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**ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF IRAN FROM  
PAHLAVI TO KHOMEINI**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper is designed to explain the role of education in changing the society in Iran from Pahlavi up to Khomeini's period with special reference to women. Education as an instrument for social transformation and social development is widely recognised. In Iran education played an important role in promoting social and occupational mobility. It provides the means for empowering the disadvantaged and marginalised groups and promoting their inclusion in society. Education was used to awaken the people and influence society. The education system is more formidable apparatus that manipulates society indistinctively. Both the regimes make use of Education to initiate social development by bringing about a change in the outlook and attitude of a man. Education is considered a top priority in the development plans of the country. It is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and in equality in the society. It promotes social justice and is a force for change.

**Key words:** Education, social transformation, modernization, Iran, Pahlavi, Khomeini

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## Introduction

Education flourished in both ancient medieval and modern Iran. Education was closely identified with the process of socialization and personality development, not only in home but in the school and in religious and state programmes for youth. The nineteenth and twentieth century centuries brought profound changes to traditional Middle Eastern society as they adopted the western, social, economic and political institutions<sup>3</sup>. In Iran this transition began during the Qajar period and reached its peak modernization blended with nationalism during the Pahlavi regime. Education had remained an element of continuity in Iran's project of modernity since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Iran is experiencing one of the most dynamic periods of its recent history. Change is occurring in all spheres of life..... The connection between social change, modernization and education had been well established in the discourse of Iranian education since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Since the inception of the Islamization in 1979, the government attempted to establish a balance between the desire for cultural and spiritual independence from the west, and the desire to succeed as a modern nation in competition with the west through education. The Islamic revolution introduced significant changes both in style and content. In the early days of the Islamic revolution the Ayatollah Khomeini proposed that 'purification of education' rather than modernization of it. During the reign of Reza shah, the country's leading educationalists and its politicians were united in their appreciation of education. The Shahs personal interests shaped the educational policy in all its essentials. He had three broad goals: nationalism, secularization and education in achieving aims, a modern educational system was a primary need and vital requirement. For all radical differences, the philosophies of Khomeini and Muhammad Reza shah Pahlavi had one thing in common their appreciation for education. Both leaders viewed it as a major vehicle for implementing their ideology, advancing their people and perpetuating their rule. Both made extensive use of education to cast 'Modern Iran' in the mould of their vision. Yet each led it along an entirely different path, one towards rapid westernization and the other towards radical Islamization.

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<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, Behnaz .A. Mirzai. *Emancipation and its legacy in Iran: An overview*. Book university Canada p, 1

<sup>4</sup> Marashi.Afshin "Nationalizing Iran: culture, power and the state,1870-1940" university of press Washington (2008)

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### **Education and social transformation during the Pahlavi era**

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Pahlavi's considered education as a primary means to advance their policies, and progress of the state and to the social adoption of the individual in it. Education was to intrigue the individual into society. Reza Shah wants to create loyal citizens and the concept of nation state in general were the highest values which education is necessary to inspire among the students. Loyalty to the state and the ruler was promoted, through the curriculum, mainly in the teaching of history, geography and social sciences. Text books exalted the notion of 'good citizenship' which include loyalty to the monarch<sup>5</sup>. Elementary education became the government's tool for promoting citizenship and patriotism, and the teachers became the agents of change. The teachers help the students to develop the attitudes and behaviour. The teacher has been the only source of guidance which contribute to freer interpersonal relations between themselves and their elders- these changes undoubtedly affect the whole sphere of their social relations.

During this period, the socially conscious people wrote articles expressing their enthusiasm for educational reform and calling upon philanthropists to donate money for schools, two prominent mullah's, Shaikh Hadi Najamabadi and syed M tabataba publically announced their support of the new school movement. Many prominent civic leaders including liberal clergymen, strongly endorsed such efforts, they believed that literary could alleviate all social problems.<sup>6</sup> During the reign of Reza shah all the educationalists and politicians of the country were united in their appreciation of education and in their conviction that it could produce advances in the nation. Reza shah's educational policy was truly a 'revolution from above'. He had a desire to raise the general population to the level of knowledge. In 1930's the government expanded the educational facilities beyond the regular school system with the aim that to 'transform' the dangerous nomads in to useful artisans, technicians and agriculturalists. For this purpose Reza shah devised a plan to educate the children of Iran's multitudinous tribes. The educational reforms made during this period had a transformative potential and a long term consequences. The Pahlavi regime pays serious attention both to elementary and higher education and to the problems of mass illiteracy.<sup>7</sup> Reza khan had three broad goals; nationalism, secularization and education in achieving these

