



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WOMEN AND ISLAMIC CULTURES

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There were a significant number of active feminist organizations from the beginning of the twentieth-century to the 1960s in Iran. These included the Women's Freedom Society, founded in 1906 by a group of male and female intellectuals who gathered in secret to discuss the status of women. In 1910, the Anjuman-i Mukhadirāt-i Vatan (National ladies' society) was formed. Its members were active in promoting women's education, and encouraging the use of Iranian-made rather than imported goods. As such, the organization was active in promoting the economic independence of Iran. In 1922, the Anjuman-i Nisvān-i Vaṭankhvāh-i Īrān (Patriotic women's league of Iran), launched a magazine called Patriotic Women, which emphasized women's rights, including women's education and women's right to marry later in life. In 1927, Zandukht Shirazi founded the Association of Revolutionary Women in Shiraz. The organization worked for women's unveiling and gender parity. Zandukht began a newspaper entitled Daughters of Iran in 1931–2. It printed news about international feminist efforts, literary articles, and Zandukht's radical poems and editorials.

The Kānūn-u Bānuvān (Ladies' center) was formed in 1935; its goals included improving the morality of women, training women in modern domestic chores, and opening charity centers for poor mothers and orphans. According to some scholars, the establishment of the Kānūn-u Bānuvān marked the transformation of twentieth-century Iranian feminist activism into a state-sanctioned and contained feminism, since the organization was overseen by Reza Shah's daughters, Ashraf and Shams Pahlavī, and received significant government funding. Recent scholarship demonstrates, however, that there was a variety of Iranian feminists and groups who pursued feminist goals autonomously. State-legislated policies such as the 1936 Unveiling Act, for instance, were preceded by women's heated debates on the subject of unveiling and women's employment.

In 1961, however, the High Council of Iranian Women was established with Ashraf Pahlavī as the honorary head; at this point, all women's organizations were encouraged to join the High Council in order to gain legitimacy. In 1966, the state replaced the High Council with a larger bureaucratic organization, the Sāzman-i Zanān-i Īrān (Women's organization of Iran). This state-sponsored organization professed to work for the social, political, and economic advancement of all women, but during the revolutionary years the organization came under attack for its perceived inattention to the needs of working-class and rural women.

Women's activism peaked during the 1978–9 revolutionary period, as women demonstrated against the Shah and what they understood to be the regime's imperialist policies. At the same time, they demonstrated against the restrictive policies regarding women's dress and mobility that the nascent Islamic Republic was beginning to promote. Because of the perception of a state-sanctioned Westernized feminism under the Pahlavīs, anti-imperialist nationalists denounced feminists as imperialists and counter-revolutionaries.

A decade and a half later, there was a resurgence of diverse and forceful Iranian feminist voices in the public arena. Women's magazines and journals have provided an important public forum for debates between secular and religious feminists in contemporary Iran. Although most of these magazines are published by religious feminists, secular feminists have been welcomed to contribute to them. Some of the more outspoken and influential of these feminists include: Shirin Ebadi, lawyer, human rights activist and winner of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize; Mehrangiz Kar, human rights lawyer and secular feminist activist who has published extensively on the legal rights of Iranian women; Shahla Lahiji, founder of the first women's publishing house in Iran; Shahla Sherkat, editor of the religious feminist magazine, *Zanān* (Women); and Faezeh Hashemi, editor of the daily *Zan* (Woman, banned at the time of writing). The current state of the media in Iran is such that while magazines are regularly forced to cease publication, other magazines soon emerge to take their place. In feminist debates in Iran, a multitude of voices is participating and attempting to shape the future of an indigenous Iranian feminism.

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