**Women and Literacies in Iran: A historical exploration of the late Qajar Era**

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**Abstract**

**Women and Literacies in Iran: A historical exploration of the late Qajar Era**

Over the course of the Qajar period (1796-1925), Iran underwent multiple processes of change in the attempt to modernize the country. The two social institutions of education and gender bore unprecedented scrutiny in that era. The shift from traditional maktab literacies, which mainly centered on Islamic education, to new European-style schools marked the fundamental change in the realm of education in Iran. The centrality of education in the modernization processes was due to the perception of a causal relationship between literacy levels and, progress and democracy. For women, this educational shift involved a double-twist process. First, the epistemological questions on knowledge had to be tackled as a distinction was made between so-called Islamic and scientific or spiritual and material knowledge. On the other hand, the question of Iranian modern woman had to be faced.

In this historical study, relying on sociocultural theories of literacy I locate the above educational transition in its social context. From there with the interaction model of literacy in mind, I strive to show that the literacy shift in Qajar era was neither a direct result of modernization attempts nor was it a cause for the country's development. Instead, I propose that the dynamics involved in literacy changes present a matrix pattern rather than a linear relationship.

To demonstrate the inner working of this conceptual framework in the historical analysis of literacy in Iran, I present historical data from the Persian travelogues of the nineteenth century, women's press of late Qajar Era, and the visual data of two digital historical archives. I show that maktab literacies in the nineteenth-century Iran were not merely recipients of change under the influence of modernization processes, but maktab literacies had a formative role in the formation of the modernization dilemma as well. This historical data confirms how the interaction model of literacy explains a coevolving relationship among various spheres in the society. Some elements of the social matrix in this study are the emergent technologies such as print, economic trade, and literacy practices such as travelogue reading/writing, and the collective reading of materials in social gatherings. I also presented that the main

components of traditional maktab literacies and European-style education in Iran were not mutually

exclusive.

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*"…The past reveals to the present what the present is capable of seeing…"*

<div align="right">(R. H. Tawney, 1926, p. 3)</div>

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

My aim in conducting this research is to locate the topic of Iranian women literacies into a historical perspective. My focus will be on the period of the Qajar dynasty (1796-1925) during which Iran went through fundamental processes of change that entailed "attempts towards modernization" (Ringer, 2000), or " refashioning" as Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) terms it. "A bridge between the medieval and the modern periods" is how Ann Lambton (1987, p. ixviii) describes this era.

Since the late eighteenth century, Iran has undergone three dramatic social and political shifts during Qajar Dynasty (1794-1925), Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-78), and finally the Islamic Republic (1979-present). Each of these eras is marked by their distinct political, economic, and sociocultural characteristics, highlighted with specific conditions for women with education and literacy as salient points. Thence, the control of literacy, its use, and the conditions under which women became literate have been enduring political and religious preoccupations. Focused on the Qajar period, the present study can be considered as the first episode of a trilogy about the history of Iranian woman literacies, leaving the work on Pahlavi and Islamic Republic timeframes for future research.

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As Marashi (2008) points out, the traditional periodization of Iranian history tends to separate political epochs by "moments of rupture" (p.1). The Qajar period, the 1906-21 constitutional revolution, Reza Khan's 1921 coup and ascension to the throne as Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925 and the revolution of 1978 This thesis obeys a similar periodization, but it also observes continuities that scholars find flowing through the entire epoch. This includes the arbitrary nature of state power, the influence of religion and the ulama (i.e., high rank clergy) on Iranian politics, the impact of global flows on various spheres of Iranian society, and the persistence of the problematic relationship between constitutionalism, Islamism, secularism, and Westernization within Iranian political culture (Marashi, 2008). The above continuities, posit the study of Qajar era relevant to present time.  As noted by Ringer (2000), modernization as "the process of developing institutional prerequisites for a modern state" was closely tied to the questions of reform and its impact on cultural identity, the socio-political status quo, and the attempts for the maintaining of long-held privileges. In this context, the institution of education was among the most contested domains.

In this study, I will explore two domains. The first key phenomenon to explore is the transformation of the concept of literacy and knowledge in the common understanding of the urban elite in the nineteenth century Iran as manifested in shifts from traditional Maktab/Quranic schools to Western-style schools. The establishment of first modern educational institutions in Iran marked by the inauguration of Dar al-Fonun in 1851 (the first Iranian Institute of higher

education) and the first European-style schools for boys and girls marked the transformation of perceptions about literacy and education.

Educational reform discourse revolved around various resolutions to tackle the "modernization dilemma" (Ringer, 2001, p.56), the apprehensions that modernization accompanied by Westernization would endanger Iranian cultural and religious values. In this context, the women question found unprecedented centrality. Accordingly, the second domain to be explored is the interrelation between the transformations of perceptions about the institution of women and the area of women's education as the channel for dissemination of certain types of knowledge and associated literacies. Pointing to the last decades of the Qajar period Ringer (2000) remarks that:

> … [in this period]The discussion over the nature of the "Modern Iranian Woman" assumed an unprecedented centrality. This relatively short span of time was a critical moment in the formulation of Iranian national identity, concepts of citizenry, the form and function of religion in "modernity," and the more general reevaluation of culture and "Tradition." Gender and religion in particular were held up to the various yardsticks of imagined "modernities" and judged according to their (in)compatibility and (ir)reconcilability. (p.47)

Exploring the nature of these debates in the Qajar period affords insight into the subject of women and literacy in relation to various dimensions of sociopolitical and cultural nature.

**Research Questions**

In this thesis, I explore the dynamics involved in the interplay between Persian women's literacies and a matrix of social phenomena, in the aftermath of confronting the West in the nineteenth century. The main questions are stated as:

- What was literacy like in Qajar era?

- Under what circumstances literacies were shaped by and re-shaped other social spheres?

- How women's literacies were influenced by/and influencing other social domains during the Qajar period?

My answer to these questions entails clarification on particular theoretical approaches to literacy adopted in this study, as well as the historical research method devised. This thesis presents a study of the context of literacy in the Qajar period. Only in the last chapter will I focus on details about women's literacy; the rest of this work will concentrate on a general pattern regarding literacy practices in their social context.

## Theoretical framework

In this research, what bounds women's history of literacy and the broader social phenomena is a theoretical approach to literacy that regards it as a social practice that needs to be conceptualized within a general theory of society (Naz Rassol, 1995, p. 435). In this view, literacy cannot be theorized outside an analysis of ideology and power within the context of the specific socio-cultural formation in which it is grounded. Further, "literacy as a cultural practice

cannot be theorized without cognizance of historical relations including subordinated local literacies, incorporations, struggles, and transformations "(Rassol, 1995, p. 435). As such, the history of women's literacy in Iran poses a complex yet interesting case for an examination of literacy as bounded to fluctuating socio-political contexts, literacy as being shaped and shaping other spheres in society. The interaction model of literacy provides the framework for the conceptualization of literacy in its context in this research. As an interdisciplinary study and with a historical perspective, the present study draws on previous research in the fields of literacy and Iranian studies. In the next section, I elaborate on the approach I adhere to in conception of literacy and historical research. I continue with an overview of literature related to the history of Iranian women's literacy.

## Perspectives on Literacy

### Autonomous Perspective

During the 1960s and 1970s, some pioneering anthropologists made generalizations about the distribution of literacy among populations and attributed great significance to presence, absence, or degree of diffusion of certain forms of literacies. Simultaneously, theories of modernization appeared within the social sciences that placed literacy among the prerequisites for individual and social progress. By then a universal, direct, and linear relationship between literacy and its impacts was assumed (Graff, p.124). Brian Street (1984) labeled this conception of literacy was as the autonomous model of literacy. Jack Goody (1968), the pioneer of the autonomous model, outlined what he regarded as essential potentiality and consequences of

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literacy in a series of publications following his anthropological fieldwork in Liberia in the 1960s.

   On the other hand, Goody's work has elicited criticism for explicitly replacing the currently discredited theory of the great divide between primitive and modern cultures with literate and non-literate societies, believing that this distinction is more useful than the traditional distinction between logical and pre-logical thought (Street, 2003, p.79). For decades, this model has been a standard view for conceptualizing literacy in many fields from schooling to development programs.  It has been assumed that literacy has intrinsic qualities that lead to a cognitive and social enhancement. And that, introducing literacy to deprived groups in society improves their cognitive function, economic prospects, and makes them better citizens regardless of the underlying social and economic conditions that accounted for their illiteracy in the first place (Street, 2003, p.77).

**Sociocultural Perspective**

        Critical of the aforementioned earlier work on literacy, New Literacy Studies (NLS) emerged in 1970s and 1980s. This new approach to literacy questioned the ideas that attributed causal effects of literacy to the individual and societal development. The field of New Literacy Studies (NLS) is located at the crossroads of sociolinguistic and anthropological theories of language and schooling and ethnographic and discourse methodologies (Gee, 2000; Street, 1993). This view signals a paradigmatic shift in the study of literacy, a shift from Psycholinguistic views towards a sociocultural perspective. It means that NLS launched a study

of literacy in its social context rather than merely answering the questions of pedagogy and mental process of individual reader-writer (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009). Key tenets of this paradigm shift continue to be:

- The dislodging of what Street (1984) regarded as the autonomous model of literacy that draws a binary between literacy and orality and the consequences of literacy.

- The conceptualization of literacy as a social practice (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009).

- The emphasis on ethnographic research findings in order to understand the contexts of use and acquisition of literacy (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009).

Foundational works promoting this approach were Shirley Brice Heathe's *Ways with Words* (1983) and Brian Street's Literacy in *Theory and Practice* (1984). These studies shifted the focus of the study of literacy to out-of-school contexts. Scribner and Cole's work *Psychology of literacy* (1981) highlighted the ways literacy operated in social groups via local and contextual practices. These works are called first-generation of literacy studies (Baynham, 2004). The second-generation were empirical studies that developed the first generation approaches (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009, p.1). The most prominent in this group are the works by Barton and Hamilton (1998), Bensier (1993), Kulic and Stroud (1993), Prinsloo and Breier (1996). Third-generation studies in NLS are expanding the boundaries of literacy research from the domain of local to trans-local, from print based literacies to electronic and multimedia literacies and from verbal to multimodal (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009, p.2). The field of literacy studies keeps evolving as social and technological change bring about dynamic changes in the object of inquiry

in the field of literacy and demands researchers to revisit the foundational principles and constructs to account for new contexts and new data (Baynham and Prinsloo, p.2).

**Interaction Model Perspective**

In this model, literacy is regarded "as a force that shapes and is shaped by disparate social processes" (Ross Collin, 2013, p.27). Thus, changes in literacy are regarded as conditions of and conditions upon changes in other domains. Being equipped with this model may help researchers rectify the supposed technological determinism of the autonomous approach (Goody's work) and the cultural determinism or localism identified in some sociocultural approaches. The implication of this view can be found in the James Collins and Blot and Richard K Blot (2003) accounts of the interrelation between the formations of hybrid identities and hybrid literacies in the context of colonization and major historical conquests. These two concepts provide the theoretical structure in conception of literacy in this study which will be contextualized in the forthcoming chapters.

## Literacy in the Qajar Period

**Literacy and Power**

In thinking of the theoretical framework of literacy in this study I was drawn to the strands of literature within the field of New Literacy Studies (NLS) that discuss the relations between literacy, power, and identity in various contexts of colonial and postcolonial era, as well as, what is known to be the processes of development. This includes, the interdisciplinary topics within the fields of literacy and women's studies focusing on dynamics involving women in the

arena of education and literacy learning in the above contexts. Particularly, the subtleties at play in the incorporation of new forms of literacy and subordination of traditional literacies such as Quranic literacy in colonial contexts like that of India by Bryan Maddox (2006), triggered my curiosity about the case of Iran, given that Iran was never colonized but was heavily impacted by the West. The notion of power as a means of political control is a familiar theme. In this study the conceptualization of power in regards to literacy is based on the post-structuralist or the practice-theory argument that "writing [literacy] is usually associated with power, and particularly with specifically modern forms of power" (Collins and  Blot, p.5).

I elucidate what I mean by " power" in relation to literacy referring to Collins and Blot (2003) based on Michael Foucault's conception of power:

> Most basically, and of greatest relevance for understanding the puzzling legacies of literacy, it has become clear that power is not just some concentrated force that compels individuals or groups to behave in accordance with the will of an external authority, be it parent, boss, or public authority. Instead, power has microscopic dimensions, small, intimate, everyday dimensions, and these are constitutive as well as regulative; they are the stuff out of which senses of identity, senses of self as a private individual as well as a social entity in a given time and place, are composed and recomposed. (p.5)

# CHAPTER TWO

## Historical Background

I start this chapter with a general synopsis about Iran and continue with a description of the Qajar period.

### Iran: The Present and the Past

The map of present time Iran is demarcated after the extensive loss of territory to Russians and the Britain in Qajar era. With a population of about seventy-nine million (UN Data, 2015, derived at http://data.un.org/Search.aspx?q=iran&t=Data) and located in West Asia, Iran borders with the previously Soviet-Union members of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkmenistan to the north, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to the east, Turkey, and Iraq to the west. In the south, it has maritime boundaries with Arab countries via the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (http://countrymeters.info/en/Iran).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the total population of Iran was estimated to be fewer than 12 million. Out of this 60 percent were villagers, 25–30 percent nomads, and less than 15 percent urban residents. Tehran, the capital city since 1796, was a medium- sized town of 200,000. Life expectancy at birth was probably less than thirty years, and infant mortality as high as fifty percent ((Abrahamian, 2008, p.2, based on estimates made by Curzon, 1892). At the start of the twentieth century, the literacy rate was around 5 percent, mostly in urban areas, and confined to graduates of seminaries, Quranic schools, and missionary establishments. Less than 50 percent of the population understood or spoke Persian; others spoke Kurdish, Arabic, Gilaki,

Mazanderani, Baluchi, Luri languages, and dialects of Turkic languages such as Azeri, Turkman, and Qashqa'i (Abrahamian, 2008, p.4). While these estimates are not gendered specific, it can be inferred that literate women, within this definition of literacy, comprised a tiny portion of the literate population of Iran.