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<sup>5</sup> Govt. Of Iran ministry of education, adult education Tehran, 1938

<sup>6</sup> Arasteh A Reza, *Education and social awakening in Iran 1850-1968*, Laiden, E. J. Brill 1969, pp 70-73

<sup>7</sup> Stephanie Cronin, *The making of modern Iran state and society under Reza shah, 1921- 1941*, Routledge Curzon London ND New York, 2003, pp 135-147

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three goals, a modern education system was, in the shah's view, a primary, indeed a vital, requirement.<sup>8</sup> Pahlavi's thought that education can only consolidate their authority for a long time.

The Education system was considered a Major instrument for advancing westernization. Westernization was the main aim of the pehalvis and education as a major channel of westernization. The schools were to promote patriotism (MIihan parasti), loyalty to the nation, national unity (vahada-e-milli) and national independence (estaqlal-e-milli).<sup>9</sup> Between the two world wars, the role of education in nation building became widely acknowledged in Iran. The pehalvis devised a standardised and uniform school curriculum for both private and public schools in order to create a strong centralized government.<sup>10</sup> The expansion of government was made possible by the state's entry in to the field of education. This expansion of education not only helped in the growing of bureaucracy, but also contributed to the emergence and growth of new professional and intellectual class. Graduates of foreign and local universities held the highest positions in politics, administration, and economy and played a significant role in cultural life. Reza shah was not of course the sole architect of the reforms of his period but he was ably assisted by accomplished administrators within his cabinet. The interrelationship of education and national consciousness came out most strongly in the adult education project undertaken in 1936. In 1937 twenty two secondary schools were opened for adults. Social transformation was the main aim of the pehalvis, for this purpose, in 1937 the ministry of education formed the department of public enlightenment with the declared aim of providing 'moral education' (tarbiyat-i-ma'navi). The ministry held lectures distributed numerous publications and organised exhibitions and concerts all intended to strengthen the national pride and patriotism. Reza shah perceived that there is interconnection between education and nationalism he thought that political and economic independence depends on education. In this regard Reza shah followed the policy of kamal Ataturk.<sup>11</sup> The educational reforms during the Pahlavi period have greatly influenced the position of women. In 1932 the government instituted a number of reforms, enforced by law in order to improve the position of women.

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<sup>8</sup> David Menashri, *Education and the Making of modern Iran*, Cornell university press Ithaca and London 1992 pp 90

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p 95

<sup>10</sup> Arasteh A Reza, *Education and social awakening in Iran 1850-1968*, E. J. Brill 1969

<sup>11</sup> David Menashri, *Education and the making of modern Iran*, Cornell university press, 1992

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A special goal of Iranian education was to encourage girls to go to school at all levels and thus eventually to change the overall status of women. Reza shah himself saw a direct link between education for girls, the status of women and the westernization process. School facilities were made more available to girls. During this period they had more opportunities to pursue their studies at secondary and university level. During this period the women folk of Iran became more desirous of their social role. The social consciousness of women has risen.<sup>12</sup> The Iranian woman during this period is adding a social role to her traditional family role. Women played their role almost in every sphere of life social, educational and economic participation in the rural development process. These educated women played a very important role in village improvement, teacher training, health and education and agriculture.<sup>13</sup> In 1960's the modern Iranian women has found employment open to her in a number of fields. Women worked in factories, offices, banks, stores, hospitals and schools and they held jobs as secretaries, clerks, physicians, chemist's, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory technicians and engineers, social workers, writers, business women etc. After 1962 the modernization was encouraged especially in case of women, and an effort in the domain of education. Women's place in Iranian society improves rapidly after 1963 in all sectors. In 1964 eighty women were the members of parliament and senate<sup>14</sup>. Later on Educated Women were the major participants in the Iranian revolution against the shah. The concept of freedom and the principles of constitutional rule were the input of highly educated class. The political parties existing at the time of Khomeini's advent, whether the national front and the national movement or the other movements were predominantly led by academics. The authors, journalists, publishers and other educated class made similarly outstanding contributions; they were also leaders in the process of industrialization. The educated class contributed to the popular resentment against the shah e.g. high school graduates, academic staff and thousands of vocational and university students showed great resentment to the shah<sup>15</sup>. Modernization reforms under Muhammad Reza shah delimit the influence of the ulema in education, judiciary and politics. This now required secular credentials. Islamic educational institutions in particular were undermined by the state through legislation of their required courses. The shah established theological schools and

