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Gender Bias in Persian Literature Textbooks

Ronak Karami¹

Abstract

Even though Iranian women had a strong presence in the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the Islamic regime imposed new strict rules and regulations on them. Encouraging women to pursue education and take part in society did not improve women's social position since job opportunities were limited for them. The investment in women's education was to benefit society and the new regime because the state needed educated mothers at home whose children would ensure the nation's prosperity. Accordingly, the educational system would be the most efficient way to strengthen traditional sex roles so that at least half of the population would not pose a threat to the Islamic Republic. Whereas the premise that subordinate gender roles for women have been institutionalized since the 1979 Revolution is well-known, this article adds to this knowledge by studying both the textual content and the visual representations of Persian literature textbooks used for the last three grades of high school. The paper aims at, first, observing the presence of gender stereotypes in Persian literature textbooks, and second, illustrating the extent to which these textbooks demonstrate gendered ideologies based on the regime's Islamic values. This essay's analysis confirms a pro-male bias in Persian literature textbooks in high school. The results of this research show that women have been underrepresented in titles, dialogues, stories, and pictures. The findings of this study are notable as they help the audience to identify and clarify some of the most significant ideological issues that are being taught to Iranian students nowadays.

Keywords: Persian literature textbooks, gender bias, revolutionary ideology; 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iranian women, traditional gender roles, textbooks,

Introduction

Hoping that the 1979 Revolution would free Iran from Shahism, Pahlavism, and all the pressures which the Shah imposed on people, many Iranians took part in the 1979 Revolution. However, the revolution caused a regression in the country (e.g. eight unprofitable years of war with Iraq). Moreover, the Islamic regime imposed its own strict rules and regulations on Iranians to control society with its Islamic ideologies.² Accordingly, the new state intended to replace the Pahlavi era's ideologies and representations with its own values and illustrations. Iranian women's position in family and society was one of the most important domains that had been changed after the 1979 Revolution. In contrast with the practice of sexualizing women during the

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² There is a discussion within the Islamic world about the interpretation of Islamic views. In this article, every time phrases such as "Islamic ideologies" or "Islamic values" are mentioned, it refers to the Islamic views that have been defined and interpreted by Shi'ism and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Pahlavi era, the Islamic regime established rigid regulations for all representations of women: “posters, banners, even postage stamps instructed women in appropriate social and ethical behaviors, including public dress and veiling” (Shirazi, 2010, 109). The meaning of womanhood became entangled with motherhood as “Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian clergy promoted the idea that the ideal woman is the mother who raises pious children for the Prophet’s community” (Aghaie, 2005, 95). In this sense, Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet Mohammad, who is an important religious figure for Shi’is, is admired as the most excellent of women (Aghaie, 2005, 95). According to the Islamic Republic’s ideology, Iranian women should take the women of Karbala³ as their role models. These women were ready to sacrifice their lives and their loved ones for Islam so that as daughters, wives, sisters, or mothers of a martyr, they will be treated as martyrs and will be rewarded later in paradise (Aghaie, 2005, 96).

As the Islamic regime desired to construct national, revolutionary, and Islamic modernity, the figure of the woman had been established “as a metaphor for a besieged nation, an embattled self, a delicate interiority, the uncontrollable other, the unpierced pearl to be bought and protected, or the sacred interior” in all areas (Abu-Lughod, 1998, 233). Encouraging women to pursue education and take part in society did not improve their situation since job opportunities were limited for them. The investment in women’s education was to benefit the society and the new regime in numerous economic and non-economic ways. The reason was mainly that the state needed women at home as mothers who were familiar with the values of the 1979 Revolution so that they can train their children (most importantly, their sons) based on those values. The state “claim[ed] “...” that if girls were educated they would develop into educated mothers who will raise intelligent children who would ensure the nation’s prosperity” (Shafiei, 2011, 27). In this sense, the Islamic regime insisted on pre-modern normative concepts of a woman as wife and mother which can be read in books of ethics such as the Quran (Abu-Lughod, 1998, 91). Abu-Lughod (1998) asserts, “The confinement of women within the home, the gendered splitting of the private and public, and the exclusion of woman from the public sphere are all inadequately premised on the virtues of motherhood and chastity.” (Abu-Lughod, 1998, 218). Accordingly, in order to be accepted in the society, Iranian women must perform as the pillar of the family, abide by all the laws laid down in sharia, and accept the misogynistic gender coding that had been chosen for them by the new government’s version of Islam (Abu-Lughod, 1998, 233).

