

Educating Warriors of Islam; Iran 1960-Present

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“The people of Iran, particularly in the recent years, have shown that they deem participation in public affairs to be their right, and that they want to be masters of their own destiny.”¹

June of 2009, protestors went to the streets demonstrating against the supposed landslide victory of Presidential candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The people were demonstrating the truth of the above statement by Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi. They wanted to be masters of their own destiny. While the other candidate had been deposed for corruption and incompetence during his presidency, he was still a candidate preferred by many urban voters. The response of the clerics and the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Al Khamenei, was to arrest as many as 100 protestors daily. The clerics and government officials were acting as if they, not the Supreme Leader, wanted to control the country’s destiny. On August 8, 2009, the judicial officials acknowledged that some of the detainees had been tortured and killed. This was the first such acknowledgement of murder of election protestors by Iranian officials in three months of demonstrations.²

According to the Supreme Leader, the Westerners including French researchers and employees of the French and British Embassies and most of the media had a long history of collusion and interference in Iran. They were heading a covert international effort to seduciously manage the election outcomes. The people without cell phones, internet access and education may have believed the Supreme Leader. Unfortunately for him, Iranians have cell phones and internet access that aided in their protest against the election results. As a result of the supreme leaders’ and the Islamic Republic’s continued expansion of education to all people, the people saw participation in public affairs to be their right.

Culture and Democracy

The corruption of the presidential election in 2009 initiated rebellion of the people reminiscent of the 1979 overthrow of the Shah. At that time, the people were angry at British and American involvement in the country. In 2009, there was disillusion with the leadership of an infallible Ayatollah who blamed the rebellion of the people on external forces of Sunnis, Americans and British. But when the son of a high ranking religious leader was killed by Basiji military forces without leaders’ command or knowledge, it was apparent protestors were being killed, incarcerated and persecuted by renegade and supposedly infallible religious leaders. Not only the political leaders but the religious leaders, who were one and the same, were seen as corrupt. But as religions leaders control the military, economic, and the religious power, the citizens are at a distinct disadvantage in challenging political corruption.

Iran has a 4,000 year history living in the memory of its people. Its identity is a composite of many other regional cultures. They are the people of Cyrus the Great whose charter was written 2,500 years ago promising freedom for all subjects. He, as one of the first democratic leaders in the world, stated he would not rule over people who did not wish it. During his rule, the exiled Jews were returned from Babylonia to Jerusalem as a demonstration of his democratic rule. From the time of Cyrus until the present, males and females had separate occupations, which even predated the building of cities and states, with women working near homes due to frequent childbearing. In the tribal Middle East, men’s concern about paternity and the purity of the inheritance line resulted in upper class women’s seclusion and isolation from work that might put them in contact with other men. Poorer women had to toil in the fields chaperoned by the males of the family. The family was the productive and reproductive unit with males in charge of keeping its functions unadulterated. Under this ancient social structure, the men operated in arenas of power outside the home in politics, religion, and business while women controlled the domicile. Four thousand years later, some in Iranian society maintain this traditional segmentation of power.

The religion also controlled the elementary and secondary schools that in the past only had educated male religious leaders. Iran removed the religious power over the schools under the Shah in 1941-1953; maintained secular schools under the autocratic monarchy from 1953-79; and reinstated religious control of the schools under the Islamic Republic that began in 1979.

Women's Education

With each new ruler, a new identity was imposed through the schools, specifically demonstrating itself in rules about who had access to education, careers and who controlled women's physical freedom and their future. Under Shah Pahlvi, the formerly semi-formal Ladies' Center became a training center that produced a women's journal called *Women's Language*. From 1941 on, women were active in organizing political activist groups, magazines, and participating in educational and health care programs to assist in the modernization of Iran. Under the autocratic monarchy of Reza Shah, women's concerns were brought to the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI) directed by the Shah's twin sister, Ashraf, with the queen's mother as the Vice President. The WOI was responsible for the increase in female education, improvement of health care, increase in the labor-force and public participation. Women's employment expanded into the legal, medical and business professions. In 1968 the judiciary was opened to women as was the Literacy and Health Corps where males and females served in rural or backward areas for two years. These graduates are attributed with increasing literacy and health of all Iranians. They were part of the Literacy Corps that substituted social services for military duty. Women were becoming more integrated into the workplace, social service and obtained more power in family affairs. Modern legal reforms and expanded employment opportunities were mainly affecting middle and upper-class women. Women were also living under an authoritarian police state where the legal violations were strictly enforced.

From 1925-1979, affluent girls were being educated in increasing numbers while affluent boys were continuing to attend missionary, foreign language and private schools. Poorer boys attended religious schools and worked in apprenticeships arranged by their fathers. Poorer girls stayed largely uneducated. The identities of the youth remained clearly divided along social class. Poor males and females were taught to work while the wealthy men were taught to be administrators and leaders in political, religious and social realms. Wealthy women were educated and could work if they wanted or were allowed to do so.

Mrs. Ebadi continues to live under the Islamic Republic of Iran. Six years after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, in January 2009, she was overwhelmed by a demonstration of young Iranian men who took her computer and books, painted slogans on the walls of her home and incorrectly accused her of supporting the 2009 Israeli invasion of Gaza. Three times in the previous eleven days, the Basiji, a military guard that reports to the highest religious and political leader, Ali Khamenei, attacked Mrs. Ebadi and the small Center for Human Rights she conducted from her home. As a human rights attorney, Shirin Ebadi has not charged fees for her representation of political dissidents, minorities, women and children. For the past fifteen years, she had provided free legal service to those who cannot afford it. Her most recent attack was the result of her statements quoted in the United Nations report of December 18, 2008 that resulted in a non-binding resolution admonishing Iran to improve its human rights actions. The police, whom she called when the attacks started, arrived and watched but did not act to protect her. As a woman who has been imprisoned for her legal assistance to the underserved, she is now imprisoned by fear of the military and police who are supposed to protect her. She has the right to feel **fearful** as she knows demonstrations conducted in front of her home against her must be approved by the government who **had to have** sent the Basiji para-military demonstrators.