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<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Reza shah Pahlavi, *Mission of my country*, N. Y; McGraw hill, co 1961, p 189-193

<sup>13</sup> R. F Woodsmall, *Women and the new east Washington, D .C;* the middle east institute 1960, p 67-71

<sup>14</sup> A Reza Arasteh, *education and social awakening in Iran 1850-1968*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, pp 188

<sup>15</sup> David Menashri, *Education and the making of modern Iran*, Cornell university press, 1992, pp 305

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colleges in state universities in order to counter act the influence of the ulemas religious teachings.

### **Education and social transformation during Khomeini's period**

The authorities of the Islamic republic refer to the 1979 revolution as first and foremost a cultural revolution, aimed at the creation of a new moral order and fundamental transformation of individual's values. They believe that a true revolutionary movement cannot succeed unless these fundamental changes take place in the society. The Iranian revolution of 1979 contributed extensively to the awakening of religious revival, calling for a shift from a western model of social order to the one deeply rooted in Islamic beliefs and values. As an important socialization agent, especially in a period of rapid change, the school in Iran has been assigned the task of bringing about this transformation of values, the school is referred to variously as a destiny framing centre, a human manufacturing factory and a 'centre for modelling human beings'. Giving such grave responsibility for shaping human minds, the education system has assumed a leading role in the cultural revolution as Iranian authorities has attempted to Islamize and politicize the system. In this way during this period social transformation takes place in the name of Iranian 'Cultural Revolution' it played a significant role in the acceleration of ideological and religious reform. Education was thus geared to the restoration of Islamic culture and civilization.

During the Pahlavi era education system was considered a major instrument for advancing westernization; now in the Khomeini's period came to be regarded as a tool for advancing Islamization<sup>16</sup>. The education system in Iran continues a process of philosophical transition that begins with the revolution in 1979. Since the revolution religious practices (beliefs, theologies, and rituals) have become the components of culture. After the 1979, the most important change was Islamization of education system. Religion has a strong presence in the Iranian education. All students were segregated by sex. In 1980, a Cultural Revolution committee was formed to oversee the institution of Islamic values in education<sup>17</sup>. The process of Islamization was imposed through diverse reforms during the revolutionary years (1979-1989). The discourse that dominated the first stage of the revolution included three goals: promoting Islamic culture, controlling the influence of western culture, and creating a new

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<sup>16</sup> Menashri David, *Education and the making of modern Iran*, Cornell university press Ithaca and London 1992, pp 6-7

<sup>17</sup> SA-eDUC Journal volume 9, November 2, September 2012, Assessment in education in Iran by Dr Abbas mudandar; Mrs Lida kaki; Mrs Vajeha karemi, pp 1

