Cooking," "The Glorifying of Women," "Poetry," "Jokes," "Thanks," and "Employment Announcements."26

Only four issues were published in Mashad. After the transfer of Mr. Faroukh-dyn Parsay to Tehran, the paper

25Shaikhulislami, p. 114-117.

26Ibid.
was relocated and published in Tehran. The fifth issue, which was published in Tehran, stirred the clergy to the point where the government stopped the publication. The clergy believed that the magazine was against Islam and that its articles were misleading and corruptive, despite the efforts of the writers to remain objective and not offend the clergy or conservatives.

The exile of Mrs. Fakher-Afagh Parsay brought an end to the publishing of the Jahan Zanan. From exile in Qom, she wrote an open letter to her subscribers stating,

Alas, women are not given the freedom of education, and unfortunately, the freedom of press and freedom of speech are also taken away from our men. I hope to see a brighter day and may even die while waiting. I have taken the burden of bankruptcy, and with 500 Tomans I wish to repay all the subscribers. . .27

After returning from exile, Mrs. Parsay attempted twice to re-establish the magazine, but she was unsuccessful.28

Other Pioneers of the Iranian Press and Literary World

Other women activists also spread their views through publication of newspapers and periodicals. These publications experienced a short-lived existence but were popular among the young urban students and women. The first publication to address women's status in Iran was Danesh [Knowledge], published in 1910 by Dr. Hossein Kahal

27Ibid., pp. 109-112. (Translation.)
28Ibid.
Tehrani's wife. Another of the earliest publications was *Shukufeh* [*Blossom*] in 1913. In 1920, *Nameh Banovan* [*Women's Letter*], edited and managed by Shanaz Azad, was founded. The most important one was *Zaban-i Zanan* [*Women's Voice*], founded in Isfahan in 1918 by Mrs. Sadiqeh Dowlatabadi. She, who like Mr. Parsay, was grounded in religious tradition and modern thought, did not discard Islam but tried to incorporate it into women's rights and education.

Poets, writers, and novelists also expressed their opinions regarding emancipation of Iranian women through their writings. The beauty and sincerity of their words had a powerful effect and carried their message. Their poems were soon known by heart and recited everywhere. The most famous modern female poet is Parvin Etesami (1906-1941). Other notable poets were Aref Qazvini (c. 1882-1934), Hajj Merza Yahya Dowlatabadi (1862-1939), Malek Ol-Shoara Bahar (1886-1950), Iraj Mirza Jalal Ol-Mamalet (1874-1925), and Mirzazadeh Eshqi (1893-1924).²⁹

Parvin Etesami, a highly respected and popular poet, is considered one of the great poetic talents of Persian literature by the literary community. Through her work, she was able to overcome the barriers which separated women from the rest of society. Her poem, "Women in Iran,"

²⁹*Bamdad*, p. 133.
written in March 1936, a few weeks after the official unveiling by Reza Khan, captured the feeling of the small segment of Iranian women activists at the time. This poem is considered by her peers to be one of the greatest literary masterpieces in the Persian language.

Until this day, women in Iran could not be called Iranians, because for them ways to serve were barred; only anguish and grief lay open.

Only the women dwelt in darkness for centuries; they alone were sacrificed on the altar of hypocrisy. Only the women had no advocate in the court of equity; they alone had no schooling in the academy of merit. The women's pleas for justice remained unheard in their lifetimes, and the injustice was not hidden, but overt.

The women were not inferior or stupid, but were ignorant, because the light of knowledge was kept hidden from women's eyes.

Women are guardians; virtue is their treasure, lust or greed is the thief, and disaster comes if they are not vigilant. The eye and the heart need a veil, but one of self-discipline; the frail cloak of cloth was not a bulwark of Moslem faith.

Emancipation

The initial emancipation of women during the Reza Shah years was a result of coincidental objectives of the Shah and the women's movement. Reza Shah's goal was to modernize Iran, to bring Iran into the scene of world politics as a leader in economics. The women's movement's

objective was to liberate women from the restricting social norms that had made women second class citizens. These two objectives fit together neatly in the 1930s, bringing out the first real move toward improved social and economic conditions for women. In order to show the world that indeed Iran's women were not considered second class citizens but, in fact, were regarded as Europeans and Americans regard their women, the Shah not only met the initial objectives of the women's movement but far exceeded them, to the point where even some liberal women became slightly alienated. The move toward full emancipation of women might have been successful if the Shah had also concentrated on building the economic superstructure which would have supported the social changes he instituted. However, given his short reign and lack of foresight, as soon as Reza Shah was forced to abdicate the throne in World War II, nearly all the moves toward emancipation were reversed by a backlash from the clerical-led elements of society. The Shah, in order to fully implement his plans, had to silence the clergy and in doing so created ill feelings among the conservative women, men, and clergy in Iran. It was these people who returned to their previous practices, including wearing the veil again.

During his reign, Reza Shah was an advocate for the modernization and westernization of Iran. He admired the accomplishment of the West and was eager to project a new
modern Iran onto the international scene. He wanted to adapt the customs and techniques of western education, industry, and economics.

Fakher-Afagh Parsay played a significant role in developing the women's movement in Iran in the critical years of the 1930s. Following her return from Qom to Tehran, Mrs. Parsay joined the newly formed society, Patriotic Women's League.31 The aim of the League, according to its charter, was to (1) emphasize continuing respect for the laws and rituals of Islam; (2) promote education and the moral upbringing of girls; (3) encourage national industries to increase literacy among adult women; (4) provide care for orphaned girls; (5) establish charitable hospitals for women; (5) organize cooperatives to develop the national economy; and (6) give material and moral support to the nation in event of war.32 The League tried to capture the attention of public officials through the news media. In 1923, the League founded a magazine, *Nesvan-i Vatankhah* [The Patriotic Women].33

Through this society, of which Mrs. Parsay became a leading member, women's activists pressed for reforms and improvements for women educational opportunities, as well

31Mohtaram Estandari, a Qajar Princess, founded the group in 1922.

32Bamdad, p. 64.

33Ibid.
as opportunities in the work place. Several letters were
drafted to the Court Minister, Taimoor Tash, through his
wife, Sorour al-Soltaneh. There were no replies. Insulted
and determined, the society decided to protest in public at
the Royal Palace. When the Reza Shah's motorcade left the
Palace, the women barricaded his car and gave him an
envelope requesting the Reza Shah to make a stand for
women's rights and education. The King accepted the letter
saying, "You shall also reach your dreams, but patience is
required."34

The National Ladies' Society, founded in 1909 by
Mrs. Agha Beygon with sixty women, was one of the most
active and influential groups in the women's movement in
Iran at the time. The Society's objectives were to define
the causes of the deplorable status of women in Iran and
take action to rectify those causes. They identified
foreign countries as perpetrators of bad influence and
directed their members to wear only Iranian-produced
garments and educate themselves to widen their horizons.
This society, like most of the societies at the time, was
faced with a lack of financial support as well as member­
ship. Moreover, they were opposed by the majority of
society and even the Ministry of Education. Outside Reza
Shah, the only other visible government official who

34 Piernia, "We Broke Out of Prison," p. 4.
(Translation.)
supported the movement was Brigadier General Dargahy, Chief of Police.35

Symbols of modernization and emancipation appeared to drive the liberalizing society in the 1930s. In 1928, the uniform dress code was passed through Parliament.36 In 1929, the Pahlavi hat was replaced by the "international hat." This action was met with clerical opposition, as they considered the use of a brimmed hat to be contrary to the precepts of Islam. During the prayers, the forehead must touch the ground, and the brimmed hat would be an obstacle.37 Symbols remained the primary method of expression of belief and were used as objects to influence different segments of the society as each group saw fit.

In 1934, as Reza Shah returned from a State Visit to Turkey, he decided to abolish the veil. He believed the veil presented a negative look to the Western World. But he did not find the public climate promising for such a drastic measure. He issued the formal proclamation to abolish the veil on 1 February 1936.

However, a month prior to the introduction of this law, Reza Shah, along with the Royal Family, made a public

35Bamdad, pp. 35-36.


37Ibid., p. 166.
appearance unveiled. They attended the graduation ceremony of the Normal School for Girls at which, four days earlier, the Royal Court ordered the girls to not wear their veils. For the event, the girls had to have their hair trimmed and properly groomed. Given the lack of hair-stylists, the school retained two male barbers to give the girls haircuts. All the students showed up at the ceremony with men's hair styles. Some of the girls adopted the Christian Armenian and Western style dress for the ceremony.

On 1 February 1936, regulations to encourage the abandonment of the veil went into effect. Women were not allowed to appear wearing the veil in any public building, taxi, bus, or cinema. The trade commission ordered from Germany and France 500,000 rials worth of ready-to-wear apparel and hats, to accommodate this quick change.

It is important to note that the first Iranian woman to appear in public in western dress and without the veil was Sadigheh Dolat Abady, in 1927. She was also the first woman to represent the Iranian women at the Paris World Conference in 1926. Throughout Reza Shah's reign,

38Ibid., p. 173.
40Ibid.
41Saedi, interview.
all modernization efforts met with opposition from the clergy.

**Conclusion**

When Mrs. Parsay was in her early thirties, she suffered from chronic arthritis as a result of rheumatic fever. She became bedridden for the rest of her days. However, the legacy lived on in her daughter Farroukhrou, who was being nurtured by her parents into the reasoning and need for women's emancipation.

The accidental death of her other daughter appeared to end the active life of Mrs. Parsay. However, she continued to teach at her home and read books. She also taught herself English. She died in 1979, two weeks after the arrest of her daughter for crimes against Islam and the State. Her final days were marked by the initiation of the reversal of what women had worked for so long and finally achieved.\(^{42}\) Farouk-Dyn Parsay died in 1972 from a heart attack.

The parents of Farroukhrou Parsay nurtured her from infancy in the need for improved rights for women and the role that they must play in society if Iran is to remain independent of foreign domination and improve economically. Farroukhrou, as she rose through the ranks to become the

\(^{42}\)Interview with Nahid Malek Ahmady, Los Angeles, California, 13 July 1986.
Minister of Education, consulted her parents and accepted their advice on many occasions. It was the influence especially of her father that guided her education and career. Yet both parents played an important role in the development of her career and the enactment of many reforms at the highest level.
CHAPTER III

PRE-POLITICAL YEARS

Introduction

Farroukhrou Parsay's success in government and the significant role that she evolved into regarding the women's movement stemmed from her upbringing. Her family was very simple, not extravagant. This simplicity, Farroukhrou carried throughout her life, impressing both men and women, governmental and non-governmental figures alike. Lack of greed and egotism helped to promote her through the ranks. Moreover, Farroukhrou's parents were grounded in deep religious tradition. Respect for the clergy, indoctrinated at an early age, allowed her to understand the religious objections to modernization-westernization. The ability to have a feeling for liberal modernization as a result of her parents' disposition and religious tradition allowed her to develop her own concept of "nationalistic modernization": to modernize, but only within the limits and acceptability of Iranian society.

As a result, throughout her early years and in her pre-political years, she demonstrated her capability to utilize her unique upbringing to further the causes of educational equality for all and of women's rights. She

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was able to succeed in education and in the planning and coordinating of social groups that espoused improved women's conditions. Her success and predisposition to nationalistic modernization prepared her for her years in government.

**Early Years (1922-1942)**

Farroukhrou was born on the Iranian New Year's Eve, 21 March, in the year 1922.¹ Because she was born in Esfand,² her parents named her Esfand Farroukhrou. Her parents liked to use Farroukh as a root for all their children's names.

