



The Lifestyle of Powerful Women in the Court of Qajar Period and Their Influence on the Spread of Western European Civilization in Iran

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v11i6.5734>

Abstract

In the patriarchal system of the Qajar period (before the constitutional revolution), three groups of women were engaged in acting in the family and society within the framework of the traditional Iranian system. The purpose of this research is to investigate the influence of powerful women of the court in spreading the new knowledge of Europe and the manifestations of its modernization such as the new school, newspaper, hospital, etc. in Iran. With a descriptive-analytical approach and using library resources, based on the analysis of themes in historical sources and documents, a collection of travelogues have been evaluated and analyzed. The first group, women with influence, elites and those with authority in the political and economic arena, including the mother, daughters and wives of the king and relatives of the court, whose actions have been influential in the internal situation of the harem or some social-political affairs. The second group of nomadic women, who played an important role in economic affairs. The third group is the mass of women in the society, although their family and individual lifestyles are not well documented, but their potential was effective in major social events and they interfered in the domain of the kingdom's power. Women (rich or poor) spent most of their lives in the private world of the family. They spent and dedicated their whole lives to the family. In spite of gaining literacy and education and acting as an interventionist in the political situation of the country, the influential women of the court did not take any action to spread the new sciences of Europe and its scientific manifestations such as school, newspaper, etc. and they did not even pay attention to the colonial aspect of the West in Iran.

Keywords: *Qajar, women, lifestyle, patriarchy, Mahd Alia, Izzat al-Dawlah, Anis al-Dawlah, Taj al-Sultanah, Europe, colonialism*

1. Introduction

Lifestyle is a term used to describe the way of life of individuals, family circles, and communities, and the behavior they show on a daily basis when facing their physical, psychological, social, and economic environments (1). Lifestyle is expressed by profiles of daily work and leisure time, including activities, attitudes, interests, opinions, values, and income allocation (2). From a psychological point of view, lifestyle is a combination of motivations, needs and desires and is influenced by factors such as culture, family, reference groups and social class (3). Giddens (2002) believes that lifestyle is an almost harmonious set of all behaviors and activities of a person in daily life, which have become the normal course of life. currents that are manifested in dressing, eating, and ways of acting; Such behaviors reflect personal, group and social identities (4). Analyzing the history, culture and civilization of various societies is not possible without considering the role of women. Women have been playing important roles in the social, cultural, economic and even political life of their era for a long time (5). In the Qajar period, there are important and useful sources in terms of quality and quantity, such as travel documents, newspapers, photographs, scattered publications, paintings, films, etc. In terms of authenticity and age, these documents can show a relatively clear picture of the observer's attitude towards the currents, events and developments of that period. Many studies related to this era have been done, but not about the private and family life of powerful women of the court and the influence of the scientific manifestations of Western civilization on the culture of the society. Among the presence of some European women in the court, communication with European ambassadors and their wives and meeting with European tourists were related. This research tries to investigate the performance of women with court influence in order to spread the scientific manifestations of Western civilization in Iran.

1.1. problem statement; Authoritarianism and its individual and social impact dimensions

The discussion of culture and its social effects and consequences has always been the focus of political scientists and sociologists in particular. The type of culture has an effect on the events and transformations of a society and on a smaller level of a nation or group and families. Authoritarianism is an idea in the government or a behavior from the government "from the top" down, in which political power is imposed by believing in the power or imposing this type of government on the society, regardless of the people's consent. It can be related to absolute monarchy, traditional dictatorship and many forms of military government (6). These governments are not one-dimensional and are accompanied by elements such as imposed violence, illegitimate governance and illegal issues (7). The Oxford Political Science Dictionary defines authoritarianism as follows: "a form of government in which the rulers demand the unquestioning obedience of the condemned" (8). A sentence to Frederick the Great once famously stated, "I have agreed with my people that they will say whatever they want and I will do whatever I like".