By the end of the twentieth century, Iran reached new milestones. While the population totaled 69 million, the nomadic population had shrunk to less than 3 percent, and the urban sector had grown to more than 66 percent. Tehran was a mega-metropolis of more than 6.5 million. Life expectancy reached seventy years, and infant mortality had fallen to 28 per 1,000. By the end of the century, the literacy rate had reached 84 percent; 19 million attended primary and secondary schools; 1.6 million were enrolled in institutions of higher education. More than 85 percent of the population could now communicate in Persian although some 50 percent continued to speak their "mother tongue" at home. Public entertainment in the form of sports like soccer matches, movie theaters, and various audiovisual media turned into daily routines.

According to UNICEF Institute for Statistics (UIS), the year 2012, Iran is reported to have a total adult literacy rate of 85 percent with the relative levels of female to male literacy (gender parity index, GPI) of 90.3 percent for the data collected between 2008-2012. In this index, Iran is among six countries (China, Indonesia, Iran, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, and Rwanda) with a GPI of at least 0.90 that are approaching the range of gender parity indicated by a GPI between

0.97 and 1.03[1]. These data suggest an outstanding change in various indicators of development, including women's literacy rates. In the rest of this study, I will provide more detail about Iran during the Qajar period and the processes involved in literacy and social change.

**The Qajar Era (1796-1925)**

The Qajar era is a common term to describe Iran, then known as Persia, under the ruling of the Qajar Dynasty in the period from 1796 to 1925. The Qajars were a Turkmen tribe that held ancestral lands in present-day Azerbaijan that was part of Iran by then. This tribe entered the Iranian plateau after the eleventh century. They achieved historical visibility during the Safavids Dynasty (1501-1722) as conducting some diplomatic missions and governorships in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries for the Safavids (Nashat, 2004). At the end of the eighteenth century, following the death of Karim Khan Zand, the ruler of southern Iran, the country was in danger of disintegration as a result of rivalry among several contestants for the throne. Eventually, Aqa Mohammad Khan, the chief of the Qajar tribe of Qavanlou conquered his rivals and set to reunify Iran albeit with much bloodshed (Nashat, 2004). By this time, civil wars over the throne had left the country impoverished, depopulated, and divided along various ethnic, regional and sectarian fault lines.

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[1] The UIS data on the gender parity index (GPI) was collected for adult and youth lit in eracy forty-one selected countries from four regions of the Arab States; Asia and the Pacific (including Iran); Latin America and the Caribbean; and sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates that out of the 38 countries with data only Brazil and Mexico had reached gender parity in adult literacy by 2010

In 129 years, under the Qajar Dynasty seven kings (Shah) ruled Iran. The following Table represents a chronology of Qajar era.

| 1. (1794-1797)<br><br>Aqa Mohammad Khan | By 1794, Aqa Mohammad Khan had eliminated all his rivals and had reasserted Iranian sovereignty over the former Iranian territories in Georgia and the Caucasus. He chose Tehran, a village near the ruins of the ancient city of Ray in central north of Iran as the capital city. In 1796 he formally crowned himself as the King (Shah). One year later, in 1797, Mohammad Khan the was assassinated by two of his servants and was succeeded by his nephew (Nashat, 2004). |
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| 2. (1797-1834)<br><br>Fath Ali Shah | Fath Ali Shah is known for his loss of territory to Russians. Despite his attempts to maintain Iran's sovereignty over its new territories, Fath Ali Shah was defeated by Russia in two wars (1804 -13 and 1826- 28) that lead to the loss of Georgia, Armenia, and northern Azerbaijan. During his reign diplomatic contact with the West (mainly France, Britain, and Russia) increased and intense European diplomatic rivalries over Iran began (Nashat, 2004) |
| 3. (1834-48)<br><br>Mohammad Shah | After the death of Fatḥ Ali Shah, his grandson Mohammad succeeded the throne in 1834. Mohammad Shah is known for being under the influence of Russians and making two unsuccessful attempts to recapture Herat from the British. He died in 1848 and the succession passed to his son Naser od-Din (Nashat, 2004). |
| 4. (1848-96)<br><br>Naser od-Din Shah | The fourth king of the Qajars is probably the most memorable of all mainly because his name is almost always paired with the name of his competent minister Amir Kabir. Another important but less noted point is the literal solidification of the monarch image in the mind of the public by the extensive application of the newly introduced technology of photography, the European techniques of portrait painting, and the use of new methods for printing. As Western science, technology, and educational methods were being introduced to Iran, the notions of modernization began to circulate among a group of Iranian elite familiar with Europe who advocated for reforms. |

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|---|---|
| | The first European–style school for boys, telegraph system and railway were established. The king took three trips to Europe (Nashat, 2004). |
| 5. (1896- 1907)<br><br>Muzaffar al-Din Shah | Similar to his father, Muzzafar al-Din Shah, made multiple travels to Europe while accumulating foreign debt. At his time, disparate groups in the country demanded the limiting of royal prerogatives. The massive opposition to monarchy resulted in the granting of the constitution for the first time in Iran. |
| 6. (1907- 9)<br><br>Muhammad Ali Shah | Influenced by Russians, Shah became suspicious of the new constitutional government; this led to the abolishing of the constitution and bombardment of the National Consultative Assembly building followed by arresting and murdering of some deputies. However, Shah could not contest the massive opposition of various cities in support for the constitution and he was forced to abdicate. Concurrently, Britain and Russia settled their rivalry over Iran by dividing Iran into spheres of influence, the upper half to Russia and the lower half to Britain. |
| 7. (1909-25)<br><br>Ahmad Shah | During this period, in spite of the fragmentations in the constitution coalition, parliament was successful in passing the law for universal secular education (date). After this, first modern schools for girls opened in Tehran. Soon after, allied forces occupied Iran during the World War I; and in 1919 the Iranian parliament rejected the British plan for turning Iran into a protectorate.<br><br>In February 1921 with a coup d'état, Reza Khan (the founder of Pahlavi Dynasty (1925–78) became the leading political personality in Iran. In October 1925 Aḥmad Shāh was formally deposed by the National Consultative Assembly *(Majlis)*, while he had left the country to Europe. The termination of the rule of the Qājār dynasty was declared by the assembly (Encyclopedia Iranica , derived at www.britannica.com/topic/Qajar-dynasty) |

## Literature Review, Method, and Resources

Studies looking into the relation of political power and education in Iran are not in short supply. Most of these studies are focused on the Pahlavi era and the present time Islamic Republic. Works on the Qajar era are mainly focused on the establishments of secular schools for boys and girls, as well as the establishment of Dar-al-Fonoun as the first institute of higher education in Iran. The treatment of literacy as an independent topic remains scarce; yet, information pertinent to literacy can be derived or inferred from these resources. For example, in their studies David Menshari (1992) and Monika M. Ringer (2001) address the topic of education and modernity in Qajar Iran. However, neither of them focuses on women, nor have a description of *Maktab* literacy, which prevailed prior to the processes of modernization.

In his book " Education and the Making of Modern Iran", Menshari (1992) gives a detailed overview of the role of education in modernity in Iran from the nineteenth century to the Islamic Republic. He traces the history of Iran's educational system from the departure of the first students to Europe in 1811 to the changes in educational policies enacted under the Islamic Republic. In so doing, Menshari narrates the wider political history of the struggle for control of education between the religious elite (ulama) and the secular state of Pahlavi (1925-1978) as well as the beginnings of Islamic Republic when the ulama took over all levels of education. It can be argued that Menshari (1992) offers a polaristic view in analyzing of the struggles over modernity and education in Iran, failing to include more complex socio-cultural dimensions.  Pointing to the interchangeable use of terms such as " change", "development", " modernization", and "

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westernization" in a considerable number of scholarly writings , Menshari (1992) indicates that "change" in developing states is accompanied with higher indexes of modernization (Menshari, 1992, p.5) He adds that:

> While this is not sufficient reason to equate "change" and "modernization" to "westernization" or to bring nonwestern countries in line with the West, the fact remains that at least in nineteen century-Iran, change was mostly motivated by a desire to emulate the West (Menshari, 1992, p. 5).

Menshari's treatment of modernity in Iran lacks the sophistication of some other works like that of Ringer (2001) Tavakoli-Targhi (2001), which will be consulted in the historical analysis of the sociocultural structure of nineteenth century Iran.

Ringer (2001) in her book, "*Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran*" addresses the issue of "modernization dilemma" and debates surrounding reforms in nineteenth-century with a focus on the topic of education. She highlights the apprehension of many of reformers that modernization accompanied with westernization would jeopardize Iranian religious and cultural values and integrity. She explores the ways and means by which Iranian reformists attempted to adopt Western educational institutions into an Iranian framework while preserving social, cultural, and religious traditions.                     Avoiding labels such as "modernity", "development", and "westernization" Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) terms the many processes of change in Iran since Qajar era as "refashioning". He provides an alternative historical analysis for understanding the process of change under the nationalist movement in Iran and meticulously analyzes the interrelations of the discourses of Orientalism

and Occidentalism, as well as the role of self-Orientalizing of Persians in the processes of *refashioning*. I particularly adopt Tavakoli-Targhi's views to elucidate on the subtle power dynamics in my sociocultural analysis. Also, the role of travelogue writing as a literacy practice affecting the formulation of what Tavakoli-Targhi terms as "double consciousness" will be discussed.

Succinctly put this study is grounded on a view that regards literacy as bounded with power dynamics in an interaction model perspective. Further, power is conceptualized in a post-structuralist framework, which assumes power with subtle and microscopic dimensions. And lastly, a sociocultural analysis perspective is adapted to unravel the dynamics involved in a matrix of literacy, power, and identity in the context of nineteenth century Iran.

**Method**

Inspired by the interpretivist framework offered by Carr (1962), historical research in the current study is considered as "a process of searching and interpreting of data to answer questions about a phenomenon from the past to gain a better understanding of the foundation of present institutions, practices, trends, beliefs, and issues" (Meredith D. Gall et al, 2007,p.529).

The British historian E.H. Carr regarded history as "a continuing process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past" (Carr, 1962, p. 35). In this view, interpretation plays a central role in contemporary historical research as it is considered to be a double-interpreted product. This kind of research deals with

records or data made or collected by others, which is an interpretive process in the first place. In the process of recording, personal interpretation as a manifestation of personal values, biases, and experiences comes into play. This interpretative filter explains the multiplicity of narratives made by different individuals from a single event. By the time historians add their own layer of interpretation, the data have already been affected by the subjectivities of data collectors. That is why John Burstyn (1987) calls historical reports "constructed reality"(p.169). On the contrary, in the nineteenth century the prevalent notion about historical research was based on the idea that "history consists of the compilation of maximum number of irrefutable and objective facts" (Carr, 1967, p.14). Multivolume compilations of details about various topics are representative of this viewpoint.

In the same vein, Gall et al (2007) mentions that although historical research is generally regarded as a kind of qualitative research, in respect to its epistemological orientation it tends to be positivist rather than being "purely interpretivist" (p.529). This means that acknowledging the fallibility and bias in human observations, historians believe through analyzing multiple sources of data it is possible to discover the actual happenings during a given time period.  This point is important in understanding of the difference between the historical research conducted in the nineteenth century context as well as the present day. C.H. Edson (1986) considers four main similarities between historical research and other qualitative research methodologies: "1) emphasis on the study of the context, 2) the study of behavior in the natural instead of in

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contrived or hypothetical settings, 3) appreciation of the wholeness of experience, 4) the centrality of interpretation in the research process"(p13 -27).

**Sources of Data**

The study of the Qajar era benefits from a relative abundance of source materials and documentation. This is a result of the involvement of the European powers in Qajar Persia and the availability of the print technology. However, sources about women seem to be disproportionately fewer than the other topics within these resources. In the West, the Qajar period coincided with the high point of European imperial expansion. Thus, the study of "the Persian question", as Lord Curzon put it, was part of the ongoing colonial agenda and the "Great Game" played primarily by Britain and Russia over the future of Central Asia and Afghanistan in relation to India, "the jewel in the crown"(EhsanYarshater, 2001, p.190).

The nineteenth century was also the heyday of European, philological interest in the East; the study of the languages, religions, arts, and history of Persia led to descriptive works on the contemporary conditions of the land and its topography. In Great Britain alone, numerous works emerged pioneering with Sir John Malcolm's The History of Persia (1815) and continued with generations of works shifting from a descriptive nature, to the more analytic works since post World War II. These together, along various artifacts from Qajar era, comprise the primary and secondary resources on Qajar Persia.

Primary resources about women in nineteen century are divided into two major groups. One is the direct Iranian sources ranging from what they left behind such as their personal

belongings or else, their written documents including their diaries, letters, publications, and so one. A good depository of such resource is the Women's World in Qajar Iran, a visual archive in Harvard University digital library. In this archive, the image of thousands of artifacts owned by women in Qajar Persia is catalogued. This archive will serve as one of primary sources I will use in this thesis. The second type of primary data is accounts by Europeans who visited or lived in Iran. Male European travelers had little contact with urban women because of the practice of seclusion; however, these travelers left descriptions about rural women who did not undergo seclusion as much (Nashat, 2004). European doctors who served royal families and the elite are another source of information as well as missionary women and the wives of the diplomatic corps to Iran. Among these, I look at the memoirs of Lady Sheil (1956), wife of the British minister to Iran in the early 1850s. Although her account of Iran and its people is influenced by the prevalent discourse of orientalism by that time, it still offers valuable information.

