

Touran Mirhadi:
A Prominent Pioneer in Iranian Education

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To My Father, Farid Hosseini who is watching over me from the heaven

To My Mother, Sousan Hosseini

And to My Brother, Sajad Hosseini

For their unconditional love and support in every step of my life.

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Introduction

Iran's educational system has changed greatly in the past two centuries and has transformed from its traditional method to the modern system with relatively high speed. In the past, due to the male-dominated culture in Iran, men had the opportunity to study more than women did. Nevertheless, after introducing Western methods, the view towards education changed drastically. Women and children, who had not had adequate opportunity to study, found access to discipline and knowledge through the generalization of the educational system. Creating these changes in the educational system and the public's access to education was impossible without the consistent efforts of many individuals. Yet again, due to the common patriarchal principals in Iran, men were in the majority of those who initiated the process of making these changes; however, after a short period of time, many courageous women began to look after their privileges as well.

There is no question that the role of Iranian women in the development of contemporary Iranian society has been essential, having played a crucial and fundamental role in every aspect. In particular, the years surrounding the Islamic revolution saw Iranian women exploring the country's increased educational opportunities with a newfound confidence. Aspiring to advanced education not only opened their eyes to the realities of society, but it also allowed them to accept more pivotal responsibilities therein. This being said, a careful examination of the work of these prominent women and attention to the treasures they left for society is the least we can do to compensate them for their great service. Touran Mirhadi was amongst those Iranian women who invested her life in creating methods in order to smooth out the path of seeking knowledge, and

therefore she should never be forgotten. She was amongst the group of people who viewed building a healthy and learned society impossible without educating children well.

This being said, the objective of this thesis is to point to the services and changes that Mrs. Touran Mirhadi has created in Iran's educational system as well as in children's literature. In order to do this, I have divided my thesis into three chapters. The first chapter introduces the history of education in Iran from the Qajar period up to the establishment of the Tehran University. Understanding the changes in the educational system in Iran is important to identify the reasons why Mirhadi is to be found amongst the pioneers of education as well as children's literature. The second chapter is dedicated to the life of Touran Mirhadi. In order to fathom the depth of her work, studying her life is indispensable. I have started her biography with a short biography of her parents since they had a key role in helping Mirhadi to identify her goals and desires. The third chapter will focus on her service to society and the changes she implemented in the children's educational system and children's literature.

Chapter 1

History of Iranian Education

The concept of education in each country is not separate from the cultural traditions of that country. The importance of education depends deeply on the depth of education's roots in the tradition and culture of that country. That being said, I show how the changes in the educational system took place and improved over time in Iranian history. This study is intended exclusively to clarify the importance of children's education, children's literature, and the conceptualization of children's literature in Iranian society. Since access to this goal is not possible without first looking into the history of education in Iran, in this chapter, I investigate the impact of the generalization and modernization of education in Iran, taking into account the sacrifices of individuals such as Amir Kabir and Mirza Hasan Khan Roshdiye. I then examine the impact of the work of Touran Mirhadi on the modernization of children's education in Iran.

Over the past two centuries, the world began to learn more about children and to provide for their needs. However, the status of children of the twentieth century became different and distinct. In fact, the twentieth century, with all its difficulties, is called the childhood century (Mohammadi, 12). This is because, after thousands of years, children were finally recognized as worthy beings with a distinct entity from adults, who have their own particular needs. At that stage, the rights of the family and adults were recognized as well. Yet the twentieth century is a century of great contradictions. During this period, due to the First World War and the Second World War, as well as regional wars, children suffered most of the injuries in communities and became the main victims of these wars (Mohammadi, 12-16).

Nevertheless, after World War II, notwithstanding regional wars that harmed children's peace in some parts of the world, a large number of children, especially in Western countries, were able to gain their rights. Since then the world started to respond to their needs in a more receptive and satisfying way. It can be said that in the twentieth century, when peace was ruling over the world, the situation of children was much better than that of the children of the previous centuries. Iranian children also benefited from these changes. However, the true transformation in the life of Iranian children particularly occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, when education was identified as one of a child's essential needs, like air, food, and clean water. Recognizing and becoming more familiar with these needs led many people to take extensive measures to address them and provide facilities to meet them. Due to the cultural and cognitive differences and the lack of readiness of Iranian society to accept these changes, the generalization and growth of education in Iran has been slower than in Western countries and some of its neighboring countries (Mohammadi, 16-24).

Homeschools or Maktab Khane

The late nineteenth century coincides with the time when many new movements took place in Iran in order to introduce modern education to Iranians. During the Qajar period, the common elementary education system in Iran was the traditional one, which was known as the homeschool or Maktab Khane. Until the end of Naser al-Din Shah's¹ reign, schools were limited to homeschools that provided limited education to children and teens. Due to the limited number and availability of these educational institutions, a restricted number of young people had access to them. Familiarity with the quality of education in homeschools and the overall educational

¹ Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, 16 July 1831 – 1 May 1896, was the King of Persia from 5 September 1848 to 1 May 1896.

situation within that period in Iran would help to discover the factors behind the expansion of modern schools (Banani, 85-86, Menashri, 41-42).

Homeschool as an educational institution was formed from the second century AD. Their numbers were limited in every city and as the Iranian population was mostly spread out in the rural areas, not many villagers had the opportunity to benefit from these educational centers. Homeschools were single-room schools run by a teacher who oversaw all different levels. The teachers of these homeschools did not have any specific training, and most of them were usually teachers who were educated in Islamic sciences (akhund).² The students' family directly paid the tuition fee for homeschool to the akhunds, and the government did not have any role in it. There was no standard in what was taught to students. Most of the educational concepts were selected from the Qur'an or poetry books such as Hafez and Sa'adi poems. Physical punishment of the students in these homeschools was quite common and the prevalence of it was one of the most important weaknesses of these educational environments. According to the conventional method of thinking and culture at that time, homeschools were designed to further the presence of male students and only met their needs. Moreover, students were assessed on the basis of their mental ability and their learning possibility of higher levels of education. Therefore, students with a lower level of knowledge never had the opportunity to go to the higher levels (Banani, 86-87).

Akhunds evaluated all students for all the courses on a daily basis. After every assessment, according to the abilities of each student, new lessons were taught. In fact, the evaluation had two stages: the evaluation that was performed every day or every few days, and the final evaluation, which was the end of a book or an article that was carried out with special rituals. In addition, each student was required to do an enormous amount of memorization.

² Farsi word for clergy man

Exams were mostly conducted verbally. The only tests that were done in the written form were spelling exams or writing practices. Students with more knowledge were regularly compared with other students. Given these factors, many were deprived of the opportunity to receive an education. The Qajar Dynasty ruled in Iran from 1795 to 1925; until its last fifty years, education in Iran was limited to homeschools. The most important reason for the tendency to expand the modern schools was the educational situation of the homeschools and the educational consequences resulting from these homeschools, which were constantly criticized (Banani-87).

Education during the Qajar Period

The late nineteenth century was the time when many new movements were launched to modernize education in Iran. Foreign missionaries were the first to introduce the concept of Western school to Iranians. This familiarity with the Western educational system began in the mid-nineteenth century. These foreign missionaries initially attracted students to the religions they were proselytizing. As expected, most of their students were boys. At the time, the majority of Iranian society did not embrace the education and training of girls. At first, these schools were restricted to the followers of that particular religion, but after a while, Muslim children also entered these schools. The schools established by the missionaries were welcomed rapidly and their numbers increased in a short time. Because of familiarity with the West and Western educational systems, some students were sent to Western countries to pursue educational goals by the Iranian government (Banani, 89, Menashri, 19).

Despite the religious proselytizing, the demand for developing knowledge and education grew drastically and numerous newspapers and books were published. Muslim intellectuals acknowledged Western education as a vital need for achieving progress and freedom in the

middle of the nineteenth century. Mirza Saleh Shirazi³ (in 1810), Mostafa Khan Afshar (in the late 1820s) and Amir Kabir (in the 1840s) were among the leaders in expressing such ideas. These writers repeatedly emphasized the need for individual and public education, through the publication of various books and essays. Nevertheless, in Iran, like in other Middle Eastern Muslim countries, only in the second half of the twentieth century, the emergence of such ideas by a new group of thinkers who had studied in Europe expanded. These groups of intellectuals strongly believed that in order to achieve political freedom and social and economic progress, the country should adopt the teaching methods of the West (Menashri, 28-29).

Many writers criticized society itself for ingrained ignorance and illiteracy. Malkom Khan⁵, Mirza Nasrollah Isfahani Malik al-Motakallemin and Ja'far Ibn Ishaq were among them. Mirza Nasrollah Isfahani Malik al-Motakallemin argued that education is the only way to distinguish between human and animal. Ja'far Ibn Ishaq argued, "educated people" are "the supreme beings of God." He also emphasized that "knowledge" is more important than worship. Mirza Yusuf Khan Musharraf al-Dowla also had similar views on public education. In his writings, he called for the use of the "basic requirements" of French law, including compulsory education, and state education for those who could not afford it (Tamer, 21-23, Menashri, 30-31).

The Constitutional Movement somewhat predicted the modernization of Iran's educational system. Although there were different views on these reforms, intellectuals and thinkers agreed on three basic issues: free and compulsory education should be available to

³ Mirza Saleh Shirazi was a court intellectual and the first reporter in Iran. His newspaper, *Kaqaz-e Akhbar* (newspaper), was first published in May 1837, under Mohammad Shah Qajar.

⁵ Mirza Malkom Khan (1833-1908), was a prominent Iranian modernist, a pioneer in of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, and wishful of the transformation of Iran into a modern state. He was amongst those who promoted 'law' by developing his ideas in his newspaper *Qanun* (Law).

everyone, elementary schools should be modernized, and national educational institutions should be established. These projects were introduced in 1907 and submitted to the Constitution. The government's efforts to reform the educational system were as follows:

“Each village and city center should have a school (Article 19). Public schools should primarily serve the poor (Article 25). Since then, wealthy families from cities have been responsible for the maintenance of urban schools; the rich villages were responsible for the maintenance of rural schools (Article 22-24). Education in all sciences, arts, and crafts (Article 18). Establishing schools and implementing compulsory education by the Ministry of Science and Education, all schools and colleges, under the control and supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education (Article 19).” (Tamer, 25 - Menashri, 77, 78)

Dar al Fonun- First Institute of Higher Education in Iran

In the year 1810, the first group of Iranian students, which included two students, were sent to the West to study. The second group of students was a group of five, sent between 1845 and 1847 under the command of Mohammad Shah⁸ to the West. By sending these groups of students to the Westernized world, the need for higher-education schools was felt (Menashri, 46-47). Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir⁹ found that only sending students abroad could not be a response to the need for high education. In the year 1851, at the time of Naser al-Din Shah, the first institute of higher education, Dar al-Fonun, was founded in Tehran. In fact, Dar al-Fonun was the first modern university in the history of Iran (Menashri, 47). Amir Kabir, Naser al-Din

⁸ Mohammad Shah Qajar, 5 January 1808 to 5 September 1848, was one of the kings from Qajar dynasty. He ruled in Iran from 23 October 1834 to 5 September 1848.