The most efficient way for the Islamic regime to strengthen the traditional sex roles has been “through formal and informal socialization techniques so that at least half of the population would not pose a threat to the system” (Touba, 1987, 146). Hence, the educational system has become an important way to foster the revolutionary spirit and traditional sex roles in the new generation. Through the educational system, both children and young adults can be manipulated in order to grow up thinking of their traditional sex role as being normal (Touba, 1987, 146). Educational institutions in developing countries such as Iran are not designed to shift social attitudes in favor of women; thus, the classroom can serve as a place for nurturing gender bias and stereotypes. Textbooks play an important role in the educational system in Iran and the common perception is that whatever is printed in the textbook must be practiced; consequently,

³ Karbala is a city in Iraq, best known as the location of the battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Imam Husain (the grandson of Prophet Mohammad). After the martyrdom of Husain, all women who had been related to him and had been presented in that battle were captured. The most adored female figure in this battle is Zaynab (Imam Husein’s sister) because she accompanied her brother through all the difficulties and she fought against his enemies after his death.

the students passively absorb what they have been taught (Islam and Asadullah, 2018, 2). The patriarchal orientation of the Islamic regime has been incorporated into textbooks used from elementary to high school; in this way, it will serve to fortify the traditional values concerning women's position in society, which are held by a majority of the population (Touba, 1987, 144). These stories have very personal impacts on readers: "Biased textbook contents not only limit women's worldviews and career choices, but they also distort their self-image and the image of the opposite gender group" (Islam and Asadullah, 2018, 2). These textbooks reflect cultural values and act as an instrument for persuading students to accept those values (Taylor, 1973, 1045). Hence, both children and teenagers are significant for the state because they are useful indicators of societal norms. For this reason, "the Islamic Republic has placed great emphasis on reforming the educational system to reflect its ideology, and education has been allocated a generous portion of government expenditures" (Hoodfar, 1994, 15).

Textbook contents have been manipulated by the Islamic regime for political purposes in Iran; however, gender bias in learning materials remains an overlooked topic. This essay focuses on Persian literature textbooks of the last three grades of high school in Iran which are being taught today. The reason for choosing the Persian literature course is that storytelling can be one of the most effective ways to promote gender stereotypes and this course includes a collection of prose and poetry from well-known authors. While much research has focused on the primary levels of learning, this article concentrates on the last years of school and aims to illustrate the extent to which these textbooks represent gendered ideologies based on the regime's Islamic values. Since the textbooks are prepared and distributed by the central government and all students use the same books, it can be said that this article studies sex-role socialization patterns through the educational system for the whole Iranian society. To do so, it examines both the textual content and the illustrations of these books to depict gender stereotypes that have been presented based on the Islamic regime's ideologies. This research has notable implications for gender and education policies in Iran. Even though the idea that subordinate gender roles for women and girls have been established since the 1979 Revolution is well-known, this study adds to this knowledge by elucidating gender stereotypes that are presented to youngsters through pictures and stories in textbooks. Therefore, elaborating gender stereotypes and its relation to the government will help the audience to identify and clarify some of the most significant ideological issues that are being taught to Iranian students. For this purpose, the following analysis is divided into two sections: the textual content and the illustrations. The first section has been divided into textual analysis and story analysis by grade.