Applying the visual sources from the Harvard University online library demands a sound method of interpretation. To accomplish this task, I will adhere to the guidelines of visual research in social sciences by Marcus Banks. Banks (2001) identifies three types of visual methods, 1) Analysing existing images, 2) Producing visuals during fieldwork, 3) Collaborating with participants in the production of visual representations. The visual method applied here benefits from the analysis of already existing visual data. In analyzing of photographs, Banks (2001) suggests two kind of examination of an image. The first one is the examination of external narrative or "the social context that produced the image and the social relations within

which the image is embedded at any moment of viewing" (Banks, 2001, p.11). The second one is the internal narrative or "its content, the story that the image communicates" (Banks, 2001, p.11). In order to perform such examinations Banks (2001) points that the materiality of the picture may provide many clues; also, clues can be derived from the photograph by considering it as an object as well as an image. Helpful to know what is written on back, whether postcard or snapshot, etc. If the picture is in an archive, it will help to know which file it is in and with which other pictures? Whose documents are they? How were they used? And can we identify the people in the picture through other sources? (2001, p. 11).

The online collection "Women's World in Qajar Iran" in Harvard University digital archive provides almost all of above information for each image, facilitating an accurate visual analysis. In this research, the visual resources have a complementary role to my historical/ theoretical analysis. In fact, the images supplement this text with a visual mode, embodying an abstract topic with real entities.

**The Research Questions Revisited**

In the introduction, I posed the leading question as following:

- What was literacy like in Qajar era?
- How literacy and other social spheres were shaping one another?
- How were women's literacies influenced by other social domains during the Qaiar period? How did they influence these social domains?

In this thesis my main intention is to unravel the dynamics about women's literacy and education which are absent in accounts that either search for the role of education in development (Menshari, 1992), or studies which investigate how literacy or schooling were affected by other social domains (Ringer, 2001). In these models, almost a unidirectional relation has been suggested in the description of social dynamics in relation to literacy. I will demonstrate how literacy formation and literacy practices are instrumental in the formation of specific social phenomena in critical historic moments, as well as how literacies are affected and reshaped in response to new conditions. The interaction model of literacy will inform my historical analysis. I address my research questions in the next three chapters.

In chapter three, I will describe the prevalent form of literacy in Qajar period, namely Maktab literacies. Next, I explicate the embededness of Maktab literacies on sociocultural grounds. Inspired with work of Collins and Blot (2003), I search for the links between hybrid identity and hybrid literacy formations in the context of historical defeats. I will demonstrate that Maktab education itself was both a manifestation and perpetuating of hybrid Irano-Islamic identity.

In chapter four, with the interaction model of literacy in mind as a framework, I will proceed with the historical analysis of parallel change in the domain of literacy and the broader socio-political arena of urban landscapes in Qajar period. I will highlight the reciprocal relation among literacy and other modernization processes as affecting one another. I will demonstrate that change in sociopolitical and economic phenomena were instrumental in literacy/education

change in Qajar era, however, the role of literacy itself in formation of these phenomena should not be ignored. This is not to attribute a technological determinism to the role of literacy but to avoid cultural/social determinism in understanding literacy. Instead, I propose the co-evolution of literacy along other social domains as suggested by the interaction model of literacy.

In chapter five, I will expand the discussions of chapter four into the domain of women. In other words, I will provide a more detailed and gender-specific discussion of the co-evolution of literacy with other social spheres based on the interaction model of literacy. Similar to chapter four, I will present historical data from a number of nineteenth century travelogues and visual data from WWQI (Women's World in Qajar Iran) from digital archive of Harvard library as primary sources. I will end this study with the conclusion section.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**Maktab Literacies in a Social Context**

In this chapter, I introduce Maktab[2] literacies as the prevalent alphabetic literacy in Qajar Persia. Following that, I elaborate on the positioning of Maktab literacies on sociocultural grounds. From there, inspired with the work of James Collins and Blot and Richard K. Blot (2003), I search for the links between hybrid identity and hybrid literacy formations in the context of Arab conquest of Persia in seventh century.

Although the focus of this study is on women, this chapter takes a gender-neutral approach because here I consider the women question as part of a broad social process. The focus is on the transformation of the notions of literacy as affecting the institution of education and literacy as a general category. I should add that the topic of women literacy and education only found public attention during the last decades of Qajar period especially at the time of the constitutional revolution of 1906-11. Prior to this period, women were not included in major social discourses.

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3. "Maktab" means the "place of writing" in Arabic. My focus in this study is on Persian-speaking Muslim Maktabs. I view Maktabs as a social institution, and Maktab literacy as a genre. Thus, I do not delve into the detail about the contents taught in Maktabs albeit they pose interesting cases for study.

**Maktab Literacies**



Figure 1. A maktab in Tehran

I begin with a snapshot about women's maktab literacies, referring to a description from

the book "Glimpse of Life and Manners in Persia" written by Lady Sheil (1856), the wife

of the British minister to Iran in the early 1850s,

> Women of higher classes frequently acquire a knowledge of reading and writing,
> and of the choice poetical works in their native language, as well as the art of
> reading, though perhaps not understanding, the Koran [Quran]. In the royal
> family, in particular, and among the ladies of the tribe of Kajjar [Qajar], these
> accomplishments are so common that they themselves conduct their correspond
> and without the customary aid of a meerza, or secretary. (P.146)

"Maktab" literacies existed in Iran for the major part of its Islamic history and were taught in Quranic schools or Maktabs (Rassool, 1995). While some religious authorities warned against women's education, some others recommended the teaching of women to read. Regardless of the varying pre-modern conceptions of education for women, maktabs were often open to girls. Usually, a clerical teacher (mullah) working alone or occasionally with one or two assistants, conducted the Maktab lessons. Women also served as instructors with the title of Mullah Baji in girls' maktabs. From about the age of five/six to nine/ten years girls and boys studied together in some maktabs. After that age, if the parents were willing to have their daughters further educated, they would send the girls to separate girls' Maktabs or hired tutors for them; most often at this point the education of girls would end.(Encyclopaedia Iranica, December 15, 1997, derived at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/education-iii)

There were two kinds of maktabs. First, in-house maktabs, met in the homes of wealthy people and were attended by the children of the households and their dependents. Classes were held in one or several rooms in the house or in a separate building. The teacher was employed by the head of the household and often became a resident as well. Children from other families sometimes attended these classes, with the permission of the head of the household and paying a fee to the teacher. Second, "Common maktabs" catered to the children of middle-class families; the classes met in public places like mosques, marketplace passages, or teachers' homes. Pupils

paid their fees in cash or kind, supplemented by gifts (Encyclopedia Iranica, December 15, 1997).

For children up to the age of ten years the curriculum consisted first of learning the Arabo-Persian alphabet, with emphasis on phonetics and vocalized consonants, then of reading and writing in Persian, the rudiments of mathematics, and, particularly, readings from the Quran and various prayer books. Teachers placed great emphasis on rote learning and rewarded with special recognition the pupils who memorized and verbally repeated their lessons. To acquaint pupils with scripture, the Mulla first taught "Amma Joz", an extract of the shorter verses (suras) of the Quran (verses 78-114). This instruction was followed by a study of Persian and Arabic vocabularies and the meters and forms of Persian poetry (Encyclopedia Iranica, December 15, 1997, derived at, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/education-iii).

Maktabs catering to commoners closed at noon so that children could spend the rest of the day helping with the family trade or household chores. In this way, even poorer laborers could send their children to a Maktab. However, in many of these Maktabs the teachers were semi-literate, the least competent teachers were only able to teach the Quran recitation with no comprehension of its meaning; some others would teach pupils the reading of simple Persian text without any instruction writing (Ecyclopedia Iranica, December 15, 1997, derived at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/education-iii). As such, in urban areas, the difference between the elite and commoners in terms of literacy learning was not mainly based on access opportunities but based on the quality of instruction and learning.

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**Maktab Literacy:  Brian Street's Study**

Perhaps the fieldwork of Brian Street in the village of Cheshmeh in the early 1970s is the most recognized international research on Maktab literacies in Iran. In his book "literacy in theory and practice", Street (1984) provides a comprehensive account about Maktab literacy at the time of the "White Revolution" program during the 1970s in which educational establishments expanded sixteen-fold in Iran (Abrahamian, 1989).

Participating in village life, carefully observing and examining his observations Street identified three kinds of literacy practices among the villagers of Cheshmeh, "commercial", "school", and "Maktab" literacies. Commercial literacy associated with the reading and writing used for the recording and management of fruit sales; school literacy was associated with state schools that were built all over the country as part of Shah's development program. Maktab literacy, as Street (1984) observed, centered on the reading and interpretation of the Quran, and this formed an " *intrinsic part of the traditional culture of group discussion in that community*"(p.427). He noted that group discussions focusing on interpretations of the Quranic texts and "Hadith" (moral saying of the prophet Mohammad) always supplemented the reading of Quran. Street adds that these practices were embedded within the Iranian story-telling tradition in which Mullah Nasr-ed-Din, a folklore character, plays an important role in clarifying and exploring moral issues (Rassool, 1995, p.427).

 In this interpretational framework, Street (1984) considers the text as secondary in terms of meaning making. This kind of literacy he suggests designates a joint of oral and written modes

in which malleability and fixity of text and meaning are likewise mixed. Street's portrayal of Maktab literacy gives an alternate picture of the conventional description of religious training in Islamic schools as merely revolving around rote memorization, which according to mainstream conceptions of literacy during the 1970s (i.e., autonomous perspective) did not count as literacy. Accordingly, exposure to Quranic literacy introduced the learners to a "knowledge of reading behavior" such as "selective reading", "layout", "directionality of print", and "annotated text" (Rassool, 1995, p.427). Street (1984) also provided a detailed account of the transferability of this knowledge and skills to commercial and school literacies.

**Street's Study: Implications for the Study of Qajar Maktab Literacies**

In this section, I refer to Street's study as a yardstick for the examination of Maktab literacies in Qajar Era, albeit there is a considerable temporal gap between the two timeframes.

In Qajar maktabs, Quranic literacies were complemented with Persian literacies, and basic mathematics. Thus, a comparison can be made between Street's (1984) observations of literacy in the village of Cheshmeh as the three kinds of Quranic, state or secular and commercial literacies. In addition, Street's findings about the technical aspects of literacy learning such as reading behavior, directionality of the text and so on, as mentioned above, seems to be transferable to the study of maktab literacies of the Qajar era. However, in a number of accounts the transferability of Street's study to the Qajar maktabs for females can be challenged. The first challenge stems from differences in the population under the study. Street's Study involved mostly male pupils in 1970s; and it can be argued that the generalization of some literacy

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practices such as *argumentation* from maktabs of Cheshmeh to Qajar maktabs seems to be

problematic. In mixed gender maktabs and in a culture where female silence in the presence of

males was considered to be a positive value, female participation in discussions was less likely to

take place. In Qajar maktabs inappropriate or out of place questions or comments, as perceived

by the Mulla, would lead to corporal punishment of the pupils--usually bastinado, and this stifled

the spirit of argumentation in the first place.

Aside from the methodological issue of transferability, there are some criticisms of the

conceptual nature to the work of Street (1984). Rassool (1995) questions Street's perception of

maktabs providing the pupils with the chance for the practice of critical argumentation.

Criticizing Street for a superficial understanding of deeper dynamics of maktab

literacy practice, Rassool (1995) states,

> In order to examine universal meanings attached to the concept of Maktab literacy
> as a social practice, it needs to be subjected to further scrutiny within the
> framework of Islamic culture per se -- and, especially, the possibilities and
> opportunities that it provides for people to engage in critical social debates that go
> beyond narrowly defined parameters. Whilst Quranic (maktab) literacy yielded
> positive results within the Cheshmeh region and, ironically, also provided a
> context in which criticisms against the Shah's regime could be articulated
> generally within the country, its impact should also be viewed within a more
> global perspective in order to address the function that it has served historically in
> maintaining overall religious hegemony. (p. 432)

Accordingly, it can be argued that the maktabs' main objective was a cultural

transmission based on Islamic religious morals and Persian language.

2: Bastinado, the corporal punishment in boys' maktabs Derived from IICHS at,

http://iichs.org/index_en.asp?img_cat=187&img_type=0

In the primarily agrarian society of Qajar Persia, maktabs were not geared toward preparation of the pupil for any specific profession or artisanship. In fact, Mullahs teaching in maktabs were lower rank Muslim clerics that had the monopoly of teaching in maktabs for centuries. The domination of the religion of Islam in maktabs inclined other religious minorities to establish their own learning circles.

In maktabs the dominance of the Farsi language, as the prestige and the formal language of the court and bureaucracy, would also complicate literacy learning for non-Farsi speaking pupils in a country where only less than fifty percent of the population comprehend or spoke

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Farsi (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 4). Consequently, for the majority of non-Fars[3] pupils maktab

literacy meant the reciting of the Quran with no comprehension of the text and relying on the

mullah for its interpretation. At the same time, the dominance of Farsi can be attributed to the

abundance of literary works in this language that provided the texts for reading instruction.

maktabs continued their life with almost the same traditions in the villages of Iran and they were

only completely replaced by modern schools in the early Islamic Republic period (1979-present).

**The Social Structure of the Qajar Persia**

The social structure of Iran in Qajar era is likened to "a complicated mosaic where each

inlay was a small but of different shape, texture, and color" (Abrahamian, 1974, p. 16). The word

"diversity" (p.16) according to Abrahamian is the essence of a description of Iranian population

during the Qajar period. Ethnicity, language, religion, and socio-economic status were among the

elements according to which Iranians were diversified. Abrahamian (1974) summarizes his

detailed description of the social structure of the population in the following excerpt :

> The Iranian population, therefor [sic], was fragmented into small units, each with
> its own separate social organization, each living within its own district and
> customs, speaking diverse tongues, and often in conflict with its neighbors. At the
> head of each community was invariably an important magnate. And above all
> these lesser communities was the Shah [king]. (p. 24)

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[3] Fars is the name for Persian Iranians with Farsi as their mother tongue in contrast to other
Iranian ethnicities like Azari, Kords, Baluchi, Gilaki and so on who speak other languages or
dialects.