⁹ Mirza Taghi Khan Farahani also known as Amir Kabir, 1807 – 10 January 1852. He was chief minister to Naser al-Din Shah Qajar.

Shah's foreign minister, initiated the establishment of this institute. Amir Kabir was Chancellor of Naser-al-Din Shah for 39 years, and during his time, he provided many services to Iran and Iranians. During this time, Amir Kabir's actions - despite many objections directed at him from inside and outside the country- brought advancement to the country (Menashri, 53).

After traveling to Russia, Amir Kabir immediately realized the country's need for modern schools and began working hard to create modern schools in Iran. Dar al- Fonun was the result of his efforts. Teachers at Dar al-Fonun were Western educators and implementers of Western educational methods. In the beginning, students were restricted to the sons of political leaders, but after several years, people began to enroll in all classes. There was no charge for this institution to provide education for all. The age of students at this institute of higher education had to be between fourteen and sixteen years (Menashri, 53- 57).

Before the establishment of Dar al-Fonun, two student groups were sent abroad. The third group of students was sent to France after the foundation of Dar al-Fonun. The group consisted of five graduates of the newly founded Dar Al-Fonun (Menashri, 47). The establishment of the Dar al-Fonun in the year 1851 as the first modern educational institution in Tehran by Amir Kabir was one of the most important steps in that period to create a modern educational system in Iran. In 1898, the Iranian government approved the first bill to integrate the educational system with the establishment of the National Council of Colleges. After the Constitutional Revolution of 1910, the Parliament consisted of the Ministry of Education, the Foundation and the Visual Arts for addressing educational issues. The creation of this ministry created significant changes in the educational system. One of these changes was the call for elementary education throughout the country (Menashri, 60).

For almost 50 years, until the University of Tehran was established during the reign of Reza Shah, Dar al-Fonun remained as the institute of higher education in Iran. Modern primary and secondary schools in Iran were only opened in the 1870s. Creation of these schools was not possible without the cooperation of the intellectuals and politicians who supported the West and Western education. Among the most important advocates of this modern method of thinking are Sepahsalar (in the 1870s), Mirza Mahmood Khan Ehtesham al-Saltane, and king Mozaffar al-Din himself. In 1873 - 1874, Sepahsalar (Moshir al-Dolah) in Tehran founded the first public school and called it Moshiriye in honor of his name. A similar school was founded in Tabriz in the same year, followed by a military high school in Isfahan (1882-1883) and Tehran (1884-1885) (Menashri, 57-60).

Mirza Yusuf Khan Mostashar al-Dolah and One Word

Mostashar al-Dolah was Iran's Consul General in Tbilisi from 1902 to 1905. He completed his famous treatise, the *One Word*, and published it in Iran in 1912. Mostashar al-Dolah was a libertarian and law-abiding individual. Living in Western countries and familiarity with the West's culture placed him amongst one of the hardliners in soliciting progress and modernity in Iran. In fact, he was the first person who, during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, expressed the concept of the word "law" without fear (Afary, 251-254). Afary, in her book on the Iranian constitution, writes about him:

"Mostashar al-Dolah was a law-abiding defender of Iran's progress and modernization, who did not wish for anything other than the height and rise of Iran. He was the first person who took the risk during the autocracy of Naser, and by publishing *One Word* in Iran – the translation of the most basic material of the Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted in the preamble to the French

constitution - into Farsi and modifying them to the verses and hadiths, sought to prevent people from saying that those principles are contrary to the Sharia. According to Adamiyat, "he is the first writer in Iran to say that the origin and power of the government is the will of the nation." In that same book, he writes about freedom of opinion, expression, community, the prohibition of torture, and, most importantly, the separation of the legislative powers from the executive branch in a new way in addition to the equalization of all people, from the king and the beggar, the Muslims and non-Muslims and considers it against the law. Although all of this material was taken from the Declaration of Human Rights and the French Constitution, he criticized the Eastern communities from new points and considerations rather than comparing the political and social issues of the East and West. "(Afary, 256)

In addition, in his book, he discerns education as a basic right of every human being. In this regard, Adamiyat writes:

"In *One Word*, Mostashar al Dolah had a valuable criticism of the method of new schools in Iran. His critique, however, uncovered a major social necessity: the need for the establishment of new schools. It was said in *One Word*: The teaching of science and education in the Far East ... "are amongst the most necessary tasks and duties," one of the "public rights," and "the building of homeschools and institutes to train teachers is to educate the poor children." Moreover, in criticizing Iranian schools, he wrote, "Although there are many schools in Iran that teach science, the sciences that they teach are religious sciences, meaning sciences for the afterlife and for resurrection, not for salvation." (Afary, 256-257)

The need for new schools became more sensible after the foundation of Dar al-Fonun and with the publication of *One Word*, more people who were educated noticed this need. Although the word “law” was a strange and intangible concept for the majority of the society, the publication of *One Word* brought this need to the attention of certain people. *One Word* provoked some intellectuals and newspapers. Although the clerics, as always, objected to the ideas shared in that book, some also agreed with Mostashar al Dolah and tried to enforce the law. Additionally, the famous newspapers of that time began to publish articles on the law and the generalization of education. In fact, the publication of this book enabled others to talk about this issue as well.

Mirza Hasan Khan Roshdiye and the Second Group of the New Schools

The publication of *One Word* attracted the attention of a large number of newspapers of that period. Newspapers such as *Habl al-Matin*, *Akhtar*, and *Suraya* began writing and publishing articles on the necessity of building schools and public educational complexes that follow new methods of education. Mirza Hasan Tabrizi, also known as Mirza Hasan Roshdiye, after completing his religious education at the age of 22, became an Imam in one of the mosques of Tabriz. Roshdiye was very enthusiastic about reading newspapers of the time (Afary, 259-260). Afary writes about him:

“He learned about the *Akhtar* newspaper from his father. In one of the articles he read, “Europe's illiterate population is ten in one thousand, and literacy population in Iran, there are ten in one thousand.” He discussed the story with his father. It was concluded that some Iranian educated young people should go to Europe and learn the principles of teaching.” (Afary, 260)

In the meantime, Roshdiye had the plan to go to Najaf to study Islamic and religious sciences, but reading this article in *Akhtar* had a profound impact on him. Therefore, he decided to travel to Beirut and Istanbul to learn new methods to train and serve his people, study modern science, and methods to teach them. Finally, with the help of his father, he went to Beirut and then traveled from there to Istanbul. After graduating, he traveled to Yerevan and settled there. During his travels, he was introduced to the methods of teaching, children and students, alphabets, and various sciences (Afary, 260).

In the city of Yerevan, Roshdiye opened his first school, which was following the modern methods of education. Five years after the founding of his first school, Naser al-Din Shah visited his school in Yerevan on his way back from his second trip to Europe. Naser al-Din Shah praised his school and requested that Roshdiye go to Iran with him and open a modern school there. Roshdiye accepted Naser al-Din Shah's request and headed towards Iran with him. However, in the middle of the city of Nakhjavan, the Shah's view changed because his people discouraged him from building modern schools. This being said, Roshdiye was arrested by the Shah's command and deprived of companionship with the Caravan Shah. After leaving the caravan, Roshdiye headed off to Tabriz. Shortly after arriving in Tabriz in 1928, he established a modern school in that city and called it the Roshdiye School (Afary, 261- 264).

In the newly founded Tabriz school, within less than three months, seven children learned to read and write. As a result, demand for enrollment at this school increased. One of the scholars of Tabriz, Agha Seyyed Hossein Pishnmaz, initially was a supporter of Roshdiye, but after a while, he started to send students for free enrollment out of the admission time. In protest to his actions, he was told that this is contrary to school law. He did not like hearing the word "law" and expressed his opposition to it. In these disagreements and protests, a few joined him and

plotted against Roshdiye. Those who thought his school took students away from of the ulama's schools strongly objected to him. As a result of these objections, Roshdiye's school was shut down and he fled to Mashhad overnight (Afary, 265-266).

After the situation in Tabriz calmed down, Roshdiye returned to Tabriz. He created a school with the same procedure as before. However, the school was closed again because of others' jealousy. Similarly, after each return, he would establish another school, and then his enemies would shut down the newly-built school; nonetheless, he would not give up and continuously re-built schools. During one of his flyaways to Mashhad, he also set up a school there, and his school was destroyed same as before. Once his eighth school in Tabriz was built and closed due to the presence of dissidents, he migrated to Qom and spent the rest of his life there. In Qom, he established another school and taught there. He eventually died on the 12th of December, 1944, in Qom at the age of 97. Since Roshdiye is one of the pioneers of Iran's education and is the founder of the second new school in Iran, he has been nicknamed "the Father of Iranian Culture". (Afary, 269)

School of Shokatiyah Birjand

Mohammad Ibrahim Khan Alam (Shaukat al-Mulk II) began the construction of a school in 1929. His brother, with the aim of dedicating his wealth to a charitable work, provided the funds to build this school. Mohammad Ibrahim Khan Alam went to Tehran to study at Dar al Fonun and decided to open a similar school in Birjand. This school was created with the aim of making education possible for poor and low-income people. The school was initially limited to elementary school; however, due to the high demand, middle and high school were added to its

admissions. In fact, this school is the third school that was built in Iran in accordance with modern methods of education.

Bibi Khanom Astarabadi

In all historical periods in Iran, until the end of the Qajar Dynasty, and even until the early days of the Pahlavi dynasty, women were not allowed to become educated. In the only common educational system of that period, the school system of the homeschools, women had a very small and limited share. These restrictions, due to various political, cultural and social factors, limited women in many aspects. Due to these constraints, the women participated in the schools for a short time, then left the school, and eventually had to become housekeepers for the rest of their lives. Women were merely considered creatures without any rights and only a tool to provide services to men. Unquestionably, a small number of women at that time also succeeded in attending higher education levels due to their fathers' lucidity.