From an early age her parents were supportive and provided guidance in her education and career, support which lasted throughout her life. Dr. Farroukhrou Parsay recalls:

> My parents believed in equal education for all their children, sons and daughters. They told us, "You may study as many years as you desire; we shall help you out financially or in any other way, even if you are married and have children!"³

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¹There are several published dates of birth: (1) 1918 according to Iran's Who's Who, 1972; (2) 1924 according to Iran's Who's Who, 1974; (3) 1922 according to International Who's Who, 1972; (4) 1922, Zan Rouz, in Piernia, 1968.

²The last month of the Persian calendar.

³M. Piernia, "An Interview with a Woman Minister," Zan Rouz 182 (1968):9. (Translation.)
In 1927, at the age of five, dressed in her long school uniform, given a wooden briefcase, and accompanied by her mother, she entered Sharsh School for Girls. This school is still operating in its original location in Tehran under a new name, Homa. The school had a large playground, and the students studied in an old building.

Farroukhrou was an excellent student who listened diligently to the teachings in the classroom; however, she never opened her books outside school. She was a mischievous girl, and like the other girls, was fearful of but respected their assistant principal, Mrs. Talat Sadri. Dr. Parsay, in an interview with Zan Rouz magazine, said:

I returned to school after being sick and at home for twenty days. On that day, the entire student body of our class was being punished for something mischievous they had done the day before. I too received the punishment; even though I objected and told them I was absent the day before, no one believed me.

The teachers then, unlike today, were usually unmarried; they maintained an impersonal and professional relationship with their students and were strict and harsh in their approach. In those days, very few married women became teachers.4

She had not quite finished the sixth grade when her father was transferred to Mashhad by the Ministry of Roads. Farroukhrou completed her first cycle of the secondary school at Forough School for Girls. Nahid, Dr. Parsay's daughter, stated: "This was a Bahai school, and the only school in Mashhad which enrolled girls. My grandmother

4Ibid. (Translation.)
also taught at the same school."\(^5\) In those days, the school girls in Mashhad wore veils in deference to the religious community; however, Farroukhrou never wore the veil.\(^6\) In her three years at Forough School, she graduated first in her class each year.

After three years in Mashhad, her mother decided to return to Tehran. Back in Tehran, Farroukhrou attended the Girls' Normal School, graduating first in her class in ninth grade. She then continued on to Tehran Teachers' Training College, again graduating first in her class with a major in sciences.

Jafar Saedi, a prominent journalist, recounts:

She was brilliant, happy, and had an excellent sense of humor. As an exceptionally intelligent student, she was always first in her class. Numerous times we had published her picture and recognized her achievements at school through articles in the newspapers. She knew all the Hafez poems\(^7\) by heart, and showed mastery in reciting the poems in poetical contests.\(^8\)

Tehran Teachers' Training College was founded in 1918, when the Ministry of Education took over Ecole Franco-Persian, a privately endowed six-year primary school.

\(^5\)Interview with Nahid Malek Ahmady, Los Angeles, California, 13 July 1986.

\(^6\)Piernia, "Interview with a Woman Minister," p. 9.

\(^7\)The Hafez poems are a large collection of poems by a famous Iranian poet, Hafez. To know them by heart indicates, in Persian society, culture, knowledge, and education.

\(^8\)Interview with Jafar Saedi (journalist) at his home, Los Angeles, California, 17 July 1986. (Translation.)
for girls, opened in 1905. It was then incorporated into the Girls' Normal School, and, thus comprised all grades up to ninth. The subjects taught by the college included, among other things, the principles of education and methods of teaching. Upon graduation, the students were qualified to teach at the elementary level.

In 1921, Women's Teacher Training College was separated from the Girls' Normal School. Its program was reorganized and improved, and subjects such as child psychology and better teaching methods were introduced. As the interest in the college grew, the courses were extended from three years to five years, the same as other girls' secondary schools.

Where the boys always received six years of primary and six years of secondary education, the girls only received six years of primary and five years of secondary school. The requirement to enter the University of Tehran was twelve years of education. While the boys could enter directly into the University, the High Council of Education allowed women to enter the university only after taking a special examination, and this only after finishing the five-year secondary schools or Tehran Training College. In 1934, the college became affiliated with the University of Tehran and was renamed Tehran Teaching College.  

Tooran Aehteshami, a close friend and colleague of Farroukhrou, remembers:

In 1936, a special class was established by the Tehran Teachers' Training College for those who had already graduated but wanted to enter the University. Passing this course allowed graduates to enter the University. The curriculum was very difficult; we studied from 8:00 A.M.—8:00 P.M., and the classes were coeducational. Farroukhrou and I were among the eight women and eight men in our class. Four of the girls dropped out, but the remaining four continued on to the University. We were also the first group of women who took part in the ceremonial parade in the presence of Reza Shah, on 4 Esfand, to commemorate his birthday.¹⁰

During her college years, the Parsays entertained guests who were predisposed to assist the women's movement. The parties became an informal method for discussing the status of women's rights and what needed to be done to improve the society. Farroukhrou, like her parents, recruited confidants into their study circles.

During her first year at Tehran Teacher's College, Farroukhrou invited her fellow students to join. Some students were receptive, others not, but she never pressed those who opposed. In subsequent years, some of those initially opposed worked together with Farroukhrou in various women's organizations.

Farroukhrou's family loved to entertain. Mostly family and friends would gather socially at parties to listen to the gramophone, hold poetry contests, sing, and

¹⁰Interview with Tooran Aehteshami at her home, Los Angeles, California, 17-18 July 1986. (Translation.)
dance. Farroukhrou had a good voice and enjoyed singing and dancing.  

Marriage and Family

In 1944, in her second year of teaching, Farroukhrou married Captain Ahmad Shirin Sokhan, a family friend of fifteen years. The introduction of Shirin Sokhan to the Parsay family went back to the time when as a young man of twenty-five or twenty-six he was attending the military school. He had decided to live independently of his family, and had purchased a small house connected to and owned by the Parsays. Farroukhrou was about fourteen to sixteen years old when they first met. This association became closer when Farroukhrou's brother married the Captain's sister.

After the death caused by an accidental fall of Farroukhzaman, the Parsays' eldest daughter, they moved from their home in Abshore, in South Tehran, to a large tract of land in Dulab in North Tehran, where Mr. Parsay built two houses adjacent to each other. Farroukhrou lived here when she was first married.

After a few years, Shirin Sokhan expressed his intentions of marriage with Farroukhrou to Mr. Parsay.

11Interview with Mahin-Bano Basier, Gaithersburg, Maryland, 18 August 1986.
Mr. Parsay, being fond of him, accepted. Farroukhrou had a lot of suitors at that time, but chose to marry Captain Shirin Sokhan because she knew him and chose to respect her father's wishes. She told her friend Tooran: "My father believes he is a good man, and we know him well; I should marry him rather than a stranger." Farroukhrou did not overtly express feelings and would brush them off at any suggestion. She felt that emotions are nice to have, but one should never surrender reason to impulse. Farroukhrou was intelligent and logical, and appeared to have control over her feelings.

She wed the Captain with a dowry of 5,000 Tomans. A traditional ceremony with hundreds of guests, the festivities went on for several days. On the day of their wedding, her husband received his commission as the Army Chief of Staff of Kazeroon Brigade, and they were shortly thereafter separated for three years. After his departure, she remained in Tehran, taught and continued her studies at the medical school.

With a successful and a happy marriage, Farroukhrou, after eleven hours of difficult labor, gave

12 Basier, interview.
13 Aehteshami, interview. (Translation.)
14 Ibid.
birth to her first child, Hamid, in 1948. He was four
months old when she became pregnant with her second child,
Nahid.

With two children, she began to write her doctoral
dissertation for her medical program. She later had two
more daughters, Mahshid and Navid, who are four years
apart.

According to family and friends, Dr. Parsay and her
husband Shirin Sokhan had an exceptional relationship.
Shirin Sokhan was very fond of his wife and respected her
independence. He was deeply moved by her devotion and
commitment to women's rights. He encouraged her in her
career and in the pursuit of her convictions to social
causes.

Shirin Sokhan viewed the family as the nucleus of
society and felt that a woman was capable of having both a
career and a family. Farroukhrou remembered:

When I was offered the position of principal of Vally
Olah Nasser High School, I told my husband, this job
requires me to spend a considerable amount of time away
from home, is this agreeable with you? He replied, "I
know how responsible you are in your career. I also
know you are aware of your responsibilities at home.
You are not the type of a person who would neglect your
family responsibilities! Go and work!"15

According to Nahid, General Shirin Sokhan was never
unhappy with his wife's activities which occupied her time

15Piernia, "An Interview with an Woman Minister,"
p. 96. (Translation.)

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away from home. Many times Dr. Parsay had to travel both nationally and internationally. On one occasion she received a scholarship, when her daughter Nahid was in sixth grade, to study in the United States. Shirin Sokhan agreed to assume the full responsibilities of the home, highly unusual for a man in Iran.

Dr. Parsay was very attached to her family and loved her husband and children. She considered her husband the symbol and the pillar of strength in the family. Although she spent little time with her children, she had formed a very close relationship with them and was present whenever needed. Dr. Parsay believed a mother and her children should be spiritually close with one another. To Farroukhrou, it was the quality of the time spent that was important, not quantity. She was a loving and caring mother.¹⁶

Dr. Parsay and her husband never got involved in their children's arguments; they would let them solve their own problems. They were very rational in their approach with their children. No response to any question was given without an explanation and a reason. They examined each child to determine his or her potential. They went to great lengths to nurture those capabilities.

¹⁶N. Malek-Ahmady, interview.
Absolute freedom of choice in education was offered to their children. They could choose the school they wanted to attend, the major they wanted to study, and whether or not to study abroad or in the country.

Dr. Parsay had a very close relationship with both her mother and father. She saw them on a daily basis. Her parents and her husband were very influential on her life and career. Her husband and father, being modern men opposing the traditional views regarding women, supported her in all her feminist causes and political achievements. Farroukhrou considered them friends, advisors, and confidants, and she consulted them in both family and political discussions and decision making.17

Dr. Parsay was an ambitious and hard-working woman who rarely accepted "no" for an answer. When she had an idea she would pursue it to a successful conclusion, even if it took years. She was a very patient woman who was willing to wait years for the right time to propose an idea, if waiting would improve her chances of success. She was known to conceal her emotions, even though she had a sharp and piercing look. She was very witty and quick in her answers.

17Piernia, interview; Basier, interview; Aehteshami, interview.
**Pre-Political Years**

In Dr. Parsay's pre-political years, the influence of her parents and husband had an impact on her teaching career. Dr. Parsay rose quickly in the educational field and in the social organizations of which she was a part. This became a springboard for her entry into politics. Her conservative, not radical, approach to women's rights and education tended to propel her to the top, as well as the fact that she was not as controversial a figure to the clergy as some other feminist women were.

Farroukhrou's parents believed in their children's financial independence by their late teens. All their children were therefore encouraged to seek early employment.\(^\text{18}\) It was very unusual for any girl to work in Iran, much more so for a school-aged girl. Dr. Parsay recalled: "From the time I was fifteen or sixteen, I have worked in many capacities, as a midwife, medical assistant, nurse, and finally a teacher."\(^\text{19}\)

Dr. Parsay retained her first teaching position in Nor Bakh-sh High School for girls in 1942 with a salary of eighty-four Tomans per year. She was initially a science teacher in the seventh grade and was later promoted to

\(^{18}\text{Basier, interview; Aehteshahi, interview.}\)

\(^{19}\text{M. Piernia, "A Woman: One Step Away from Being a Minister," Zan Rouz 45 (1965):5. (Translation.)}\)
teach at a higher level, the twelfth grade, which was more prestigious.