Qajar kings in general have been perceived as incompetent monarchs. Yet, they ruled

over Iran for almost 130 years. As Abrahamian (1974) puts, the relative durability of the Qajar

monarchy can be explained by referring to the theory of social fragmentation proposed by Marx

(1818-1883, in Marx and Hobsbawm published, 1964). Accordingly as Abrahamian points, the

power origins of oriental monarchies could be explained either by the theory of bureaucratic

despotism (e.g., the Ottoman Empire) or the theory of fragmented society (Persia). Counting the

main instruments of bureaucratic despotism as "strong army", "centralized bureaucracies and

administering public works", and  "large scale irrigation systems" (p.8), Abrahamian (1974)

terms the Qajar kings as "oriental despots without the instruments of despotism" (p.8). He adds,

"the Qajars neither had a large standing army, nor a bureaucracy worth the name" (p.8). They

also ruled over a society where the Qanat system as a decentralized method of irrigation

strengthened the power of local notables and communities vis-à-vis the central government (p.9).

Instead, Abrahamian (1974) argues that for understanding the power of Qajar monarchy in Persia

one should refer to Marx's idea that "socio-economic fragmentation is the key to the

understanding of oriental despotism" in Qajar Persia (p.9). He further explains :

> We ought to look at the social structure of the population: at diverse communities
> in the country, their composition, interactions, rivalries, and organizations, and at
> the relationship between the state and the society, between the Qajar court and
> many competing groups in the country. (p. 13)

The Qajar dynasty ruled over Persia not because they were strong but because the society

was weak and suffering from three major forms of factional strife at multiple levels. First at the

communal levels existed religious friction between Muslims and non- Muslims, Sunni and

Shi'is. Second, an striking contrast existed in ways of life between nomads and the settled; and

third the linguistic differences endured as emphasized by Europeans with racial theories.

Abrahamian (1974, p.19) citing an anthropologist's report that in the provinces of Iran the word

"Persian" was used as a term of abuse. Persians were considered as tax collectors and the ones

who intended to dominate other ethnicities within Iran (p.20).

　　　High rates of illiteracy observed by the orientalists to Qajar Persia can be partly attributed

to the fact that literacy was (and still is) defined as an ability to read and write in Farsi. In this

context, other languages such as Azeri, Kurdish, and Arabic were/are marginalized in spite of

being spoken and having written traditions. Especially in urban areas, socio-economic

stratification added another layer to existing fault lines. Qajar Persia was host to a fundamental

division between the higher and lower strata. A narrow stratum of courtiers, state officials, tribal

leaders, religious notables, landlords and great merchants at the top and the vast majority of

peasants, tribes people and laborers in agriculture, traditional industries, and services at the

bottom composed the top and bottom levels of hierarchy (A. Ashraf, 1981, cited in,

www.iranicaonline.org). In numerous records from Qajar sources the distinction is often made

between the nobles and notables on the one hand, and the commoners or the masses on the other

( Encyclopaedia Iranica,(December 15, 1992), derivd at:

http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/class-system-index)

Paired terms like *ḵhawas and awamm* (the elite and the commoners), *aghnia and foqaraa* (the rich and the poor), and *aqwiaʾ and zoʾafaa* (the powerful and the weak) show an implicit awareness of the three dimensions of inequality: social status, material resources, and power . Between those with privilege and power at the top and the masses there were several "middling strata" (awsaṭ al-nas), including local notables, headmen of urban neighborhoods and villages, local men of religion, small landowners and merchants, master artisans and shopkeepers, and the like In this context, women were diversified according to their cast in the social hierarchy as well as other social affiliations such as religion; language or ethnicity. For urban women, veil, seclusion, and gender segregation were the norms (Encyclopaedia Iranica,  Class system v. Classes in the Qajar Period, December 15, 1997),  derived at:

 http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/class-system-v)

**Literacy in the Qajar Court**

Despite their Turkic tribal origin, the Qajars soon adopted the bureaucratic protocols of the previous dynasties by hiring Persian secretaries (*mustofi*) and scripts (*mirzas*). However, the Qajars held the positions of administrative work open to Qajar tribal chiefs (*khan*) and their kinship if they acquired demanded literacies. Thereafter, many were willing to hold these positions and this is shown by the increasing number of Qajars who adopted the title of *mirza* while retaining that of *khan* at the end of their names in order to differentiate themselves from Persian officials (Abrahamian, 1974). Therefor, the distribution of literacy followed a top down

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model, the Qajar court with highest and the villages and tribal units with the lowest respectively. For example, in nomadic tribes usually only the headmen had varying degrees of Farsi literacy.

**Society and the Cultural Divide in Persia**

In line with Abrahamian's analysis (1974) based on social fragmentation theory, Hunter (2014) searches for the historical roots of the divide in Iranian society. Hunter (2014) believes a long and turbulent history of several major invasions to Iran accounted for its decline and cultural division at the dawn of 19th century. Especially, the invasion of the Arab/Islamic armies in 642 CE, and the multiple Turkic and Mongol invasions between 11th -14th centuries transformed Iran's ethnic, religious, and cultural landscape (Hunter, 2014). Accordingly, the most transformative event in the history of Iran is the Arab invasion and Iran's subsequent Islamization (Hunter, 2014, p.18).

It is worth to note that the question of the impact of Arab/Islamic conquest on Iran is highly controversial. The two opposing narratives in this regard are Islam as the liberator and Islam/Arab conquest as a source of misfortune (p. 19). A discussion about which narrative outweighs is not in the scope of this study. Anyhow, the Iranians depending on the degrees of assimilation to or dissociation from Islam leaned towards one of the two camps of Arabizers and Iran Loyalist as Hunter (2014) notes. The former, denigrating their own culture, privileged Islam over Iran; to this group subscribing to pre-Islamic Iranian culture was contrary to Islam. The latter, on the other side, identifying themselves with their pre-Islamic history, tried to retain its culture and language. Being a dormant political potential for a long time, the divide between Iran

and Islam re-surfaced during the last decades of Qajar era. This clash was more boldly expressed as a result of the simultaneous foregrounding of the Shi-a clergy[4] in the sociopolitical arena and the encounter with Europe and subsequent rise of nationalist sentiments and efforts for modernization in the nineteenth century.

Abrahamian's (1974) analysis fairly explains the underlying causes of high rates of illiteracy in Iran. On the other hand, Hunter's analysis of the roots of cultural divide in Iran can be consulted for an understanding of the form and function of maktab literacies in their context.

**Cultural Divide and Maktab Literacies**

Shireen Hunter's (2004) analysis of the roots of cultural divide in Iran based on the Arabizers versus Iran Loyalists is more useful in an understanding of the cultural conflicts of the Pahlavi era (1926-1978) that followed the Qajar period. To be more specific, I believe a polaristic view in the cultural analysis of Iranian landscape fails to capture the complexities faced during the reform period in Qajar Iran. Instead, I subscribe to the concept of "hybrid identity formation" and its relation with "the formation of hybrid literacies" in the wake of historical conquests, elucidated on by Collins and Blot and Blot (2003).

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[4] The foregrounding of Shi-a Clergy began from the period of Safavids Dynasty (1501-1722). For the first time, Safavids declared the Shi-a Islam as the formal religion of Iran (Hunter, 2014, p. 24). This was a measure taken by the Safavid kings for unifying Iran and inserting a sense of national identity based on Shi-a religion. During the Safavids period, the clergy body was subservient to the political power; however, toward the end of the Safavids rule some fragments of clergy developed inclinations for power against the secular power of the king. This trend grew larger in the Qajar era. This time, clergy focused on the aspects of the Shi-a theory that considers political power legitimate only when sanctioned by the clergy and under its supervision.

A detailed description of the formation of hybrid Irano-Islamic identities in the aftermath of Arab conquest in the seventh century calls for a separate study. Indeed, this hybridity was reflected in maktab literacies and was evident in the general template of the curriculum in maktabs. As mentioned before, the main components of maktab education were Quranic lessons and Persian literary works; however, the Persian literature taught in maktabs was not necessarily compatible, or even in contrast with the Islamic morals. The persistent adjacency of the Quranic lessons and classic and folklore Persian literature in maktabs designates a double catering function for maktabs serving both the Islamizer and Iran loyalist ends. However, this adjacency is better explained based on the formation of hybridity rather than a conflict perspective.

**Hybrid Identities- Hybrid Literacies**

In this section I refer to the work of Collins and Blot and Blot (2003) in which they examine the interrelatedness of text, power, and identity in various colonial contexts of South America by indicating that colonial encounters, from their inception were designated by a clash of unequal powers. The resulting struggle on one side was that of the aboriginal peoples who resisted the encroachments threatening the cultural integrity that sustained the very structure of their society (p.121). On the other side was the colonizers attempt to make the subject populations "Christians", "politically subservient" and "literate" (p.121). For an analysis of the case of the Arab conquest of Persia, I adopt the concept of conqueror/ conquered instead of colonizer/colonized in order to provide a general sketch of the formation of hybrid identities and literacies as mentioned above. This is not to imply that I consider the two contexts identical;

rather my focus is on the resulting phenomena, the formation of Irano-Islamic identities and literacies as indicated in maktab literacy practices. Collins and Blot and Blot (2003) maintain that "always and everywhere local people have resisted and rebelled against the imposition of Western cultural forms, transforming them in ways congruent with their own culture" (p.122).

In the colonial contexts, schooling, as a means of creating a special class of local people to transmit the political, social, and religious directives of the conqueror also opened "a space for the creation of countra subject" (Collins and Blot, 2003, p.122). In such contexts these selected literate class might form an identity, which incorporated native meanings into conqueror discourse in ways to resist the conqueror order. In these contexts, languages used, literate means employed, texts produced and read, indicate much about the construction and transformation of selves through literate practices.

The production of a profound body of Persian literature in Arabic alphabet and its inclusion in maktab education beside the Quranic literacies exemplifies such hybrid literacy practices. A good example representing the implicit struggle for voice by the conquered is the writing and the dissemination of *Shahnameh* (the book of kings) in eleventh century Persia as a means of reviving the Farsi language and circulation of Persian mythology by Persians in the aftermath of Arab conquest. *Shahnameh*, the Book of Kings, is an epic composed by the Iranian poet Hakim Abul-Qasim Mansur (later known as Ferdowsi Tusi), and completed around 1010 CE. The epic chronicles the legends and histories of Iranian (Aryan) kings from primordial times to the Arab conquest of Iran in the 7th century CE, in three successive stages: the mythical, the

heroic or legendary, and the historic. The *Shahnameh* is composed of approximately 100,000 lines as 50,000 couplets /distiches (bayts) each consisting of two hemistichs (misra), 62 stories and 990 chapters, a work several times the length of Homer's Iliad (Zoroastrian Heritage, derived at http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/shahnameh/).

Nineteenth century Iranian intellectuals such a Fath Ali Akhundzadah (1812-78), Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani (1855-98), and Mirza Malcolm Khan (d. 1908), who were critical of Iran's poetic tradition as being polluted with Arabic vocabulary and style, respected Firdawsi, the poet of *Shahnameh* (the Book Of kings) for endeavoring to use the pure Farsi language. Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani viewed the *Shahnameh* as a formulation for preserving the "people/nation of Iran". He continues :

> If it were not for the Shahnameh of Firdawsi, the language and the race of the Iranian nation/people would have been at once tramfomed into Arabic after the domination by the Arab tribes in lran. Like the peoples of Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, the Persian speakers would have changed their race and nationality (as cited in Tavakoli-Targhi, 2001, p. 99).

As such, the inclusion of Persian literature in maktabs denotes of a loci for the fashioning of Iranian selves in the context of Islamization. This Irano-Islamic hybrid identity it was that went through scrutiny and re-evaluation during the nineteenth century as noted by Hunter (2004) as she states "being a dormant political potential for a long time, the divide between Iran and Islam re-surfaced during the last decades of Qajar era" (p.19).

The adaptation of Collins and Blot and Blot (2003) view supports this study in two respects. First, this view provides a good platform for the examination of maktab literacies. As

Collins and Blot (2003) mentions, "the new identity of the conquered subject is no mere amalgam of indigenous ways and conqueror manners, but is a true hybrid, an identity born of struggle with and against imperial powers" (p.122). Second, Irano-Islamic hybrid identity formation as mediated by hybrid literacies explains a critical underlying factor in the genesis of nineteenth-century modernization dilemma which was closely linked to the domain of literacy and education.

Ringer (2000), in her discussion of the discourse of modernization and the problem of cultural integrity, points to blurred components of Iranian identity,

> The lack of a clear distinction between Islamic and other, nonreligious basis of Iranian identity further complicated attempts at legitimation of modernization-cum-secularization (2000, p.67)

## Summary

In this chapter, I provided a description of maktab literacies. I located these literacies on sociocultural grounds of the Qajar era. I demonstrated that various theoretical lenses yield various perspectives in conceptions of maktab literacies in Iran. The "social fragmentation theory" of Marx (1818-1883) explains the high rates of illiteracy as a result of the lack of national cohesion at various levels. Specially, the ethnic/ linguistic diversity and a failure of dissemination of Farsi or arithmetic literacies feed into the common understanding of maktab literacy as being limited to Quranic literacies.