The possibility of the benefit of training for them depended solely on the view of the man. At the end of the Qajar dynasty, changes in the educational system were made, when the Constitutional Regime gained power. In the closed and male-dominated society of Iran, opportunities for education and development belonged to men, but after the Constitutional Revolution women struggled to revive their lost rights. Because of the construction of the Dar al-Fonun School by Amir Kabir, as well as the deployment of several student groups abroad, the Iranian educational system was becoming ready to accept further changes. With the generalization of education and the elimination of its exclusive assignment to boys, the thoughts of the public were slowly changing. Increasing numbers of modern European schools also paved the way for the community to adapt to these changes. Although many people in society were

aligned with these changes, there was disagreement over the establishment of new schools after the Constitutional Revolution.

The Constitutionalist views on the establishment of new schools were divided into three categories: the first constitutionalists believed that girls should not interfere in men's issues. From their point of view, in addition to learning how to teach children and do house-hold chores, they could learn some of the basic sciences that are related to the ethics of livelihood and family socialization. The second group of constitutionalists was that which believed that girls should enjoy all human rights and even that all girls in rural and remote areas should enter schools and homeschools and have academic facilities. The third group of constitutionalists was the one which completely disagreed with the presence of girls at the new schools, and only saw their presence in the homeschool (Menashri).

Bibi Khanom Astarabadi was one of the writers of the Constitutional Revolution who wrote articles in defense of women's education in the *Habl al-Matin*, *Tamadon*, and Parliament's magazine. Bibi Khanom established the first girls' schools under the name of the School of Maidens (Dooshizegan) in the year 1906. Men confronted the opening of this school with severe disapproval. The establishment of girls' schools and choosing the name "maiden" for it was the most controversial issue for women at that time. For the antagonists, who objected to the establishment of a girls' school, the name of the school seemed to be embarrassing and male-provoking. The antagonists wrote in a letter to Parliament to protest that a corrupted woman in her house founded the school. Therefore, despite the resistance of Bibi Khanom, this school was closed due to these objections. According to the memoirs of the daughter of Bibi Khanom, one of the clerics said over the pulpit: "We should be crying for this country in which a maiden's

primary school was founded.” After a while, with Bibi Khanom’s effort, the school reopened under the condition of only accepting girls from four to six years old (Javadi, 19-20).

The School of Maidens was the first school established for women in Iran and therefore has a special role in combating gender discrimination and women's rights in Iran. Although studying at this school like other schools was initially limited to wealthy families and the lords of that era, after some time, with the endless efforts of Bibi Khanom, more women were allowed to enter this school and exploit this educational system. These limited educational spaces for women at that time played a key role in shaping the movements of women and their protests in relation to gender discrimination. When there was strong opposition to the presence of women in society and their education and growth, this powerful woman struggled with these thoughts and tried to set up the first women's school in Iran. Bibi Khanom’s work did not go without criticism, and various newspapers published critical articles about her in support of the limited role of women in society. She also published two books, *Tadib al-Niswan* and *Maayaeb al-Rijal*. Bibi Khanom's reputation is all the greater because of the writing of these books. Bibi Khanom in her writing considered men and women to be equal beings who should enjoy equal rights, including education (Javadi, 21, 22).

Education during the Pahlavi Period

When Reza Shah gained power in 1921, he made many efforts to reform and modernize Iran including modernization (along with nationalization), secularization, and Westernization. The contradiction between modernization, namely nationalization, and Westernization have drawn precise reformist policies. He faced serious problems, including the need to strengthen his position, the speed of modernization, and the existence of strong oppositional and reactionary forces in the country. Reza Shah tried hard to eliminate these problems by implementing

reformist themes. The modernization of the education system was one of those themes. The first major reform, the establishment of the General Education Organization in 1925, was a subcategory of the Ministry of Education in order to introduce the nationalization of the educational system in Iran (Tamer, 29-31).

During this period, a single and compulsory curriculum was introduced to all Iranian schools. The final exams were introduced to the students in the sixth, ninth, and twelfth grade. In addition, private schools went under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and were forced to follow the ministry's plans. Moreover, foreign institutions were also placed under the authority of the Ministry of Education. In order to encourage the flourishing of the Persian language, it was mandatory to follow the curriculum in Persian and teach in Persian in these schools. Inspired by the experiences of traveling to Turkey, Reza Shah began literacy and adult education programs for adults through adult classes, which were founded in 1937 by the Ministry of Education with the aim of providing domestic education to the public. For increasing recognition and appreciation of the Persian language, Reza Shah ordered the printing of integrated textbooks and articles in the fields of history, literature, and mysticism (Tamer, 30-31).

Along with the modernization of Iran and the creation of 13 new ministries, during Reza Shah's era, homeschools were replaced with the new schools that were governed by the new civil law. The Parliament also approved that, from the year 1928 to 1933, a hundred students would be sent to Europe to study in higher education every year. A number of these students achieved key roles in the Iranian government after their return. Between 1925 and 1929, there was a major change in Iran's educational system. These changes included the establishment of a high level of teacher education, compulsory primary and secondary education, a model from France, an

increase in the number of primary school lecturers, and an increase in the enrollment of female students in the primary schools (Tamer, 32-35).

Tehran University

After traveling to Europe, Reza Shah was heavily influenced by universities in Western and European methods. Despite the annual student deployment to Europe, the need for specific skills and the creation of a university to teach these skills was felt strongly in Iran. During this period, Ali Asghar Hekmat offered the establishment of a university to Reza Khan. Reza Shah welcomed this offer. Reza Shah initiated the construction of the University of Tehran as the largest Higher Education Center in Iran in 1934. This institute was a combination of the Academy of Sciences, the School of Political Science, the School of Medicine, Falahat High School and Rural Industries, Falahat Mozaffar School (the first agricultural school in Iran), the School of Arts (established by Kamal al-Mulk), the High School of Architecture, and several other higher education centers in Tehran. This university was eventually constructed with six colleges, and on February 4, 1935, the establishment of the University of Tehran by Reza Shah was initiated. In addition, Tehran University was officially founded on Friday, March 15 (Tamer, 40-41).

It is worth noting that, in the time of Reza Shah, the development and expansion of schools was taking place with great progress. The increase in the number of these schools improved the number of educated students in Iran. Although the growth of these schools was high, many cultural concepts related to education were growing at a slow pace. Physical punishment, neglect of students' rights, and the dependence on some of the misconceptions of previous educational methods such as the prevalence of memorization, were among those issues. Therefore, the entry of people such as Touran Mirhadi into the field of education created a huge

transformation in these common cultural beliefs, which existed in the educational system. With the belief in Montessori's educational method, Mirhadi was able to eliminate many wrong beliefs such as gender barrier and punishment. She was among the first to people who put this educational method into practice in Iran.

”ایران مادرهای خوب دارد و غذاهای خوشمزه و روشنفکران بد و

دشت‌های دلپذیر... و همین...”

-سهراب سپهری

“Iran has good mothers, delicious food, bad intellectuals,
and pleasant meadows... and that is all...”

-Sohrab Sepehri

Chapter 2

Touran Khanoom: A Prominent Pioneer in the Educational System

“Biography is the only true history.”

-Thomas Carlyle

Given the considerable amount of emphasis and attention on acquiring knowledge, it is everyone's responsibility to strive to pave the path of seeking knowledge. There is no question that the role of Iranian women in the development of contemporary Iranian society is crucial. A careful study of the services and lives of these women is the smallest thing we can do to keep their memories alive. In order to do so, I will introduce the life of Touran Mirhadi, the Iranian pioneer educator. I will present an overview of her early childhood and education in addition to the services she offered to Iranian society.

Mirhadi played a key role in improving the educational system in Iran. In order to fathom the depth of her service, one must have a solid understanding of her life. Furthermore, in order to comprehend the path she took to cause fundamental changes in the contemporary Iranian educational system, studying her life is indispensable. I have benefitted from internet sources in order to piece together her life, because the information available about her in the Iranian book market is relatively limited. Throughout this chapter, I have been devoted to avoiding personal judgment and only expressing the authenticated information that I obtained through various resources.

Fazlollah Mirhadi and Greta Dietrich

Fazlollah Mirhadi, Touran's father, left Iran for Switzerland in 1909 full of idealism and hope for the future by means of the scholarship that was granted to him by the Iranian government. After finishing his high school in Switzerland, he went to Germany to study mechanical and structural engineering. During the First World War, Fazlollah met his future wife, Greta Dietrich, a German sculptor. A student, Greta majored in Arts at the University of Munich. The young German woman, who was attracted by the seriousness, thoughtfulness, and courtesy of Fazlollah, agreed to tie the knot with him soon after they met. Despite Greta's strict Catholic upbringing, the two got married and returned to Iran in 1919. Her family was humiliated by her marriage with Fazlollah, an Iranian Muslim man, and said, "at least you could have married a Protestant." However, eventually, Greta's family became impressed by his idealism and hard work.

After the marriage, the two decided to return to Iran and settle there. In Iran, Fazlollah Mirhadi and Greta Dietrich became parents to five children, and they raised all of them there. Greta raised her children as Iranian, but she ensured that they stayed connected to Europe by teaching them German and French and exposing them to European culture. She decided that her children would grow up Iranian but also have the chance to study in Europe like their father. Her ambition, by living in Iran as a sculptor, was to help build a completely new society. In order to do so, she started with her own children and their friends. Later, she told her children that she gave up making sculptures in order to sculpt them. Meanwhile, Fazlollah Mirhadi played a prominent role in building Iran's railroad. During the Second World War, he was accused by the government of Iran of advocating for Hitler and was imprisoned for 13 months during 1941 and

1942. Greta was able to manage all the affairs of the household and raise their children during that critical time.

Greta was passionate about building and gardening. To create a healthy environment for her children she designed their family homes and landscaped. She designed a healthy environment in which her children were able to have intellectual and physical growth. She was an athlete herself and taught her kids different sports. Not only did she carefully listen to her children and their needs, but she also asked them questions, taught them how to ask questions, and taught them how to speak up for themselves. Moreover, through all of her teachings, she taught her children to think about what they were learning. She allowed her children to choose their university majors and be the decision-makers of their own lives.

Touran Mirhadi, a Prominent Pioneer in the Educational System

After moving to Iran, Fazlollah and Greta resided with Fazlollah's father for a short time. Immediately after gaining financial independence, they bought a house and settled there. In the early twentieth century, Iran did not have a health system good enough to fight against the prevailing high infant and child mortality. Greta was struggling hard to keep her children alive. Although all of her children were diagnosed with different life-threatening diseases, such as cholera, she did her best to save them from the claws of death. After the birth of her first child, Greta vowed not to let any of her children fall ill to common diseases that plagued the period in which they lived. Therefore, during the hot summer, when the likelihood for an outbreak doubled, she did not stay in Tehran and lived in a tent in one of the Shemiran gardens, spending hot summers there (Mir Alaei, 7). Touran was born on June 17, 1927, in one of these tents;

therefore, she spent the first three months of her life in one of them. She was the fourth born out of five children (Razagh Panah, Zende, 138).