The Textual Content of Persian Literature Textbooks

Words, Sentences, and Depictions in the 10th Grade Textbook

In general, Persian literature textbooks are written by men, for men; that is, women's presence (either as the author or the central character) is pale. The 10th grade Persian literature textbook only contains one story titled after a female character's name, Gordāfarīd.⁴ In addition, the distribution of dialogue for each gender is notable: female characters speak less frequently and with shorter sentences. Not only the form, but also the content of the female characters' dialogue depicts gender stereotypes. The first instance of dialogue of a female character (the mother of the family) in the story "The Wall" (Divar) in the 10th grade textbook is when she asks

⁴ She is one of the heroines in *The Book of Kings (Shāhnāmeḥ)*, an enormous poetic opus written by the Persian poet Hakīm Abū l-Qāsim Firdawsī Tūsī around 1000 AD.

her son if he knows where the father of the family is (*Farsi 1*, 2018, 25). Through her later dialogue, the mother is demonstrated as a person who does not have adequate sense or reasoning to answer her child's questions. While the narrator, who is a little boy, asks why there are walls between the houses, the mother answers: "What kind of a question is this?" and "How would I know? Leave me alone!" (*Farsi 1*, 2018, 26). It implies that it is the father's duty to answer the children's questions and spread his wisdom, as he is depicted as more rational by nature. Additionally, since the examples of dialogue between individuals of a particular gender are less frequent in the textbook, students of the silenced gender will have fewer opportunities as dialogue participants. Moreover, since one sex initiates the conversation most of the time, the other sex will have more passive participation in the dialogue (Islam and Asadullah, 2018, 5). Islam and Asadullah (2018) state, "This marginalization within textbooks indirectly shapes female students' acceptance of disempowered roles as the female students become discouraged to play roles that are restricted linguistically as well as occupationally" (Islam and Asadullah, 2018, 5).

Both men's and women's presence in the context of the 10th grade Persian literature textbook demonstrates the traditional image of gender from the books of ethics; i.e. the personality traits presented in the textbook depict men as traditionally courageous and as achievers. They are also represented as deviants and producers of conflict. On the other hand, women are never presented as assertive, whether innovative or deviant, since they are traditionally represented as women who are nice, pretty, and reserved (Touba, 1987, 152). In the context of the chosen Persian literature textbooks, female characters do not work outside the home except in one story called "The Lionesses of Iran" (Shir Zanan-e Iran), in which the female character is employed as a social worker (*Farsi 1*, 2018, 87-93). Hence, "males are traditionally presented as overwhelmingly performing most economic, scientific, sport and recreational activities as well as being religious and more politically and socially oriented" (Touba, 1987, 153). In the story "The Wall," every time the male narrator refers to his mother, she is busy with indoor activities such as pouring tea or washing fruit and vegetables (*Farsi 1*, 2018, 21). In the story "The Old Man Was the Apple of Our Eyes" (Pirmard Cheshm-e Ma Boud), the male narrator refers to the wife of a great Iranian poet as a woman who would not show her face (*Farsi 1*, 2018, 43), which means that she was always behind the curtain hiding from other men. Accordingly, female characters are portrayed as victimized, passive, and subordinate, whereas male characters are portrayed as bold, brave, and active agents in society (Islam and Asadullah, 2018, 14). The most celebrated image of women in Persian literature textbooks is the lion woman, i.e. a woman who is as courageous as a man. Thus, positive aspects of the personality, such as braveness, which has been assigned to women, are male traits. In the story "The Lionesses of Iran," the female narrator is very proud when she is called the daughter of Khomeini by Iraqi soldiers (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 89). Moreover, after she receives a letter from her family when she has been captured by Iraq military forces during the Iran-Iraq War, she mentions that the letter smelled like her father, the hero of her life (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 99). Therefore, being dependent on a father figure seems necessary for a woman to survive. The lion woman can endure her dreadful situation by thinking about her father. A good woman is a woman who obeys the ruler of her society (i.e. Khomeini) and who acts for the benefit of the Islamic regime.

Words, Sentences, and Depictions in the 11th Grade Textbook

The 11th grade Persian literature textbook includes a story with the title of a male's name, "Kaveh" (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 100), whereas it contains no story with a female's name in the title.