I linked the historical roots of cultural divide proposed by Hunter (2004) to the concept of Hybrid identity/ hybrid literacy formation put forth by Collins and Blot and Blot (2003). I argued

that although observation of the cultural divide of Arabizer/Iran Loyalist exists within the Iranian cultural landscape, it does not capture the whole picture of every day realities of social life. Instead, the concept of hybrid identities/literacies more accurately explains the form and function of maktabs in Qajar Iran. In the next chapter, I will explore the dynamics involved in the reciprocal relation between social change and literacy practices of the time.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Transition from Maktab Literacies to Schools Literacies

With the insight from the interaction model of literacy that construes literacy as a force that shapes and is shaped by disparate social processes, in this chapter, I strive to elucidate on the dynamics involved in the transformations of the notions of literacy and transition to new school literacies. My aim is to investigate the interrelatedness of literacy with other spheres of the social system as noted by Ross Collin (2013). My focus will be on the beginning of modernization processes in the Qajar era as a turning point in the history of literacy and education in Iran. Working with this general plan, I proceed as follows. I begin the chapter with an exploration of visual data in two digital historical archives. The visual exploration is to complement my historical research with a visual mode of data and to unbundle from the hermeneutical loop of existing literature in search of fresh insights. Second, to contextualize and examine my visual data, I present an overview of historical highlights of the nineteenth century that had a direct or indirect relation with the domain of education and literacy. Next, referring to the work of Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) I present travelogue writing as a literacy practice, which had a formative role in the future, discourses on modernization within Iran in the nineteenth century.

**A Visual Enquiry**

In chapter two, I have used photographs to visualize the written text. In this chapter, I approach the visuals to examine the insights they offer. I also acknowledge that my subjectivity plays a significant role in this interpretation.

With the question of educational shifts from maktabs to new schools, and with the keywords of "maktabs and schools in Qajar era" I explored two digital visual archives:

- The Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies (IICHS).
  http://iichs.org/index_en.asp?id=3114&img_cat=187&img_type=0
- Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran in the digital library of Harvard University (WWQI).
  http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/index.html.

**Results of Search One:**

The search in the first archive yielded fourteen pictures, four of which were irrelevant to this search as they belonged to the Pahlavi era (three of them depicted modern girls' high schools). Of the rest, one was a Dar al-Fonun Secondary School facade. Three pictures were depicting traditional maktabs, two of which I have already used as visual representations of the maktabs in chapter two. Out of the rest, one depicted the Dar al-Fonun senior students. The other five were pictures of new boys' schools. There was no picture of girls' maktabs or schools for the Qajar era in this search (last updated April 18, 2016).

The second archive, WWQI (Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran), yielded fifty-six entries including the digital photographs of various artifacts such as school diplomas and letters. Out of

fifty-six entries, nineteen were photographs of schools and students. Out of those, one was a picture of a British boys' school, and the rest depicted girls' schools with students and teachers. Seventeen pictures were related to girls' Christian and Jewish missionary schools. Only one picture depicted a Muslim girls' elementary school; surprisingly Harvard digital archive cited this picture as revived from IICHS. It should be noted that the IICHS is not a gender specific archive, while WWQI is a women specific archive

**Results of Search Two**

I performed another search in IICHS to make sure I do not lose any data on women. I searched with the keywords of women's education and women's schools. For both searches, there appeared a number of short articles and no images. Then I performed another search with the keyword of "girls' maktabs" no results were found. The search with the keyword of "girls' schools" also did not yield any results as well.

<center>**Visual Data**</center>

In this section, I present the six photographs derived from IICHS, and one photograph of a Muslims' girls' school derived from WWQI.

**Figure3**. The Dar al-Fonun Senior Students with Mir Seyyed Ali Kimiagar, The physics teacher, in 1925.

(derived from IICHS at: http://iichs.org/index_en.asp?img_cat=187&img_type=0  )

**Description**

Dar-al-Fonun is a college founded in Tehran in 1851 to train upper-class Persian youth in medicine, engineering, military sciences, and geology. The establishment of Dar-al-Fonun by Amir Kabir, the prime minister during the rein of fourth Qajar king, marked the beginning of modern education in Iran (Encyclopedia Iranica, December 15, 1993, derived at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dar-al-fonun-lit)

The students clothing in this picture depicts an incorporation of European clothing to traditional Persian ones, for example the British collars and buttoned vests combined by Persian

hats. Students' clothing can be considered as a manifestation of hybrid identity formation parallel to their acquiring of Western knowledge and literacies. This exemplifies my discussion of interrelatedness of hybrid identity formation and hybrid literacies in previous chapter. The inscriptions on the photo are the name of students. The first person on the left marked by a cross might be the physics teacher but the first person on the right hand side of the A picture attracted my attention as being an elderly man wearing an *abaa* usually worn by clerics but he does not wear an *amameh* that all *mullas* would were on their heads. So, he might be an influential figure from traditional spheres. The presence of the aforementioned figure in this group portrait denotes of the presence of authority affiliated with traditional culture amid the modern school setting
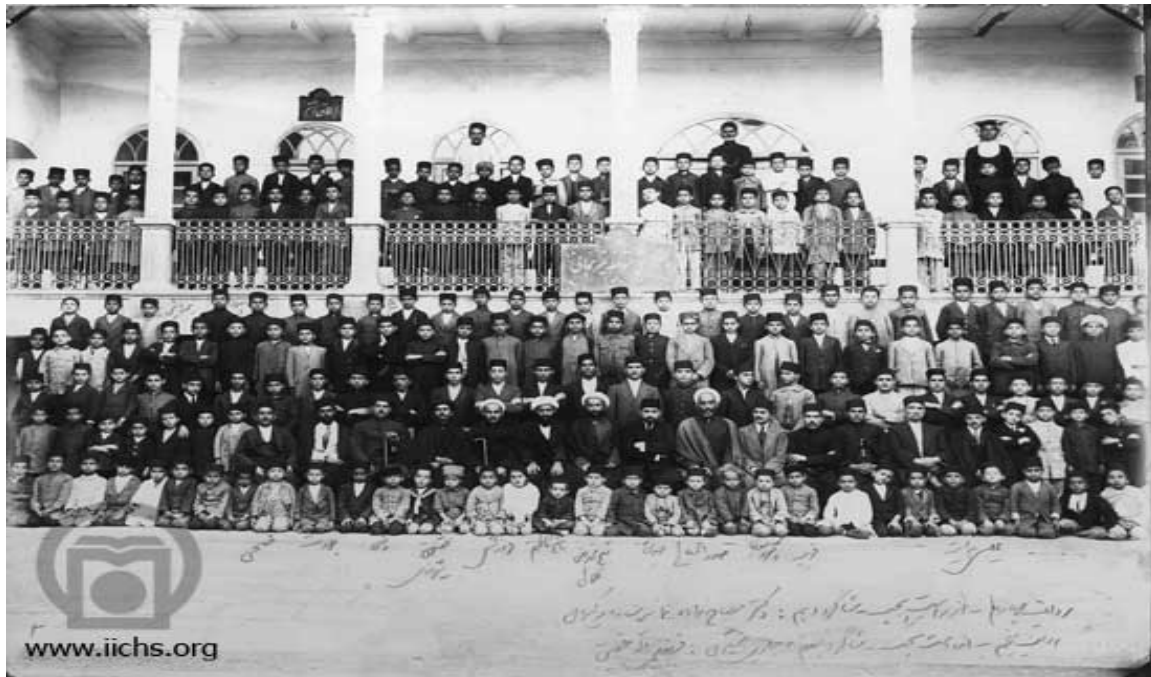
**Figure 4**. Students and teachers of Tehran Syrus School in 1922.

Derived from IICHS at: http://iichs.org/index_en.asp?img_cat=187&img_type=0

**Figure 5**. Sharaf senior students in Tehran

Derived from http://iichs.org/index_en.asp?img_cat=187&img_type=0

**Figure 6.** Different levels' Students and teachers in Rahmiye Sa'adat School in Tehran

( IICHS, derived from:  http://iichs.org/index_en.asp?img_cat=187&img_type=0 )

**Figure 7.** Students and teachers of Tehran Elmiye school, the First Floor, in Qajar era    (IICHS), Derived from:  http://iichs.org/index_en.asp?img_cat=187&img_type=0

**Figure 8**. Several students in Roshdiyh School in Mozafari Era

(IICHS), derived from:  http://iichs.org/index_en.asp?img_cat=187&img_type=0

عکاس کمینه مولود صبیه طایره ۱۳۲۸

**Figure 9**. Students and teaches of a Muslim girls' elementary school in Tehran.
Inscription on recto: "Photo by the humble Mawlud, daughter of Ta'irah, 1910"
derived from WWQI at: http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/1261A220.html
Record no. 1261A220

**Emergent Themes**

The first theme appeared in this digital archival search was the disproportionately lower ratio of records representing Muslim women/girls to that of their male counterparts for the IICHS archive (absence of any record, a ratio of zero). This theme repeated in my search in WWQI, yielding only one picture of Muslim girls' schools in comparison of eighteen records on missionary, Christian and Jewish girls' schools in total (ratio of one to eighteen).The second theme regarding women was that in both archives, related to the topics of education appeared other entries were designating other social processes such as veiling, dress code, and the constitutional revolution in regards to women schooling.

The common theme in regards to boys' schools was the presence of cleric men in the settings of new European-style schools. In the end, two questions raised:

1. What are the cleric men doing amidst the faculty of European-style schools?
2. Why are Muslim girls' schools disproportionately fewer than all boys' schools, and Christian and Jewish girls' schools?

**Literacy Being Shaped by Modernization processes**

> From the out set of the modernization process, the adaptation of some sort of European-style education was acknowledged to be an important, if not means, of effecting reform. By the late nineteenth century, educational reform was viewed as a crucial agent of political and social change. (Ringer, 2000, p. 58)

As Monica M. Ringer (2004) observes, the primary impact of the West on Persia followed a series of military defeats from Russia (1813, 1828), and Britain (1838). These military defeats compelled a defensive military reform, the *Nezam-e Jadid* (New Order) by the Crown Prince, Abbas Mirza who died before ascending to throne. By that time, the Ottoman Empire and Egypt had already gone through the same experience and had initiated their reform programs (Ringer, 2000, p 58). The military reform program in Persia consisted of the introduction of military technology and modern methods of troops training by hiring Western military advisers and dispatching students for education in the West, so that Iran became familiar with Western scientific ideas. Students' residency and study in Europe unraveled the inner workings of its society and the secrets to its power. This in turn affected the perceptions of reform itself. The first cadre of Persian reformists also served as initiators of a number of other measures, such as translation of European books, the establishment of the printing press, and the publication of newspapers, all of which had tremendous effects on the formation of new literacy practices and the transformation of older ones.

In the meantime, attempts for further centralization of the state's authority, control, and increase of taxation as a prerequisite for formation of a strong army were insisted on (p.58). These measures were taken to repel the continuous political, commercial, and territorial encroachments by European powers (Ringer, p.58). In spite of these efforts, European influence on Iran increased during the century, feeding the anti-imperialist sentiments on one side, and serving as an impetus for enacting far-reaching reforms in order to strengthen Iran against further

encroachments on the other side (Ringer, p.59). It seemed that reforms should be modeled from European institutions; thus, it can be said Europe was regarded both as a model for change and a threat. One of the most influential reformers of the Qajar period, Mirza Malcom Khan once asserted, "the surging power of Europe has rendered impossible the survival of barbarian states. Henceforth all governments in the world will have to order like those of Europe, or be subjugated and conquered" (Quoted in Hamid Algar, 1973, p.71). The labeling of non-European countries as *barbarian states* in this quotation designates the feeling of backwardness and deficiency vis-à-vis Europe under the influence of the discourse of orientalism.

The reform process in Iran for the first thirty years was predicted on the adaptation of military and technology (p.60). But soon after, the belief that Iran's weaknesses were resting upon technological deficiencies was refuted, giving way to the acknowledgement of the necessity for adaptation of the European institutions such as education and constitutional government. Prominent reformers like Abd al-Rahim Talebof emphasized the necessity of universal elementary education. They also aired concerns about social problems like the situation of women and the role of clerics in various socio-political spheres of Iran (Ringer, 2000, p.59). However, the transferability of European institution was highly questioned on cultural grounds. Even many advocates of reform associated European culture with "Christendom", "infidel customs", and "a less developed moral code" (Ringer, p.59); these views, of course, were modified to some extent as the century progressed as many reformers became Europeanized by

travel and study abroad (P.59). However, the controversy over the importation of European culture remained controversial and an emotional issue for many.

**The Establishment of Dar al-Fonun in 1851**

The establishment of Dar al-Fonun, the first state sponsored European-style secondary education, had crucial political, intellectual, and cultural implications. The desired outcome was to "spread new technology and military expertise while at the same time limiting the cultural contact and political influence of Europe" (Ringer, P.61). This goal was deemed to be accomplished by not sending students to Europe for study, and by limiting Iran's dependency on foreign experts. In contrast, the school itself turned into a locus of European influence in Iran. Thus, it became a rallying point for the contestation of reform. The establishment of the Dar al-Fonun was a threat to the religious establishment and the traditional Iranian scientific community who had the monopoly over the institution of education for centuries. This monopoly was instrumental in their general opposition to modernization and the teaching of Western sciences, including Western medicine. It was because of this opposition that in 1860 a decision was reached to teach the medical students at Dar al-Fonun the traditional medicine as well (p.61).

The inclusion of clergy and traditional science practitioners to Dar al-Fonun is the point that justifies the presence of the man with traditional *Aba* clothing (usually worn by Muslim clergy) in the group photograph of Dar al-Fonun in the first part of this chapter.

**The New Boys' Schools**

The active opposition of the majority of the clergy is well narrated in the story of the trials and tribulations of Mirza Hasan Rushdiyya in trying to establish new schools from city to city in Qajar Persia. This journey started in 1888 in city of Tabriz where he established a Rushdiyya school that had to be closed as Ulama (i.e., higher rank clerics) accused him of heresy, compelling him to flee for his life. He sought refuge in the city of Mashhad where he opened another school. This trial also had to be terminated as soon as it came to the attention of the religious authorities. Over the course of the next five years, he repeatedly opened schools in the city of Tabriz, all of which had to be closed in spite of good attendance. Finally, the fear on the part of parents and pupils that the schools might be attacked ended the trial in Tabriz. Eventually, under the protection of Mirza Ali Khan Amin al-Dawlah, a Rushdieh school was opened in Tehran, however, conditional upon the inclusion of Quranic literacies under instruction of mullahs (Rostam-Kolayi, 2008).