When Mirhadi was a child, the number of children's books in Persian was small and their quality was not good. Greta translated foreign books, to fulfill her children's need for stories. On the other hand, Sakineh Khanom - their old nursemaid - fulfilled their needs by telling them ancient Persian stories, such as *Khale Souske va Agha Moushe*, *Kadoo Ghelghe Zan*, and *Mahpishuni va Malek Ibrahim* (Nemati, 19). Greta knew that children have other needs besides books and education. She knew that not only their body but also their spirit should be nurtured. She permitted her children to spend time playing various indoor and outdoor games in the daytime (Nemati, 19).

Touran's mother was an artist and taught art history at Kamal al-Molk Conservatory for a while. Her acquaintance with Ali Akbar Sanaati¹⁰ was an opportunity for all of her children to participate in painting classes in order to learn the basics. This way, Mirhadi and her siblings cultivated a respect for art through their mother (Razagh Panah, Zende, 141). Education, particularly learning about different cultures, was important for Touran's mother. She supplemented Mirhadi and her siblings' education with other subjects such as language, literature, art, and music. Greta sent all of her children to Iranian schools and, as such, Persian was their main spoken language. Touran's elder brother and sister had a teacher for Persian literature. Occasionally her mother arranged gatherings on Persian literature at her home. Since Greta considered each language a gateway to the rich culture of other countries, she believed that all of her children should learn other languages as well (Razagh Panah, Zende, 139, 140). Greta herself taught all of her children German. They also learned French through tutoring sessions

¹⁰ Ali Akbar Sanaati (1916-197) Iranian painter, sculptor, and one of the most prominent sculptors of the new era of Iran.

they attended regularly (Nemati, 20). To learn English, Greta sent her children to Nourbakhsh High School¹¹ (Razagh Panah, Zende, 140,141).

After graduating from high school, in 1945, Mirhadi was admitted to Tehran University to study biology. Thanks to her education, by the time she attended Tehran University, she was fluent in four languages and had a fair amount of knowledge about world literature. During her studies at Tehran University, Mirhadi met Jabbar Baghtcheban¹² and Doctor Mohammad Bagher Houshyar¹³. Under their influence, she realized her passion for education and teaching.

According to her, she realized “which ocean’s fish she was”¹⁴ after meeting with those two distinguished pioneers of education. Especially after meeting with Jabbar Baghtcheban in Tehran University, she reached the conclusion that training and education is an ocean of thoughts, labor, and drive in which she would like to swim (Nemati,23). Later, in her interviews, Mirhadi names Jabbar Baghtcheban, Doctor Mohammad Bagher Houshyar, and Doctor Zahra Khanlari¹⁵ as the most influential Iranians she met in her life (Ahmadi, 29).

In order to pursue her love for education, she decided to abandon her studies at Tehran University. She moved to Europe in the fall of 1946 and began a new course of study at Sorbonne University in Paris. In Europe, Mirhadi focused her studies on prominent Western psychologists. She had the opportunity to study with two outstanding figures in the field, Henri Wallon¹⁶ and Jean Piaget¹⁷. During her time in Europe, in order to rebuild the ruins left from the

¹¹ Nourbakhsh High School was one of the modern high schools that was following a western standard of education.

¹² Mirza Jabbar Asgarzade (1886-1966), known as **Jabbar Baghtcheban** was a leading authority on pedagogy in Iran who was the inventor of cued speech in Iran. He established the first kindergarten for deaf children.

¹³ Mohammad Bagher Houshyar (1904-1957), Professor of Tehran University, author of the principles of education, and translator of philosophy and psychology books (Peik,29)

¹⁴ A Farsi Idiom, which refers to discovering who you are “ماهی کدام دریا است”.

¹⁵ Doctor Zahra Khanlari Kia, Professor of Persian Literature, translator, writer, and principle of Noor Bakhsh High School

¹⁶ Henri Wallon (1879-1962), a French philosopher, psychologist, and neuropsychiatrist.

¹⁷ Jean Piaget (1896-1980), a clinical psychologist known for his pioneering work in child development.

war and educate children across the nation, she voluntarily joined post-war student groups. When Mirhadi was in Europe, two years after the end of the war, she heard the sad news of the death of Farhad, her youngest brother, in a car accident. This tragedy had a profound influence on her. For consolation, she decided to turn her great sorrow into a great work for the people of her country. This terrible tragedy was only the beginning of Touran's struggle against death; however, from it the Farhad School was born.

Touran Mirhadi was introduced to Ja'far Vakili, her future husband, through a mutual friend, Fereidoun, when she was in France. Ja'far was a young major in the Iranian Army. About her first meeting, she proclaims, "When I think about Ja'far, I remember the day that I had my first date with him. I came back from college. When I arrived home, I realized that Ja'far had arrived earlier than I had. I had told my property owner that if he came, he should let him come and sit inside until I arrive." She continues, "he was there, seated on the chair when I arrived. I only saw his profile at the first moment and, at the very first glance, I realized how glorious he was. We only had two short meetings, because he had to go on a mission. After that, our correspondence began. Altogether, we saw each other on four or five occasions during those times in which he returned to Iran. When he returned to Iran, I also went to Germany to work, but we continued our communication with each other and exchanged letters. In January, when I went back to Iran, I informed him about my return. However, our meeting was very coincidental. We saw each other on the street" (Ahmadi, 11, 12).

Mirhadi completed her degree in Educational Psychology at Sorbonne University and returned to Iran in 1951. Her return was simultaneous with the time when Iranian society was experiencing fundamental cultural and political changes. With the experiences she gained through her education and life in Europe, she was looking for a way to affect the changes that

were underway in Iranian society. She started her career as a kindergarten teacher in Tehran soon after her arrival. She continued her vocational path as a language teacher in various schools, amongst which was Nourbakhsh High School (Nemati, 28).

A year after coming back to Iran in 1952, she met Ja'far Vakili once again and the two were married a year later. The couple's first and only son, Pirooz, was born on February 4, 1954; however, their happiness did not last long. Vakili was executed¹⁸ in 1954 because of his association with the Tudeh Party¹⁹ of Iran. Mirhadi says that the last time Ja'far saw Pirooz and herself was in October 1954, almost two days before his execution. At the time, Pirooz was eight months old (Ahmadi, 14). In the wake of this tragedy, Mirhadi was left alone with her infant son to build an entirely new life. In the account of her passion for Ja'far, Mirhadi in an interview proclaims, "Whenever I think of Ja'far, I thank him for teaching me the ways to eliminate my weakness from my life. One day, he said to me, "Come on, sit down and write down all your weaknesses on paper." I wrote them. Then he said, "Now, put them in front of your desk, take a look at them when you are studying at night, and see what you have done? Assess if you have worked on your weaknesses or not?" The method was a very useful method (Ahmadi, 13)."

Ja'far's death was a severe blow to Touran. However, with the support and inspiration of her mother Greta, Mirhadi got her life back on track and started to pursue her ambitions once again. Mirhadi was very young when she decided to establish a kindergarten. However, due to her young age, she was not able to obtain a permit to run the facility; therefore, her mother helped her by applying on her behalf. Furthermore, her father gave her their old home in order to house her project. Thus, she established a kindergarten with two classrooms in 1955 and named

¹⁸ Ja'far secretly sent six letters to Touran while he was in prison. These letters were subsequently published under the title of "letters from Prison". In these letters, Ja'far's love for his wife and child, as well as his strong determination and constancy, are well demonstrated.

¹⁹ **Tudeh party** was the Communist Party of Iran formed in 1941.

it after her deceased brother, Farhad. At the kindergarten, she had various roles. She was the manager, coach, and teacher. She also had to pick up the little children from different parts of the city. Her goal was to prove that Iranian children were at a high level of mental capacity and that they would be able to achieve the finest possible prosperity through proper training (Razagh Panah, Zende, 149-150).

Two years later, Mirhadi married her second husband, the schoolteacher Mohsen Khomarloo. Together, they added primary school-level classes to the Farhad facility. They gradually moved forward and expanded the school. At first, they established a second kindergarten and gained their first experience there. Parents liked the system and requested the addition of a preschool to Farhad Kindergarten. With Greta's support, they obtained the license for expanding Farhad Primary School. Each year, they added another level to the previous classes that already existed. Mirhadi learned a lot from Fakhri Golestan²⁰, who worked at the preschool when the school was newly initiated (Habib, 28). Everyone rapidly welcomed Touran's creativity, innovation, and progress in the educational system; therefore, due to the positive reception, she turned the kindergarten into a full educational complex within less than six years. Soon after, she added middle and high school level classes to Farhad as well. Farhad Educational Complex ran until 1980 and, during its operational years, it taught 1,200 children each year.

The library at Farhad School played a crucial role in the development of the educational complex as well as in the overall trajectory of Touran's work. It revealed the need for more children's books and for more accessible children's books on a wider scale. In order to overcome this need, Mirhadi and her colleagues held the first children's book exhibition in Iran in 1957. At

²⁰ Fakhri Golestan (1925-2012), wife of Ebrahim Golestan. She was a potter, translator, and activist of the rights of Iranian children.

the exhibition, Dr. Houshyar addressed the issue of children's books in the wider context. His talk became the motive for the educational journal *Sepideh-ye Farda* to devote one of their issues to children's books (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*, 26). This small exhibition showed a much wider audience the need for children's books. During that period, well-known authors, compilers, creators, and pedagogues of children's books, such as Jabbar Baghtcheban, Sobhi Mohtadi²¹, Abbas Yamini Sharif²², Samad Behrangi²³, and Ibrahim Bani Ahmad²⁴, also felt the need for children's books and tried to look for a solution (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*, 25-26).