Mrs. Ebadi, as one of the first female judges in the Islamic judicial system, and other graduates of contemporary schools embody the empowerment of Iranian women through education. Women were initially empowered as part of the modernization of Iran under the Pahlavi monarchy beginning in 1925. Education strengthened the Shah's ability to control the people while moving the country toward nationalization. For most, each day of schooling began with the national anthem." Our Shah-an Shah, may you live long, Iran, oh, land full of jewels, Oh, your soil is the source of art and virtue. May my life be sacrificed for my Motherland".³

The Shah's modern education expanded to include more women at all grade levels. In addition, new subject areas were added to the religious legal and leadership curriculum. All students continued to take religion, Persian language and literature but they also took science and math. Shirin Ebadi's family did not raise her with the traditional expectations for girls. She was encouraged to achieve whatever goals she set for herself. As a result, she was one of twenty women who graduated from law school in 1970. Under the Pahlavi's regime, there was an emphasis on women's access to education, freedom, legal rights, and secularization. Shirin Ebadi was one of the top two graduates in her class and at the age of twenty-three, she was one of the youngest and among the limited number of qualified women judges.

She took advantage of the Shah's emphasis on the education of women and providing them with access to legal education and subsequent employment. However, the return to Islamic values under the Ayatolla Khomeini, meant that she would have to live a traditional life. Although she had supported the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, her colleagues terminated from her from her judgeship because she was a woman whose life had to demonstrate traditional values. Her choice of a career and her education threatened the new theocracy. Instead of continuing to work as a judge, she was assigned to a job as a clerk to a desk where she sat without working to protest her demotion for six years, until her retirement. She had been placed as a "typist, paper pusher, a mere researcher".⁴ Her experiences emphasize the discordant traditional and modern Iranian society. Ebadi was an educated woman whose talents and potential were ignored because of her gender.

Her story and that of the elections protestors of 2009 emphasizes the resilience and determination of Iranians and the impact of their education upon their culture and their democratic expectations. Women's identity changed dramatically through education with the Islamic Revolution. First, their behavior was restricted to demonstrate the Revolution's interpretation of Islamic values. Women had been told not to wear the traditional covering of chadors in 1939 which continued under the Pahlavi's. After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, women were told to again to cover themselves. The women had developed into modern, secular females who were now mandated to follow traditional behavior, irritating the modern and pleasing the traditional citizens. Islam has always valued education. Ignorance is a sin. Therefore, Islamic men and women were to be educated in the Islamic Republic. The curriculum of the monarchy had to be changed to that of the theocracy. Between 1980 and 1983, universities were closed in order to re-write the textbooks and change the curriculum in accordance with Shi'ia directives.⁵ *Reading Lolita in Tehran* described Iran during these three years to the world outside.⁶ Readers learned of young covered women sneaking into homes to continue their intellectual and social development through the reading of banned books. Their constricted lives were displayed to the world.

When asked why women so quickly accepted the radical restrictions of the Islamic Republic, some Iranians felt their freedom under the Shah had been directed from the top, the Shah's sister, rather than a women's "grass roots" motivation.⁷ Women didn't really want to have employment outside their homes. Others stated that the entire social system, rulers, religious leaders, and the patriarchal family aligned against the schooling of women and their access to occupations for which they had been educated. The ancient belief that women do not need to be educated continued to be held by some of the society. Women did not need to be educated to make choices for their future.

After the Islamic Revolution, all classes became segregated by gender. To quote one traditional father, "Should I send my daughter to go sit in classes with women with loose hair, so that boys can flirt with her?"⁴ Such arguments no longer keep girls from getting an education. As a result, there continues to be an increase in education for all Iranians, including girls from conservative religious families. The increase in education for girls was an unexpected result of following the rules of Islam where ignorance is sinful. The Revolution of 1979 increased access to education through the five year Economic, Social and Cultural Development Plans of 1989-1993 and the Second Economic, Social and Cultural Development Plan of 1994-1998. The number of youth in primary, elementary, secondary and universities since then has expanded greatly: 97% of those between the ages of 6 and 29 are literate, women comprise 63% of the university students, 54% of the college students and 45% of the doctors. These percentages demonstrate an enormous increase in the education of all, particularly women from the beginning of the century when the literacy rate for all was 5%, limited mostly to those who attended Koran and missionary schools.⁸

Indoctrination in Primary Schools

The elementary schools remain bastions of conservatism/tradition.⁹ As thirty nine percent of the population is under the age of fifteen, Iran has one of the youngest citizenry in the world with a growing need for elementary schools. Primary school is mandatory but not always attended by poor, Afghan refugee or rural children. If they are enrolled, all learn from teachers who follow government textbooks page by page, day by day. The millions of textbooks printed by Ministry of Education and Training have all the content and religious instruction needed for the 747 classes that are offered at all levels. The theocratic government's aim is to shape consciousness without providing alternative sources of information such as mass media or encyclopedias that would repudiate the "modified" national narrative. This narrative removed accomplishments of previous rulers and elevated Islamic achievements. One of Khomeini's first speeches presented the importance of re-writing the elementary and secondary textbooks to follow Shi'ia beliefs and revised Iranian history.