Above is the narrative behind the presence of mullahs in newly established modern schools in Iran. This time the hybrid curriculum of traditional Islamic education and Farsi literacy accompanied Western sciences in new schools.

**Print Technology in Iran**

The dissemination of the print technology was another historical landmark that greatly influenced the literacy arena in Iran. The first hand-press printing machine was brought to Iran in 1819 by Mirza Salih Shirazi who was dispatched to London for the study of printing and cannon making in 1815 at Oxford University (Green, 2010). In addition to bringing back a printing

press, Mirza Salih wrote a detailed account of his four years of residence and learning in London (Green, 2010, p.479). As Green (2010) points out the existing trend in the many historiographical writings has been to frame printing within the rubric of modernity. This scholarly trend, in turn, has provided connections between the dissemination of printed material and the development of secularism, nationalism, and the constitutional revolution. While this holds true in the context of the nineteenth century Iran, Green (2010) calls our attention to the following points,

> A key feature of this framework has been an emphasis on the study of the text and reading over that of the book and printing, focusing on print as a disseminator of ideas, which, in being spread through reading, demand that the historian pay primary attention to the texts that constitute evidence for the movement of such ideas (p. 479).

Green (2010) adds that the global trends that underlined opportunities and limitations that enabled printing to develop in Iran concerned the circulation of manufactured industrial goods similar to the cases of Australia, India, Malaya, and large parts of the Americas. Walter Benjamin observed that printing brought about the mass reproduction of cultural products, but it is generally overlooked that to do so, printing machines themselves had to be mass-produced in the first place. In global terms at least, the point at which this became possible was what has been termed the Stanhope revolution (Green, 2010). In addition, the role of cultural interactions and reconfigurations were an important feature of the spread of printing as Green notes.

Balaghi (2001) argues, "it was in the late nineteenth century that print culture became a significant component of Iran's intellectual and political landscape" (p.165). The question of print culture entails a discussion of audience and readership. In the context of Qajar era, the lines between literacy and orality were more blurred, and the consumers of print culture should not be

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equated with those who could read. Balaghi (2001) reports the observation of H. L. Rabin, the British consul in Iran as follow

> Newspapers had been greatly beneficial to the state of affairs in Iran and had increased the desire of the Iranian people to acquire literacy. Even those who were illiterate were known to purchase the newspaper for their children (Quated in Balaghi, p.168).

Balaghi adds that the ritual of reciting poetry extemporaneously in majlis gatherings[5] was retained and adapted to the reading of printed matter in small social gatherings.

**Literacy Shaping Other Social Domains**

**Travelogue Writing**

In this section referring to Tavakoli-Targhi (2001), I elaborate on the practice of travelogue writing /reading as literacy practices that had formative roles in the upcoming modernization processes.

Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) asserts that the Persians perceptions of Europe were not solely influenced by the discourse of Orientalism but was also greatly impacted by the "Persianate Europology" (p.35). As early as 1766-9, Persian envoys to Europe brought with them their written accounts of Europe. Like Orientalist narratives, "these accounts based their authority on self-experience and eyewitness accounts of alterity" (p.37).

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[5] Gatherings were places where plays were read aloud.

Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) reports that I'tisam al-Din, who traveled to London in1765, found the institutionalized disciplining in England more beneficial for the children of the elite than the Indian and Persian practice of hiring private teachers at home. Like nineteenth-century reformers he praised the European devotion to education and scientific inquiry, contrasting it to the Persian-Indian quest for the beloved,

> They are not like the people of this country, who repeat Hindi and Persian poem in praise of a mistress's face, or descriptive of the qualities of the wine, and of the cup-bearer, and who pretend to be in love. (cited in Tavakoli-Targhi, p.63)

Another envoy to Europe who brought comprehensive accounts of the West was Mirza Abu al-Hassan Khan Ilchi (1776-1845) who went on a diplomatic mission to London in 1809-10. He titled the report of his travel "The Book of Wonders" *(Hayrat Nameh)*. Impressed by this report, the Crown Prince, Abbas Mirza, sent two students to England for getting educated in Western sciences. In 1815, another five students were dispatched to England, except for one, all of them returned to Iran on 1819. Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) adds, contrary to the public view, these students were well educated and familiar with Europe and Europeans prior to their departure.

Some of these students served as assistant to the orientalists to Iran such as William Ouseley, William Price, and James Morier (Tavakoli-Targhi, 2001, p.43). They also had a significant contribution to the establishment of new institutions and modern Sciences. For example, Mirza Ja'far Mushir al-Dawlah Husayni authored some scientific treaties and taught mathematics and engineering in Dar al-Fonun. Likewise, Mirza Salih Shirazi founded, Kaghaz-I

Akhbar (1837), the first Persian newspaper published in Iran (Tavakoli-Targhi, 2001, p. 44).

Mirza Salih's influential travelogue offered a detailed political history of England and modern

Europe with accounts of American, English, and French revolutions. He also translated Gibbon's

Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire. The organized efforts of Mirza Riza and his cohorts set the

ground for the emerging of the field of Europology in Persia (Tavakoli-Targhi, 2001).

   As noted by Tavakoli-Targhi (2001), a forerunner of travelogue writing about Europe was

Mirza Abu-Talib Khan (1752-1806) known as Mirza Talebof. He traveled in Europe from 1799

to 1802. After returning, he wrote his travelogue, Masir-i Ṭalibi, in 1804, which was translated

into English (1810) as"The Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, in Asia, Africa, and Europe:

during the years 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, and 1803." This book was also translated into French

(1819), Dutch (1813), and German (1813). The translation of travelogues to native languages of

subject peoples as noted by Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) stems in the natural curiosity of "seeing

oneself being seen" (p.36).In the following section, I present some excerpts from Mirza Abu-

Talib travelogue, cited in Tavakoli-Targhi (2001), to elucidate on the anthropological and

sociological insights embedded in the Persian travelogues. In a lengthy chapter, he enumerates

four vices and virtues of the British people.

 **The Virtues and the Vices**

       As reported by Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) "Self-respect" was the first virtue that according

to Mirza Talebof was inculcated in individuals through "childhood education" and was

maintained by the public censoring of those who lacked it (p.45). "Acknowledgment" of

individual achievements and excellence was regarded as a second virtue. This, in turn, elevated individuals' opinion of each other and promoted their national honor and credence (p. 45). He discerned an affinity between individual and national self-respect. As Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) notes, "the linkage of individual and collective accomplishments was a novel contribution to Persianate modernity and modern subjectivity," especially in the context of Qajar era when social fragmentation and factional strife were present (p. 46).The third virtue according to Mirza Talebof was "the fear of law-breaking and the abiding of self-limits" (Tavakoli-Targhi, 2001, p.46). The main civil benefit of this virtue was then "the promotion of social cohesion and the stability of collective and state power" (Tavakoli- Targhi, p.46). Accordingly, avoiding of transgressing the law contributed to "individual tranquility." Again, Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) believes, Mirza Talebof's linking of the status of a nation to social cohesion, civil benefits, and personal tranquility transcended the conventional political paradigm of Persianate political theory and its overwhelming concern with the stability of despotic state and religion (Tavakoli-Targhi, p.46). Especially, the articulation of the concept of nation (millat), individual (nafs), and civil benefits (favayed-I madani) altered the traditional signification of these concepts. Applied to modern England, the notion of millat (nation) no longer signified a religious community and the notion of nafs connoted "the individual" and not "the soul" as presented in classical Islamic philosophy (p.46)."The rationalists' inclination for the public welfare and aversion to public harm" (Tavakoli-Targhi, p.46) was the fourth virtue, embedded in which was the interrelatedness of collective and individual welfare.

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Ending his observations on the virtues of the British, Mirza Talebof elaborated on the specific conception of "perfection" (*kamal*). Comparing the Islamic notion of *kamal* as "absolute perfection" to that of its English notion, Talebof asserted that in English view "Perfection" and human endeavor for its attainment was based on a prior state; thus it was not absolute (Tavakoli-Targhi, p.47). Mirza Talebof (1804) presented a European redefinition of "perfection" (Kamal) that displaced " spiritual perfectos" with "worldly porogressus" (cited in Tavakoli-Targhi, p.48).

These insights set an ideological ground for re-evaluation of traditional education and the kind of literacies it transmitted. The inclination to teach new sciences in order to get onto the road of progress rose out of familiarity with these ideas which in the first place were the result of direct observation of Europe, and, secondly were disseminated through the practice of travelogue writing.

Analyzing a body of nineteenth century travelogues, Tavakoli- Targhi (2001) observes that Persian travelers constituted Europe as a distinguished site of analysis and gaze, as producing a body of knowledge about European history, politics, culture, science, and economy. However, in contrast to Europe, this knowledge, instead of forming a specific branch like Orientalism, was integrated into a" general repository" (p.44). Tavakoli-Targhi states that

> The dialogic interaction of European and Persianate knowledge set motion the dynamic process of modern cultural (trans)formations. Whereas European modernity actively suppressed the heterotopic context of its emergence, Persianate modernity celebrated its transformative converse with Europeans. This active remembrance of creative process of cultural hybridization and

diversification is often misunderstood by historians of modern Iran as an undifferentiated process of Westernization. Thus the rich textual resources of Persianate modernity, instead of being viewed as hybrid texts containing a double consciousness, are often dubbed as bad copies of originally European views and ideas. (p.44)

The active opposition of conservative groups to the processes of modernity, especially modern education, was partially due to misunderstanding of aforementioned texts. In addition, these texts inculcated a double consciousness, which was the result of learning about "vices" of the Europeans based on Persianate accounts.

Mirza Abu Talib list of the British virtues was followed by a longer and more detailed list of their vices. Prominent among other vices was "the disbelief in religion and resurrection, and inclination toward philosophy." The other vices were listed as "the arrogance induced by the past fifty years of power and good fortune" (p.48), "passion for money and wordly affairs" "enormous desire for comfort and ease", "irritability and ill-temper"; "spending excessive time sleeping, dressing themselves, fixing their hair, and shaving"; "multiplicity of needs and desire for pleasurable household appliances", "wasting invaluable time on shopping", " excessive consumption of meats, drinks, and etc", " Error in recognition of boundaries of sciences and languages", " the escaping of girls with their partners, and pre-nuptial coplation of mates and scarcity of chastity among men and women" (p.51). Recounting of being ridiculed for sleeping with his pants on instead of going to bed naked like the English, Mirza Talebof blamed the British for viewing their own culture as "flawless and proper" (p.51).

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To conclude Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) acknowledges that,

> Persian travelers were not gaping at an advanced culture. As keen observers of Europe, they were endowed with a critical 'double-consciousness.' Fully aware of Europe as a significant new Other, travelers' oral and written reports of self-experience served as self-refashioning scenarios for Iranians. (P.53)

Expressed in written word and circulated within society, this double-consciousness complicated the processes of reform in Iran.

**Chapter Summary**

In this Chapter, I explored some of the processes of modernization as influencing literacy domain. The most prominent process was the shift towards European style education and the inclusion of modern sciences to the traditional literacies which were comprised of Quranic, Persian, and basic arithmetic literacies by then. This shift also had to do with the transformation of the epistemology of knowledge and the question of what counted as useful knowledge. Also, the emergence of new technologies such as printing contributed to the dissemination of new literacy practices such as collective newspaper reading. In a discussion of forging hybrid identities and literacy in the context of post-enlightenment political activities, Collins and Blot (2003), emphasizes, "the importance of shared participation in literacy activities like reading newspapers and popular novels written in standardized, national languages, as a means of creating national identities" (p.122). This point is of utmost importance in the context of Qajar

Iran when linguistic diversity and lack of national identity were regarded as an impediment en route to modernization and progress. Thus, the reciprocal relation between literacy and the emergence of new technologies can simply be put as with the dissemination of printed press like newspapers the desire for learning the Farsi literacies increased. On the other side, the practices of collective readings fed into the formation of national identity.

I also presented the genre of travelogue writing/ reading as a disseminator of double-consciousness about European culture and society. This double-consciousness both triggered a drive towards modernization and progress and, at the same time, an apprehension that the emulation of European institutions would endanger the religious and traditional integrity of Iranian culture. At this point the dormant cultural fault line of Iran-Loyalist versus Arabizer reappeared, resulting in long lasting controversies. Among these controversies were the questions of Modern Iranian women and women education and literacy.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## Women Literacies

In this chapter, I expand the discussion of chapter four into the domain of women. In other words, I will provide a more detailed and gender-specific exploration of the co-evolution of literacy with other social spheres based on the interaction model of literacy. I first provide a background on the major transformations concerning shifts from women's maktabs to school education and literacies. Next, I will present historical data from a number of nineteenth-century travelogues and visual data from the Women's World in the Qajar Iran digital archive as primary sources in order to contextualize my discussion. I will end this study with the conclusion.

## Background

Existing historiographical literature addressing women's education and literacy in modern Iran follows two major trends. First, the scholarship on the Reza Shah period (1925–41) focuses on the Pahlavi state as the initiator of reform in modern female education. This body of literature marginalizes pre-Pahlavi contributions and their role in the shaping of the cultural underpinnings of educational reform. The second group emphasizes the contributions of individual Iranian men and women, criticizing the state's shortcomings and/or its ideological agenda (Rostam Kolayi, 2008). Most discussions of female education in Iran omit or underestimate the role of Armenian, Jewish, Baha'i, Zoroastrian, and foreign missionary schools and only highlight the establishment of Muslim-initiated schools as the starting point of modern education in Iran (Rostam Kolayi, 2008). New studies on modern-style Iranian-Armenian,

Baha'i, and missionary schools imply the need for revisions of these general assumptions (Berberian, 2000; Rostam-Kolayi, 2008). Thus, a comprehensive description of women's literacy education calls for a long-term view, tracing the origins of modern girls' education back to the nineteenth-century in the private initiatives of both Iran's religo-ethnic minorities and Muslim reformists. For the purpose of this study, I only address the Muslim aspect.