Additionally, there are only three instances of dialogue from three female characters among all of the stories. These three female characters are mothers of the central male characters, and they reinforce the traditional image of the mother as a nurturer (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 127, 135, 151). Otherwise, the textbook is completely male-centered. Through the story “Tender Verve” (Zogh-e Latif), the male narrator identifies his aunt in terms of her male counterpart, mentioning that it is a great sorrow for a woman to be without a husband and a child (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 40). Hence, women’s happiness is bound to men and they find themselves valuable when nurturing other people. The male narrator of “Tender Verve” also notes that the mental issues and complexes that exist in today’s society are the result of the clash between east and west and east cultures (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 40). In the story “Friendship Bond” (Misagh-e Dousti), some young boys pick an apple blossom, refer to it as the white-skinned maiden, and swear on its chastity that they will support each other through ups and downs (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 51). Accordingly, women’s chastity is being praised in a way that one would swear to it. In this sense, the best model for women to follow is Fatima, who appeared in public wearing appropriate garments, such as a veil. Fatima’s heroic role as a woman is demonstrated through her pain, suffering, patience, and piety. She is the sorrowful mother, friend, and compassionate companion of her husband.

In the Persian literature textbook or the 11th grade, the word “man” has been used instead of “human” in numerous texts. It seems that not only the characters within these stories are all men but also, the audience is male, e.g. in one of Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī’s⁵ stories, the narrator says: “Men [humans], carry the weight with their effort and endeavor, not with the strength of their body” (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 16). In another story, that of Aṭṭār,⁶ the narrator states: “A man should be busy in the market (bazaar) so he would not forget God, not even for a moment” (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 58). In addition, in the poem named “Fatherland,” the poet notes that sacrificing one’s life is a man’s job (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 116). Therefore, referring to men as the agent of both sexes highlights the superiority of males and subordination of females in a patriarchal nation such as Iran. Since Iran is a patriarchal society, the father-child relation seems to be a remarkable bond and the orders and advice of the father of the family seem to be important. This is also evident in the 11th grade textbook through the biography of Mawlānā⁷ when the writer mentions that the poet had gotten married to someone only because of his father’s orders (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 29). It should be noted that the father-child tie goes back to the relationship of God as a father to human beings and the Prophet Mohammad and 12 Imams to the nation (Dowd, 2000, 24). Moreover, the cultural and historical images of fatherhood are of authority figures such as Khomeini.

Words, Sentences, and Depictions in the 12th Grade Textbook

Similar to the two previous Persian literature textbooks, the textbook for the last year of high school depicts women who are only engaged in domestic roles. There are no extracts with female names in the title and little dialogue has been attributed to female characters. The high number of female characters who are engaged in domestic roles is one of the common forms of gender-stereotyped representation in these three textbooks. In the story of “Goose Kebab” (Kabab-e Ghaz), the male narrator’s wife’s only concern is how to be a perfect hostess (*Farsi 3*, 2018, 142). Therefore, female occupations seem to be traditional and less valuable and female characters appear to be introverted and passive in terms of personality traits. Consequently,

⁵ A well-known Persian poet (1414-92).

⁶ A 12th century Persian poet.

⁷ A 13th century Persian poet.

systematic underrepresentation of females is evident regardless of whether one looks at the text or pictures (Islam and Asadullah, 2018, 1).

Overall, the only female character names that have been mentioned in the three Persian literature textbooks are Zuleika, Fatima, Sudabeh, and Gordāfarīd. Other female characters have been referred to as mothers, sisters, aunts, wives, and, in the story of “The Lionesses of Iran,” they are also called the daughters of Khomeini. It can be said that women have been excluded from these books and even when they appear, they often play insignificant roles, remaining both inconspicuous and nameless. Moreover, their dialogue is noticeably less than male characters. In the stories, “loving, watching, and helping are among the few activities allowed to women” (Weitzman et al., 1972, 1130). Those few female characters who exist in the stories of the books play traditional feminine roles, directed toward pleasing and helping their husbands, brothers, and fathers. Accordingly, it seems that women are simply invisible through words, sentences, and representations. The political reason behind traditionalizing women’s role is that the regime and Iranian clergy need women who raise pious children for the Islamic community. Even though the Islamic Republic opens the way for women to be educated, it still wants to keep them subordinated. According to their ideology perfect Iranian women should be ready to sacrifice their lives and their loved ones for the Islamic regime like a lioness.