In order to clarify the status of books for children and adolescents in Iran as well as to encourage writers and publishers to work in this field, Mirhadi, with the help of a group of her friends, held three children's book exhibitions, in 1957, 1959, and 1961 (Nemati, 32). The great success of the exhibitions turned the attention of many of the publishers, writers, and translators to the genre of children's literature. Most importantly, this newly-gathered attention did not only result in the publishing of a large number of children's books, but also in the foundation in 1963 of the "Children's Book Council of Iran"²⁵, a non-governmental organization that overviews children's books and children's literature (Nemati, 32, 33). The Children's Book Council also focused on establishing libraries in various schools. According to Touran, six people initiated the Children's Book Council, Touran Mirhadi, Masoumeh Sohrab²⁶ (Mafi), Noosh Afarin Ansari²⁷, Soraya Ghezal Ayagh²⁸, Abbas Yamini Sharif, and Mohsen Saleh Pour²⁹ (Azarang, 40).

²¹ Sobhi Mohtadi (1897-1962), famous storyteller and founder of the storytelling tradition for children in Iranian radio.

²² Abbas Yamini Sharif (1919-1989), a pioneering teacher, school principal, and author of Persian children's literature.

²³ Samad Behrangi (1939-1967) was an Iranian teacher, social critic, folklorist, translator, and short story writer who received international attention for his book "The Little Black Fish".

²⁴ Ebrahim Bani Ahmad (1910-2000), author and active in the field of child education.

²⁵ Children's Book Council known as shoraye ketabe koodak in Iran "شورای کتاب کودک"

²⁶ Masoumeh Sohrab Mafi (1925- 2004), Teacher, expert and researcher on education, and one of the leading educators of Iran in the twentieth century.

In the 1950s, board members of the Council and principals of several large and influential schools—including Farhad (Touran Mirhadi), Mehran (Masoumeh Sohrab and Yahiya Mafi), Ravesh-e No (Abbas Yamini Sharif), and Ayandeh (Touran Eshtiaghi)—focused on the growth of traditional literature in Iran. According to Touran's words, "we observed that our growing generation needed appropriate books, especially reference books, in order to move beyond the limited format and framework of textbooks" (Azarang, 40).

After the establishment of the Council, the world became acquainted with children's literary work in Iran. Iranian books were sent to international exhibitions and festivals, and some of the authors and illustrators of these books received international awards (Nemati, 37). The council became one of the most influential organizations in the development of children's literature and remains so to this day. Leyli Iman Aahi³⁰, Touran Eshtiaghi³¹, Mahdokht Sanaati³² are amongst the group of experts who worked with Mirhadi at the Children's Book Council (Mohammadi, 25). Later, this experience facilitated Mirhadi to help with the establishment of The Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults³³, an organization which promoted youth exposure to, and participation in, art and literature.

April 23, which coincides with the birthday of Hans Christian Andersen, is World Book Day. With the Children's Book Council effort, this day was also registered and recognized in the Iranian calendar. For the first year, the Council organized a ceremony on the same day in Tehran

²⁷ Noosh Afarin Ansari, One of the most prominent librarians in Iran and the secretary of the Children's Book Council.

²⁸ Soraya Ghezel Ayagh, writer and pioneer in children's literature.

²⁹ Mohsen Saleh Pour, writer and pioneer in children's literature.

³⁰ Leyli Iman Aahi (1951-now), one the founders of the Children's Book Council and a pioneering educator in children's literature.

³¹ Touran Eshtiaghi, pioneering educator in children's literature and education.

³² Mahdokht Sanaati, pioneering educator in children's literature and education.

³³ Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults known as Kanoone Parvaresh Fekri-ye Koodakan va Nojavanan in Iran "کانون پرورش فکری کودکان و نوجوانان"

at Dekhoda Elementary School³⁴. The entrance for children and adolescents was the purchase of a book written for their own age group, and the elderly could attend the celebration without paying an entrance fee. Many authors, storytellers, and booksellers were invited to the ceremony, and children had the chance to meet them personally (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*, 27, 28). Additionally, a large number of leading institutions emerged from the Children's Book Council. The first was (DONYA) Children's Research Institute³⁵ (Mir Alaei, 51). The next was The Institute for Research on the History of Children's Literature, which has published seven volumes on the history of Iranian children's literature (Mir Alaei, 52). The third was the MAM Institute³⁶ (Mir Alaei, 53).

According to Pirooz Vakili, Mirhadi and Mohsen became parents to three children: Delavar, Pendar, and Kaveh. Sadly, in 1964, their youngest son, Kaveh, died during a flood in the north of Iran. Mirhadi says,

“Kaveh was in the first grade of the elementary school when the flood event happened. On an afternoon, Mohsen and his brother decided to go to the north of Iran. We all drove up to the north with a pickup truck that belonged to Mohsen's brother. Four people sat in the front and me, Mohsen, Pirooz, and Kaveh, in addition to four other people, sat in the back of the truck. We were close to Amol when a very heavy rain began. We drove towards Alamdeh and approached to the bridge located on the road between Alamdeh and Noshahr. That bridge was broken and therefore our car sunk into the water. Those who were in front of the

³⁴ Dekhoda Elementary School was established during the first Pahlavi era and now is registered as a national monument.

³⁵ DONYA Children Research Institute is an independent, specialized, and non-governmental organization, which has been active in Iran since 1994 with the aim of early childhood care and development.

³⁶ MAM Institute is an independent and non- governmental organization with the aim of dealing with family related issues.

truck were able to get off the car and save themselves, but we who were in the back were stuck in the water. I was trying to save the kids when they fell from my hands and water took them to the middle of the sea. I knew how to swim so I saved myself; Mohsen and Pirooz were also saved. Nevertheless, Kaveh and the three other people who were sitting in the back passed away (Ahmadi, 25).”

In Touran’s own words, the death of her son caused her to extend the love she had for her own children towards all the children of Iran. In August of 1979, she lost her husband, Mohsen, who was not only her inspiration, but also her soul mate. Mohsen’s will stated that Mirhadi was to spend one-third of his property on charitable work. However, she was to be dealt yet another painful blow. After the 1979 revolution, the Ministry of Education acquired all private schools and the owners were reimbursed with minimal fees. The government, with a special focus on the ones that were co-educational, bought these schools.

Mirhadi proposed writing an encyclopedia for children and adolescents during a seminar at Nourbakhsh School in 1964. After retirement, Mirhadi launched *The Encyclopedia for Young People* with one-third of her husband’s inheritance. After the 1979 Revolution, at the 17th anniversary of the Children’s Book Council of Iran, she and more than 300 authors began to produce an encyclopedia for young people. During her lifetime, thirteen volumes of the twenty-six volume encyclopedia had been completed. The work, research, and editing for the *Children and Adolescents’ Dictionary* began in 1978 at the Children's Book Council, and the first volume of it was published in 1992 (Azarang, 34).

After losing Farhad School during the Revolution, Mirhadi concentrated her efforts on the Children’s Book Council of Iran and on research. She also spent most of her time writing books to share the experiences she obtained through the Farhad School. She published three

books based on her educational thoughts and her teaching experiences at Farhad School in order to guide the teachers and educators of the country. These books are as follows: *Do Goftar*, Two Speeches - about school libraries and their role in creating habits of study; *Ketab-e Kar-e Morrabi-e Koodak*, Children Educator's Workbook- an annual pedagogical program for kindergarten trainers; and *Jostejoo dar Rah-ha-ye Taalim va Tarbiat*, Research in the Methods of Education (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*, 5). Her works are full of respect for children and adolescents and she sincerely respected the hard work of the creators of children's books (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*, 28).

After the Iranian Revolution, she was nominated for several different awards related to children's literature. The nominations for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award³⁷ in 2013 and 2015 were amongst her highest achievements. Membership in the Board of Directors at the International Book Fair for Young Generation (twice), membership in the jury of the International Hans Christian Andersen Prize (four times), and membership in the international referees' jury of Bratislava Illustrators are amongst her international honors. She was one of seven in the world invited to speak at the International Congress of Children's Literature in Japan in 1986. Being amongst twenty world experts to participate in the UNICEF ten-year planning session (2001-2010) and preparing the heads of state in Atlanta (October 2000) are among her other international accomplishments (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*,30,31).

Education would not have been where it is today in Iran without Touran Mirhadi's contributions. Due to her genuine offerings to Iranian society, she is nicknamed lovingly "The Grandmother of Progressive Education in Iran." Sadly, on November 8, 2016, Mirhadi passed

³⁷ The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award is an international children's literary award established by the Swedish government in 2002 in the honor of the Swedish children's author Astrid Lindgren (1907–2002).

away from a stroke after two months of being in a coma in a Tehran hospital. She was 89 years old.

Timeline of Touran Mirhadi's Life

- 1927: Birth in Shemiran
- 1932: Primary school
- 1938: Start of High School
- 1945: Beginning of university
- 1946: Departure to France
- 1947: Death of Farhad
- 1951: Return to Tehran
- 1952: Marriage to Major Ja'far Vakili
- 1954: Pirooz's Birth
- 1954: Death of Ja'far
- 1955: Establishment of Farhad Kindergarten
- 1956: Marriage with Mohsen Khomarloo - Formation of the first children's book exhibition in Iran
- 1957: Kaveh Khomarloo's Birth – Foundation of Farhad Primary School
- 1958: The second children's book exhibition
- 1960: The third children's book exhibition
- 1961: Pendar Khomarloo's Birth
- 1962: Establishing the Children's Book Council
- 1964: Kaveh Khomarloo's death
- 1966: Delavar Khomarloo's birth
- 1970: Death of mother (Greta Dietrich)
- 1971: Establishment of Farhad School as a schooling complex
- 1973: Publication of "Gozari Dar Adabiat-e Koodakan" as co-author
- 1975: Death of father (Fazlollah Mirhadi)
- 1976: First membership in Hans Christian Andersen World Awards
- 1977: Farhad School was transferred to a new location (from Jaleh (Shohada) Street to Sohrevardi Street)
- 1978: Beginning of Mohsen's illness
- 1979: Mohsen Khomarloo's Death - Establishment of the Dictionary for Children and

Adolescents – Publication of “Do Goftar Darbarey-e Ketab va Ketab Khani” (First volume of Farhad School experiences)

1980: Retirement from the Ministry of Education

1981: The birth of the first grandchild (Sarah Mir Fakhraei) – Pendar Khomarloo’s daughter

1985: Membership in the Bratislava Illustrator Biennale

1986: Publication of “Ketab-e Kar-e Morrabi” - Publishing “Jostejoo dar Rah va Ravesh- hay-e Tarbiat” (the second and third volumes of Farhad school experiences)

1988: The birth of the second grandchild (Sepehr Mir Fakhraei) - Pendar Khomarloo’s son

1998: Publication of “Aan ke Amad, aan ke Raft”

2000: Acknowledgement in “the Cultural Heritage Society of Iran”

2004: Publication of “Madar va Panjah Saal Zendegi dar Iran”, in collaboration with Simin Zarrabi