The old regime tried to eradicate the human spirit and mold materialistic individuals, whose worldview was more weapons than textbooks. The culture of the previous regime, we all witnessed, was introduced through this channel. This year the children can experience a new era of social and cultural rehabilitation, but that cannot be accomplished without a change in the books.¹⁰

The textbooks used under the Shah emphasized elements of the pre-Islamic Iranian national culture, Western technology and loyalty to the monarchy and to the Shah personally via a cult of personality.¹¹ The Shah was erased from the new 1981-82 textbooks written by 20 committees composed of Ministry of Education officials, subject specialists, textbook writers, teachers and religious leaders. Each group was to re-write a book of history, religion or social studies for a class level. These textbooks written under the direction of Khomeini have not been significantly altered, other than stating Khomeini died, since their issue over thirty years ago.¹² There is limited effort to update the education and teach children new information. This does not seem to be an education but indoctrination.

The key issue was how to change the modern, nationalistic allegiance to the monarchy of Iranian youth to traditional, religious, nationalistic allegiance to the Islamic Republic. The change was accomplished by addressing atonement or the separation of man from God. The guidance man needed from God came from the political and religious leadership of the divinely chosen Imam. Khomeini was this Imam in 1979 and Ali Khamenei became the supreme religious and political ruler upon his death in 1983. The Imam's inability to make a mistake and sin assures the Shi'ia believers that they can follow their religious leader and rely on his mandates. These lessons of divine succession are found in all of the religious textbooks from second to fifth grade. Man can struggle with his passions and urges that work to divert him from following God's precepts. Since man alone cannot overcome his desires, the Twelve Prophets and their inherited leaders, who are the generational Imams, provide the divine grace that enables man to become closer to God. Education teaches the values and history necessary to cement the power of this theocracy.

Shi'ia tenants emphasize this concept, the divine grace of the Imams' and revolutionary beliefs such as the future role of the Mahdi (messiah). The biggest change in instruction has been that children are taught in the textbooks that they no longer have to suffer in this world and wait for redemption in the next. Instead, they are to work for the redemption in the present life. The student is taught that belief alone is not enough; it must be combined with action taken every moment of his life. "This notion, which accords with the idea that the individual must determine his own fate on the strength of his faith and deeds, forms the essence of the revolutionary education".¹² The senior religious leader and Imam is the heir of the political and religious authority that guides youth in every area of their lives. It is the senior religious leader who guides the youth in their own personal struggles and in the struggles or wars against those who do not follow the Islamic vision as set forth by the Prophet. Such texts reinforced half a million Iranian youth's confidence in going to war against Iraq and any other infidel country or group.

The textbooks identify the Iranian youth as the warrior of Islam on the personal and national fronts. Military values replaced modernizing values. The Islamic Revolution also integrated itself into the nationalistic history of Iran. The previous monarchies were reprehensible and were righteously eliminated and replaced by religious leaders. Throughout the Islamic Republic's revised history, there are the achievements of the Iranian people and the evil of the monarchies from the Akhamedis to the Pahlavys. The monarchies are described as oppressive, remote and cruel, wasting the money of the people. In the new history, there are no negative characteristics of the pre-Islamic past. Iranians who pre-date Cyrus are "our ancient ancestors." The transition from the pre-Islamic to Islamic period was not a revolution but a religious, moral and governmental advance or accession to a higher level.¹² The Arab monarchies, regardless of their accomplishments in the thousand years of history, were evil.

Textbooks reflect Khomeini's traditional doctrine as expressed in his book and subsequently, the revised Iranian constitution. The Islamic regime uses the educational system to convey ideological messages and half-truths that cannot be validated by historical research. If a student investigates history outside school textbooks, there are no other resources available in the school that have not been censored or re-written. Truth is consistently represented in written material. The student is taught that belief in God alone is not enough: belief should be combined with amal (practice). Only this combination can make a person a true believer, whose passage to heaven is not predetermined by his being Shi'ia but something he has to strive for every moment of his life.^{13, 14} Although it is not possible to detail all the religious, historical and social revisions made in the textbooks written in 1980-83, the combined impact of the textbook's content and the teachers' reiteration of the same, is powerful for children. It has changed their identity and loyalty.

How can they consider another perspective when no other viewpoint presented? Furthermore, repeated innuendos indicate that teachers who do not support the beliefs of the texts, are harmed.²

The official objectives of elementary school, as described by the government are;

- 1) Focusing on the Principles of Islam, the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) which emphasize the development of moral and ethical values within education programs.
- 2) Encouraging a spirit of respect for law, group cooperative activities, environment and natural resources and the family unit. Commitment to participation in political and social matters, attentiveness to health issues, studying as well as self-education habits are also seen as priorities.
- 3) Coordinating the policies adopted by the Ministry of Education with other national policy-making entities for cultural, political, social and economic affairs. Harmonizing directives of the Ministry of Higher Education and Departments of Technical and Vocational Education as far as general principles and objectives are concerned.
- 4) Giving priority to overcoming shortages and problems related to the content and methods of education, especially in the first grade of primary education with reference to national ethnic and cultural diversities. This is to decrease the drop-out rates and create enthusiasm and motivation among children in continuing their education.
- 5) Showing sufficient flexibility in using a variety of instructional methods and benefiting from manpower, space and educational tools and equipment in compliance with the local situation, type and level of education, gender and pupil's interests and aptitudes.
- 6) Giving priority to teacher training and in-service programs on a continuous basis and promoting the status of teachers, as well as specifying their position in society and within the education system as a model guide and counselor for students.
- 7) Stressing the importance of continuous evaluation and revision of policies, programs and educational methods.
- 8) Refraining from limiting evaluation only on tests, especially among elementary pupils.³