While teaching, she continued her education and became one of the first women to enter the School of Medicine at the University of Tehran. When Dr. Parsay was in medical school, she continued to teach twelfth grade biology at Nor-bakh-sh. She would take her students on field trips to the Tehran University's anatomy laboratory to encourage and promote an interest in higher education and science.

She taught well and was able to inspire her students to learn. However, she kept her distance from the students and was not considered a teacher to whom one would go for advice or consultation. But later, as the principal of the school, she developed a very close rapport with the students. They respected her, even though she was viewed as a tough, serious individual.

In the year 1950, after eight years at Nor Bakh-sh, she accepted a position at Jandark High School for Girls and remained there until 1956. Farah Diba, who later became the Queen, as wife to Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, was one of her pupils. During those same years, she taught and became vice-principal of VallyOlah Nasser High School for Girls, and, in 1957, was appointed to Principal of VallyOlah Nasser. One year later, she left VallyOlah Nasser and was promoted to principal of Nor-Bakh-sh, the
largest high school for girls in Tehran, with over eleven hundred students. She was the first woman to be appointed to this position. In the past, due to the size of the student body and the teaching staff, a male principal was chosen. Dr. Parsay's appointment was, therefore, a major symbol in the emergence of women in education in Iran. By the time Dr. Parsay left Nor Bakh-sh to assume her position in Parliament, enrollment had increased to over eighteen hundred.20 There was such high demand for teachers and facilities for the growing enrollment that Dr. Parsay introduced two teaching shifts. One half of the students were schooled in the morning, the other half in the afternoon.

During her eight years in Nor Bakh-sh, she earned a household reputation. Many families desired their daughters to attend Nor Bakh-sh, which had become one of the most famous for its curriculum, quality of teachers, and general quality of education in Iran.21

She was considered by her colleagues to be an excellent administrator and was highly respected by both the students and the teaching staff. During her tenure at

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21 Interview with Iranian government official (does not wish to be identified), Maryland, 18 August 1986. [Hereafter is referred to as Interview (A).]
Nor-Bakh-sh, through her ability to attract the best teachers to this school, she had been able to raise the quality of teaching at Nor-Bakh-sh.

Dr. Parsay was also the first principal to hire part-time teachers, yet still provide them with full-time benefits. To attract more qualified female teachers who desired to maintain a high quality family life, Dr. Parsay was more sensitive to the needs of women teachers who were also mothers. A former teacher tells the story that, after the birth of her child, she was called in by Dr. Parsay and was told, "I have arranged your teaching schedule so you can be able to go home between your classes and breast feed your baby." She would show such consideration but at the same time was very serious and a tough administrator who did not like to allow too many exceptions to the teachers.

As a principal, she paid particular attention to the students' extracurricular activities, recognized the need, and encouraged the students to excel in fine arts and sports. Qualified instructors and advisors were hired to ensure the progress in these areas. Thus, her school became well known for its programs and was always included in all the national parades. Through fund raising via their fine arts programs, the school was able to raise enough money independent of the Ministry of Education to
add a new building.  
Dr. Parsay's day would start at 6:00 A.M., and end around 7 P.M. After work, Dr. Parsay would then go to the "Iran Novin Party" headquarters. A few evenings a week, she would stop at the women's prison and teach the female inmates.

Dr. Parsay loved teaching and was committed to this profession. That is why she chose to remain a teacher after graduating from the University of Tehran as a medical doctor of Pediatrics in 1950. She was of the opinion that as a teacher she could serve the society as a whole more effectively than as an M.D. In an interview, when asked what was the most suitable job for a woman, Dr. Parsay answered: "The best jobs for women are in teaching and the educational field, followed by nursing, administrative positions, and then any job that doesn't require excessive physical strength." While she encouraged women to further their educations and careers, she stressed that

22Interview with former Iranian government official (does not wish to be identified), Virginia, 3 and 8 August 1986. [Hereafter is referred to as Interview (B).]

23Piernia, "An Interview with a Woman Minister," p. 96.

24Shaikhulislam, Famous Women in Islam and Iran, p. 236.

25Piernia, "A Woman, One Step Away from Ministry," p. 5. (Translation.)
a woman's first and most important achievement is the creation of family and raising children. While she was principal, she encouraged the teachers to stress this point to their students.  

In 1941, Dr. Parsay accelerated her women's movement efforts by becoming an official member of "Kanoon Banovan" (The Ladies' Center). The Ladies' Center was established in 1935, when the Minister of Education, Ali Asghar Hekmat, invited the teachers of the Women's Teacher Training College not to only place their efforts into teaching but also to "set up a permanent organization to interest other ladies in pioneering social services and activities which would enable Iran's women to escape seclusion and catch up with the rest of the world's women." In 1937, Mrs. Sadigeh Dowlatabadi became the primary coordinator. The objectives of the Ladies' Center were to: (1) provide adult education for women, (2) promote physical training for women, (3) create charitable institutions for the support of destitute mothers and children, and (4) encourage the use of Iranian-made products and

28Bamdad, From Darkness into Light, p. 92; Javaher Kalam, "Memories of the Unveiling Days," Zan Rouz 97:2. (Translation.)
maintain simplicity of lifestyle. In a show of royal support, both Princess Shams and Ashraf attended the meetings.29

Faced with loss of support by the people and the stagnation that the women's movement was experiencing (caused by World War II events), the educated women, in order to preserve the women's movement and make it active again, formed two other groups: (1) the Women's Political Party founded by Mrs. Safyeh Firuz and later renamed the Council of Women and (2) the Women's League, with its own newspaper, Zan-e Emruz (Women Today); this organization in 1956 became the Women's League of Supporters of the Declaration of Human Rights. The Council of Women worked in conjunction with the Women's League and another group, the New Path Society.30

The New Path Society in 1955 was founded by Mrs. Mehrangiz Dowlatshahi.31 The objective of this organization was similar to that of the other groups; it included social welfare, literacy, and child care for women.

Other minority groups such as the Armenians, Assyrians, Zoroastrians, and Jewish women had also organ-

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29 Bamdad, From Darkness into Light, pp. 94-95.
31 Mrs. Mehrangiz Dowlatshahi in 1976 was the first woman to be appointed as Ambassador (Denmark). Bamdad, From Darkness into Light, p. 110.
ized their own ethnic pressure groups. Initially independent, these groups later coalesced into one large, potent force for women's rights. These groups were active in social work and educational programs for youth.\textsuperscript{32}

In the early 1940s, Dr. Parsay joined the newly formed Association of Teachers' Training College Graduates (Kanoon Mehregan). This association was founded by a former graduate, Mohammad Darakhshesh.\textsuperscript{33} The Kanoon Mehregan was an organization for educators who were dissatisfied with the system and aimed to improve education and teachers' social status by utilizing active political measures. In 1949, the association organized successful teachers' strike for higher wages. Later in the same year, the association and its magazine, Mehregan, were banned, along with several other political organizations, after an assassination attempt on the life of Mohammad Reza Shah.\textsuperscript{34}

Dr. Parsay was forced to leave this organization in 1950 when it was disbanded. The Kanoon Mehregan had a large number of teachers with a communist inclination. Because she did not want to be associated with communist ideology, which would have blacklisted her in the government, she quit the association as it was being dissolved.

\textsuperscript{32}Aehteshami, interview.

\textsuperscript{33}Mohammad Darakhshesh was Minister of Education in Dr. Ali Amini's Cabinet in 1961. Zonis, p. 92.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid.
Moreover, she was not overtly a political person; rather, she was active in social reforms.\textsuperscript{35}

Another important political party in this period was the Society of Democratic Women, established in 1949 by the communist Tudeh Party.\textsuperscript{36} The Communist Tudeh Party was influential in preventing the complete return to the veil, after Reza Shah's abdication. This party advocated women's rights and attracted teachers, students, and modern educated women. Their goal was to expand education for girls and equalize pay between men and women.

Dr. Parsay, while she was the principal of Nor Bakh-sh, later renamed Reza Shah Kabir, established the Society of Women Educators in 1952.\textsuperscript{37} Its goals included the elimination of illiteracy, the creation of welfare projects, and the broadening of professional opportunities for women. This society arranged meetings, speeches, and field trips. Its membership was large, several hundreds, because most of the educated women were playing at least some role in improving Iran's educational opportunities for women.

\textsuperscript{35}Aehteshami, interview.
\textsuperscript{36}Nashat, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{37}Aehteshami, interview.
By 1956, as the number of women's organizations grew, leaders of these women's associations saw the need to form a federation. Under a coordinating committee, each group was able to preserve its independence. The goal was to combine their efforts and draw up unified long-range goals and purposes, rather than have each organization function separately. Dr. Parsay was one of the women who encouraged the creation of the Federative Body. In the first year of its existence, the Federative Body consisted of the Council of Women of Iran, the Women's League of Supporters of the Declaration of Human Rights, the Women's Relief Committee of Tehran, the New Path Society, the Society of Women's Educators, and the Women Medical Practitioners' Center. Later, Dr. Parsay served as the President of this organization.

The First Federative Body, in its first public declaration stated that, in the last fifty years, women's tasks and responsibilities in society had undergone dramatic changes. Women, in order to assume their new duties, needed new political and sacred rights. These women demanded to be given the rights which they felt were rightfully theirs.

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38Aehteshami, interview; Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light*, p. 107.


The First Federative Body, aside from its attempts to improve and change the social role of women, also worked toward altering the political and economic foundations of Iran which precluded women from playing an equal role in society. The women in it felt they were ready to be integrated into every aspect of society.41

Throughout the 1950s, the number of activist groups continued to multiply, coalesce, and again multiply in an effort to develop a united front on which to press for reforms. In 1959, seventeen various groups including the First Federative Body, under the auspices of Princess Ashrah Pahlavi and Dr. Parsay, met and chartered a new body called the "High Council of Iranian Women's Associations." Dr. Parsay was among the founders of this organization.42 In 1966, this organization renamed itself the Women's Organization of Iran.43 By the late 1970s, the membership of this same organization grew to one million women, with 400 branches and a volunteer staff of 70,000.44

Dr. Parsay served as the Chief of the Education Committee of the High Council of Iranian Women's


42Mir-Hashem, interview.

43Hamdad, From Darkness into Light, p. 112.

44A. Pahlavi, p. 155.
Associations. This organization became active and involved itself in the political and social arenas. It endorsed parliamentary candidates and, with the guidance of Dr. Parsay, lobbied for the passage of the Family Protection Act in 1975. The organization's underlying philosophy was the conviction that every individual in the society must be encouraged to learn, work, grow, and contribute to nation building; that education in the broadest sense is the most important means to bring about constructive change; that women's economic independence is one of the first priorities for the foundation.

The Committee of the Higher Council of Iranian Women developed four major social projects in Iran: (1) the creation of welfare programs (health and day care facilities, education, legal counseling for women, family planning, and child care) in rural areas, (2) the establishment of a school for social work in Varamin in 1963 (after a two-year program, this school offered associate degrees and encouraged its graduates to work in the family welfare centers), (3) a lecture and conference circuit on women's issues, and (4) sponsorship of research on women's issues such as the veil, the status of rural and tribal


46 Interview with Mahnaz Afkhami, Foundation of Iranian Studies, Bethesda, Maryland, 1 August 1986.
women in Iran, and the sexist portrayal of women in books, advertisements, and commercials.\textsuperscript{47}

During 1959-1960, Dr. Parsay and twenty-five other female university graduates met informally several times for the purpose of forming a new organization for women with university educations. In 1963, after several years of planning and consultation with the International Federation of University Women and the American Embassy, the Society of University Women was formally established.\textsuperscript{48} Its membership initially numbered one hundred under the chairmanship of Dr. Parsay. One year later, this society was adopted as a member group of the International Federation of University Women, adhering to its constitution.\textsuperscript{49} The objective of this new organization was to educate Iranian women and women of other nations concerning the political, social, and economic status of women in Iran.