In authoritarian systems such as the studied government (Qajar), the extent of politicians' demands is very wide and they can break any rule and tradition at any moment to protect their interests and desires. In such a system, the social system, collective interests, people's wishes and consequently national interests have no meaning, and in fact, there are governments that rule with violence and do not have democratic principles. (7). Leaders in authoritarian regimes such as the Qajar era often consider their power beyond existing laws. While modern authoritarian systems usually exercise power through political parties that control the economy, media and education (10). Women and men who are high in authoritarianism, gender also plays an important role in which male and female roles are clearly defined. As a construct, authoritarianism is not just about understanding political relationships with people, but also affects the most personal spheres—private and romantic relationships, lifestyle goals, and basic attitudes about male-female relationships (11). The Qajar era is a long period of Iran's history. In 1796, Agha Muhammad Khan officially legitimized his rule as the Shah of Iran and the founder of the Qajar dynasty, as the shadow of God on earth, and by gathering Shia leaders around him (12). This period is known as the period of political and cultural weakness and humiliation due to the conclusion of political

contracts and increasing military threats and the influence of foreign agents (13). The Shah was at the head of the political system of Iran and behind him were the courtiers and a huge group of princes, each of which received a huge fee from the government's finances (14-15).

1.2. Family and the legal system of women in the traditional Qajar era

As the king was the absolute ruler of the society, the man was considered the ruler of the family. In other words, in this era, proximity to the court and the ruling class creates power, and "gender" is also considered another form of power (13). In the Qajar era, there is evidence that in terms of the structure of power, the dominant pattern in Families have been the model of patriarchy. Obedience to the head of the family pyramid, i.e. the father, by male children, regardless of whether the boys are married or unmarried, as well as female children, has been common until they go to the husband's house. Basically, raising a daughter in a father's house is based on fulfilling the role of an obedient wife and a capable mother in the future (16). As Mostofi says: "A woman, especially in that period, is everything to her husband." (17). Jaubert points out the great difference between Eastern and European habits, women respect their husbands and children respect their parents.

In fact, the position of the father in the family is not about force and power, but from the position of authority. He says: "Women in these countries are the first servants of their husbands; They consider the husband as their master and their support; They never speak of them except with respect" (18). In Jaubert's view, the power of the father, among the people of the East, is more than what is common in the Western culture, and this is based on the deep respect that the children have learned as a result of education (18). Therefore, the status of women in the society is rooted in looking at them in the private and family spheres. Gender supremacy started from the family and then spread to the community level and in various fields. To understand the dimensions and scope of patriarchy and its effects on women during the Qajar era, "family study" precedes the study of society (19). On the other hand, some researches stated that family authority has been approved to some extent as a means to manage and protect conditions, psychological threats (20).

The word "patriarchy" will be widely used as a concept that has political significance. The origin of patriarchy is men's wider access to the resources and privileges of dominance structures, inside and outside the home (21-23). General Sir John Malcolm was a Scottish officer and politician who was sent to the Qajar court many times by the East India Company to conclude political and commercial agreements in the early 19th century. He writes about women's lifestyle: "In Iran, women were kept in a state of imprisonment and social deprivation, and this has a general and important effect in delaying the progress of the country. ... Everyone is a ruler in their own home and has been since childhood until adulthood, he gets used to obedience..." (24).

1.3. The condition and position of women in the family in different groups; court women

The attitude and style of government in the Qajar era was such that although women suffered more than men, men were not allowed to enter and participate in the political sphere, instead, they could more easily participate in group actions in the social sphere. but women in the social-political field did not have the power and collective movement to express their wishes and demands (25). These conditions have not been the same for different groups of court, urban, rural and nomadic women. Despite the efforts of the Qajar society of that day to show women in secret, court women made great efforts to gain a place and respect for themselves next to the men of that society (26). Usually, harem women spent most of their time in the harem under the care of guards, despite this restriction and care, the harem was usually the place of Chinese conspiracies against each other, and some harem women exerted their influence on the heads of state and intervened in political affairs. For example, the involvement in various governmental affairs indicated the authority of *Mahd-i Ulyā* (Naser al-Din Shah's mother), which was not hidden from the eyes of European tourists.

As Lady Sheil writes: "She is very intelligent and is involved in most of the country's affairs" (27). Urban women before the constitutional revolution were confined within the framework of the traditional system and played only the role of wife and mother. they did, but rural and nomadic women played a significant role in the economy of the society (28). Travelers such as Layard, Bishop and Macbean Ross have presented general reports of the political, social and economic conditions of the nomadic region (29-31).

2. Method

2.1. Protocol of survey

This review article was written from November 2022 to April 2023 in order to investigate the lifestyle of influential women in the Qajar court and their impact on the spread of Western European civilization in Iran.