Unfortunately, these elementary school goals are thwarted by existing problems. First, there is a shortage of qualified female primary school teachers who live in the rural areas. Many rural girls will not learn elementary skills as there are not enough teachers for the segregated schools. Secondly, the teachers that are employed may not be qualified to teach elementary school or not chose to remain where they are employed. And finally, there are over five million refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan living in Iran. Their children may be attending schools in the refugee camps, in cities and villages or not be in schools at all. Of the approximately 2.1 million Afghan and Iraqi refugees currently in the country, almost half are estimated to be children under the age of 15, the majority of whom were born and brought up in Iran. Although Iranian law requires all children to be recorded at birth, not many of them are in fact registered limiting their enrollment in school. The low registration of Iraqi and Afghani children is because few refugee marriages are registered, mainly for lack of proper identification documents. This makes it difficult for the children to attend Iranian schools although many older children are allowed to attend adult literacy courses conducted by the Literacy Movement Organization. The lack of teachers and their poor qualifications further restricts the government's effort to educate refugees.

Additional educational problems have been itemized below by the Ministry of Education and Training.

- 1) Inadequacy and lack of flexibility in the contents and methods of teaching resulting in absence of creativity, order, responsibility, respect for others, and group activity.
- 2) Economic poverty preventing parents from supporting incidental expenses of education for their children and its effects on registering for primary education.
- 3) Lack of obligation for parents to send their 6-10 year-old children to school due to weak regulations regarding child labor.
- 4) The great size of the section considering the number of students, employees, educational regions and unlimited centralization in management and decision making.
- 5) Lack of clarity in the country's development pattern as a result of lack of harmony between educational courses in secondary education and the job market.
- 6) Rapid universal changes in production and scientific development, hence general knowledge and use of new educational methods, is creating a gap in the quality of education and methods, equipment between the country and abroad.³

In other words, the Iranian graduates are not educated to advance the economic and social issues in the country. The education they receive is not parallel in the quality of elementary schools as found in other comparable countries. At the end of all elementary schools, all fifth grade children are tested on an exam that covers nationally agreed upon content. Students learn the principles of Islam, the religious laws to be followed and fluency in Persian language, literature and history.

The same content is taught to members of the nomadic tribes including the 123,000 Bakhtiari, which often creates gaps in achievement based upon ethnic rural and urban experiences of the children. This exam determines if primary age children will enter secondary school. If admitted, students' scores will determine which type of institution they will attend.

Secondary Schools

Iranian youth learn who they will be in secondary school. They do not have any rights of choice of majors, elective classes or schools. In addition, all schools teach the beliefs of the clerics even if the beliefs do not agree with that of the parents. "Maman, is it really wrong for me to go in front of my male cousins without a veil? Maman, is America truly the source of all that is toxic in the world? Maman, was Mossagdegh really a bad man?" It was a delicate balance, trying to teaching my daughters progressive values and the emptiness behind the revolutionary dogma they were fed in school while ensuring that they learned and superficially obeyed all that dogma anyway, so they could pass through the educational system."⁴

Along with the dogma, the educational process also restricts employment for youth. A student's test scores, not his own interests, decide that he will go to Theoretical, Vocational or Technical Secondary Schools. Theoretical Secondary contains General Secondary, Experimental Science, Math and Physics, Culture and Literature or Theology deciding his academic and career path. Regardless of the different labels, consistencies remain. All students take twelve hours a week of religion and ethics and foreign languages. All students are prepared to understand different cultures through learning at least one foreign language with English instruction beginning in seventh grade. Private schools (including language schools) were permitted to re-open in 1988 as non-profit institutions. It is estimated that over 1 million students (both children and adults) are currently enrolled in private English language institutes, the most renowned are the Iran Language Institute and Kish Language Institute. These two schools are self-funding but government-affiliated, and account for approximately half the total national English Institute enrollment.

There are very few native English speakers permitted to teach within Iran and the resources available to English teachers are very limited. United Kingdom English Language Teaching textbooks are commonly used in language schools, with *Headway* textbooks as the most popular. The majority of the books used are pirate copies, rather than recent, legitimate texts. The teaching of English is not currently allowed to be conducted by foreign bodies such as the British Council. However, two International English Language examination centers (including the British Council) are now operating within Iran. When examining Iranian secondary students scores on international tests, the scores are low. For example on the TIMSS, Iranian youth have 7% of all students scoring in upper 25% on the test. As described, the secondary students in Iran have access to education but the quality and focus of classes fixate more on religious and social indoctrination than on educating youth to think critically and solve meaningful social problems.

Employment of Teachers

There has been a concerted effort by leaders of Islamic Revolution to indoctrinate its people. The media, newspapers and school textbooks are censored. The government is well known for coercing individuals to bend to its demands. In this, there was little difference between the educational emphasis of the monarchy and the theocracy. Since 1979, the clerics have tried to forge a national identity based primarily on a marriage of Shiite Islamic teachings with a revolutionary ideology. Initially, some leaders tried to dilute the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian traditions. But that effort proved impossible and has largely been abandoned. Today, elementary, secondary and some higher education teacher training programs are a part of this indoctrination. Teachers are employed by the authority of the religiously directed Ministry of Education and Training and provincial, city, district, and village councils whose members are elected by a public vote to a four year term. Teachers have been encouraged to teach in rural areas where there is a need for teachers and schools. The Ministry is providing rural teachers with subsidized housing and jobs decided upon by quota systems taken from the number of tribal groups in an area. There is also two years of literacy teaching in rural areas which is considered equal to mandatory military service.