Dr. Parsay's new organization was considered one of the most elite and prestigious in Iran due to its membership restrictions to women with a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree. It represented educated Iranian women, who saw the potentially more active role they could play in


\textsuperscript{48}Aehtheshami, interview.

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid.
politics and economics. This organization also was among the most visible in the country in that its members participated actively in all national and international women's conferences.

Dr. Parsay was elected yearly from 1963 to 1978 as the President of the Society of University Women, in spite of her requests not to be elected. Dr. Parsay was an effective and persuasive speaker, who had the ability to touch the audience. She had an excellent sense of humor and could speak for hours without notes. The topic of all her public speeches included education, women's issues, and women's status.

Dr. Parsay followed a conservative approach in her efforts in women's rights and the political arena. She understood both the existing women's attitudes and the existing realities. Although she was a modernizer, she believed in moderate evolutionary changes rather than radical revolutionary changes. In order for any change to have a positive result, timing and preparation of the public and educational institutions were necessary.

Dr. Parsay always cautioned Iranian women not to go to extremes in emulating the West, especially referring to

Ibid.
Mir-Hashem, interview.
Ahehteshami, interview.
superficial symbolic changes and appearances. In an interview while she was Under Secretary of the Ministry of Education, she stated:

The reason that the Iranian women's movement has not been able to experience a rapid growth can be attributed to women, who in general have not been able to understand their responsibilities and goals. This is the result of decades of deprivation. Even now that they have been given their freedom, they cannot comprehend the extent of their responsibilities. The women have gone overboard in imitating the western fashion, instead of trying to imitate the west regarding human rights, education, and women's issues.53

Dr. Parsay did not consider herself a feminist or a westernizer. Although she dedicated her life to the women's movement, she viewed herself as an educator, a role model, and a nationalist-modernizer. She was a practical woman who believed in a cause and wanted to bring about change, but within the realm of the society's capacity to digest such changes.

53Piernia, "A Woman, One Step Away from Ministry," p. 5. (Translation.)
CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICAL YEARS

Introduction

During the early years of Dr. Parsay's political career extending to her posts in the Ministry of Education and up to the end of her position as Minister, Dr. Parsay appeared to follow three basic tenets. It is these tenets that led to her successful career. They are:

1. Maintain a pragmatic position on all issues;
2. Separate women's rights activism from official duties as an elected official; and
3. Pursue women's rights in the extragovernmental world.

The first tenet resulted in Dr. Parsay presenting herself as pragmatic and not radical. As such, she gained the favor of Prime Minister Hoveyda, who helped to orchestrate her career from her early political years. She was not viewed by her opponents as a stubborn, single-minded feminist radical in pursuit of revolutionary change, but rather as a reasoning, logical individual who dealt with the realities of political life and understood the society.

Once established in her career, she chose to separate the issues of education and women's rights, which
before had been spoken by her in the same breath. This ability to pursue only educational achievements within her Ministry and exclude women's rights programs for the full six years during which she held her Ministerial post demonstrated her professionalism to the rest of the cabinet.

Finally, though she did separate education and women's rights, she continued to pursue women's rights in a non-official capacity. In fact, all of her achievements in the women's movement, except two, were made by her acting in a non-official capacity as the leader of several women's organizations. The two exceptions were her banning the veil for school girls and her directive to have the primary textbooks rewritten to present a non-sexist attitude.¹

However, it was the inherent problems of the Ministry of Education that led to her nonreturn to the Cabinet in 1974. Despite the very successful formula Dr. Parsay had prescribed for herself, the Ministry needed more. Despite the fact that she had held the post of Minister of Education for six years, longer than anyone else, and was the first woman in the Cabinet, the problems confronting education in Iran were too large for any one person.

The Ministry of Education was too large, and growing too fast. Not only was the staff responsible for

¹These directives are discussed later in this chapter.
national level policy making and implementation, but it was also responsible for every school, school teacher, school building, and school child in Iran. The whole educational system of Iran was centralized under Dr. Parsay's leadership, and it was expanding.

The expansion was so rapid that any improvements such as the increased distribution of textbooks, orders to build school houses, and attempts to increase the quality of the teachers would be immediately overshadowed by even greater demands. Books and school houses were not supplied quickly enough, and the ministry was forced to lower the quality of the teachers so that there would be enough teachers for all the students. The expansion was so great and rapid that it was achievement enough by Dr. Parsay to retain her post for a total of six years.

Near the end of her tenure, the organizational capability of the ministry began to be paralyzed by the overwhelming amount of work and the mounting problems. As a result, Dr. Parsay was legitimately criticized by both her supporters and opponents on the basis that there were problems and they were not being addressed quickly enough.

This criticism, along with her refusal to agree with the Shah on a Free Food Plan\(^2\) for school children in

\(^2\)Free Food Plan (Taghziyeh Rayegan). To serve on a daily basis free food to all school children in Iran. The Plan was subsidized by the central government. Implemented in 1973.
1974 (because the Ministry did not have the staff to carry out the program successfully); allegations of bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism; and the increasing radicalism and criticism by her female constituency led to her downfall from the Cabinet.

The Early Politician

In 1962, the political party Kanoon Motaraghy was established by Mr. Hassan Ali Mansur and Amir Abbas Hoveyda. The leaders of this liberal party played a significant role in the Iranian Cabinet and in shaping the future of the country. They supported women's equal rights and decided to invite some of the well-known and respected women's leaders and educators to join their party. A group of twenty women in the educational field were selected, among whom were Dr. Parsay, Mrs. Tarbiat, Mrs. Johan Bany, and Mrs. Ebtahaj Samiej. They were chosen because they had earned the respect of their communities.

The Kanoon Motaraghy was renamed the Iran Novin

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3Hassan Ali Mansur and Amir Abbas Hoveyda, as prime ministers, were allowed by the Shah to staff their cabinets with party men and women to create a united "team." Zonis, p. 83.

4Interview with a former Iranian government official who does not wish to be identified, Bethesda, Maryland, 19 September 1986. [Hereafter referred to as Interview (C).]
Party in 1965. The party chose four women to run in the Parliament election, including Dr. Parsay. All four women mentioned above were nominated and elected as Deputies (equivalent to member of the House of Representatives in the United States Congress) to the twenty-first parliament. This marked a turning point in the history of Iranian women's rights; for the first time women became full partners in the national level decision-making process and could change the laws which affected them.

Dr. Parsay was chosen by the party to run in the elections for the following reasons: (1) she was not perceived by the general public as "feminist," (2) her outstanding educational achievements, (3) her solid portfolio in the women's rights movement, (4) her contributions to education, (5) her clean political past, and (6) her respectability and fame earned in the community.

The women's movement's incredible achievement took place within a time span of less than two decades. It began with the enactment of the White Revolution. The fifth point in the White Revolution was the amendment of the Electoral Law to abolish discrimination which favored the influential class and which prevented entry of other

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6Ibid.
people into the Parliament. This resulted in the abolition of the restrictions which prohibited female suffrage and granted them rights equal to men. Until the early 1960s, women were treated as if they were mentally unbalanced or financially insolvent in that they were deprived of the right to vote or to run for public office. This meant that almost half of the Iranian population had no say in their affairs.

The overall objective of Mohammed Reza Shah was to modernize and technologically develop Iran. In 1961, the Shah undertook to transform Iran into a modern country; a six-point program of reform referred to as the "Revolution of the Shah and the People" was put to a special referendum. The elements of the program were passed through the Parliament, and what was popularly known as the White Revolution became a reality in early 1963. The general referendum was held on 26 January 1963. An overall majority of the people voted in favor of the plan in the referendum.

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7 Zonis, pp. 74-76.
9 This date is equivalent to 6 Bahman 1341, in the Iranian calendar; thus, this referendum is referred to as the "6 Bahman."
10 M. Pahlavi, p. 3.
The 1963 radical electoral reform program was adopted by the government, which recognized the need for equal suffrage rights and to allow women to be elected to both houses of Parliament. On 7 March 1963, the disenfranchisement of women was removed by decree of the Council of Ministers. From that point on, both men and women participated in the elections in a democratic manner.

When the date of the referendum was announced, Dr. Parsay decided to participate actively. She told herself: "Women must take part in this referendum," and to encourage a favorable environment, she devoted full time to this effort. Daily, she spoke at various women's groups and in girls' high schools both in Tehran and other cities. She also organized a group of women to lobby Parliament and the Cabinet.

Because of her prominent position in politicizing and her renown in pressing for women's activism, one day Prime Minister Alam received her in his cabinet office and told her, "His Majesty has said that I am asking the whole nation of Iran to vote. The women are part of this nation." Then, as she was leaving the room, Mr. Alam turned to Dr. Parsay and said, "I hope to see you in one of

11A. Pahlavi, p. 166.
12Piernia, "An Interview with The Madam Minister," p. 96. (Translation.)
our cabinet meetings, occupying one of these seats some
day."13

Dr. Parsay continued her public appearances and
became a well-known moderate in politics, devoted to
improving the status of women. Her capability to under­
stand her constituency and provide guidance at the highest
levels of the women's movement led to her involvement in
the Iran Novin Party. In 1964, Dr. Parsay accepted the
nomination of the Iran Novin Party to run for the elections
in the 21 Parliament. By then, she had established a
large, nationwide constituency for her ideas. In her first
years in the new Iran Novin Party, she ran for Parliament,
and with 178,000 votes was able to defeat her opponents,
becoming one of the first women to enter Parliament in the
history of Iran.14

As she began her political career, Dr. Parsay
committed herself to the women's movement. She felt that
the movement needed a leader and that she could fill that
position. The day she gave her farewell speech to the
students at Nor Bakh-sh, they went on strike in protest of
her leaving. She said, "I must take this position not for

13Ibid.

14Ibid.

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me but for you, to pave the way for you to follow and open new doors for you, the women and the future of Iran.  

During this period, Dr. Parsay's High Council of Iranian Women's Associations was actively involved in working for women's rights; this organization was instrumental in having suffrage for women included as one of the six points of the White Revolution.

All this was not accomplished without a great deal of resistance from some politicians and from the clergy. Strong objections were raised by the clergy, who called the decree a move against Islam. When the law limiting individual ownership of lands was submitted as the third point, and the law giving women the right to vote and run for provincial and town assemblies was submitted as the sixth point, a wave of bloody riots, fires, and acts of disorder took place.

One of the clergy, Ruhollah Khomeini, who opposed all the modernization programs, especially those dealing with land reform and the emancipation of women, expressed his disapproval in a speech in 1962, by referring to women as "prostitutes." He said, "...we are not against the progress of women, we are against these prostitutes, we are against these wrong doings. Are the men in this nation

15Ibid.
free that the women are asking for freedom?! By words alone can we have free women or free men?"16

Meetings were held by the clergy in Qum and other provinces. In November of the same year, a meeting was held in Qum, composed of four distinguished clergy and Ruhollah Khomeini. They sent a telegram to the Shah and Mr. Alam announcing their differences.17 They told them that:

No Parliament or government can set rules against the Islamic rules. . . . This is a muslim nation and the clergy (leaders) are still living. . . . We shall cut off the hands of the people who attempt to commit treachery against the basic laws of Islam.18

The pressure was strong enough to cause Prime Minister Alam to withdraw the permission allowing women to vote in the referendum.

This action of the government aroused the anger of women, in particular, Dr. Parsay. Normally, the women's associations held an annual celebration on 7 January to commemorate the unveiling by Reza Shah. However, being deprived of civil rights to partake in the referendum, they cancelled the celebration. That morning women activists, among them Dr. Parsay, gathered in Reza Shah's mausoleum


17These basic diversions and disagreements finally led to exile of Ruhollah Khomeini to Turkey in 1963.