In these Persian literature textbooks, women can also be represented as a lioness or a manipulative whore. Both Zuleika and Sudabeh have been mentioned in these textbooks as the manipulative whore who tried to seduce a handsome young man. In the case of the lionesses, Zaynab is the finest model for Iranian women. Even though she is described in pious terms and she is praised for her endurance and perseverance, she is compared to a brave man, a man of honor, and she is characterized as a fighter whose weapon is her skilled rhetoric. She is a woman with knowledge of the Quran and a marvelous public speaker, an outspoken person, fearless, and at times she is compared to a lion. She is a woman of loyalty and kindness, a friend and protector of orphans, and one who is genuinely interested in the welfare of all women (Aghaie, 2005, 116).

Stories within the 10th Grade Textbook

There are 28 texts from male writers within the 10th grade Persian literature textbooks, not including texts that have been selected from the same writers more than once. On the contrary, because Persian literature does not lack great female authors in its history, only two texts from female authors have been presented in the book. Rābi’a Balkhī, Zhaleh Alamtaj Ghaemmaghami, and Forough Farrokhzad are great women poets in the history of Persian literature who have never been mentioned in school textbooks. In addition, Simin Dāneshvar and Zoya Pirzad are among well-known Iranian women prose writers who have been ignored in the educational system. Even though there are numerous eminent female authors in the western world, none of them have been mentioned in the world literature section of the book, i.e. all of the extracts are from male writers. Additionally, the central characters are men as well, e.g. Tsar or Tamerlane. The only section which involves female authors is the chapter that includes the Islamic Revolution’s literature. In this part, there is one poem and one piece of prose that have been written by female authors propagating the ideologies of the 1979 Revolution (*Farsi I*, 2018, 84, 87). Accordingly, gender identity can be related to national identity and politics. These female writers are included in the book as good women who support the values of the 1979 Revolution and the present regime. It can be said that the values regarding sex roles being propagated by the religious clergy are being formally transmitted to the generation of the revolution (Touba, 1987, 143). Overall, only one political and social role for a woman was

portrayed in the textbook, which was social worker. Unlike men, who are shown as having successful professions, it seems that those women who are in one way or another associated with the Ahl al-Bayt⁸ become significant and noteworthy. As Aghaie notes, “Persian literature is filled with information about prominent female Shi’i religious figures” (Aghaie, 2005, 97). Thus, the textbook presents the images of holy females in the Shi’i tradition who participate in jihad (i.e. Islamic struggle for a just cause, often war) and whose sacrifices are central, such as the social worker in “The Lionesses of Iran.”

Stories within the 11th Grade Textbook

Whereas about 36 extracts from male authors are included in the 11th grade Persian literature textbook, there is no trace of female authors. Scanning the list of titles and authors in the textbook as the very best-designed learning books gives the students the impression that females are not very important because no one has bothered to write about them or include them as writers. The textbook reflects a man’s world via both the illustrations and the textual content. In this book, there is only one story, “Tender Valve,” which includes a female character. This text is from a male narrator’s point of view telling the story of his aunt (*Farsi 2*, 2018, 40). The narrator elevates the “good old days” when everything was simpler than nowadays. Among those things that belong to the glorious past is women’s demeanor. Even though the narrator’s aunt is financially independent, she is very gloomy because she does not have a husband or a child. Hence, she considered the narrator to be her child. The narrator mentions that his aunt never criticized her condition because she knew that this is God’s will, which is best for all. It seems that this presentation is identified as the “very best” for Iranian women, for they must follow God, the prophet, and Khomeini’s orders.

Stories within the 12th Grade Textbook

Compared to 32 extracts from male authors, the number of extracts from female writers is small in 12th grade textbooks: there is only one poem from a female poet, Parvin E’tesami, in this book. Altogether, there are two stories with central female characters in the three textbooks: one from a female writer, the other from a male narrator. There are two poems from two female poets and there is only one poem with the title of a female’s name, Gordāfarīd. In these textbooks, women are excluded; that is, the students would notice the lack of a female presence. Moreover, whenever females exist in these books, they are presented with bias in a sense that the students would observe the dominance of one gender over the other.