2.2. Information of data sources:

In order to obtain documents related to the lifestyle of women with court influence, search by referring to travelogues, biographies, historical documents and various reports of people who lived in the Qajar period. Also from the databases magirin, Iran doc, SID, Google scholar, Scopus and PubMed.

2.3. Eligibility criteria for selecting and evaluating the quality of articles:

Articles were searched using the keywords Qajar, women's lifestyle and family, *Mahd-i Ulyā*, *Ezzat ed-Dowleh*, *Anis al-Dawlah* and *Taj al-Saltanah* without time limit, and the articles that were most similar to the title of the review were included in the study. At the end of the search, among the 48 articles obtained, 21 articles that met the inclusion criteria were examined. If there were several reports of a study, the most complete study was considered. Exclusion criteria included insufficient data in the study and lack of access to the full text of related articles.

2.4. Study selection and data collection process

To collect data, first, articles that had one of the above keywords alone or in combination in the title or text were selected. Based on the inclusion criteria, abstracts of articles published in Farsi and English were studied. After removing the articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria, the full text of all eligible articles was studied. Then their results were extracted according to the investigated factor and given to another researcher for review and correction. In total, 21 articles were selected and reviewed (figure 1).

3. Results

Regarding the performance of Qajar court women, 4 cases are briefly mentioned

3.1. Malek Jahan Khanum nicknamed Mahd-i Ulyā

- Malek Jahan Khanom (1220 – 1290, AH) was known as Mahd-i Ulyā, the wife of Muhammad Shah, mother of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar and the queen of Iran. she was very intelligent, mastered Persian literature and Arabic language, with music and singing. She was familiar and wrote in small and large handwriting and wrote poetry and used many wise proverbs and traditions in her words. Mahd Alia paid attention to the construction and renovation of buildings (34). He had a great desire to study poets' books and history books, and his private library consisted of these two types of books (35-36). While women's literacy was considered a shame and many literate women hid it; For example, some of Naser al-Din

Shah's wives were able to read and write, but the Shah did not know about it (37). In the Qajar society, only the daughters of the royal family and dependents, wealthy families of the mass of the people and people from families with knowledge were literate, who were educated at home with the help of a teacher. This situation was such that until the constitutional revolution, there were only boys' schools in Iran and no school was built for the education of Muslim girls. In his travelogue, Dieulafoy writes about religious missionaries: "For several years, these church sisters have established a school and educated the children of several European families residing in Tehran. A large number of Armenian girls also go to their school, and a very small number of Muslims have placed their children under the care of the sisters, on the condition that they do not interfere in their beliefs and religion and this situation was so