2004: Publication of “Ketab khane Amoozeshi va Naghsh-e aan dar Ijade-e Adate Motale’e”

2006: Publication of “Kasani ke Jame’a ra Misazand” Interview with Touran Mirhadi

2007: Acknowledgment at “the Avicenna Cultural Center” in Tehran

2008: Acknowledgement at “the Center for the Study of Astronomy” in Tehran

2008: Publication of “Solh ra Bayad az Koodaki Amookht” Interview with Touran Mirhadi

2016: Death of Touran in Tehran

"زندگی صحنه ی یکتای هنرمندی ماست
هر کسی نغمه ی خود خواند و از صحنه رود
صحنه پیوسته به جاست.
خرم آن نغمه که مردم بسپارند به یاد"

-ژاله اصفهانی

"Life is the unique scene of our art
we each sing our own melody and leave
(But) the scene is carries on
May the melody that people remember be exuberant"

-Zhaleh Esfahani

Chapter 3

The Grandmother of Progressive Education in Iran

Mirhadi played a key role in improving the educational system. Even though she established children's book exhibitions, the Children's Book Council of Iran, and Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, little work exists in English on this trailblazing woman, lovingly nicknamed "The Grandmother of Progressive Education in Iran." I am particularly interested in examining the rationale behind this nickname. A review of the teaching methods and services provided by Touran Mirhadi to the community shows that she embodied all the positive characteristics that may exist in grandmothers - features such as patience, unlimited love, self-devotion, presence under any circumstance, indulgence, care, sympathy, forgiveness, and unconditional support. Moreover, she considered all Iranian children as her own grandchildren. After devoting sixty years of her life to providing for the essential needs of her children, I believe that Mirhadi deserves more attention and needs to be introduced to the western world. In this chapter, I aim to place emphasis on the services that Touran Mirhadi provided for Iranian society.

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child in Iran

On one occasion, Touran Mirhadi was asked what path of life she would choose if she were to be born again. She replied, "This question reminds me of Louis Aragon's poetry. Certainly, if I were born again, I would have chosen the same path" (Mir Alaei, 175). Her love for children was apparent through her work, effort, and consistency. The crown jewel of Mirhadi's career was the role she played in implementing the Declaration of the Rights of the

Child in Iran. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child was approved by the World Child Welfare Charter on November 26, 1924, as the first statement of children's rights of this kind in the world. As the result of this declaration, in the second half of the 20th century and after World War II, the world's perspective towards children and the younger generation changed considerably. Gradually, children started to be considered as trustworthy and talented citizens whose growth, education, acquisition of knowledge, and skills would provide a better future for the country and the world (Mir Alaei, 156). According to the declaration:

- The child must be given the means requisite for its normal development, both materially and spiritually.
- The child that is hungry must be fed, the child that is sick must be nursed, the child that is backward must be helped, the delinquent child must be reclaimed, and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succored.
- The child must be the first to receive relief in times of distress.
- The child must be put in a position to earn a livelihood and must be protected against every form of exploitation.
- The child must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents must be devoted to the service of its fellow men.

According to Mirhadi, education and knowledge are keys to preventing human misery and war. She was one of the first people in Iran who stood up to defend the rights of the child and stabilize the child's position in the community. She viewed life as an opportunity for growth, interaction, and proliferation for every living creature. Amongst all the earthly creatures, humans have the power to recognize their needs and build their life according to their needs (Mir Alaei,

160). She recognized education as a means of helping humanity understand their needs and respond to them accordingly.

Farhad School

In Europe, Mirhadi worked as an intern in an elementary school. It was interesting for her to notice that the teacher did not have a textbook. According to Mirhadi, the teacher would choose a subject and the students would write about the subject themselves. Then the teacher would convert the finalized text that they had worked up together into one page with the small printing device she had. She would print it for all of the children and would give it to them. Additionally, since the teacher wanted to enable the students to discover the scientific facts on their own, she would organize many daily tours to allow the students to explore nature and museums (Habib, 36).

After World War II in Europe, Mirhadi was confronted time and time again by the question of violence. She started asking herself: Why do people kill each other? Why do people build prisons? Why do people go to war? Does their culture permit this? Eventually, she came to the conclusion that the problem was in the education system, which did not cultivate men, but instead produced soldiers and submissive followers. In other words, it trained obedient men who must listen to commands and constantly strive to keep their elders happy. The observations, studies, and experiences that Mirhadi gained while studying in Europe helped her identify her career goals and aspirations.

Mirhadi also had the experience of studying in Iran and was well acquainted with the educational system in Iran. These observations helped her better understand its deficiencies. Therefore, she decided to love the children of her country as much as she loved her deceased

brother, Farhad, and devote everything she had in her power to improve their lives. Beginning then, she dedicated her life to improving children's education, since, to her, education was the key factor in making lives better (Nemati, 27, 28). With her work, she wanted to prove that the best educational system would produce enlightened individuals rather than slaves. Mirhadi truly believed that all Iranian children have high mental potential, and that appropriate education could be used to improve their talents and to make them flourish in their society.

This realization was the beginning of the innovative educational system that Mirhadi and other educators initiated in Farhad School from 1955 to 1979 (Seyedi, 33). With the Farhad School, Mirhadi established a school that did not have a grading system that supported honors or rankings, a school in which no competition existed, a school whose library was always filled with students and teachers, a school where teachers and students wrote textbooks together, a school that encouraged observation and discovery, and a school where art had a key role in allowing creativity to flourish amongst the children (Habib, 40).

Farhad School offered a wonderful environment for all the kids, teachers, and families to experience the glory of this world. According to Mirhadi, "one day there was a flood in the south of Tehran; each of Farhad's schoolchildren brought a breakfast meal with themselves. Then, they gathered breakfast and together, in groups of three to four people, walked to the flood area. This was in order to provide breakfast for kids who were affected by the flood" (Seyedi, 34). At Farhad School, all the members made the decisions together. In every step, from preparing to transcribing, both children and teachers were involved in the annual school planning. Lessons were planned and structured to facilitate experiential learning on the part of the students. For this reason, many daily tours were organized at Farhad School to allow students to explore nature as well as various museums (Amini, 22). If the teachers were to ask students a question, their

purpose was to find out whether the children had understood the subject being discussed in the classroom. Likewise, questions were asked in order to assess the need for a redefinition and to make a better use of the teaching materials in order to make the subject more understandable for children. The point of assessments was not scores or grades; teachers evaluated children's homework to check their understanding.

Farhad School's educational system was unique to its time and continues to be so, even when considering the present-day educational system of Iran. During the lifecycle of Farhad School, a large amount of time was invested in research on innovation in the educational system. Soon after, the results of this research were used nationwide. Farhad school was a student-centered educational complex. The laws at the school were written by the students, and the teachers had to follow the laws that were legislated by the students. For instance, the students adopted the law that teachers could not punish the students or kick them out of the classroom. In many cases, students were challenged to voluntarily teach the new lessons to their classmates. Based on the students' decision, grades were not the only criteria for advancing in studies. The educational system is different now, and this type of authority is not given to the students. In other words, a student-based educational system is not accepted by the current educational system. In the current educational system, students only listen and study what their teachers tell them to. Meanwhile, the principal sets all the laws and makes all the key decisions for the school. The differences between the educational systems could be the reason why, remarkably, most of the graduates from Farhad School have since been very successful.

The Farhad School was able to come to life despite the unsupportive national system in which it operated. The aforementioned observations—coupled with other experiences obtained in Europe, which Mirhadi has repeatedly mentioned in various books—made it possible for her

to achieve the successful experience of Farhad School and its students. This is why she spent sixty years of her life teaching different approaches to a healthier life for the younger generation in Iran. She made a lot of effort to set this approach into practice; however, the weak education system of Iran was not able to accept this.

Dismissal of Competition and Hierarchy

In 1976, the Minister of Education suggested that Mirhadi accept the Deputy Minister of Education position so that she could use her valuable experiences from the Farhad School in order to appraise and restructure the national educational system and its methods. However, Mirhadi refused to accept this position, as she was opposed to any type of hierarchy in the system (Azarang, 36).

Mirhadi's method in Farhad School was based on an approach to teaching that diverged heavily from the typical pedagogy of the time. According to her approach, each child has a unique world that should not be compared with those of other children. This view is similar to Montessori's view that considers children's worlds unique; therefore, like Montessori³⁸, she believed that to assess children's knowledge, they should not be compared with one another. As such, one of the fundamental principles that Mirhadi put in place at Farhad School was collaborative rather than competitive work. She believed competition brings death to children's feelings and knowledge. For this reason, she was always one of the opponents of the tendency towards grading, multiple-choice assessments, and university entrance exams (Mohammadi, 40). To address the need she felt while studying in Europe, Mirhadi and her colleagues designed a system in which there was no ruler. In her words,

³⁸ Maria Tecla Artemisia Montessori (1870 – 1952), was an Italian educator known for her philosophy of education and her pedagogical viewpoints.

“The decision was left to the students and teachers. No rules, no competition: whatever it was, it was self-management. When Farhad School’s enrollment increased from eight hundred to one thousand and two hundred, its educators were able to solve the problems observed due to the consideration of children and their needs. The most important thing was the children's constant collaboration. Farhad educators eliminated score and competition-based system from the school. They also eliminated the position of valedictorian. Their only concern was the general advancement of children and their collaboration. The children set up school rules, and Mirhadi and her colleagues became teachers and the follower of the rules that the children had set up. Children themselves, as the student council, enforced these laws.” (Seyedi, 33)

Mirhadi was nominated twice for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (Mir Alaei, 65). In an interview, she states that “I do not like competition, and I have only accepted the candidacy for two reasons: one, to introduce Iran to the world, and second, to provide financial aid to compile a children's and adolescent dictionary” (Mir Alaei, 66).

Peacemaking in Education

Mirhadi is one of the most highly regarded scholars in studying the concept of peace in the area of education. She believed that “the idea that peace can be formed by itself is unrealistic and impossible” (Nasrin Pei, 24). Similar to her dismissal of competition and hierarchy, she sought to minimize elitism in education as a whole. Therefore, in addition to implementing an educational system that was very creative, modern, and progressive for her time, she was an advocate of free education, which is based on the natural and spiritual life (Nasrin Pei, 11). Much

like the philosophies at the core of the Farhad School, this stance was profoundly influenced by Mirhadi's experiences in Europe.