18Iran Nameh, p. 317. (Translation.)
and later made their way to the Prime Minister's office and presented their demands to Mr. Alam.\(^\text{19}\)

On 24 January 1963, various women's associations and women teachers in particular, led by Dr. Parsay, went on a labor strike as a form of protest. On that day, several hundreds of thousands of women teachers and women employed in the Civil Service and private institutions went on strike. This forced the officials to take action to comply with the women's request. The result was purely symbolic: an unsubstantiated act to appease the women. In view of the legal circumstances, which did not permit women to vote, they provided special boxes into which women cast their ballots, even though these votes would not have any legal value.\(^\text{20}\)

Later, however, women were allowed to vote. The voting issue was not then mired in the political sensitivities of the other points in the White Revolution. This was a watershed achievement for women, led by Dr. Parsay. In February 1963, Iranian women were given the right to vote and run for office. In September 1963, national elections were held, and six women including Dr. Parsay

\(^{19}\)Bamdad, From Darkness into Light, p. 117.

\(^{20}\)Interview with an Iranian government official who does not wish to be identified, S. S. Md., 1 July 1986. [Hereafter referred to as Interview (D).]
were elected to the Majles (Parliament) and two women were appointed by the Shah to the Senate.21

The Shah's decision to modernize Iran in every sense of the word, by offering equal rights to women, set the stage and the climate for women to enter the political arena. At this time, the women's movement, by achieving such rights, found it imperative to assert itself in decision making at the national level in order to redirect the entire societal developmental process to include women and to improve the educational opportunities.

**Appointments to the Cabinet**

In the Parliament, Farroukhrou served as a member of the Education and Budget Commission. She worked and campaigned vigorously on ending discrimination against women and improving the educational system for both men and women. As a member of the commission that dealt with these issues, she made great contributions in the development, introduction, and passage of the Family Protection Law Act in 1967.

The women in Parliament had not quite gotten accustomed to their new environment and, accordingly, the other members were not used to the presence of women in the Parliament. This adjustment required the passage of time.

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21The Iranian Senate in 1963 had sixty members, thirty of whom were elected and thirty of whom were appointed by the Shah.
By their twentieth month in office, the female Deputies were placed under severe pressure by their women constituency to make rapid changes and were scrutinized by the media.

To get the Family Protection Law passed was a struggle from the beginning. Various committees labored for hundreds of hours to word the provisions in such a way as to minimize both public and clerical resistance. To ensure this, the commission invited several senior religious authorities and several senators, high officials, and judges representing the Ministry of Justice to serve as advisors to the committee. Each proposal drafted by the commission was brought to the attention of these men, who provided valuable advice on ways of preparing legislative text so that its language would avoid conflict with religious doctrine (Shariah) and the Koran. All other laws at the time were developed in accordance with the Koran and with clerical approval. The committee's effort represented an attempt to do the same with the Family Protection Act. Even though measures were taken in this regard, the fanatic conservative clergy opposed the rapidly changing status of women and attacked the Family Protection Law. This law was drawn to be consistent with the Shariah. The intent was to clarify the religious quality of the laws, not eliminate them. The clergy's very negative response was therefore unfounded.
Once passed, the Family Protection Act gave Iranian women the most sweeping civil rights in the Islamic Middle East. The Family Protection Act recognized: (1) a wife as an equal partner in marriage, in decision making, and in planning the future of the children and limited the man to one wife by setting strict conditions which virtually made it impossible for him to marry a second wife, (2) that divorce can be obtained only by the court's permission, (3) a minimum age of marriage, for girls 15 and boys 18, and the most important, (4) the matter of child custody, women could become custodians of their children.22

In 1975, the Family Protection Laws were amended to include more articles on women's rights. One provision that was modified related to the job possibilities for women. According to the Civil Code, the tradition foundation of Iranian law, the husband could forbid his wife from accepting a job that would disgrace him. The Family Protection Act of 1975 stated that wives, too, could forbid their husbands from accepting a job that might disgrace her. In such cases, the court had to render an approving decision. The court's judgment was to be based on the efforts of the husband's employment, family income, and welfare.23

22Afkhami, interview.
23Ibid.
The traditional population opposed the passage of the Family Protection Law of 1967 and condemned it as radical and non-Islamic, while, on the other hand, the modern and the educated opposed the Act as not radical and comprehensive enough to meet the necessary and needed changes that the new, rapidly developing Iran required. The passage of the Family Protection Act, in any case, was an important step in bringing civil rights to women. It was Dr. Parsay's first major success as a governmental leader. It established her as a credible parliamentarian.

By 1965, Mr. Hoveyda, the leader of the Iran Novin party, had become Prime Minister. He was interested in introducing a woman into the cabinet. Dr. Parsay had been a very active and accomplished party member who had proven herself in the Parliament.

Mr. Hoveyda, who was experiencing administrative problems within the Ministry of Education at the top levels, was interested in making some administrative changes and was looking for an individual who had experience within the Ministry of Education. Dr. Parsay, with her portfolio, a teacher who had climbed all the steps in the educational system, met his requirement. Mr. Hoveyda asked her to accept the position as the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education as a favor to the party and a show of loyalty. This was not considered a promotion for her. As a member of Parliament, she in fact held a higher
status. She accepted this position in 1965 after serving in Parliament for two years. She retained the position of Undersecretary for three years.

When Dr. Parsay took office as the Parliamentarian Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, the organization was experiencing internal problems at two levels. First, conflicts existed between the Minister of Education and a few of his Undersecretaries. This stemmed, in most cases, from the fact that the Undersecretary was appointed by the Prime Minister, in this case Mr. Hoveyda. Dr. Parsay was chosen for this position because of her loyalty to the party and Mr. Hoveyda. She was to represent the growing number and value of women in education and to serve as a role model for the emerging educated women into society. She became a pioneer for women in politics in Iran.

Secondly, the number of female teachers and female students had increased by nearly 50 percent in the Ministry of Education. These teachers had some demands and were unhappy about their low pay and low status within the organization. Thus, appointment of Dr. Parsay as a woman administrator with a background in all levels, teaching and

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24 Interview (C).
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.

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administration, who had a better understanding of these needs, seemed to be the answer.27

Dr. Parsay on the day she took office summarized her goals as follows: (1) to create a harmonious working climate within the Ministry of Education, (2) to improve the educational programs to meet the needs of the country, (3) to introduce programs to aid the financially needy students, and (4) to incorporate in the teaching curriculum programs to increase both political and social awareness of female students regarding their status.28

Dr. Parsay's new position was to merely represent the educational programs of the Ministry of Education in the Parliament and through lobbying ensure their passage and approval by the Parliaments. This was an administrative and a bureaucratic position and lacked any decision making and creativity. Yet, Dr. Parsay still was able to influence policy and help guide improvements in education and women's rights.29

The three years Dr. Parsay served as undersecretary were considered by her to be the least active and least productive of her life to this time. In most administrative matters, the undersecretaries were overlooked; the

27Ibid.
28Piernia, "One Step Away from Ministry," p. 5.
29Interview (B).
Minister of Education would in most cases conduct business by contacting the General Directors of the Ministry to deal with programs and issues. Dr. Parsay was very unhappy with this post and on many occasions had expressed interest in returning to teaching. She began to think that her training and expertise were being wasted.

During this period, Dr. Parsay's most notable program achievements in the women's movement were those she helped develop and implement in conjunction with the extra-governmental High Council of Iranian Women's Associations. As the Chief of Education of this association, she engineered the formation of the family welfare programs and the establishment of the School of Social Work mentioned earlier in this chapter.

One of the most significant contributions of Dr. Parsay was her effort in the establishment of the Women's Literacy Corps. In 1962, Princess Ashraf, the Honorary President of the High Council of Iranian Women's Associations, asked Dr. Parsay to investigate a variety of programs to combat illiteracy in the rural areas and the
idea of implementing a Women's Literacy Corps. After three months of investigation, Dr. Parsay and her committee reported that the attitude of the people in the rural areas was not ready yet to accept a woman from the urban area, who had left her father's home to come to their village to offer assistance to their wives and daughters. The timing was not suitable for such a program.35

It was not until 1963 that, in accordance with the sixth point of the White Revolution, the Literacy Corps for men was established. Corpsmen36 were not only responsible to teach literacy in the rural areas, but, also, were asked to provide general knowledge to all people. The Health Corps, set up in 1964 and the Development and Extension Corps, set up in 1965, provided medical, agricultural, and developmental help in rural areas.37 However, all corpsmen, regardless of the Corps with which they were affiliated, were not quite accepted by most rural men to teach their wives and daughters.

In light of the White Revolution and the opportunities it provided for women, the women's assistance in the Corps became essential. The Women's Literacy Corps was finally established in 1968 by the government with the co-Anonymous

35Ibid.

36Founded in 1962, conscripted by the army, under the provision of the White Revolution.

37M. R. Pahlavi, p. 126.
guidance of the Princess and Dr. Parsay, along with the efforts of the High Council of Iranian Women's Associations. This not only helped to improve the literacy of women in rural areas and increase the living standards, but it also helped to close the existing gap between urban and rural areas. The corpswomen taught practices of hygiene, housekeeping, and child care.

Another program which Dr. Parsay assisted in founding was the Education Corps Teaching College. It was founded in 1964. The major objective was to provide the Corps' members with teacher training in four areas: (1) educational guidance, (2) primary education, (3) rural education, and (4) experimental science. This college also was created to further the Corps personnel's educational achievements by providing them with programs leading to both the Associate and Bachelor degrees through correspondence. In 1972, 73,466 students were enrolled in the bachelor degree programs and 1,252 in Associate degree programs.

As a high-ranking member of the High Council of Iranian Women, Dr. Parsay assisted in the creation of adult

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38 Aehtesthami, interview.
39 Noeli, p. 60.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
education for women. Each member of this council was, in her own community and in the South of Tehran, to gather adult women and, as well as teaching literacy, educate them in their legal rights. Counseling classes were also offered to these women.  

By the late 1960s and the early 1970s, significant expansion was occurring in the number of women being educated and in the work force. This was the result of the changing sociopolitical environment and the legal reforms in women's status that Dr. Parsay helped to bring about. These changes were the result of the country's accelerated rate of economic development and radical change caused by increased oil revenues and nationalization of the Iranian oil industry. The increase in the country's GNP created many new jobs and, as a result, women's employment opportunities increased and a greater number of women entered the work force.

Women's participation in political affairs increased, even though the number of women participants was very low. It was a gradual increase. In 1971, several women were elected to town councils throughout Iran. In 1978, 333 of 1,660 candidates elected to town councils were women. Twenty-two women were elected to Parliament and two served in the Senate. There was one cabinet minister,  

42Aehteshami, interview.
three undersecretaries, one governor, one ambassador, and five mayors.\textsuperscript{43}

Dr. Parsay's attempts to improve education in general and for women were successful. During the first half of the 1970s, the number of girls attending elementary schools rose from 80,020 to 1,508,387.\textsuperscript{44} The number of girls attending vocational training schools rose tenfold.\textsuperscript{45} The number of women candidates for the universities rose seven times.\textsuperscript{46} In 1978, there were approximately 659,000 female students in Iranian Secondary Schools and 36,644 female students in higher education, majoring in all fields.\textsuperscript{47}

In 1979, there were two million Iranian women in the labor force and 187,928 enrolled in academic and specialized fields.\textsuperscript{48} Thirty-three percent of the teachers in secondary schools were females.\textsuperscript{49} There were 1,803 female professors, assistants, and instructors in the

\textsuperscript{43}Afkhami, interview.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47}Motahedi, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{48}Afkhami, interview.
\textsuperscript{49}Motahedi, p. 51.
institutions of higher education. Civil servants numbered 146,604, and of these 1,666 were managers or directors.