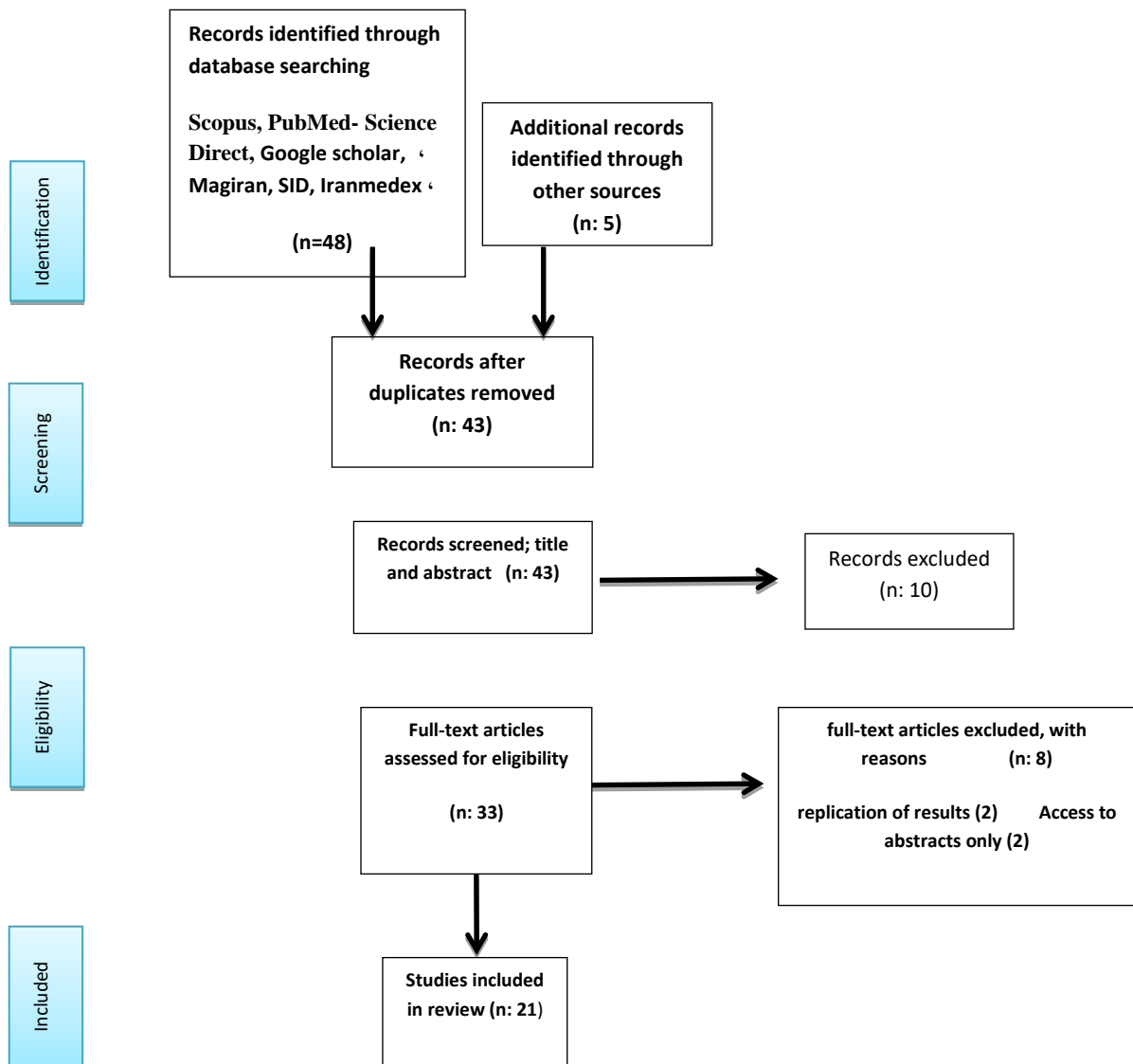


Figure 1: Process of literature review of the lifestyle of powerful women of the Qajar court and their influence on the spread of Western European civilization in Iran

Complicated that one of the biggest concerns of women in the late Qajar period was the demand for girls' right to education (38-40). But Lady Sheil writes in her memoirs: "The women of the wealthy class were usually literate and familiar with the poetry and manners of their country, and most of them know how to read the Koran - but not its meaning." Among the women of the Qajar clan and especially the royal family, the number of literate people is very high, and most of them write their books personally

without the help of Mirzas" (27). The princesses and other women's knowledge of languages other than Persian also shows the ability and ability of women to be educated: Ashraf al-Sultaneh (Izzat al-Mulk) knew French and Istanbul Turkish (41). Dr. Wills has mentioned in his book; In addition to men, the daughters of rich people and businessmen and government officials also often acquire literacy and education and information. However, the number of literate women compared to men is about one in fifty (42). European merchants also introduced the court women to European culture. They played a role in popularizing European fashions among court women. Wealthy women paid attention to dressing Europeans, women's shoes during the time of Naser al-Din Shah were a type of galosh brought from Europe and worn by elegant women. Also, a wide and short skirt like the skirts of European dancers, which Mahd-i Ulyā made popular among harem women (43,35). Mahd-i Ulyā, although he had frequent meetings with British and Russian ambassadors, tourists and European merchants, he did not take any action to spread new European knowledge in Iran. Mahd-i Ulyā, although he had frequent meetings with British and Russian ambassadors, tourists and European merchants, he did not take any action to spread new European knowledge in Iran. She did not set out to establish scientific manifestations of Western civilization such as new schools, newspapers, well-equipped hospitals, etc. What attracted his attention from the West was the luxury and appearance of European women (44). The political representatives of European governments and their wives also played a role in the transfer of European civilization. She was interested in following the example of the Queen of England and asked Lady Sheil to show him a picture of the Queen (27). On the other hand, one of the most important interventions of Mahd-i Ulyā in politics is that he accompanied the Russian and British conspiracies to weaken the government and incite the Shah to kill Amir Kabir (45-46).

