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Parvin Paidar

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In a comprehensive and original analysis of the role of women in the Iranian political process, Parvin Paidar considers the ways they have influenced and been influenced by the evolutionary and revolutionary transformations which have dominated twentieth-century Iran. In so doing, she demonstrates how political reorganisation has necessarily entailed a redefinition of the position of women. Challenging the views expressed by conventional scholarship, which emphasizes the marginalisation of Muslim women and defines their role in terms of Islamic precepts, the author asserts that gender issues are, in fact, situated right at the heart of the historical and political process of contemporary Iran. The implications of the study bear on the broader issues of women in the Middle East and in the developing countries generally.

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- 1 A Tehrani woman skiing in Aliabad ski resort on the outskirts of Tehran wearing appropriate Islamic clothes
- 2 Retired prostitute playing ‘Taar’ in her home in Sirius Avenue in Tehran
- 3 Women listening to a sermon in Ayatollah Khomeini’s shrine in Tehran on the anniversary of his death
- 4 Tehrani women shopping in Mosalla Friday market in Abasabad in Tehran
- 5 Women leading the procession to mark the opening of ‘women’s olympic’ competitions in Tehran
- 6 A lower-class family in their house in Sirius Avenue in the south of Tehran
- 7 Women using a Caspian Sea beach in Mazandaran wearing appropriate Islamic clothes

## Preface

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The objectives of this book in providing detailed information and comprehensive analysis on women's formal position in the twentieth-century Iran are twofold: to challenge the marginalisation of gender issues within the mainstream Iranian studies, and to expose some of the prevalent mis-conceptions about the role and place of women in Iranian society.

The conceptual framework of the study is influenced by two bodies of feminist literature, the literature on Middle Eastern women, and western feminist literature of the last two decades – particularly as developed in Britain. These feminist trends have grown in conjunction with each other: the influence of Western feminist theories on the literature on Middle Eastern women has been considerable, and in turn Middle Eastern feminist movements have instigated challenge and stimulated debate within Western feminisms.

The history of Iranian women's movements demonstrates the contagious nature of feminism. Despite enormous differences in the development of feminist movements across and indeed within nations, and irrespective of the absence of a history of organised and systematic communication between them, women everywhere have sought to increase their opportunities and choices in the twentieth century. I will use the simple and broad framework of 'aiming to increase women's rights, opportunities and choices within any ideology or context' as my definition of the term feminism in this book, and describe a wide variety of women's activities in this direction in twentieth-century Iran as feminist activism. This broad definition of the term 'feminism' will accommodate many feminisms in many political or ideological frameworks in this book. The different feminisms that I will refer to include Western feminism, Middle Eastern feminism, Iranian feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, secular feminism, Islamic feminism, and so on.

This study is about the construction of women by political discourses, institutions and processes. It does not aim to be a general sociological study of women in Iran, nor does it claim to provide a comprehensive

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analysis of the effects of political change on women's lives in any of the historical periods it covers. These aims have not been followed for a number of reasons.

With regard to historical parts of this study, the volume and quality of historical materials available to me, particularly those pertaining to gender issues, were not adequate to allow proper historical sociology. I have had mainly secondary sources available to me for the historical parts, since in the 1980s access to original historical materials in Iran was very difficult indeed. This means that I have not been able to confirm or reject the reliability of some of the material that I have used in the historical parts, let alone base a historical sociology of women on them. This task will remain to be undertaken by scholars in the future.

As to contemporary parts of this study, material on the 1970s and 1980s periods was collected both in Iran and Britain and included primary and secondary written sources, interviews and discussions. Extensive use was also made of Iranian and Western newspaper reports on these periods. Two working visits were made to Iran, one during July–November 1979 and another June–September 1980. These concentrated on the post-revolutionary Islamic women's movement. Interviews with Muslim women activists and visits to Islamic women's organisations were made and written materials collected. Another study visit was made to France in 1982 for the purpose of interviewing exiled opposition leaders and collecting materials about the views and activities of opposition forces during and after the Revolution. My links with Iranians in exile and my involvement with the Iranian women's movement in exile provided an opportunity to understand the theoretical and political bases, and organisational forms of secular opposition to the Islamic Republic.

However, lack of subsequent access to field work in the Islamic Republic has limited the scope of this study. Indeed it was only possible to rely on primary and secondary published materials, discussions with prominent Iranians abroad, and the accounts provided by visitors from Iran to build a picture of post-revolutionary Islamisation policies and institutions and their effects on the lives of ordinary women. Because of these limitations, this study needs to be complemented by further sociological field work to provide a better understanding of how the lives of different categories of women have been affected by the institutions of the Islamic Republic.

A final word about the structure of the book. The Introduction will survey the relevant literature and expand on the conceptual framework and the main themes of this study. The rest of the chapters are organised around three broad political discourses that have dominated Iranian political life in the twentieth century. These discourses, which have been

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non-exclusive and overlapping but yet rather distinct, will be examined in three parts as follows. Part 1 will cover the discourse of modernity which dominated the long period of 1900–77 and included a number of political phases. These will be covered in chapters 1 to 5. Part 2 will cover the discourse of revolution which was dominant during 1977–79 in Iran. The different aspects of the discourse of revolution will be examined in chapters 6 and 7. Part Three will cover the discourse of Islamisation which has been dominant in Iran since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. This part will be covered in chapters 8 to 10. The conclusion will provide a summary of the main themes of the book.

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge that I have previously published under the name of Nahid Yeganeh.

## Transliteration and references

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The arrangement followed for translation of Farsi (Persian) words in this book is as follows. Farsi common words, with some exceptions, have not been translated in the text and the reader needs to consult the Glossary for the meaning of these words. The exceptions are those common words which have only been mentioned once in which case their meaning is explained in the text. Other Farsi words translated in the text (always in parentheses) are speeches or names and titles of political parties, organisations, books and journals.

Transliteration of Farsi words follows a simple system without diacritic, and *a*, *o*, *e* are used for Farsi short vowels. For long vowels, long *a* is transliterated as *ā*, long *e* as *ī*, and long *o* as *ū* or *ou* as appropriate. The plurals of familiar Farsi words are identified by adding an *s* such as *mollas* for *molla*, but in most cases the correct Farsi plural is used such as *fatavi* for *fatva*. The same transliteration system is used in quotations from cited works, but in the case of references the original transliteration is preserved. The reader will notice some discrepancies in transliteration, partly because of preserving the original transliterations in the references, but particularly in relation to the use of *gh* and *q*. This is because *gh* has been used as a norm here, but where usage of *q* has become customary in the literature, such as in the name Mosaddeq, it has been preserved.

In following this transliteration system, I have attempted to preserve the Farsi pronunciation of both Farsi and Arabic words. This is because the application of Arabic transliteration to Farsi tends to destroy the specificity of the Farsi language, which is an important aspect of the cultural context of this text and relevant to the political discourses discussed here. Where the transliteration system used here has resulted in difference of spelling from conventional usage both spellings are referred to in the Glossary.

In the section listing references, Farsi titles are translated into English in parentheses. These translations will not always be exact but sometimes just an abridged description. For Iranian newspapers, both Western calendar and Iranian solar dates are provided. To avoid overcrowding the

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text, footnotes are excluded and for books and articles only the author's surname and date of the work is mentioned in the text. For newspaper and magazines, reference numbers are given in the text and the full details are listed in the reference section.