

Women in Iran

CHAPTER 2 THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The nineteenth century debate on modernity did not, for the most part, consider the status of women. Centuries-old practices that subordinated the rights and position of women to men persisted throughout the 1800s. Yet while the conversation on modernization and reform did not seriously discuss the status quo regarding females, some women began to question the status quo regarding their rights and position. Thus, just as the modernization debate paved the way for the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11, so too were the seeds of women's advancement sown in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the salient features of women's status in nineteenth-century Iran, beginning with a discussion of the general features that characterized the lives of Iranian females. After considering the general status of women in the nineteenth century, this chapter will turn to a discussion of Iran's first feminists: Táhirih, whose commitment to the Bábí religion caused her to be put to death; Bibi Khanum Astarabadi, known for her treatise *The Vices of Men*, a response to a widely-read commentary penned by a Qajar prince called *The Correction of Women*; and the Qajar princess Taj al-Saltaneh, whose famed memoirs are filled with feminist content. These three women came from three different backgrounds, but all insisted, in different ways, on the need for women's advancement in Iran, and may have paved the way for a shift in thinking in Iran about the status of women. Finally, the chapter will discuss protests as one of the ways in which women were permitted to participate openly in the public sphere in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These protests are important to note because they likely set a precedent for the manner in which women participated in the Constitutional Revolution.