Such benefits have not yet been successful improving teaching conditions, if the protests by teachers are any indication. Protests December of 2001 and May of 2006 demonstrated against the low salaries preventing teachers from surviving on their salaries and poor morale caused by low social status of all teachers. Many teachers take second jobs and tutor to supplement their incomes. Tutoring is a national undercover source of income for all teachers. They must tutor and get additional money from their students' parents in order to live on their wages. The tutor teaches to the tests so students get the information that is not given in class but is on the tests. Furthermore, educational resources like overheads, electricity and even chairs are missing in some schools.

The teachers don't have texts other than the government printed texts that are the basis of the national exams. When questioned about computers, students say they enjoy seeing pictures as there are none in their mimeographed books. Most instructional time is spent teaching to the test as teacher instruct from government developed books.

Other problems for today's teachers are difficult working conditions that limit instructional variety. The teacher directs learning through lecturing, questioning and calling on students to respond to the instructor's questions. Authoritarianism is the only viable instructional strategy when media and material resources are missing and classes are large. Many teachers need computers, instruction in how to integrate media into instruction in primary, guardian and secondary schools. As of 2003, the only year when data was available, 6,500 out of 15,000 schools had computers.⁵ This does not mean that each student has a computer but that computers are available to someone in the school. Sometimes it means only the administrators have computers, in other locations there are laboratories of computers for student use during assigned class time. Teachers who complained about low salaries and low social status could also protest the lack of instructional resources, pervasive gender inequality and weak commitment of the Republic of Iran to teachers' working condition.

Universities

In order to get admitted into universities, students have to take a year in high school of college preparation courses called Konkur. The entrance test at the end of this year acts as a gate keeper and admits one twelfth of the 720,000 qualified Kondur **those who take college preparatory coursed during their senior year of high school** graduates who apply to universities. Political and military connections also determine admission for others. The admission process teaches the university admitted youth that they are the elite. Not being admitted to their own universities also impacts the identities of university-age youth.

Despite meeting all of the requirements, the majority of the Iranian high school graduates do not get into Iranian universities or colleges. In order to address this need, four options have emerged. The first is to allow students to go abroad on scholarships where they are introduced to different cultures and values. This process has been in place for decades when there were very few Iranian universities and the elite males went to foreign universities where the education was assumed to be better than in Iran. In the past, many came back to lead the modernization of Iran under the Shah. Some who go abroad do not return to Iran contributing to the brain drain of gifted youth. For example, the Rachlin family with seven children and five daughters, sent both sons and one daughter to the U.S. to study in the 1970's, none returned. In 1990's, Mrs. Ebadi sent one daughter to Canada expecting that she also would not return. The sending of young Iranians abroad is not the easiest option for students, their families or their country.

A second option is the Azad University that began in 1981. This is a tuition charging college taught over the internet. Those who attend must be at least middle class in order to be able to afford the cost. The courses follow syllabi designed by professors who do not teach the courses. Instructors, with or without degrees, are hired to teach the on-line classes using **syllabi developed by other teachers** and respond to student assignments and discussions. These instructors are monitored by course managers who supervise fifteen or more instructors. Delivered throughout the Middle East, the Open University or Azad University began in the United Kingdom and is a commercial enterprise with no educational connection to the Iranian governmental standards. Since the courses are largely developed by British educators, the graduates Azad University are accepted into British universities for graduate school should they decide to go abroad.

The third option is the Payaam-e Noor, or distance education. These university offerings are known in most locations as continuing education. Payaam-e Noor currently offers professional development seminars and certification courses for teachers and civil servants. These courses are offered by correspondence and television. Exams are taken by students in university offices. By keeping control of the testing, the Payaam-e Noor meets Iranian government standards for non-university courses.

Another university population is the religious seminary students. These individuals number approximately 25,000 young men who attend Centers of Excellence in Qom or Mashad or take courses with theological faculties in major universities. If students are planning early in their life on becoming religious leaders, their education can begin in the theoretical major in secondary school. These men have the excellent option of becoming the religious leaders in the country. Beginning in 1997 with the election of President Khatami, some restrictions for university students were reduced. There was an eight year period when the morality police did not impose so much in individual lives.³ Previously, even light nail polish was cause for lashing or detainment. University age students, because of their sheer numbers, started fighting the social restrictions. Their numbers and boldness made it impossible for the state to impose itself as before.³ This Iran was still a country where a woman's voice could not be heard singing on the radio.

However, university students could connect with each other on the internet and in the classroom. Not being stopped at checkpoints was progress to them. Furthermore, president Khatami advocated tolerance, rule of law and freedom. In 2009, he withdrew his application for President for another term so that the opposition candidate would not divide the voters against the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In the past, Khatami was an advocate of religious democracy. Today, democratic principles of equal access to education are not extended to those who follow the Bahai faith. Believers apply to Iranian universities and then find their papers "lost" despite repeated applications and meeting or exceeding university entrance requirements. Bahai's have been denied university education for over twenty-five years. They have also been executed for their beliefs, denied inheritances, employment and have had their property confiscated without recourse to the legal system. As the largest religious minority in Iran, Bahais are persecuted along with other groups. Religious democracy has not been attained in education for minorities who have not yet been able to leave the country.