Dr. Parsay was able to use education as an agent of change to affect the Iranian's attitude toward women's status and women's role—toward acceptance of women by men in full partnership. By the middle 1970s, the women had assumed and were playing a significant role in the educational development of Iran.

By 1967, the rapid urbanization and industrialization of the country had pushed the expansion of the primary and secondary schools. In the academic year 1964-65, the enrollment at the secondary level had reached 439,296 students. On the other hand, the growth of the university was not in step with the needs of the secondary level graduates and was not able to accommodate these students in the existing system of advanced education. In the academic year 1964-65, the system of higher education was only able to enroll 25,373 students.

As a result of social pressures, the growing economy, and the need for a trained and qualified manpower, 

50 Ibid.
51 Afkhami, interview.
52 Noeli, p. 96.
53 Ibid.
the government established a new Ministry. In 1967, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education was established.54

In 1968, the higher education institutions came under public and government criticism. The concern was over the quality of the higher education in Iran. As a result, the Council of Educational revolution was organized in 1968. Its first action was to adopt a Charter.55 The charter focused on the improvement of the social conditions and welfare of students. The Council was chartered to bring in line the education of students in vocational and university programs and the country's economic developmental programs.

As a result of the Educational Revolution, new private and public colleges and technological institutions were established. The total enrollment in the academic year 1972-73 grew to a total 115,311, of which 34,530 were women.56 However, this growth was not sufficient enough to meet the demands of the industrial growth rate, and the needs of the high volume of secondary education graduates. In 1973, 92,000 candidates took the Konkur (mandatory

54Ibid.
55Ibid., p. 98.
56Ibid., p. 99.
university entrance examination), but the capacity of the universities and colleges was only 9,992.57

The need for higher education, the technological advancement of the west, and easier entry into foreign colleges were among the factors that drew Iranian students abroad. In 1973, there were 100,000 college students at home and 40,000 abroad.58

With the help of Dr. Parsay, during the 1960s, three more universities came into existence: the Iran National University, the Aryameh University of Technology, and Pahlavia University. The 1960s saw an acceleration of participation by private and non-profit institutions in the educational process. In the academic year 1972-1973, the enrollments at these institutes totaled 24,785 students, 20 percent of all college students in Iran.59

In 1968, Mr. Hoveyda chose and introduced Dr. Parsay as the first woman Minister of Education. In a morning audience with the Shah, Mr. Hoveyda presented her as the "Minister without Portfolio."60 Later he accompanied her to the Ministry of Education and commented that "Dr. Parsay was chosen for the post because she has always

57Ibid., p. 100.
58Ibid., p. 102.
59Ibid., p. 67.
60Interview (C).
acted in accordance with the aims of the Educational Revolution." "The Shahanshah," Hoveyda said, "had expressed a desire to have someone well-acquainted with educational problems and the aims of the Educational revolution appointed as Minister of Education. He approved that such a great honor had been bestowed on an Iranian woman."61

Dr. Parsay, on the same day in a short speech, pledged that she would work hard to ensure the attainment of the goals set by the Educational Revolution Conference. She explained her policies and emphasized implementing a crash program for training teachers, because Iran's schools were suffering from an acute shortage of teachers.

In her six years in office, she accomplished the implementation of some successful programs. One of these was the establishment of institutions of higher education affiliated with the Ministry of Education. It was recognized by the government that there was a great need for technologically oriented and qualified, skilled persons rather than liberal-arts-educated college graduates. When Dr. Parsay entered her Ministry, for every college graduate the government had to spend approximately 500,000 Tomans,

61Ibid.
since almost all private elementary, secondary, and universities received government subsidies.62

To improve the viability of Iranian higher education, Dr. Parsay expanded the mission of institutions of technical higher education in Iran to emphasize the responsibility for training semi-skilled professionals to match the diversified needs of the rapidly expanding economy. This also took the pressure off the government's extremely high subsidy payments. In the academic year 1972-73, a total of 25,932 students were enrolled in the thirty-five institutes of technology or schools of hygiene.63 An associate degree was offered after completion of a two-year program. Although the Ministry had succeeded in developing technological institutes, it confronted a new problem: not having enough qualified full-time faculty and staff.

To solve these new problems, Dr. Parsay was instrumental in drafting the Fourth and Fifth Developmental Plans. She spearheaded the effort to improve the educational quality of Iran's schools and teachers in both plans.

The Fourth Plan was introduced in 1968 (1968-1972) to rectify the unbalanced and unequal educational expansion

62Interview (C).

63Noeli, p. 74.
in the 1960s. Dr. Parsay's principal motive was to expand and improve the educational system to meet the high demands. The improvement of quality of education was emphasized, including training qualified teachers, and the use of more adequate texts and teaching materials.

In 1968, a new structure for primary and secondary schools was introduced by Dr. Parsay; the old 6-6 structure was reorganized to 5-3-4; the primary school was five years and the secondary school was divided into a three-year guidance program and a four-year secondary level. The goal of the three-year guidance education was to identify the student's aptitudes and talents and direct them toward appropriate fields of study. The program was to provide technical and vocational training as well as academic instruction.

The new secondary education consisted of two levels, a four-year academic program followed by a practical program, depending on the field of specialization, between two and four years.

The Fourth Developmental Plan, the provisions on education having been drafted by Dr. Parsay, included improvements in both quality and quantity of higher education. It also provided for better educational opportunities in Iran by planning on increasing the number

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Szyliowicz, p. 420; Interview (C).
of university graduates by 60 percent by the end of 1972.\textsuperscript{65} However, this number grew to twice what was planned, due to the increase in the number of private universities with government subsidies.\textsuperscript{66}

The Fifth Development Plan, 1973-1978, was also partially drawn up by Dr. Parsay. She was responsible for its education section. The Plan was implemented at a time when Iran was experiencing an economic boom and rapid industrial growth caused by the oil revenues. Dr. Parsay presided over expansion in educational planning at all levels. One of the Plan's goals was to achieve free education at the primary guidance levels by 1983.\textsuperscript{67} By 1983, 80 percent of rural children and one hundred percent of urban children were to be enrolled in schools. Like the previous plan, an emphasis was placed on establishment of teacher training institutions, improvement of curricula, and provisions for upgrading and multiplying educational equipment and research facilities.\textsuperscript{68}

The Fifth Developmental Plan accomplished many of its goals. By the end of the plan, 82 percent of the target number of urban children were enrolled in preschool.

\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{65}Navai, p. 41.
\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{66}Ibid.
\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{67}Ibid., p. 46.
\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{68}Ibid.
Ninety-five percent of the target number were enrolled at primary school, and of this number 46.3 percent were in urban schools and 53.6 in rural; of the rural number 14.6 percent were taught by Literacy Corps. The Guidance cycle enrollment was on target, with 1,540,000. Of this number, 78 percent lived in urban areas, implying unequal educational opportunities between the two at the guidance cycle level. The secondary school enrollment by the end of the plan had reached 926,000, exceeding the planned objectives by 22,000 students. Of this number, 94 percent were in urban areas, showing that an extremely large gap existed between rural and urban enrollment.

Education during the Fourth and Fifth Plans experienced tremendous growth, as result of the far-reaching programs begun by Dr. Parsay and implemented by her Ministry.

However, in general, educational opportunities were more accessible to the urban and middle classes than the lower socioeconomic classes in the rural areas, even though on paper educational opportunities were provided equally for both sexes. All institutions of higher education had

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., p. 47.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
become coeducational. The curriculum became more comprehensive, and a variety of technical and vocational subjects were introduced at all levels. Moreover, the development of the curriculum was centralized in the Ministry. Textbooks were upgraded and in the areas of sciences were translated from foreign books. In higher education, the curriculum remained theoretical and degree oriented. Still, given all the improvements, research and library facilities were limited at all levels.

Given the success of many of Dr. Parsay's programs, it was the attempted implementation of her unsuccessful programs that led to Dr. Parsay's downfall. These began to surface after the first two years of her administration, which are considered by Iranian historians to be her most effective and productive years.73

The major problems confronting Dr. Parsay during the last four years of her six years in office included the country's experiencing a great expansion in education at all levels. Even though great expansion in teacher education institutions was made, the shortage of qualified teachers, the lack of availability of useful texts, and the lack of proper facilities remained significant problems. This situation was caused by the lack of interest in the

73Interview (B).
teaching professions because of the notoriously heavy teaching loads and low salaries.\textsuperscript{74}

In order to oversee the vast expansion, Dr. Parsay, who had four undersecretaries, added six more undersecretaries to her administration. She divided the country into six districts, and each undersecretary became responsible for the implementation of the programs in that district. The undersecretaries were even sent to live in those areas.

Yet, though her administrative and programmatic changes were significant, they did little to rectify the increasing problems.

Confronted with severe and growing problems in the disparity of education between rural and urban areas and the demand for proper educational facilities far exceeding the capability of the state to provide such facilities—a problem that increased in magnification daily—Dr. Parsay became a frustrated and ineffective leader.

With the failure of administrative and procedural changes made by her, Dr. Parsay was confronted with several other difficulties that led to her not being asked to return to the Cabinet as Minister of Education in the Cabinet shuffle of 1974. One was her reluctance to implement the Food Program of 1973 (Taghziah Rayegan). There were charges and counter-charges of corruption at the

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid.
Minister and Undersecretary level that led to Dr. Parsay being brought into court on charges of corruption, and, finally, there were a large number of young urban radical feminists who were highly educated and who felt that the old guard of women in the government should be replaced by younger women. These difficulties began to make Dr. Parsay feel estranged from her constituents and more and more useless as a Cabinet member.

Yet, in her latter days as Minister of Education, and thereafter as a private citizen, Dr. Parsay was actively involved in pressing for improved social conditions for women and in improving education throughout Iran. As a Minister, Dr. Parsay was able to make substantial advances in women's rights in her last years.

As a result of research done in 1974 by the Women's Association, which revealed that women found the veil awkward when they went to work, Dr. Parsay issued a directive that teachers and students should not use the veil in the classrooms. This recommendation, while contributing to her downfall by causing a negative reaction on the part of the traditional and religious sectors of society, was a landmark achievement for women's rights.

Moreover, Dr. Parsay was able to implement a program to re-write and re-publish many existing texts for primary, secondary, and higher education, thereby eliminating the obvious sex role stereotyping which had contrib-
uted to women's suppression. This revision program, though impressive, encountered great resistance from the clergy, putting Dr. Parsay at odds with the religious leaders. In addition, she began to incorporate the teaching of the Koran in a non-sexist, equalizing manner. Thus, for the first time since the Arab invasions, women and men began to learn about the positive role women had played in society.

Yet despite the remarkable advances led by Dr. Parsay as a Minister and as leader of many women's social clubs, including the Women's Association, she stepped down from her office, in hopes that her successor would be able to provide impetus to the juggernaut of change.

Dr. Parsay left her position as Minister of Education in 1974.
CHAPTER V


Post-Cabinet Life

After twenty-four years' service in the government, Dr. Parsay was not "introduced" as the Minister of Education in the Cabinet. In effect, failure to be "introduced" is forced resignation. Prime Minister Hoveyda offered her several other Ministries, but she rejected them.¹ She joined the private sector in her new position as Deputy Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Mojtameh Amozeshi Farah, a privately financed school in the South of Tehran. Mr. Hoveyda, the chairman of the board, was instrumental in securing this post for her.² Though this was a voluntary position, she continued working in this capacity until the beginning of the revolution in 1979. The school was appropriated by the new regime.

Though Mojtameh Amozeshi Farah school was founded in 1972 through private finance, it received manpower aid from the Ministries of Education and Labor, the School of

¹Aehteshami, interview (translation).