**From Maktabs to Early Modern Women's Education**

As mentioned in chapter three, prior to the rise of modern education for girls, there were two overlapping forms of education encompassing maktab instruction and private tutoring for the elite. Private tutoring for women in Iran has been documented as far back as the royal household of the Safavid period (1500–1722 C.E.), but probably preceded it (Rostam- Kolayi, 2008, p.62). The content and curriculum of an upper-class home education was not substantially different from what was taught in maktabs, nor was it entirely female-specific as Rostam-Kolayi (2008) observes. Women and girls of the Qajar royal family and other elites received lessons in the Qur'an and religious stories, Persian and Arabic language, Persian literature, reading, writing, and perhaps some limited instruction in European geography, history, and languages.

Some prominent Iranian reformists spent time in neighboring regions like the Ottoman, Russian Empires, and India, which preceded Iran in modern female education. They also read reformist works written in Turkish and Persian from these areas, including works advocating greater equality for women. In the early 1880s, Mirza Hasan Rushdiyya an educator from the

province of Azerbaijan studied teacher training in Beirut. He also observed modern primary

schools called Rushdiyya in Istanbul, identical to his own surname. At the end of the nineteenth

century, Rushdiyya and other individuals opened modern-style boys' schools in Iran modeled

after the Ottoman example, offering foreign language and science instruction (Ringer 2001).

Early private boys' schools had a significant influence on the first girls' schools in several

respects. Both shared a new style of curriculum and texts, made use of classroom space separate

from religious venues, and saw as their mission to educate students in order to serve the nation.

However, they differed significantly. Firstly, boys' education benefited early from state support

and protection, while girls' schools were deprived of such support as Ringer (2001) notes.

Secondly, the curriculum for girls highlighted the domestic sciences and girls' future roles as

mothers and wives. This trend was evident in all discourse of modernization; emphasis on

women's education was not based on the concept of gender equity or human rights but based on

an idea that regarded women as bearers/educators of a new force for the advancement of the

country. Rostam-Kolayi (2008) notes that,

> the educated mother and wife would produce happy and healthy offspring, nurture
> a harmonious relationship with her husband, and thus provide the foundational
> building block for a strong and independent nation. The education of women
> would prepare them for the work of educating a modern nation. This argument,
> first articulated in the late nineteenth century, became the predominant
> justification for female education in the 1920s and1930s. (p.74)

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After private boys' schools had taken hold among a particular segment of the urban population, a few private girls' schools opened in Tehran and some provincial cities. Established and financed by individual women and men, girls' schools were often located in the homes of their founders (Bamdad,1977).The first girls' school as Dawlatabadi (1923) reports was established in 1900, serving two grades. This school was shortly closed down and its charter was lost (Dawlatabadi, 1923). However, as Rostam Kolayi (2008) notes, in the face of opposition from clerical authorities and the state, it was primarily the urban upper-middle classes that struggled to found modern girls' schools as the locus of learning new literacies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In 1903, the Parvarish (Cultivation) School was established in the home of Mirza Hasan Rushdiyah in Tehran. During the constitutional period (1906-11) additional girls' schools opened in Tehran, such as Mukhaddarat (Ladies) in 1905, and Hurmatiyah-yi Sadat (Honor of Sadat), Dushizigan (Maidens) in 1906, Hijab (Veil) and Khayrat Al-Hisan (Virtuous Charity) in 1910, (Rushdiyah, 1983). Namus (Honor), founded by Tuba Azmudah in 1908, operated five branches in Tehran and had taught 3,473 students by 1914 (cited in Rostam Kolayi, p.72-77).

Foreign, missionary, and minority religious schools had mainly catered to the Muslim aristocratic and upper classes and the Armenian upper-middle classes. Despite the upper-middle-class origins of their founders, the new private Muslim girls' schools gradually drew from a broader socioeconomic population and subsidized a considerable proportion of students. While

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increasingly broadening their reach to poor children whose parents were inclined to send them to school, new Muslim-initiated schools continued to educate the upper classes.

**Vocational Schools**

Adult education in the form of vocational training also emerged in the later decades of Qajar period. This was an attempt to integrate poor women into the expanding arena of Iranian female education. In the first vocational training school, the "complete academic subjects and handicrafts" were taught. The women's journal *Shikufah* described the organization of such a school, called Dar al-Sana'ah Muzayyiniyah. (As quoted in Rostam- Kolayi, 2008)

> Whoever would like to learn carpet-making will be honorably accepted. Students are accepted on the conditions firstly that it would be free for a year to work on carpet-making and learn all of its forms. Later, there would be a monthly payment. After one year, whoever wants to continue working for the school can do so and whoever wants to leave can go elsewhere. If a student wants to learn without paying and with- out being employed, there would be a monthly payment to the office until they learn the trade. Then they are free to serve in the office and be paid if they choose to do so. (p.78)

Vocational schools for women expanded the curriculum of girls' schools to address the needs of non-elite women who had to work to support themselves and their families based on the understanding that poor women too needed basic academic literacy besides vocational training. Such schools were run by a small cadre of women and sometimes shared space with a girls' school or the office of a women's association or journal. Literacy training was often the focus of schools for adult women. Rostam Kolayi (2008) observes that these early vocational schools

serve as the foundation and model upon which the state, during Pahlavi period (1925-1978),

launched its adult education and anti-illiteracy campaign. In that context, education was seen as

means of social mobility that provided poor women with the training for a socially dignified

vocation, rather than resorting to begging or prostitution. Unfortunately carpet-making, the poor

woman's ideal vocation according to educational reformers, was a work associated with

exploitation, long hours of non-stop work and low pay that precluded any possibility of

fulfillment of the domestic responsibilities.

**Precursors to the Discourse on Women's Education**

Similar to the previous chapter, I refer to Tavakoli-Targhi's (2001) study of the role

Orientalism and Occidentalism in the refashioning of Iran in the Qajar period to elucidate on the

undercurrents of the discourse of women's status and education in the late Qajar era. As I did in

chapter four, I provide excerpts from early Persian travelogues about European women that

constituted a yardstick for the imagining of modern Persian women for progressively minded

reformers. Travelogue writing and reading as a literacy practice served as a double-edged sword

triggering both a desire for adaptation of and opposition to European institutions.

Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) maintains "with the political hegemony of Europe, women's body

served as an important marker of identity and difference and as a terrain of cultural and political

contestation" (p.54). The first travelers to London, I'tisam al-Din (traveled to London in 1765),

Mirza Abu al-Hassan Khan Ilchi and Mirza Abu-Talib (traveled to London, 1809-10), were

impressed by the beauty of the London women and described Europe as "the birthplace of

beauty" (as cited in Tavakoli-Targhi, p.54). But more important are their accounts as they compared European Women to Persian women. In their understanding, women had a prominent role in the political dominance of Europe. They considered a causal relation between women's education and the progress of Europe. For example, I'tisam al-Din pointed to the significance of schooling in the shaping of society and gender relations:

> In England it is usual for the people of rank to send both their boys and daughter to a distant place for education. The people of wealth in England, commencing at the age of four years, keep their sons and daughters constantly employed in writing, reading, and acquiring knowledge; they never permit them to be idle. [if a man or woman not be acquainted with the musical art, be unable to dance or ride, he or she is accounted by people of substance as descended from a mean parentage, and taunt and reproaches are not pared.... The ladies, particularly, who can neither dance nor sing, are considered in a very inferior light; they will never get well married. (cited in Tavakoli-Targhi, p.62)

Mirza Abu-Talib (1804) also remarked "through education, the English have cleverly restrained women from deviant deeds" (quoted in Tavakoli-Targhi, p.63). He viewed education and the veiling as two diverse patterns of disciplining for women, stating, "The institution of the veil as a form of restraining is also an instigator of sedition and corruption" (as cited in Tavakoli-Targhi, p.63). The disciplining of women through education was more appealing to Persian travelers who viewed the veil as a contributor to moral depravation.

Mirza Fattah Garmrudi, who traveled to Europe in 1838, unlike his cohort nineteenth-century travelers, developed a distaste for European manners and characteristics and warned

against closer contact with them Tavakoli-targhi (2001). His pornographic account of Europe was the precursor of Europhobic socio-political perceptions in Iran (Tavakoli-targhi, 2001, p.65). Aware of the colonization of India, he warned that Europeans should not be trusted. For "if opportune, they would damage the religion and the state and destroy the Shariah traditions." (cited in Tavakoli-Targhi, p.65). Garmarudi's (1837-38) description of European women is as follows:

> In this land of diverse persuasions, women and girls are generally pantless and without a veil [chador] and have a constant desire for able pummelers. Covered women are rare and unacceptable. Women are masterful in realization of the wishes of men. They are addicted to pleasure and play, and are free from suffering and toil [az ranj va ta'ab azad]. In actualizing the demands of their partners, they are always daring and exquisite. But they are incompetent and frail in preserving their own honor" (cited in Tavakoli, p.66).

Above historical records represents the mediating role of literacy practices such as travelogue writing and reading in the formation of desire for or opposition to adaptation of European social institutions.

**Opposition to Female Education**

The opposition to girls and women literacy was the main reason for girls' schools lagging behind boys' educational institutions. Standing against opposition had religious and social implications for educators, students, and their families. At the turn of the nineteenth century, women's literacy was still a topic of controversy and was becoming a social stigma due to widespread fears that women might use their reading and writing skills to engage in acts such as

corresponding with lovers. Conservatives viewed women's education as a sign of sexual and

moral decay.  In the patriotic society of Qajar Iran, the cleric opposition to female education

reflected deep anxiety concerning female sexual transgression (such as adultery and loss of

chastity) as threats to male honor (Rostam-Kolayi, 2008, p.76).

**The Press and the Education of the Masses**

As Ringer (2004) remarks, the early twentieth century, occurring between the

constitutional revolution of 1906-11 and the authoritarian modernization program of Pahlavi era

during the 1930s, was distinctive in many respects. First, the debates around modernity involved

the most sophisticated analysis of social change in the context of modernization, even to this day.

Second, for the first time, reformers realized the impossibility of top-down reform,

understanding "that there was not a supermarket for technology and institutions, but that

technology and institutions possessed their own cultural and historical context and thus could not

be adopted willy-nilly to an unchanged Iran" (Ringer, 2004, p.47). They came to learn about the

importance of the grassroots level and realizing the individual as a social actor.  As early as

1851, and with the emerging of the printing press, "Nasir aI-Din Shah assumed the task of

"discipling /educating [tarbiyat] the people of Iran and informing them of internal and external

events. The official gazette, vagai Faqayi'-i Itifaqiyah, which began publication in 1851, was to

carry out the Shah's pedagogical task of fostering "the intelligence and perception of the

residents of the Sublime State" (Tavakoli-targhi, 2001, p.118). Third, this period afforded "a less

censored, controlled, or rigid intellectual climate" (p.47) and therefore the debate around modernity was more expressive of the variety and flexibility of plans for tackling social dilemmas more than any other time. In this context, the various forms of printing press served as the arena for the contestation of the main topics on modernity including the questions of gender and religion.

**Printed Press as a Space for Contestation of Women's Literacy**

The struggle over women's literacy is well depicted in the reformist and women's press of early twentieth-century. These press embodied new literacy practices which were closely linked to the emergence of new technologies and cultural contact with the West. On the other hand, the women press served as a catalyst for the expansion of women's literacy. The printed press during the constitutional period (1905–11) and modern Iranian nationalism provide a valuable historical source for the analysis of women's literacy and education shift in Iran.

Some women voiced their opposition to those who attacked women's education directly through publishing letters in the pro-constitutionalist newspapers such as Habl al-matin. For example, a woman addressed Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri (1842-1909), a prominent clergy, for issuing an injunction against female education. Like many other Muslim proponents of modern female education, she argued that God had mandated knowledge for women: "I am talking about a God whom you have made unjust and oppressive to us women. Otherwise, the God we know and worship is too high and great to make such distinctions between men and women and ordain

so unwisely." She argued that if those who opposed female education and girls' schools did so out of concern for loss of women's honor and chastity, they had lost sight of the numerous ways girls and women were abused and robbed of their virtue in existing arrangements. It was not uncommon, she said, for girls attending maktabs to be sexually molested by male relatives of the Mullabaji and for illiterate, widowed women, "without money or beauty," to resort to begging and prostitution to support themselves. Since most of the new private schools were staffed by women, she reasoned, they offered girls and women protection from such violations of honor, and at the same time, they provided an education that would allow destitute women to support themselves in a dignified fashion (cited in Rostam- Kolayi, 2008, P.77).

Rostam Kolayi (2008) reports that in another occasion, to settle clerical anxieties over the content of modern education, a female-authored letter to the editor of the newspaper *Tamaddun* (Civilization) introduced the new terminology and textbooks used in conjunction with the modern girls' schools as "a continuation of, and improvement upon, the old schools (*maktab-khanah*) and texts" (p.78). Rostam-Kolayi adds:

> This lesser one, of the inhabitants of this country, asks: Did we not have in the capital city mulla bajis? Or did we not have, from the beginning of the world till just now, any maktab-khanahs? Or did our daughters not go to the local akhunds [mullas] to study? And, if they did, were they walking through private passage-ways?Or were books such as Mush va gurbah [Mouse and cat], or Shabastari's Husayn-i Kurd [Husayn the Kurd] and Chihil tuti [Forty parrots]34... better and superior books to books such as Tarbiyat al-binat [Education of girls], Nukhbah-i Sipihri [Selections from Sipihri], and Nakhustnamah [The first book]? Is it apostasy to say madrasah instead of maktab-khanah, or is it wrong to say dabistan [modern- style primary school], which is our

ancestral language? Or if anyone says dushizah instead of dukhtar, does it mean he/she intends to teach matters corruptive of religion? And is it a major sin to share the problems of our poor men or teach sewing on a machine and knitting and needlework and silkwork, instead of making a skull-cap, quilted shoes... the uses of which have now gone out of fashion in our country? (Cited in Rostam-Kolayi, p.78)

Rostam Kolayi counts this as "an example of a conscious strategy to present new girls' schools as a continuation of *maktab* religious schools that had also served girls" (p.79). However, it was argued that modern schooling required new texts, curriculum, and approaches to education for girls and women. Accordingly, modern educational developments did break with pre-modern arrangements in certain fundamental ways including curriculum, language, and spatial organization (Rostam-Kolayi, 2008).