From primary through university level, the schools inform and shape the students as future citizens of Iran. The belief in their own personal power and their loyalty to the Supreme Spiritual Leader is taught from the first day of school. In guidance, high school and universities, the students are taught the language, history and religion of Iran. They are to become the **warriors** of Islam. The religion taught under the Pahlavi's was not an emphasized part of the curriculum. Today, students spend hours daily learning complex, difficult religious theory. They are becoming resentful toward religion. In many cases, their education does not match the needs of the graduates or contribute to their economic success. Most of the students in the universities, over sixty percent, are women who must be employed in a socially appropriate work. In today's Iran, educational content of instruction and the religious and political conditions in society are the responsibilities of the Supreme Leader.

Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education or apprenticeships used to be the basis of education for young men of lower economic classes. This practice, prevalent until the late 1960's, prepared males for multiple occupations. Fathers would apprentice their sons to stone masons, carpenters, bookstore owners, grocery stores for summer positions. As the boys were not skilled, the fathers would pay the master craftsmen to employ the children. The boys learned a respect for workers, experiences in multiple occupations and self assuredness from proficiency in many employment areas. When they were not apprenticed, the boys would attend elementary schools called kuttabs or religious schools for basic academics and religion. The apprenticeships taught men the value of physical work.

Non-formal education, or what used to be considered apprenticeships, is now offered as courses under the administration of the Ministry of Education or provided by agencies such as non-government organizations, mosques or other government ministries. This kind of education is mainly presented to improve the quality of links among family members as well as those between parents and children. The content or topics of family education courses are systematically revised in order to meet new situations. Presently five educational courses are being implemented in urban areas to meet the families' specific educational needs, the titles of which are as follows:

- a. Youth and family's education course which is specifically planned for young people willing to get married. This course contains information about birth control, sexual conduct and other matters considered important to the Islamic marriage.
- b. Family and the children studying at pre-primary level
- c. Family and the children studying at primary level
- d. Family and the children studying in lower secondary level
- e. Family and the children studying in upper secondary level⁹

More than 3,897,400 parents have participated in these courses; 75 per cent of whom were mothers. Although diversity was observed through offering of more than 40 subjects for the five educational courses, the content present covers subject areas that include religious instruction and do not meet the parents other educational needs such as health or personal career advancement.

A second area, literacy, has become a central part of the Iranian identity. The Literacy Movement Organization (LMC) began in 1960 following the Cuban model for increasing literacy in the rural areas. The program has two educational cycles and several follow-up programs. The objective of the first cycle or level is that learners get to know the Persian alphabets and their combinations to make words and sentences. They will learn to read and write simple Persian texts. Learners also acquire enough ability in numeracy to meet their daily needs. The academic mastery at its termination at the end of the second cycle is equivalent to fifth grade instruction in formal or government education. During the period 1989-1998, 682,806 learners were enrolled, out of whom 403,401 succeeded in receiving the level one graduation certificate. For any educational program, the graduation of two thirds of its students is a negative result. Eighty-seven per cent of all successful graduates were female. The problem is that the quality of the education in the LMC prevented most of the graduates of the second cycle from passing the exit exam. As an indicator of the poor education, those sixty percent who might have enrolled in the second cycle could not go further. The competencies of the fifth grade LMC acquired for functional literacy by adults, refugee children and those who were drop-outs from government schools, were not equal to those fifth graders in government schools. The emphasis of religious instruction in the LMC classes is demonstrated by the fact that scores on the religious portion of the national test were equivalent to that of students enrolled in the government schools. Interpretation could be that these courses were used as tools to increase government religious and political goals rather than literacy goals.

Despite its enrollment and stated achievements, adult literacy education faces numerous problems. The major problem is the failure of students to retain their literacy skills. This means they have not actually been taught to read in Farsi as they would easily have day-to-day practice in store and street signs and other daily reading experiences. Such practice would ensure students could keep the rudimentary skills they had been taught. However, since most of the material is religious and in some cases presented in Arabic, instruction is not seen as useful. For example, the students would not be competent enough in Arabic to read the Koran although they had learned to read Koran verses. As stated by Mehran, the major reasons for poor instruction are:

1. Inapplicability and unappealing nature of the materials being taught.
2. Shortage of specialized manpower, including female teachers
3. Improper educational spaces. Most of the literacy courses are offered in non-educational spaces such as houses, mosques, and tents which lack desks, seats, blackboards and enough light
4. Financial problems and budget deficits. Financial and cultural poverty of illiterate people.
5. Inaccessibility to some disadvantaged areas due to their remoteness and the nomadic nature of some of the students
6. The financial resources to implement literacy programs are mainly provided by the government. A small portion of the budget is paid by donors, charity societies, and non-governmental organizations.

In the period 1995-1998, 661,146 learners enrolled at follow-up literacy groups and 42 titles of books on health, religion, training, society, economy and science were simplified and distributed among them. An assessment carried out on these groups indicates that the results of this project are not significant. However, the projects have been continued. One hundred thirty eight million learners are under supervision of the LMO. Fifty one per cent of the total number of learners succeeded in receiving a certificate at some level.