²Interview with an Iranian government official who does not wish to be identified, 22 September 1986. [Hereafter referred to as Interview (E)]. (Translation.)
Social Welfare, and the Tehran Municipality. This is one of the schools for which Dr. Parsay as Minister of Education had approved the original proposal for in 1969. It was considered a unique project by both the American and European educators. Mojtameh Amozeshi Farah was spread over 35 hectares. It had 5,300 male and female students, with coeducational classes beginning with nursery through secondary school. The campus was unique. The school offered more than just educational opportunities for students; it included a Health Clinic, Dental Clinic, Social and Child Care, and Home Economics courses. It also specialized in Adult Education classes and job employment assistance to the community. Its modern facilities were equipped with the most advanced research and laboratory equipment. Extra attention was placed on extracurricular activities, sports, audio-visual, TV, fine arts, and film production. The school also had a world class sports program; several students of the school achieved national and international recognition.

Mojtameh Amozeshi Farah offered a family planning clinic and prenatal care. After birth, at four months, the children were brought under the nursery school's care, and education was initiated and continued through secondary school.

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3Interview (E).
After the revolution, the school was brought under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Its extra-curricular activities and community services and clinics were halted, and its curriculum was reorganized along the lines of other standard schools.\(^4\)

During her post-cabinet years, Dr. Parsay devoted her time to volunteer work at the Clinic of the Alumnae of the American School, and, for the first time since receipt of her medical degree, established her own private practice and a free clinic for children in Tehran.\(^5\) In addition, she taught at the Medical Technical Training Institute, of which she was one of the founders and owners.\(^6\) Moreover, in her post-political years, she and a friend, Mrs. Safima, had a weekly radio program, a talk show covering women's issues and women's social awareness. It had a heavy educational accent. It was on the air for two years.\(^7\)

During this period, Dr. Parsay also wrote books and articles about women and child care, child development, and nursing.

"This was probably the happiest time for my mother," recalls her daughter Nahid Malek Ahmady.

\(^4\)Interview (E).

\(^5\)Aehteshami, interview (translation).

\(^6\)Ibid.

\(^7\)Ibid.
She enjoyed her political achievements, and for the first time was able to establish a normal daily routine. She would meet her friends for lunch, go on a diet, read books and magazines, travel, take care of her grandchildren, sew and knit, and leisurely write articles.  

With the onset of the Islamic Revolution, a clear response to too much modernization and westernization in too short a period of time, Dr. Parsay had to part with her new life when her family, fearing for her life, decided that she should go into hiding.  

**Arrest and Execution**

Khomeini came to power on 11 February 1979. In March, a referendum was held and the new Islamic Republic was formed. A new constitution was drafted, giving supreme extra-legal powers to an Faqih (religious jurist). Upon ratification of the constitution, Khomeini became the first Faqih. The Faqih had control of the armed forces, and could dismiss elected governmental officials if they did not comply with Islam. The constitution also included a Prime Minister and a cabinet and an elected Parliament.  

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8N. Malek Ahmady, interview (translation).  
9Ibid.  
10Keddie, p. 257.  
11Ibid., p. 258.  
12Ibid., p. 259.
On 28 January 1980, a new president was elected, Bani-Sadr.  

During the early days of the revolution, in September 1978, Dr. Parsay was traveling in the U.S. and England. She was advised by family and friends not to return to Iran because of the political situation. The country had ground to a halt because of a nationwide strike; some government officials were arrested on corruption charges. Mr. Hoveyda, Dr. Parsay's mentor, as a scapegoat for corruption, was also arrested shortly before the fall of the Shah. Mr. Hoveyda was one of the first men executed after the success of the revolution.  

But Dr. Parsay refused the advice, convinced of her innocence, and returned to Tehran later in September 1978. After the revolution and the fall of the Shah, the new regime arrested many government and military officials and politicians. Dr. Parsay again was advised to leave the country. She refused, believing there was nothing in her past that could be used against her or that she should be

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14 N. Malek Ahmady, interview.

15 Barry, p. 173.

16 N. Malek Ahmady, interview.
fearful of. However, under the pressure of her family, she went into seclusion.\textsuperscript{17}

By 1980, a year had passed since the fundamentalist revolution had commenced. Vigorous searches and seizures practiced by the revolutionary government had begun to subside. Khomeini had proclaimed general amnesty and issued a decree that only those who had committed murder should be executed. At a glance, it seemed that the country was on the road to normalization.

Dr. Parsay decided to return home after a year of seclusion, a seclusion which had been decided for her by her family. During that first year, she had been subjected to several warrants and attempts at arrest. Moreover, the government appropriated all of her cash and non-cash assets, a law that affected all the people who had served in the Parliament. Later she was able to recover her properties, proving that she had voluntarily resigned from the Parliament when she took office as an undersecretary of Ministry of Education. The prosecutor's office also released her bank accounts, which totaled between eighty and ninety thousand Tomans.\textsuperscript{18}

After the incident, again her family pressed her to leave the country, but she refused her family's wishes.

\textsuperscript{17}Basier, interview.

\textsuperscript{18}Interview with Faroukh Malek Ahmady, Los Angeles, California, 17 July 1986.
Several times voluntary exile had been suggested to her by several revolutionary officials who had previously been on her staff at the Ministry of Education. She believed she had committed no crimes that required her to flee.

I am a symbol for the Iranian woman; the men cannot fully comprehend my situation; no one will arrest them for simply being "male." If I flee, everyone is going to assume that I must have been guilty of a crime, and they will say, "see, women cannot finish the job they have started." I want to remain here so that I can finish my task to the end.19

In May 1979, Dr. Parsay's nephew Saied, who had joined the revolutionary guard (Pasdaran), came to her house along with several other Pasdar looking to arrest Dr. Parsay.20 Fortunately, she was out of the house. The Pasdaran were told by her husband, then General Shirin Sokhan, that she had left town and was in Mashhad, and was not due to return until the next day. He assured them that upon her return she would come into the prosecutor's office in person. The Pasdaran then called their headquarters, informed them of the news, and were told to seal up the rooms and leave. Hours later, Dr. Parsay returned, and became aware of the situation. Her family told her she must leave; again she refused and said that "she did not want to be a fugitive, everything can be explained. . . ."21

19F. Malek Ahmady, interview (translation).
20Ibid.
21Ibid.
Shirin Sokhay called a friend, and through his aid, the arrest warrant was cancelled by 10:00 P.M. that evening. She had kept her spirits high during this period. She had lost a lot of weight and seemed to be in deep thought most of the time. She almost felt guilty for being free while some former Ministers were jailed and executed. Her close friend, Mr. Hoveyda, had been executed.22

Once again she tried to resume a normal life. The family, at the suggestion of an official in the Islamic government, tried to get her a false passport and get her out of the country. This official had advised the Parsays to go to any efforts possible to get Dr. Parsay out. He warned if the revolutionary government arrested her, she would certainly be killed, because she was a pioneer in the unveiling of women.23 In view of this, the family went through a lot of effort to obtain a passport, without Dr. Parsay's knowledge. When it was time to pick up the passport, it was necessary to take a photo of her with the veil. When she was told of the plan, she refused to cooperate. She said in a sad tone, "What am I accused of? I have not committed any crimes. You are born one day and you must also die some day. I am not going abroad."24 Not too long after her return home, the Pasdaran came looking for her once again.

22 N. Malek Ahmady, interview (translation).
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
In October 1979, during Dr. Parsay's year of hiding, an advertisement appeared in *Ete-la-at* newspaper, stating that the properties of the following Ministers, their families, and children were to be confiscated by the courts. Dr. Parsay's name was among the list. When she saw this, she could not believe it, considering that she only owned limited properties, a small house adjacent to her house where she had lived for thirty years, and 400,000 sq. meters on the shores of the Caspian Sea. She was shocked that a court had conducted a trial for her *in absentia* and had requisitioned her properties. In anger and protest, she wrote a letter to the chief prosecutor's office (Dadsetan Kol Enghelab), stating

In the *Ete-la-at* issue, it was written that the courts in my absence had issued a sentence to confiscate my properties. In view of the fact that I have been residing at my home during this time and the courts had access to me, I would like you to indicate the reason why: (1) my property was confiscated, and (2) why has a verdict been given in my absence. I can be reached at this address and phone number.

After this revelation of her location to the authorities, on 1 February 1979, Dr. Parsay and her husband were arrested at their son's residence. They and their friends had gathered together for a visit when the Pasdaran

25Ibid.

26Ibid.

27Ibid. (Translation.)

28Ibid.
stormed the house and demanded the arrest of Dr. Parsay. General Shirin Sokhan refused the arrest of his wife and requested to see a warrant. The Pasdaran did not have a warrant, but were able to obtain one quickly by a call to the local Commiteh (Revolutionary police station). Then, both were issued an arrest warrant, and taken for questioning to the Majlis.\textsuperscript{29} The norm was to keep the prisoners at the Majlis for two or three days and after obtaining sufficient evidence transfer them to Evin Prison.\textsuperscript{30} In this case, General Shirin Sokhan was held for ten days and then released due to lack of evidence. But even though there was nothing to substantiate Dr. Parsay's confinement, she was held at the Majlis for thirty days.\textsuperscript{31}

During this time, attempts had been made to gather complaints from the public to justify a trial, but no one had come forward. The Chief Public Prosecutor finally gave the order to the investigators in the Majlis that, due to lack of evidence, she should be released. But, instead, she was transferred to Evin. The reasons why this was done

\textsuperscript{29}Majlis: The Parliament building which was used as the headquarters for the Commiteh in the beginning of the revolution.

\textsuperscript{30}Evin Prison: The central jail in Tehran noted for its use by the Shah's SAVAK.

\textsuperscript{31}N. Malek Ahmady, interview.
are still unknown, and the people responsible are still unidentified.32

The normal waiting period for the start of the trial after being placed in Evin was usually about a year. However, Dr. Parsay's trial commenced less than six weeks after her transfer.

My mother's cell-mate was a young woman of communist ideology. She had some contacts in the prison, and had gained the sympathy of her prison guard. One day she asked my mother if there was anything she could do for her, getting her magazines, clean clothes . . . my mother told her, "No, I don't need anything, but the expedition of my trial."33

Two weeks later her trial began.

During her imprisonment, she kept to herself and didn't talk to anyone; most of her time was spent thinking. Thursdays were visiting hours, and only immediate family and close friends were allowed to visit. When she met her family and friends, she would give them words of encouragement and tried not to show any pain. She appeared mentally strong, although extremely sad. She would always ask about her children and would encourage them to think of themselves and not worry about her.

Dr. Parsay's trial started on 22 April 1980. The

32F. Malek Ahmady, interview.
33N. Malek Ahmady, interview (translation).
court met for nine hearings. Excerpts of what took place in the court sessions were reported in the newspapers.\(^3\)

On the first session, 22 April 1980, at Evin Prison, the Islamic Revolutionary Judge began his bill of indictment by stating:

In the name of God almighty, the court recognizes Mrs. Esfand Farroukhrou Parsay, born in 1922, from and residing in Tehran, citizen of Iran, imprisoned as of 21 February 1979 (1358.11.28 Persian calendar). The ex-Minister of Education under the now 'executed' Prime Minister Hoveyda and Deputy to the dissolved Parliament, is charged with: (1) expansion of corruption and embezzlement from the Ministry's treasury; (2) expansion of prostitution within the Ministry of Education, (3) corruption on earth and warring against God; (4) close alliance with the 'dissolved' SAVAK, against teachers who were freedom fighters, and firing the teachers who fought against the implementation of the 'detested' Pahlavi regime policies; (5) delivering speeches on many occasions to encourage the expansion and implementation of the policies of the 'detested' Pahlavi regime; (6) participating in the development and passage of laws which were against the people's interests; (7) abusement of your position to encourage the affiliation of the Iranian educational system to the Imperialist educational system; (8) having close ties with the 'executed' Nasiry; and (9) having immoral relationship with the special assistant of your office.\(^3\)

During the second hearing on 23 April, Dr. Parsay was not allowed to have a defense attorney. Wearing a black suit and a black scarf, she was permitted to speak in her own defense. She said,

\(^3\)All the newspaper excerpts presented in this paper are translated.