Witnessing the catastrophic and bitter consequences of World War II agitated Mirhadi. From then on, she put all of her efforts into studying the causes of war. In her opinion, a sense of insecurity, anxiety, and thirst for power are amongst the foremost causes for armed escalation. Violations of human rights, for example, cause such anxiety and apprehension. Thus, in reality, war happens when inner peace is absent. Mirhadi believed that it was crucial to convey a sense of security to children while in school. Progress, as she saw it, could not happen when students felt the full burden of material, emotional, spiritual, and social risk. According to her philosophy, these four pillars of security must be accounted for at every stage of children's lives (Nasrin Pei, 33). In response to the question of how mobilization achieves peace, Mirhadi says,

“Life experiences tell me not to stay silent! Not only in my life, but also in the lives of many other people, their life experiences may tell them the same thing. Those who, like me, were the young generation of World War II, and our fathers, who experienced World War I and II, know how peace disappears when a war begins. They also know how people prepare for fighting, killing, and destroying when a war begins. This group must have thought about war enormously and must have been sensitive to it. Sadly, several things happen in order for people to prepare for war, invasion, murdering, torture, and all the acts and all the behaviors that humankind does during the war. 1) People lose their sense of security. During World War II, people initially lost their sense of security and thereupon were ready to fight. 2) People must start to believe that their ultimate goal is to gain power, and, therefore, they would do anything to achieve that goal. 3) They must

become full of anxiety and apprehension. 4) People must think that they have an enemy and that they have every right to overcome that enemy.” (Nasrin Pei, 23, 24)

The cycle of violence, which Mirhadi outlines in the quote above, rests on the feeling of insecurity or risk at its core. As such, Mirhadi’s educational philosophy puts security at its core. By creating a sense of security for students, they can focus on developing their minds and opening themselves to understanding instead of putting their energy into addressing their own anxieties.

This being said, the pedagogic work of Touran Mirhadi was instrumental in the internalization and establishment of a culture of peace in Iran. She focused her work on the roots of Iranian society that are in the domain of education. Having this in mind, she designed a system in Farhad School to spread the peace culture amongst Iranian children. She knew that independence in thoughts in addition to independence in actions reinforces peace amongst humanity. When inner comfort comes into place, inner peace grows within people. She also tried to raise awareness amongst the families in this regard. In her own words,

“The social duties of families, in the present day, are much more than in the past. This is no longer only my problem; it is everyone’s problem. It is our children’s problem. Therefore, it is necessary for all of us to make a choice amongst the cultural, artistic, and literary materials for children. As parents try to deliver the best nutrients to their children to grow, they must provide the best and most suitable material for their child's inner self as well, and they must be much more sensible in this regard.” (Nasrin Pei, 26)

This material care for the child's inner self went far beyond just what could be offered by the educational system. In addition to including participation from the family, Mirhadi's educational methodology focused on youth literature as a resource that was intimately tied to promoting the enrichment of children's individual minds and individual lives. This teaching philosophy did not go without criticism. In one interview, Mirhadi states that, when she taught in "Danesh Saray-e Aali" in 1967, "she was summoned by SAVAK for interrogation." During the interrogation, she was asked:

"Why do you talk about Samad Behrangi in your classes? Why do you introduce Samad Behrangi's works?" Her response was fascinating: "Students enter the university or institution of higher education to learn about children's literature. These students know Samad Behrangi. Furthermore, to teach a lesson, every teacher starts from the known and then moves to the unknown. Therefore, in order to talk about the tales of today, I have to start with what the students have read already and are familiar with. Since Samad Behrangi is well-known and his "little black fish" was published by the center of intellectual development, and *Oldouz va Kalagh-hayash* (Oldouz and his Ravens) is being printed and distributed in this country, I will start with him. Why not talk about him? I only know Samad Behrangi as a village teacher, and I am not familiar with his other works. It is important that students have read his books. For that reason, I start with what is known to them and then slowly introduce other books. In fact, I gradually expand their horizon and talk about poetry and literature (Ahmadi, 11, 12).

Mirhadi's goal was to inspire children to grow of their own volition, like Samad Behrangi, about whom—per this interview—she recounts being interrogated for including in her

lesson plans. Instead of pushing the educators out of their comfort zone, Mirhadi preferred to help them expand their comfort zone to include more challenging and complex work. In addition to working outwards from sources familiar to her students, Mirhadi specifically worked to frame conversations about academic subjects such as literature so that they included an explicitly moral education as well.

Outstanding Disposition

Touran Mirhadi's view on education, love towards children, and children's education was a combination of the love and holistic approach of her parents in raising her. The educational system that Mirhadi presented to the learners at Farhad School was the essence of Greta Dietrich's teachings to her five children and their numerous friends. Greta had a key role in shaping her view towards life. Her teachings were a combination of what she found best in the two cultures. Later, in an interview, Mirhadi revealed, "my family raised us in the way that we all became independent people. My parents had a lot of concern in being able to bring up capable children." (Goftegoo, 19) In her own words, Mirhadi "learned [her] resistance in life from [her] mother, not only through her words but also through her deeds. She showed [her] the ways to fight against hardships, and that is how [she] learned the qualities of a decisive person" (Mir Alaei, 26). The method she used at Farhad School was a combination of the teaching of her parents and the experiences she gained through living in Europe.

Since Mirhadi was half-European and half-Iranian, she became familiar with two different cultures; consequently, this familiarity with two cultures had a significant impact on her view of the world. Growing up in a modern family that was familiar with the foundations of modernist thought enabled her to enjoy freedoms that were not common in society at that time. Freedom of education in addition to being able to do various activities such as traveling, cycling,

and skiing with friends were amongst the reasons that soon permitted her to see the dissimilarities between girls and boys. Her teenage years coincided with the time when the Iranian urban community, especially in Tehran, was experiencing progress and transformation. She was one of the first people who had the advantage of attending Nourbakhsh High School (Mohammadi, 6). Likewise, Touran Mirhadi became acquainted with the style and manner of Montessori's teachings – which were so influential to the Farhad School – while studying in Paris (Mohammadi, 40). In her interviews, Mirhadi extensively discusses her educational experiences in Europe. One particularly insightful excerpt is as follows:

“We were twenty-eight girls from different parts of the world. The educators at the European Institute did not test us when our training was completed. I asked, “Don’t you hold any test sessions?” They said, “We have already tested you.” I said, “How did you do that?” They said, “We evaluated your teacher's comments during the training period. We made the necessary measurements after your trip to Belgium and the Netherlands. We also measured your capability with the practical work that we gave you. There is no need for extra measurement. Good luck to you!” Before our trip, they said to all of us twenty-eight girls, “We will accommodate your stay, but you will have to find a way to pay for your expenses!” We were supposed to go to Belgium and Netherlands to explore their innovative educational institutions. Together we thought, “How are we supposed to make money?” One suggested making a puppet show and selling tickets for it! We made a puppet show and sold tickets. After that, we decided to make baby clothes and toys and sell them. Then our treasurer went to the institute and informed them that we had raised the money for the tickets.” (Habib, 61, 62)

Then she reveals that they went on the trip on their own, without any teachers supervising them.

She continues,

“We were all nineteen or twenty years old. We went on the trip by train. Someone welcomed us at the train station and sent us to the facilities where we were supposed to stay and informed us about the specific time and place where we were supposed to meet the next day. We went to various institutions, talked with the professors, and went on field trips with the schoolchildren. Our three-day-long journey ended in a great way. Then, we had tickets to Holland. Another woman welcomed us there, and there we lived with Dutch families. We saw their advanced institutions, we asked questions, and then we returned to France. They did not even ask us for a report. Later, we realized that our test was to make our own money and see these places on our own. (Habib, 62)

Per her mother’s teaching, Touran Mirhadi embodied the definition of persistence and decisiveness. Although she experienced numerous tragic incidents throughout her life, she never ceased striving towards her goals. Instead, she decided to turn her great sorrow into great work for Iranian society. Much like her decision to establish the Farhad School after her brother’s passing, she established “The Children’s Book Council” to foster a culture of book-reading amongst the young children of Iran after she lost her son Kaveh during a flood in northern Iran. With the inheritance left behind by her second husband, Mohsen Khomarloo, she launched an encyclopedia for young people. The driving force behind Mirhadi’s work was a relentless ambition to improve the Iranian educational system. Therefore, she utilized whatever resources she was able to access in order to fulfill her lifelong goal of improving the realm of education in Iran (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*, 12, 13).

Love is amongst her strongest motives for Iran. She says, "I always think of the great nation of Iran, and I consider their right to be much more than what they already have." (Mirzaei, 46) One of the best sources of her personal life and its effect on her work is an article written by Ali Mirzaei, a former colleague and student of Mirhadi, which discusses the superior principals that made her successful. From Mr. Mirzaei's point of view, "Touran Khanoom is a person who loves everyone." He adds that "Mirhadi loves her work; she is a role model of persistence against the difficulties of life, someone who transforms every great sorrow into a great work. Someone who gives everyone confidence in her deeds. She does not stop until she sees the best outcome of her work, she is tireless, and she gives everyone hope at any moment. In her sixth decade of active participation in the fields of culture and education, her scientific, cultural, and educational thoughts are still fresh. She also is someone who always recommends having a positive relationship with others. She fertilizes self-confidence in her colleagues." Mirzaei continues, "according to my deceased friend and colleague, Dr. Hussein Azimi, Mirhadi is someone who is always anxious about Iran. She is not only known for her decisive presence in the national and international context of children's and adolescent literature, but also for her crucial contribution to the founding of the Children's Book Council. She is also known for her management of the publication of *The Encyclopedia for Young People*, which, due to her pioneering structure in the creation of educational activities, has been recorded in the history of Iran's education and culture" (Mirzaei, 37).

Enhancing the Culture of Reading

As mentioned in chapter two, Mirhadi was exposed to books since childhood and reading books was a habit of hers since then. Some of the stories she read in childhood deeply affected her thought and future goals. Moreover, the influence of culture surrounding books and literacy

pushed her to hold children's book exhibitions and to aid in founding the Children's Book Council. By closely monitoring and examining publications through the Children's Book Council, she strove to eliminate the presence of the concepts of inequality that would otherwise be detrimental to the promotion of peace within the pedagogic realm.

Two factors that can show how this culture affected her personal life can be found in the following interview. During this interview, Mirhadi is quoted saying that when she was eleven years old, two stories left a profound impact on her heart and soul and affected her life to a certain extent (Razagh Panah, *Zendeh*, 142). The first book was about the story of a five-year-old boy who loses his parents while evacuating the city during World War I. The pain of this wandering child had a profound impact on her, and since then, a hatred of war and the disasters caused by it became a part of her (Razagh Panah, *Zendeh*, 142,143). The other book, Mirhadi proclaims, was about Maya, the elusive girl from the beehive. Maya is a playful honeybee, who one day flies away from the hive and is captured by the hornets. This book also implanted in her the motivation to serve, self-transcendence, and the value of effort; it also instigated her to love her country, her people, and its culture (Razagh Panah, *Zendeh*, 143).