According to the law ratified by the Islamic Republic cabinet, all civil servants including employees and laborers and those working in the private sector who cannot read and write are bound to attend literacy classes and at least receive the certificate at the complementary level. Statistics indicate that 457,267 learners were enrolled in the period 1989 –1998, 40% of whom succeeded in receiving a certificate. Upon successful implementation of this project for the employees and laborers, their new literacy is celebrated in most of the administrative and production centers. In addition, all military and law enforcement units are bound to educate illiterate conscripts up to the lowest, functional level. Based on this project only those illiterate conscripts who have successfully finished the complementary level of the LMO can receive the military service completion certificate. The LMO was able to educate 376,778 people in military and law enforcement. In the conscripted teacher plan, the surplus draftees for military service after receiving some educational and cultural training, act as literacy teachers in rural and disadvantaged areas. The program has accelerated the pace of literacy programs.

The LMO has also mobilized immigrant teachers to accompany nomadic people to their winter and summer grazing areas. These teachers set up classes for school - age children and adults who have not received an education while traveling. Through this project from 1990-1998, 131,876 people became literate. The people who have not been able to attend literacy classes or those who cannot take part in classes continuously can receive literacy learning materials and study them on their own. Students could then participate in the examinations for non-regular students and after passing the examinations receive the relevant certificate.

According to the law ratified by the cabinet, those illiterates who according to labor law go on dole can remain on the dole while gaining literacy skills. In 1992,¹⁶ stated that literacy training in Iran was viewed as an element of stability (religious re-education) and yet another government socializing agent serving to fortify the country. She recommended more opportunities for practice should be provided. Literacy experts concur that the goal of literacy instruction should be the mastery of reading skills that transfer to situations outside of the classroom. Addressing some of these limitations, new provisions were made for continuous education so that students can take more classes in order to read above the functional level. The government is now providing reading practice in social situations outside the classroom indicating the awareness of the Literacy Movement Campaign that instructional improvements need to be made in the existing program for literacy to be retained.

Teaching Democracy in Iran since the 1979 Revolution

Initially, the people thought the purpose of the 1979 revolution was to achieve self rule and democracy.^{4, 15} The Islamic revolt of 1979 came as a result of the Pahlavi monarchy denial of liberty, equality, and social justice while modernizing Iran. If there was a theater in Britain, then Iran would have one. If there was secularization in Britain, then Iran would de-emphasize religion in society. The 1979 Revolution also came as a result of the people feeling that the British and U.S. had controlled Iran's resources and the Shahs during the monarchy. While laws of social justice were made a part of the legal system, the Shah himself in interviews with Barbara Walters and others stated that such laws did not need to be enforced for women. According to Rachlin, they weren't.³ The Iranian people wanted their own country and control of its gas, oil and other mineral resources. And yet, it should be noted that women like Shirin Ebadi and her female associates were educated during the Pahlavi monarchy and employed in leadership positions in the government and the religious judicial system.

The democratic components the people expected began with the 1979 Constitution which gave the rights of the general electorate to vote on the president, the Majles, the provincial and local councils as well as the Assembly of Experts. All citizens, irrespective of race, ethnicity, creed and gender, were guaranteed free elementary and secondary education, basic human and civil liberties; the rights of press freedom, expression, worship, organization, petition and demonstration; equal treatment before the law; the right of appeal and the freedom from arbitrary arrest, torture, police surveillance and even wire tapping. The rule of Cyrus the Great had returned. The accused were to have the right of habeas corpus and had to be brought before the civilian courts within twenty-four hours. The law deemed them innocent until proven guilty beyond any doubt in a proper court of law.¹⁴ Now the natural gas, oil and mineral riches of the country were matched by the civil liberties and democracy of its people.

This constitution was altered by a referendum submitted by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1981. Secular bodies of Nojehedin, Fedayin, and the National Front refused to participate in the national vote. The new constitution expanded the bureaucracy from 850,000 civil servants in 1982 to over a million by 2004. The clergy were elevated and voted into leadership government positions. The media and the newspapers echoed the joy of the people who knew the Ayatollah, meaning Doctor, had to be more intelligent and compassionate than the Pahlavi rulers. The Ayatollah Khomeini did have an appreciation of the power of the written word. He mandated that the school books be changed and schools were closed three years for him and his teachers to do so. Rewritten textbooks eliminated favorable depictions of the monarchy, secular Iranian leaders, the United States, Israel and Iraq. The Literacy Movement Campaign (LMC) that began in the 1960's to reduce illiteracy in rural areas was altered in 1980's to become a "stabilization" of indoctrination rather than transformation tool. Students were to learn religion rather than acquire skills to improve their lives and employment opportunities.

Although it appeared to be a democratic program increasing educational access for poor and rural illiterates, the literacy program did not teach participants to comprehend or understand the written word. Teachers were selected predominately upon religious beliefs rather than instructional skills. The textbooks emphasized religious content. This instruction made little educational sense when reading skills were needed, particularly among the poor. Furthermore, students in the LMC were likely to return to illiteracy after attendance in the program.¹⁶ This program provided grass-roots instruction of religious fundamentalism predominately to women,

The democratic principles of governance initially approved by the Iranian people were altered to become the principles of a theocracy that controlled the government and the educational system. Today, the primary education remains conservative. Education and the textbooks have been used as a tool to increase religious beliefs and teach a collective history of Iran as determined by the regime. Only those who can remember times prior to 1979 have a different education which continues to remain strong in science and math. Other successes include the increased literacy rate so that Iran is now a country where most citizens under the age of 29 can read and write in Persian. Most citizens under the age of 29 can also recite the Koran in Arabic and score well on the religious section of the national exams. The Iranians remain unhappy about the lack of university acceptance for their children to the free Iranian universities.