\(^3\)Ete-la-at, 23 April 1980, p. 1, and Kayhan, 23 April 1980, p. 11. (Translation.)
I am sorry to say that none of the charges which I have been accused of are based on truth or on a sound base. These unfounded accusations have disturbed me deeply. The accusers have even doubted my religion and faith. I must reiterate that I am a muslim, I am born a Shii, and also hope to die as a Shii. A person's religion is something that one is proud of, not embarrassed by to the point to hide it. . . .36

She defended and elaborated on the directives she had issued as the Minister of Education regarding religious studies and the study of Koran in schools, by stating:

. . . fifteen days after I took office as the Minister of Education, I issued a directive which ordered the teaching of the Koran in grades 4, 5, and 6 should be accompanied by the Persian translation of Koran. To translate the passage of Koran into Persian, I consulted and invited a commission composed of religious leaders such as Dr. Mohammad Javad Bahonar and Ayatollah Bara Ghomi to be formed. The commission was also asked to write religious textbooks to be taught at schools. . . . The seminar held in Mashhad regarding the teaching of religious studies with participation of Dr. Bahonar, Ayatollah Bara Ghomi, and Dr. Behesthti is evidence of and attests to my statements presented in this court.37

In continuation of her defense, she stated:

"Regarding the accusation of immoral relations with my Chief Officer, mentioned in the bill of indictment, I must tell you, I swear on the Koran, that only a professional relationship existed, and nothing more. . . ."38

She continued, referring to the seven people who had filed charges against her by saying: " . . . taking into


37Ibid.

38Ibid.
consideration that the Ministry of Education employed 300,000 personnel, and 8 million students were studying in the system during my tenure as Minister, the fact that only several persons have filed charges against me, it is proof in itself of my devotion to my job and how well I have served my office as Minister."

Dr. Parsay stated:

\[\ldots\] regarding the embezzlement and corruption charges. This is a gross accusation and I categorically refute these charges, because as the Minister I had no access to the Finance Department, financial matters, or their expenditures. These people who accuse me of stealing millions should be prepared to document these allegations and indicate the manner and sources of how action took place!\[40\]

Continuing in her defense, Dr. Parsay said:

\[\ldots\] regarding the charges that during my tenure as Minister I ordered the formation of a network to spy on the teachers, it should be explained that it was the 'dissolved' SAVAK who approached me and expressed the formation of such a network. They wanted to have teachers' and students' activities under surveillance in order to prevent the expansion of communism among teachers and students. I refused their proposal and in return gave an alternative suggestion to meet their objective. My suggestion was, rather than surveillance, more practical educational means should be employed. That anti-communist books should be published and students and teachers should be educated in and introduced to all these philosophies. However, SAVAK, faced with my stern disapproval and lack of cooperation on this issue, began to campaign against me by fabricating stories about embezzlement and importing luxury items without paying duty taxes. I swear on the

\[39\text{Ibid.}\]

\[40\text{Ibid.}\]
Koran that I have never imported any item into this country without paying duty taxes.\textsuperscript{41}

Regarding bribery and imperialist charges, Dr. Parsay answered the court:

As a Minister I have never paid off the media, and it was during my tenure that the foreign advisor role was brought to a closure in the Ministry of Education. They were not replaced by any other foreign groups. There has never been any close ties between the Ministry of Education of Iran and the United States. . . . regarding the special account which was at the disposal of the Minister of Education to spend at my discretion, this was the only money that I had access to. The annual amount of 300,000 Tomans. According to the usual practice, bookkeeping was not necessary, but I kept a special book at the Ministry which indicated the expenditures. I normally used this money to improve the teachers' needs. For example, one year, several water heating equipments were purchased by this fund for the Teachers' Apartment House located on Hashemi St. in Tehran.\textsuperscript{42}

Dr. Parsay in her closing statement said:

I cannot say that corruption and wrong doings did not exist in the past; they did. However, I did my best to avoid corruption. Today, in the ray of the Imam Khomeini's forgiveness and the clear conscience of you members of the Islamic court, I declare that all these charges made by my accusers and SAVAK are false and untrue.

While I was in seclusion, I studied the Islam government, and I know and I am aware of the importance of Islam in the administration of the government. In lieu of the Imam's mercy, I request my acquittal from this court.\textsuperscript{43}

Then she was asked to explain about the directives regarding girls' school uniforms. She responded:

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43}Ibid.
I always tried to keep the uniforms conservative. Parents were always consulted regarding this matter. However, this directive you have mentioned was issued during Dr. Hedayaty's tenure, and I have no knowledge of that. I only ordered the uniforms not to be alike, but to be different for each school.\footnote{Ibid.}

In the fifth session on 29 April, Dr. Parsay was asked to explain her ties with the Iran Novin Party. She responded:

The reason I joined the Iran Novin Party was because it was my realization at that time that a dictatorship form of government was being replaced by a Democratic form of government and because women were given the freedom for participation in the government. I told myself I can be effective in this role.\footnote{Ete-la-at, 29 April 1980, p. 12. (Translation.)}

Dr. Parsay, in presenting her last argument at the ninth hearing on 4 May 1980 said:

During my tenure as the Minister of Education, I concentrated my efforts to employ and train qualified teachers. All the work in this regard has been the responsibility of the Educational Council. You recall that the textbook The White Revolution\footnote{The White Revolution was written by Mohammad Reza Shah.} was taught at schools as a mandatory textbook. I tried my best to eliminate it from the curriculum, even though it was a risky act and politically disadvantageous.

I know, I am a woman and that is why I am accused of such hideous accusations. I have never received a penny as a bribe, and you know very well that many rumors have always floated in the Ministry of Education.

Keeping in mind the existing political atmosphere

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item\footnote{Ibid.}{Ibid.}
\item\footnote{Ete-la-at, 29 April 1980, p. 12. (Translation.)}{}
\item\footnote{The White Revolution }{The White Revolution was written by Mohammad Reza Shah.}
\end{thebibliography}
at the time, I request pardon and forgiveness from the Imam.\textsuperscript{47}

At the closure of the ninth session, the court went into deliberation. Later on 4 May, the first division of the Islamic Revolutionary Court met in a special session and found Dr. Farroukhrou Parsay guilty of the following charges: expansion of prostitution in education by government employees at all levels, corruption on earth, embezzlement from the treasury, and warring against God. She was sentenced to execution.\textsuperscript{48}

On 8 May 1980, 12:30 A.M., she was executed by firing squad,\textsuperscript{49} even though on 7 May 1980, Khomeini had issued a pardon and reduced her sentence to life imprisonment.\textsuperscript{50} This was requested by then-President Bani-Sadr with a plea from Shirin Sokhan and the intervention of some friends. Bani-Sadr had no sympathy for the defendant; he merely recognized that such an act would be viewed by the West as barbaric. He also was personally interested in gaining a following among the female constituency to secure his Presidency and gain power.\textsuperscript{51} There seems to have been

\textsuperscript{47}Ete-la-at, 5 May 1985, p. 2; Kayhan, 5 May 1985, p. 12. (Translation.)

\textsuperscript{48}"Farroukhrou Parsay was Executed," Kayhan, 8 May 1980, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{50}F. Malek Ahmady, interview (translation).

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid.
a power struggle involving key religious personalities and government officials for which Dr. Parsay became a pawn.52

On the evening of 7 May 1980, 11:00 P.M., Mr. Massovdi, Dr. Bani-Sadr's assistant, informed General Shirin Sokhan that he had just returned from the Evin prison and had personally delivered the Directive from Iman Khomeini for the reduced sentence.53

That evening around 11:30 the family was called by the prison to come to visit Dr. Parsay. The family thought it was a mistake, because they were to visit the next day. Finally, after receiving several calls, Dr. Parsay called herself. General Shirin Sokhan, his son, and a close family friend visited Dr. Parsay. On this occasion the visitation was in a regular room, not behind the separation glass.

Dr. Parsay had entered the room very calmly with wet hair, just having had a bath. She embraced her family and said these would be her last hours. Her son and husband could not believe it and told her that a new sentence was issued and all would be well. She told them that she knew that they were planning to execute her and told her family not to take it hard. She said, "they asked me what is your last wish and I told them to take a bath,

52Ibid.
53K. Malek Ahmady, interview.
so they allowed me."54 "This is the road I must take, this is my destiny, and it will take place. I do not want to die old and ill in my bed. I would rather die in this manner." In her will she drafted while in prison she wrote, "Here (Iran), they recognize an immense difference between men and women. I hope our women will have a brighter and better future through their efforts."55

Summary

This dissertation dealt with a review of the literature that relates to Dr. Parsay, education, and women's status in Iranian society. What makes this dissertation unique are the many personal interviews conducted by the author with individuals who had first-hand experience in the evolution of education in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s or had intimate knowledge of Dr. Parsay's life. The study, therefore, is more than a historical biography of Dr. Parsay. It documents events, perceptions, and opinions of persons involved in women's rights and the educational system of the late Pahlavi Dynasty that would otherwise be lost as time incessantly advances.

At the highest level of analysis, through the life of Dr. Parsay and the modernization of social attitudes and the educational system in the 1960s and 1970s, the primary

54Ibid.

55Ibid.
factors affecting women's status in Iran and the educational system are illuminated: Islam, politics, and economics.

Islam as the state religion and the guidance for jurisprudence has had a significant effect on Iranian laws pertaining to women: the inheritance law, veil, marriage, and divorce. These laws, even though they were progressive in the era of Mohammad the Prophet, were altered through regional practices. This trend slowed and stagnated any movement toward sexual equality. That is why, up until the 1960s, Iranian society was essentially the same as it had been 1,300 years earlier. This began to change as the Pahlavi Dynasty began to introduce changes at all levels of society based on a modernization-westernization program. Until 1979, this program was highly successful in improving educational opportunities, job opportunities, and women's rights. However, it also promoted polarization of the society between the modernizing elements (the government and elitists) and traditional elements (the clergy, lower classes, minority political groups, separatist groups, and rural populations).

The combination of modernization and westernization with Islam was done in a volatile way. The ensuing revolution was highly reactionary against modern education and women's rights, those things which had consumed many, many hours of Dr. Parsay's labor.
The result of this volatile combination was a reversal in educational and social rights for women. The society in the post-revolutionary period enforces mandatory wearing of the veils and sexual segregation in the schools. Changes in the society resulting from the revolution included: a 40 percent drop in the number of girls being educated, the finest teachers transferred to boys' schools, leaving schools for girls with a much reduced quality of teaching staff, and the reversal of a scientific-technical curriculum at most schools to a curriculum similar to that which had existed over a thousand years ago.

The biography of Dr. Farroukhrou Parsay is demonstrate of the effects of the modernizing elements of society. It shows that a significant segment of society in Iran had altered its traditional values and had become aligned with modernization. While the method or timing or inherent nature of the modernizing programs implemented under the Pahlavis may perhaps have been unwise (in that it contributed to the revolution), it stands nonetheless that there were large numbers, both men and women, who were prepared to work step-by-step to improve education and women's status in Iran. They were prepared to accept a woman being raised to the top of the government as a Minister. Society had come around from its early position
on women's rights to the point where it allowed a woman full responsibility and partnership in decision making, thereby affecting not only women but the nation as a whole.
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