In order to promote the culture of reading books, Farhad School's first library was established without spending any money and without having a librarian. Teachers requested the kids to bring a book in order to enroll in the library. Altogether fifty books were collected and with these donations, Farhad School's library was established. The year after that, the number increased to two hundred books. According to Mirhadi, in the last year, they had fifteen thousand books in the library. Since all of the books were provided by the schoolchildren, they took good care of them (Ahmadi, 81). In Farhad School, books were considered an essential tool to broaden

the children's knowledge while also training them in critical thinking. Children were always encouraged to read books and use the library at Farhad School.

Team Work

Touran Mirhadi had an outstanding personality that distinguished her from her contemporaries. She was the symbol of group work and solidarity in a country that was said to be failing at collaborative work. She deeply believed that everything that was being done in Farhad School, The Children's Book Council, and *The Encyclopedia for Young People* should be done through collaboration (Mohammadi, 32). In Farhad School, most of the activities were performed in groups. It is important to note that teamwork does not only uphold independence in actions, but it also erases comparison-based and competitive systems since it creates equality amongst the participants. When there is no winning or losing, everybody holds the same share in the implementation of the work. In the following passage, Mirhadi talks about the power of collaborative work. It is this sentiment which is at the heart of all of her projects and which makes her a unique historical figure. According to Mirhadi,

“Collaboration begins as soon as the child learns to move around at home with you. When you tell him/her: take care of this until I get back. In fact, you tell him/her that he/she is important! The child feels he is capable of doing things. For instance, almost all of our school activities were collaborative at Farhad School. This means that children took part in teaching the lessons; often, they solved problems for one another and helped each other. For this reason, we also started to believe in a participatory approach. Stronger children propelled and strengthened the weaker children, and consequently, Farhad School was created without a pass-or-fail concept.” (Nasrin Pei, 44)

Growing up amongst four other siblings, Mirhadi grew up in a culture of appreciation for teamwork. In addition, her mother Greta emphasized to her children the importance of collaboration and joint effort. In Farhad School, group work was always preferable to individual work. Indeed, Farhad School was built on the culture of cooperation, intercommunication, group work, and volunteer effort.

Per this philosophy, the schoolchildren played an important role in running the school. Amongst all the students of each class, one student was chosen as the class representative. Different responsibilities were defined for each of the class representatives. Amongst their responsibilities, having regular meetings with each other in order to set the behavioral standards for students and dealing with conflicts were the most important. Students were always helping each other with their studies. When a student needed extra help with their studies, the tutor was chosen from the student body. Academically stronger students always supported their weaker classmates in order to contribute to their education. The class representatives had the responsibility of identifying the weaker students' needs and arranging educational tutors for them.

The Encyclopedia for Young People

While Mirhadi was in Farhad School, she felt the need for a reference book accessible to the schoolchildren; however, the first and only available reference book for children and young adults at that time was a translation of an American source which was published in ten volumes (Mir Alaei, 103). She and her colleagues felt that the available dictionary underserved the needs of Iranian schoolchildren. A proposal for writing an encyclopedia for children and adolescents was presented during a seminar at Nourbakhsh School in 1964. The children's and adolescent

dictionary's work, research, and editing began in 1978 at The Children's Book Council and a volume of it was published in 1992 (Negah, 34).

According to Noosh Afarin Ansari, one of the most prominent librarians in Iran and a colleague of Mirhadi's, the encyclopedia is one of the main foundations of Mrs. Mirhadi's thoughts. In her interviews, Mirhadi repeatedly emphasized, "mankind is not a commanding machine," and adds, "I studied the education system of different countries and observed that education systems limit the students" (Ansari, 38). She goes on to say that "one of the ways out of the conflict resulting from limitations imposed on the children, which can cause anxiety and psychological reactions amongst them, is to create 'safe' and trustworthy books for children and adolescents" (Ansari, 39).

For this reason, Mirhadi and her colleagues, who felt the need for safe books for children, started to prepare appropriate textbooks and reading materials for them. Ansari continues, the existence of a dictionary should be considered indistinguishable from Mirhadi's perspective on the schooling and the education system. Since the establishment of the first children's books exhibition in Iran in 1957, she focused on non-fiction literature, including reference books (Ansari, 39). Ansari also clarifies that Mirhadi considered a textbook a valuable source, like a launch pad or jump board. She considered the dictionary as a part of the education that must accompany textbooks (Ansari, 46). Mrs. Mirhadi chose the age range from 10 to 16 years for the encyclopedia; during this stage of life, children and youngsters are wanting to understand what is going on, learn more about the world, and learn how everything is important to the world (Ansari, 39).

Abdolhossein Azarang, another colleague of Mirhadi, explains the importance of Mirhadi's work by saying, "Some of the encyclopedias require much time, money, and energy

due to the wide scope of work” (Azarang, 52). By referring to the heavy workload associated with writing an encyclopedia, he referred to the importance of the work of Mirhadi and the people involved in publishing the encyclopedia. He also adds that more than 200 people were involved in publishing the first volume of the encyclopedia and more than 600 were involved in the twelfth volume. This number includes people in the stages of printing and production to distribution and sales (Azarang, 53).

Publications

During her life, Mirhadi traveled to various places and schools in Iran to pass her experiences on to other teachers. She also wrote three books about her experiences in Farhad School so that other teachers could benefit from them (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*, 16). These books are as follows: *Do Goftar*, Two Speeches - about school libraries and their role in creating habits of study, *Ketab-e Kar-e Morrabi-e Koodak*, Children Educator’s Workbook- an annual pedagogical program for kindergarten trainers, and *Jostejoo dar Rah-ha-ye Taalim va Tarbiat*, Research in the Methods of Education (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*, 5).

Ketab-e Kar-e Morrabi-e Koodak is the outcome of the instructor's work and experience with ways to coordinate individual differences in the development of children, with the intention of avoiding the creation of a closed system in the pre-primary system. This book describes techniques to enable children to enter various social activities in all fields and techniques to shape their minds as an influential creature (Mir Alaei, 80). *Do Goftar* is about the school libraries and the habit of reading books. The first volume of this book, published in 1979, is about the experiences of Farhad School (Mir Alaei, 84). In her book, *Jostejoo dar Rah-ha-ye Taalim va Tarbiat*, in discussing children’s bad habits, she notes:

“The janitor used to sweep the school’s yard every day. Not only the yard but also the tables, couches, classrooms’ walls, glasses, windows, and public areas’ furniture, in addition to the pine tree, plantain tree, berries’ bushes, and honeysuckle bushes, were not safe because of the students. They were kicking the flowers, rooting the seedlings, and demolishing everything. After their lunch, the dining hall was an ugly scene. Seeing these scenes, we [The Farhad School coaches] started to question ourselves: Why were students demolishing things around them? Why did they not care to preserve the environment? What was our fault? Did this show the families’ failure in training their children? After examining the problem, we came to know that family education is an important factor, but it cannot be the origin of such collapse. During those days, I went to work for another school, where I witnessed a scene that enlightened many of the issues. During the classes’ break time, the vice-principal came out of the office with a long ruler in her hand. The students lined up and walked towards the stairs quietly. They were scared of the vice-principal to the extent that they were moving like living sculptures with fear in their eyes, worried about the principal’s ruler. In that environment, fear and terror were dominant, not beliefs and principles. I said to myself that I would rather not try to curb the students’ energy this way. We, The Farhad School coaches, never tried to deceive ourselves with these types of methods. After doing some research, study, and consulting with experts, we found out that the children have an excessive amount of energy, but when they set goals for themselves, they can quickly organize their energy (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*, 21, 22).

Mirhadi thus was not concerned with discipline of this kind but more so with helping these kids grow by their own volition. While this directly echoes her educational philosophy, it is more significant to know that this passage is part of the book that was published as a guide for teachers. What we see here is that Mirhadi was concerned with transforming education—not only in the context of her school but as a field entirely. Moreover, by doing so through her teachings, rather than pursuing policy outright, we see Mirhadi here conducting herself along the same philosophy.

In appreciation of her hard work and exceptional public service, Mirhadi was selected as an executive board member of various international children's literature organizations. Furthermore, she was nominated for various international awards. Four main institutions regarding Iranian children's literature, which have been active since the 1950s and 1960s, are the Children's Book Council, the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, the Peik Journals, and the Franklin Book Program (Mir Alaei, 66). Mirhadi was able to establish one of these four main institutions, Children's Book Council, and had a profound influence in establishing the rest (Razagh Panah, *Khadamat*, 4, 5).

Concluding Remarks

According to Mirhadi, the educator is a bridge. They guide the child to become grown so that they can contribute to the production, development, and advancement of a country (Mir Alaei, 124). A teacher must be modest, patient, and precise. It is a necessity for them to have a neutral state, a creative mind, delicacy, and depth of thought. They should be flexible and must be able to establish a sincere and humane relationship with their students. It is essential for them to have the power of design and prediction. Mirhadi was an exact model of all of these constructive characteristics. The Italian educator, Maria Montessori being her role model in her educational methods, Mirhadi put all of her effort in developing on the ways that reinforced children in natural learning.

In fact, Mirhadi lived and practiced her philosophy of education. Throughout her life, Mirhadi dedicated herself to proceeding her child-centered approach to education. She initiated a system that widely prepared teachers for that educational method. By pointing out the changes that the Iranian educational system underwent over the past two centuries (chapter one), emphasizing on Mirhadi's biography (chapter two), and describing the services she offered to bring changes into children's literature as well as children's education (chapter three), I tried to demonstrate the reasons why Mirhadi is amongst the pioneers of Iranian education.

At the core of Mirhadi's career of incredible service to the children of Iran was her philosophy of love. As teachers engage with the students while they are in universities, teachers too must intimately confront the same truth that Mirhadi herself so gracefully confronted: what happens in the classroom today influences what happens in the world tomorrow. From Mirhadi's career as an activist, an educator, a teacher, and a student of life, we can come to a greater understanding of the radical potential of pedagogies based on understanding. This outstanding

woman devoted more than 60 years of her life to improving the educational system of Iran. Were she alive today, Mirhadi would say that academics like primary school teachers must prepare their students for life. If you fill the class with love today, the world will be filled with love tomorrow.

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