The wives, sisters and relatives of the martyrs from Iranian conflicts are admitted regardless of competencies. Furthermore, Iranians realize the departure of intelligent young people in order to study abroad is a great loss for the country. The brain drain of university graduates continues after thirty years of Iranian Republic Rule as students leave for more attractive foreign positions that utilize their education and talents. Employment in Iran insures a small salary and little chance of promotion. Their salaries would not pay even half of their apartment rent.⁴ Another source of anguish are the conflicts educated women suffer in meeting the demands of a patriarchal society and actualizing their own self confidence and scientific and mathematical skills acquired through education. How are the 63% of university students who are female going to find employment? Will they bring happiness to their families as they work at home? The third source of unhappiness is the failure of the government to teach literacy skills to the poor and uneducated who could benefit from applying mastered literacy skills to their jobs, to the military and to get off the dole.

In spite of these educational failures, the Iranians are learning to take control of their own country. As demonstrated by Mrs. Ebadi, educated women have been employed and continued to take care of their families. She used the system which gave her a retirement to live on and used her legal skills to help political dissidents, minorities, women and children. Instead of celebrating her compassion for the poor and the alienated as demonstrating the qualities of a practicing Muslim, she became a target for the government. The police responded to her call for assistance from the demonstrators as they were required to do so by law. However, they did not assist her. It seems that while democratic principles of equal protection under the law are in the Iranian Constitution, they are not enforced. As was equally true under the Shah, the legal system is not a foundation for human rights and social justice. But in the case of the Shah, the people demanded democracy. In the past thirty years, the Iranians have not been successful in gaining increased university access, improved teacher training or curriculum that meets the needs of the graduates and the society.

Conclusion

Today, social justice is not a part of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Innocent bystanders and youth participating in the Presidential election protests in June 2009 were arrested and killed. The Supreme Leader took a strong stand against these protestors accusing them of being puppets of foreign terrorists or countries. However, when the son of a high ranking Iranian leader who was a respected dignitary in the Islamic Republic could not find his son for three days, he was distraught. After five days, his son's body was brought to him. The boy had been arrested as a protestor and beaten and killed by those who ran one of the detention camps for the Republic. After this tragic death, the Supreme Leader could no longer claim isolation from the election conflicts and the murdering of protestors. The people now see that the leaders of the theocracy are corrupt and autocratic rulers. Religion has been used as a justification of the same behavior they had experienced under the Shah. What had been learned about theocracy in thirty years? It seemed religious rulers did not want to trust the people to rule their own country. Democracy had been written in the constitution but not implemented by Iran's rulers.

When Shirin Ebadi returned home from receiving her Nobel Peace Prize in 2003, her plane was re-routed so she could not see the one million Iranians who came to greet her at the air port. University students protested against the government closing of the independent newspaper Salaam and were attacked. The newspaper and its editor were charged with violating national security code for publishing articles linking senior officials to the killings of dozens of dissidents "as well as those simply found annoying." The newspaper accused the state of murdering its opponents. According to students' accounts, uniformed policemen stood by and did nothing. The paramilitaries kicked down doors and smashed through the dormitory halls. They grabbed female students by their hair and set fire to dorm rooms. They thrashed about with their batons and flung students off third-floor balconies. Several fell to the pavement below, their bones crushed. One lay paralyzed. Shots must also have been fired, because students turned up at hospitals with bullet wounds. Witnesses reported that at least one student was killed, three hundred wounded, and thousands detained in the days that followed. No reports of these attacks appeared in the newspapers.

Students and their parents learn of thwarted democracy with such events that are not covered in the media and in subsequent trials of the aggressors. The Tehran police chief and the officers accused of this university attack were charged in the military court. At the end of the long, protracted trial, all of the defendants were acquitted. Only one officer in the entire case was charged with stealing an electric shaver from a dorm room.⁴ The greatest danger to democracy and social justice occurs within the schools themselves. There, the voices of other cultures, religions and the Sunni Islamic sect are not heard. Teachers and students are told they are in a global war with the West and specifically the U.S. in the name of Islam. Other religions and cultures are infidel oppressors. According to Iranian Human Rights activist Ghozal Omid, Iranian children following their beliefs are "ticking bombs" ready to explode.

One of the largest studies of Iranian textbooks consistently identifies the U.S. and West as the enemy.¹⁷ Furthermore, there are no lessons in history on dissenters or those who have demanded social justice and equality on the part of the Iranian minorities of Armenians, Ashuris, Jews Bahais and Zoroastrians. Individuals such as Ghazal Omid, Shirin Ebadi, Golnar Mehran, protesting university students and citizens demonstrate the power and resiliency of the Iranian people. Their actions and opinions are not valued by their own media, the government, police or military. Because of their involvement with the election protests of 2009, the universities were closed to keep the educated youth from congregating. The ostensible reason was the swine flu but the people knew differently. Iranians send pictures around the world of their protests with their writing, research, iPhones and the internet. Today, respect for multiple viewpoints, tolerance for different sects, religions and minority members are not taught in Iran's schools. What is taught is that all students should believe and follow the Shi'ia precepts under the leadership of the Supreme Leaders. However, the emphasis on religious instruction may be alienating the youth rather than inspiring them. Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan are the only countries in the Middle East that unite education and politics under the precepts of the Shi'ia sect. With the power of the oil revenue, the Ayatollahs who prevent representative government and comprehensive education are not easily deposed. When and if they are, the political change will be lead by the educated Iranian people who have been ruled by empires, monarchies and theocracies. They have earned the right to choose a government that represents what they have learned from their painful education.

Notes

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