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Muslim individual through religious socialization<sup>18</sup>. Abruptly, following the Iranian revolution in 1979, many school cultures changed, such as the morning national salutes, which were replaced by reciting Quranic verses, and prayers for the victory of the Muslims. Social science text books are also actively involved in ideological acculturation covering a number of social e.g. family, social groups and socialization) and political topics with an Islamic view point. History text books often analyse the transformation of society through the lens of religion. Two major themes of all Iranian texts are religion and patriotism. Iran has created a series of texts for Jews, Christians and the people following the Zoroastrian faith which are titled (teachings of the sacred religions and ethics for the religious minorities) are produced by the ministry of education after consultations, meetings and workshops with the teachers and religious leaders of each faith<sup>19</sup>. All curricula from history to sciences were revised in order to remove all secular content, and replace it with the Islamic content that reinforces the ideological base of the Islamic republic of Iran. Ideological training of youth is not limited the content of formal education only, but in 1980, an important bureau was established within the educational system known as ‘omur-e- tarbiyat’ (the bureau of educational affairs) the main aim of the bureau was bringing Islamic culture to the schools and eliminating all remnants of the anti-Islamic, colonial culture of the Pahlavi regime in the educational system<sup>20</sup>. It became one of the most important devices used by local education authorities for diffusing the political ideology of the Islamic revolution through schools, to the extent that Rajari, the education minister at that time, called moral education teachers the ‘soldiers of the revolution’<sup>21</sup>. The four ideological pillars of the Islamic republic are; inseparability of religion and politics, Islamic revival, Cultural Revolution, and the creation of a committed Muslim, has had a direct impact on Iranian education. As a result, opinions on historic events are formed based on their connection with religion and the constant struggle between sacred truth and the enemies of the divine order. An important result of this

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<sup>18</sup> Legatum Institute, Mayfair London, 2012, The future of Iran: Educational reform, Education in the Islamic republic of Iran and perspectives on Democratic reforms, by Saeed Paivandi, pp 1

<sup>19</sup> Comparative education review, vol.32, feb.1988, The Islamic education in Iran, by Mobin Shorish, pp 64

<sup>20</sup> WENER 1992 winter, *Cultural revolution and educational transformation in the Islamic republic of Iran*, by Mehran Golnar, pp 11

<sup>21</sup> *Economia, sociedad y territorio*, vol. 3, 2002, *Islamism and education in modern Iran, with special reference to gendered social interactions and relationships*, by Hossein Godazgar, pp 495

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approach is the large scale mixing of religious beliefs with scientific and secular knowledge and unity of different fields of knowledge<sup>22</sup>.

In post revolutionary Iran, in particular, the education of girls is considered as an effective tool in creating the new Muslim women- the ideal female citizen who is socialized, politicised and Islamized to serve the traditional needs of the family as well as the modern demands of the country. It is said that a cleric went to Imam Khomeini after the triumph of the Islamic revolution and asked him to order women to return to their homes and not to go out to their administrative jobs or in to the streets and not to get involved in social issues. The Imam answered that the time had come for women to leave their homes and participate in society as the environment had become cleansed of all the decay of Pahlavi's and the perversion spread by the western governments<sup>23</sup>. Female education has received much attention since the 1979 revolution, illustrated by the increase in the number of women participants at all levels of education from elementary classes up to university level<sup>24</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

In Iran as in other developing countries, education is much appreciated and educated people enjoyed considerable esteem in society. Education has undoubtedly one of the most important social instruments shaping modern Iran. Most important in this regard is its contribution in fostering national identification. Education in Iran has long been viewed as an instrument of social transformation and sustainable development. More specifically, female education has been regarded as a means of bringing about gender equality and empowerment. Major achievements have been recorded in the realm of female education. Both the regimes considered education a top priority in the developmental plans of the country. It served in attaining legitimization of the regime and imposing the ideology of the state. The Islamic movement was able to gain a strong hold of Iranian political life, which was reflected in post 1979 educational policies and curricula. Since the 1979 education was used as a tool for advancing Islamization. Elites of both the regimes were aware of the fact that it was not

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<sup>22</sup> Legatum Institute, Mayfair London, November 2012, The future of Iran: Educational reform, Education in the Islamic republic of Iran and perspectives on Democratic reforms, by Saeed Paivandi, pp 5

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Ansia Khaz Ali, Iranian women After the Islamic revolution, Conflicts forum: Beirut- London, 2010, pp 5

<sup>24</sup> *Women and Islam: social conditions, obstacles and prospectus* (edit. by Haideh Moghissi), chapter title, *A study of girl's lack of access to primary education in the Islamic republic of Iran*, by Mehran Golnar oct. 1997, Tylar and Francis, 2005, pp, 330



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going to be easy to transform the country, so they undertook transformation of education system that would eventually led transformation and change of society.

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