This study reveals that women are underrepresented to a great degree in the titles, central roles, and illustrations of high school Persian literature textbooks. The gender bias is even more evident within the 1979 Revolution’s literature, where boys lead and rescue others while girls follow and serve. Adult men and women are equally sex-stereotyped: men engage in a wide variety of occupations while women are presented only as wives, aunts, daughters, sisters, and mothers. Through these textbooks, the regime teaches the appropriate behavior for both boys and girls. Inferior socialization of women is verified in the stories since the greater values belong to men. Females are not seen interacting together the way males are, and boys seem more skilled than girls in physical tasks. Due to the limitations that are imposed on women (such as their hijab and chastity), females do not have the freedom to inquire, explore, and achieve, and thus they are

⁸ Within the Islamic tradition, the term refers to the family of Prophet Muhammad.

automatically inferior. Additionally, stories that include females are not as long as those which include males. There are numerous stories about teenage boys and their cooperation, whereas there are no such stories about teenage girls in the textbooks.

Visual Representations in Persian Literature Textbooks

The distribution of illustrations is likely a valid indicator of the dominance of men and subordination of women in the textbooks. Most of the pictures portray men, either singly or in groups. Whereas the three Persian literature textbooks contain about 70 illustrations of males overall, they contain only 3 pictures that include females. It should be mentioned that this essay does not consider those pictures that show men in front and women in the back as a representation of women. The first picture belongs to a poem titled “Preserving the Truth” which has been composed for the battle of Karbala and martyrdom of Husain. The picture was painted by Mahmoud Farshchian⁹ and shows the women of Karbala (relatives of Husain) crying beside Husain’s horse. The women’s bodies and faces are not visible because they are covered by a black veil (*Farsi 1*, 2018, 64). The second picture belongs to the story of “The Lionesses of Iran,” which demonstrates a woman with appropriate social and ethical behaviors, including public dress and veiling (*Farsi 1*, 2018, 89). The third picture belongs to the title page of the revolution literature’s section. This picture presents a group of women who came to the street to support the Islamic Republic in public dress and veiling (*Farsi 1*, 2018, 86-7). Thus, females have been underrepresented not only in titles, dialogues, and central roles, but also in pictures within the three textbooks. Including females in stories or pictures does not guarantee gender empowerment or equality, for “patriarchal customs and social norms continue to affect gender roles through socialization processes at school and home ... and women remain poorly represented in economic as well as political spheres” (Islam and Asadullah, 2018, 3). The passivity of women is evident not only in their exclusion from visual representations, but also in the way they are restricted by their clothing and dresses, which prohibit more adventurous activities. For more clarification, this article includes a table in which the presence of both females and males through words, sentences, stories, and visual representations have been illustrated.

⁹ A contemporary master of Persian painting and miniatures

1. Text Content: Non-Pictorial					
a. Words					
Titles (Female)			Titles (Male)		
10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
1	0	0	2	1	2
Total: 1			Total: 5		
Non-Domestic Social Roles (Female)			Non-Domestic Social Roles (Male)		
10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
1	0	0	17	14	13
Total: 1			Total: 44		
b. Sentences					
Dialogue (Female)			Dialogue (Male)		
10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
18	3	7	109	92	108
Total: 28			Total: 309		
c. Stories					
Authors (Female)			Authors (Male)		
10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
2	0	1	28	36	32
Total: 3			Total: 96		
Leading Character (Female)			Leading Character (Male)		
10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
2	0	0	22	16	15
Total: 2			Total: 53		
2. Visual Representation					
Female			Male		
10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
2	1	0	26	21	23
Total: 3			Total: 70		