3.2. Malik Zadah Khanum or 'Izzat al-Dawlah

Another court woman, Izzat al-Dawlah, was the daughter of Mohammad Shah and Mahd-i Ulyā and the wife of Amir Kabir for 3 years. She went to school in his father's house, learned literacy, and learned goldsmithing. Justin Sheil, the British minister in Iran (who himself was one of the executors of the plan to remove Amir Kabir from Ministry) wrote about Ezzat al-Dawlah's honor with words of praise: "... for in order not to poison her husband with food, she eats herself first. The stability of her will and self-respect that she showed all the time, may not have been seen in any Iranian woman...". Watson, an English historian, writes: "... to the extent that history has recorded, no Christian court woman who has moral and marital virtues has shown more love and sacrifice towards her unfortunate husband than Ezzat al-Dawla (47)". Ezzat al-Dawlah was somewhat familiar with Europeans in his father's house, and due to his interest and knowledge of Amir Kabir, he was expected to act and react to the Russian and British colonial policy or European scientific manifestations in Iran. However, there is no mention of Izzat al-Dawlah's practical knowledge or imitation of the luxurious aspects of the West. Usually, the sources mention her simplicity. His relationship with Western colonialism is also not clear. Her association with Amir, although due to her loyalty to his wife, can be considered a form of non-cooperation with colonialism (44).

Anis al-Dawlah

3.3. Fatimah Sultan Anis al-Dawlah (1258-1315 A.H.)

She was one of the influential women of the Qajar era and the wife of Naser al-Din Shah. She was a worthy woman, and the principles of manners. For this reason, the management of official court parties was his responsibility. Fourieh, Shah's special physician, writes about this: Among the king's wives, two people are particularly important, one is Anis al-Dawlah, who is in charge of receiving respectable foreign ladies, and the other is Amina Aghdas, who is the key holder of the royal treasury. All princes and courtiers respected them (48). The only figure comparable to Mahd-i Ulyā, in terms of political influence and ambition, was Anis al-Dawlah, the head of the harem and the wife of the visionary Naser al-Din Shah. She was at the head of the political affairs of that period as the real queen of Iran for about thirty years and sometimes he used his influence to take actions for the benefit of the people (43). In

the tobacco incident, Anis al-Dawlah, despite the Shah's opinion and following the fatwa banning the use of tobacco by Mirza Hassan Shirazi in 1309 A.H., publicly banned hookah drinking in the harem area. This action undoubtedly encouraged the king to cancel the Régie Company privilege (tobacco trading privilege for fifty years) (49).

3.4. Zahra Khanom Taj al-Sultaneh, the daughter of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1354-1301 A.H.)

European civilization had become more popular in Iran, many Europeans came to Iran. European women often interacted with court women. She was one of the defenders of the constitutional revolution and a member of the Women's Freedom Association and was fond of writing her memoirs. Parts of his memoirs called "Taj al-Sultaneh Memoirs" have survived, which show the extent of his knowledge and are an important historical source. He was a defender of constitutionalism, women's rights, freedom, equality and law, and considered many of the country's problems to be the result of the inadequacy of the Qajar kings. She was also associated with freedom-seeking poets such as Mirzadeh Eshghi, and Aref Qazvini praised her in his verses (38, 40). According to its historical position, Taj al-Sultaneh was familiar with the western civilization, cooperated with the women's association, and was a supporter of constitutionalism. However, when he had influence and power, he did not take action in terms of expanding science, establishing a school, establishing a newspaper, etc., and in practice he chose to follow the western fashion (44).

4. Discussion

There have been different and sometimes contradictory attitudes of tourists about the lifestyle of women in the early Qajar period. The variety of viewpoints in the writings of tourists is based on what viewpoints are formed? This representation was made through the lens of European culture, or was Eastern culture also included in it? Also, due to the residence and relations of these writers in the cities, the criterion for judging and evaluating the personality and performance of Iranian women has been court or city women. While there has been less talk about other women. Another point, since these people were rarely allowed to enter the interior of houses or harems, and due to women's clothing, they could not see a woman's face or talk to her. As a result, they have generally talked about women (28). Therefore, the curiosity of tourists about the condition of women, their clothing and their work is reflected in this way: "Are these women ugly or beautiful and old or young?" It is not certain. But in my opinion, these creatures, about whom nothing is known, attract more attention than the women we are used to seeing in Europe (50). One of the differences in the tourists' report is as follows:

According to the report of Sir John Malcolm English, after marriage, the girl was imprisoned in her husband's family, just as she was not allowed to leave the house before marriage in her father's house (24). But in the writings of the French Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, it is contrary to this claim: "Iranian women leave the house whenever they want, and because men stay at home less often, women always want to go out... (51). Another noteworthy point is that in the historiography of Iran, women in general have been given less attention as "equal partners" for several reasons, and it was written by non-Iranians who have a different cultural view of people's lives, so in a way The biased approach has compiled reports with judgment (37). For this reason, the historiography of the Qajar period has deep gaps and dark frameworks due to the lack of clarity of the position of women, and according to the image of cultural and political activities in other sources, it is not very realistic (52). For example, Shail believes that: "The life of court women and rich people is usually spent in laziness and luxury, with a monotonous state and without variety. In their lives, there are no programs that are available to us, such as theater gatherings, operas, luxurious parties, by the sea, etc., so that their life is out of monotony. In the event that Serena talks about parties where women participate in those gatherings, they are immersed in joy and fun, and they don't spend their moments in a monotonous state or without variety that Shail talks about. Or Clara Rice gives a pessimistic view of the Iranian Muslim woman. She believes that "the life of a Muslim

woman is devoid of valuable goals, no ideal, no real love, no attractive business, just a one-dimensional attitude and...(53).

The presence of women and men in the religious assemblies of the government is the first breaking of the foundation in the field of separation of women's and men's spaces, which was done by the order of Naser al-Din Shah (54). In fact, by participating in such religious gatherings, women practiced to be present in public societies. "The most active aspect of women's social presence in the Qajar period was participation in Muharram ceremonies and Ta'ziyeh shows (54, 55-56).

In general, during the Qajar period, the influential women of the court in the Sultanate of Agha Muhammad Khan, due to his serious personality, did not interfere in the country's political issues in any way. (57) However, during the time of "Fath Ali Shah" and "Naser al-Din Shah", there was a great deal of intervention of women in the current political issues of the country, for example, when Naser al-Din Shah would decide on an order in the harem, he left this work to the literate women of the harem (35).

4.1. Conclusion

The evidence shows that in terms of power structure, the dominant model in families has been the patriarchal model. The possibility of education for women has been very limited and only the daughters of the royal family, the rich families of the masses and the people of the families of scholars were educated at home with the help of a teacher. Of course, the princesses and other women's knowledge of languages other than Persian, such as French, Istanbul Turkish, and Arabic also showed the ability of women to be educated in that era. It is noteworthy that in Iranian historiography, women in general have been treated less and there are travelogues of non-Iranians who have a different cultural view of people's lives. Therefore, with a biased approach, they have compiled reports with judgment. This has caused many aspects of women's life in this period to be abandoned. Basically, from the point of view of the author, who is not familiar with the culture of this land, the influence of women on the outside world has not been noticeable and it becomes a little difficult to judge the lifestyle of court and non-court women of the Qajar period. Influential women in the court, such as Mahd-i Ulyā, Izzat al-Dawlah, Anis al-Dawlah and Taj al-Sultaneh, the mother, sister, wife and daughter of Naser al-Din, who often acquired literacy and education and expressed opinions on domestic political affairs. These women were introduced to Western advances through Russian and British ambassadors, tourists, European merchants and reading books, but they did not take any action to spread new European knowledge and its manifestations, such as the establishment of schools, newspapers, hospitals, etc. Therefore, nowadays, the increase in awareness, social participation, employment and education of women has transformed their status and position in the family and society and has created opportunities to eliminate patriarchy and increase women's rights. On the other hand, it has faced challenges in the field of identity and the structure of family relationships. For this reason, it is not possible to understand the achievements and progress of today's women except through historical study. It is necessary to first examine the situation from which women have risen to reach this point. This can also provide a perspective for future changes in the field of women.

Acknowledgements

The present article resulted from authors' research. Therefore, we would like to thank all those who published articles in this regard and provided the grounds for this comparative article. Besides, we thank Saman Soleimanzadeh for editing the English article. **Conflict interest:** authors not Conflict interest

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