It is worth noting that, even though modern education for women faced opposition from the ulema, not all Iranian clerics took such a stance. A noticeable number of prominent, religiously heterodox clerics of the early twentieth century were proponents and sponsors of the new Iranian-initiated girls' schools, and their female relatives took part in the opening of such schools (Rostam-Kolayi, 2008, p.80).

**Trivialities**

Up to this point, I have explored some major sociopolitical phenomena influential in the change in the domain of literacy education in Qajar Persia. I also have examined the role of literacy practices such as travelogue writing and collective readings of printed press in the shaping of social change. In this section with the concept of trivialities within the field of social history in mind, I directed my attention to the digital archive of WWQI in order to get some insights about the everyday life of Iranian women in Qajar era. I begin with elaborating on the concept of trivialities proposed by Hopkins (History Today, 1985):

> Trivialities are what social history used to be about: clothes, hunting, sex, weddings, houses, eating, sleeping. For most people, in all periods, major preoccupations; but for serious historians, marginal matters compared with politics, laws, wars, and foreign relation. Social history provided mere light relief, the tail-piece for proper history, just enough to convince the reader that the subject matter was human after all (History Today, derived at:
>
> http://www.historytoday.com/raphael-samuel/what-social-history#sthash.FAKaFhDu.dpuf)

The inclusion of the concept of trivialities in this section stems from the conceptual underpinning of the literacy in this study as put fore by Naz Rassool (1995),

> Literacy as a social practice is integrally linked with social, economic, and political institutions and processes. As such, it has a material base which is fundamentally constituted in power relations. Literacy is therefore interwoven with the text and context of everyday living in which multi- leveled meanings are organically produced at both individual and societal level. (p. 423)

In this view, *trivialities* contribute to a social analysis of literacy at the individual level. Trivialities also exemplify some of the microscopic dimensions of power relations in a poststructuralist conception of power mentioned in the chapter one of this study.

**The Visual Archive Search**

The homepage of WWQI (www.qajarwomen.org) provides six tabs for exploration of six genres of data under the titles of manuscripts, objects, photographs, legal and financial, correspondence, and audio files. Under the genre of objects appear several subjects. I chose the subject of box (containers) all of which belonged within the households of Qajar women. At least 36 out of 52 result images were imported goods from Europe or Russia. This collection included boxes and chests; jars and containers; and boxes of manicure sets and European cosmetics. The entire collection has items as early as Aqa Muhammad Khan's reign through the Pahlavi era. However, among the selected pieces in this collection, the earliest date to Fath'ali Shah's period and the latest to the early Pahlavi period (1804-1969).

Figure 10. Cosmetics jar. (derived from WWQI, Record no. 31g168)

http://search.qajarwomen.org/search?query=31g168&lang=en



Figure 11. Food tin. (derived from WWQI, Record no. 31g170)

http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/31g170.html

Figure 12. Aspirin tin. (derived from WWQI, Record no. 31g171)

http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/31g171.html



Figure 13. Sewing box. (derived from WWQI, Record no.1138A62)

http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/1138A62.html
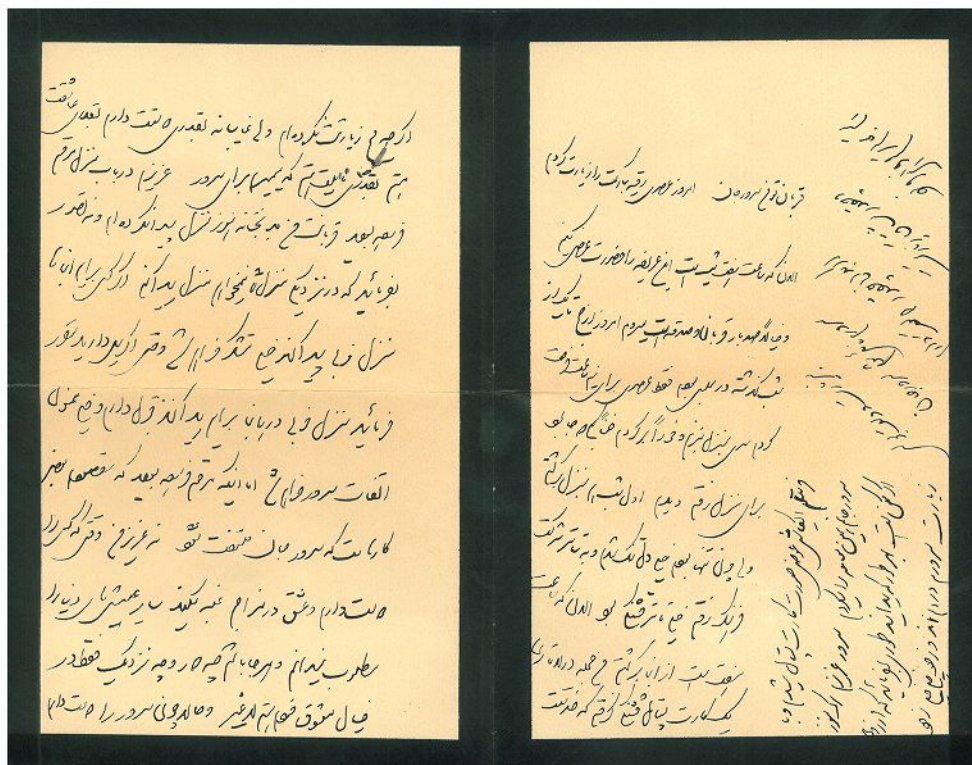
Figure 14. Greeting postcard, derived from WWQI,

http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:12637998

Figure 15. Love letter, (derived at WWQI, Record no. 1282A4)

**http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/1282A4.html**

**An Influx of European Cultural and Material Goods**

Exploring through thousands of visual documents in the Qajar women's archive, I came to realize the increasing presence of European made objects, some replacing the Persian version of the same thing, and some others were a total novelty. The cosmetic jar (Figure 9), the food tin (Figure 11), the sewing box (Figure 13) with the image of a European woman and children on it, not only denote of an influx of European goods to Iran through trade, but they are implying of the penetration of European consumer culture. These objects replace what already existed in its traditional form. Notably, the Aspirin tin (Figure 12) designates a deeper phenomenon: the penetration of Western conceptions of the human body and medicine. The presence of Aspirin within the everyday life objects of a household denotes of a micro-level phenomenon that embodies the struggle over the practice of medicine among traditional medicine practitioners and European medicine proponents in the Dar al-Fonun polytechnic school. The postcard (Figure 14) is also demonstrative of both an introducing of new objects (i.e., the postcard), and the emergence of new literacy practices associated with the new objects/technologies (i.e., postcard writing).

**Insights from the Interaction Model of Literacy**

The premise behind the interaction model of literacy is that society is not a closed machine whose parts fire according to a fixed schedule, rather it is a "decentered totality" and "assemblage" made up of "interrelated, coevolving activity spheres" (Ross Collin, 2013, p.32). Among these activity spheres, Harvey (2010) includes technologies and organizational forms such as literacies, social relations, administrative and institutional arrangements, production and labor arrangements, and so on. These institutes form a social totality based on the each of these domains interacting, shaping and being shaped by the full complexity of other domains. Thus, social totalities are considered "decentered and evolving entities" (Collin, 2013, p.33). Therefore, the influence of one sphere on the other is indirect.

In this view, literacy is not regarded as a technology of decoding and encoding but forms of literacy condition and are conditioned by other social spheres. In this chapter, I strived to present a section of a complex matrix of literacy among other social domains. I showed some of the ways broader social phenomena such as modernization processes, including nationalist reformist movements, were instrumental in shaping new literacies. And conversely, by introducing travelogue writing and the dissemination of the printed press as two examples, I demonstrated the way certain literacy practices were influential in the formation of social discourses and crises such as the modernization dilemma.

At the end by proposing the concept of trivialities, I tried to examine the power crisis of Qajar era in the face of transmutation of Europe and its penetration into the Eastern cultural spaces.

> Most basically, and of greatest relevance for understanding the puzzling legacies of literacy, it has become clear that power is not just some concentrated force that compels individuals or groups to behave in accordance with the will of an external authority, be it parent, boss, or public authority. Instead, power has microscopic dimensions, small, intimate, everyday dimensions, and these are constitutive as well as regulative; they are the stuff out of which senses of identity, senses of self as a private individual as well as a social entity in a given time and place, are composed and recomposed" (Collins and Blot, 2003, p.5)

The influx of European goods brought with it an inclination for emulating the West. The presence of European women as an object of desire imprinted on various European goods, such as postcards, dishes; upholstery could have served as an imagined future for Persian women of the Qajar period. The sewing box (Figure 13) and the postcard (Figure 15) with the imprinted image of a European women freely dancing with the music presents such an example. This is the kind of microscopic dimension of power noticed by Collins and Blot and Blot (2003).

## Conclusion

The choosing of Qajar period (1796-1925) for this historical study of Iranian women literacies was not random. This historical era was a turning point in which the urban population of Iran faced multiple individual and social crises when first confronting the West. On one side, they

faced the dormant identity crisis of Iran-Loyalist vs. Arabizer. On the other side, they had to stand against the encroachments of the West during the high point of colonial expansion. It was in this context that nationalist sentiments grew widely and served as an impetus for reform. This era also witnessed a closer contact with the Europeans, an emergence of new technologies, and an influx of European goods to Iran. All of this, combined with army defeats and political complexities in dealing with Russia and Britain, created a whole social matrix that literacy education acted as an element swaying among many others. In this context, one can raise the question of what dynamics were involved in the interplay between Persian women's literacies and above matrix of social phenomena.

Sociocultural perspective to literacy and in particular New Literacy Studies provided a conceptual lens to describe and examine literacy in its context. In simple words, it was answering the question of how broader social circumstances shaped literacy, and vice versa, how literacy was instrumental in the shaping of broader social domains. In this regard the Interaction model of literacy served useful in answering the second part of above question.

In the description of existing forms of literacy in Persia, maktab literacies were introduced. The 1984 study of Brian Street in The village of Cheshmeh was revisited, and the benefits of maktab literacy in its context, as well as its role in religious hegemony, were elaborated on. Adopting of the concept of hybrid literacy/identity formations provided a deeper understanding of the form and function of maktab literacy, pointing to its roots in a historical past.

The blurred boundaries of the hybrid Irano-Islamic identity, perpetuated by the hybrid maktab literacy education, came into play at the time of sociocultural crisis of the nineteenth century. This also complicated the processes of reform by fueling the modernization dilemma.

Two questions regarding the institution of education and the institution of gender respectively affected the trajectory of female literacy education in Iran. The first question pertained to the epistemological nature of knowledge resolved within the vicissitudes of boys' education. This controversy led to the preservation of maktab literacy, albeit in newer forms, and the adding of new sciences in modern settings. The tradition of combining the Islamic education with European science education still forms the main body of Iranian educational system, a tradition survived since the establishment of Qajar modern schools. The second challenge to tackle regarding modern literacy for women was the question regarding gender. The nationalist movement of Iran was a driving force in advocacy for women's literacy. However, these processes became complicated under the influence of what Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) calls "double-consciousness" which was partly a byproduct of the Persians' Europology disseminated via the practice of travelogue writing. In this way, literacy can be regarded as a force that shapes and is being shaped by other social spheres in indirect ways and via microscopic dimensions of power relations. I exemplified these microscopic dimensions of power in the influx of European goods into the women's spaces of everyday lives. The wide presence of imported objects not only signals a gradual cultural contact but also denotes the emergence of new literacy practices associated with new cultures and new technologies.

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## Photograph Sources

Figure 1. IICHS (Institute for Iranian Contemprary Historical studies), From Maktab Khane to School, [AA4- 3789].One of the Tehran Maktab khane (old-fashion school) in 1914.

Figure 2. IICHS (Institute for Iranian Contemprary Historical studies), From Maktab Khane to School, [M275- 61663]

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Figure 3. IICHS (Institute for Iranian Contemprary Historical studies), From Maktab Khane to School, [AA2- 17] Students and teachers of Tehran Syrus school in 1922.

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Figure 4. IICHS (Institute for Iranian Contemprary Historical studies), From Maktab Khane to School, [AA1- 4480], Students and teachers of Tehran Syrus School in 1922.

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Figure 5. IICHS (Institute for Iranian Contemprary Historical studies), From Maktab Khane to School, [AA1- 4480], Sharaf senior students in Tehran.

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Figure 6. IICHS (Institute for Iranian Contemprary Historical Studies), From Maktab Khane to

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Figure 7. IICHS (Institute for Iranian Contemprary Historical studies), From Maktab Khane to

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Figure 9. Students and teaches of a Muslim girls' elementary school in Tehran, Record no.

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Figure 10. Cosmetics jar. Collections: Bahman Bayani

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Figure 11. Food tin. Record no. 31g170

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Figure 12. Aspirin tin, Repository; Bahman Bayani Collection,Restrictions No

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Figure 13. Swing box, Collections: Ashrafi, Repository: Ashrafi family collection Accessed 11

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Figure 14.ʿAbd al-Husayn Muʿazzaz al-Mulk to Surur al-Saltanah,  circa. 1910 or 1911.

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Figure 15.Love letters. Dabiri Collection,, Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran Digital Archive.

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