Conclusion

Not only did the 1979 Revolution not make the social situation of Iran better, but also it caused a regression in the country. The Islamic regime imposed its severe rules on Iranians to control Iranians' lives via its Islamic values. Therefore, the new state replaced the values of the Pahlavi era and representations of Pahlavism with its own ideologies. Meanwhile, Iranian women's position in family and society was one of the domains that changed drastically after the 1979 Revolution; that is, new kinds of restrictions were imposed on women. In contrast with the practice of sexualizing women during the Pahlavi era, the Islamic regime established strict rules and adhered to rigid regulations for all graphic representations of women. For the new regime, the ideal woman is the mother who raises pious children for the Islamic community. The excellent model for Iranian women should be the daughter of the Prophet Mohammad, Fatimah, who sacrifices her children for Islam when necessary. Although the Islamic regime paid attention to women's education, it did not improve their situation since the job opportunities were limited for them. The state claimed to train women with revolutionary values so that they could train

their children (most importantly, their sons) based on those values. In this sense, the Islamic regime insisted on pre-modern normative concepts of a woman as wife and mother, which can be read through books of ethics, e.g. the Quran. From then on, Iranian women were to perform as the pillar of the family and accept the patriarchal rules that had been chosen for them by the new government's version of Islam so that they can be accepted in the society.

To strengthen traditional sex roles, the Islamic regime has chosen both formal and informal socialization techniques as the most efficient ways to ensure that at least half of the population would not pose a threat to the system. Consequently, the educational system became an important way to transfer the values of the 1979 Revolution and traditional sex roles to the new generation. The student textbooks (from elementary to high school) serve to fortify traditional values concerning women's position in society because the patriarchal orientation of the Islamic regime has been incorporated into these books. Since the educational institutions in Iran are not designed to shift social attitudes in favor of women, the classroom serves as a place for nurturing gender bias and stereotypes. Whatever is printed in the textbook must be practiced in the class, as textbooks play an important role in the education system in Iran; thus, the students passively absorb what they have been taught. This biased content not only limits women's worldviews and career choices, but they also distort their self-image and the image of the opposite gender group. Hence, children and young adults are significant for the Islamic republic, as it has placed great emphasis on reforming the educational system to reflect its ideology.

Although textbooks' content has been manipulated by the Islamic regime for political purposes in Iran, gender bias in learning materials remains an overlooked topic. This essay focuses on the Persian literature textbooks of the last three grades of high school in Iran which are being taught today. While much of the research has been focused on the primary levels of learning, this essay concentrates on the last years of school and teenagers' books. The paper aims at illustrating the extent to which these Persian literature textbooks demonstrate gender bias through stories and illustrations. For this purpose, this article studies both the textual content and the visual representations in these books to depict gender stereotypes that have been presented based on the Islamic regime's ideologies. This article's analysis confirms a pro-male bias in Persian literature textbooks in high school. The history of Persian literature includes numerous notable female writers; however, these Persian literature textbooks do not mention or introduce these authors to the students. The results of this research show that women have been underrepresented in titles, dialogues, stories, and pictures. They are either excluded or poorly represented; that is, even if there is a female as a central character, her occupation is usually traditional and less prestigious than males. Women appear to be involved more in domestic and indoor activities while men have a higher presence in professional roles. Even if the students only scan the pictures or the texts, they will notice systematic underrepresentation of females. It seems that the state wants to keep the subordinate status of women in society and to heighten the vulnerability of females. Social norms, cultural traditions, patriarchal attitudes and ideology, gender stereotypes, and discrimination toward women pose a challenge to achieving gender equality in Iran.

This research has notable implications for gender and education policies in developing countries such as Iran. The significance of this study lays in the way it breaks down the ideological codes of the time that are presented to the youngsters through pictures and stories. It illustrates the way gender is supposed to be practiced in Iran in the present time. Therefore, elaborating on gender bias in textbooks will help the potential audience to identify and clarify

some of the most significant ideological issues that are being taught to Iranian students. The reason that this essay has focused on textbooks is that in comparison to other school-specific drivers of gender inequality, textbook content is less researched and frequently overlooked in Iran. Not only Persian literature textbooks of other grades, but also other fields of study such as social sciences require further research so that the effects of the ideological codes on students can be made evident. Subsequent research can examine both the hidden Islamic ideologies within these books and their effects on the students' gendered identity. This research can study other grades at schools or other fields of study both in the past and present. Furthermore, one could prepare surveys and interviews to depict the effects of the textbooks on the new generation. Such examinations are important, first, because they might reveal reasons for some common traditions or specific behaviors among Iranian people, and second, they might awaken the society and help the people to recognize the ideological codes hidden in every aspect of their lives.

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