

EXPLORING THE VOICES OF IRANIAN WOMEN IN THE QAJAR ERA:

A STUDY OF TAJ AL-SALTANEH'S AND BIBI MARYAM

BAKHTIYARI'S EXPERIENCES AND LEGACIES

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ABSTRACT

For a long time, the voices of Iranian women in history have been silenced and ignored. It is only recently that scholars have paid attention to the crucial role women played in shaping and etching their contributions to history. In this thesis, I attempt to amplify the voices of two iconic figures during the Qajar era (1789-1925): Taj al-Saltaneh (1884-1936) and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari (1874-1937). I use their memoirs to explore their contributions to women's awareness. Three different angles are used in this study: literary, historical, and women and gender studies lenses. These disciplines help to understand the importance of their memoirs and their significance in women's studies by reviving their voices and experiences. This project aims to highlight women's voices in the past that could influence the empowerment of contemporary women and girls.

DEDICATION

To my mom, Farah,

And all the brave Iranian women.

Woman

Life

Freedom

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Vantage Point

My personal reasons for conducting this research project are rooted in the experiences I had growing up in Iran. I went through different types of discrimination. As women, we are not allowed to sing or ride a bicycle. We are forced to wear compulsory hijab and have little control over our clothing in the public sphere. Women are being pushed to get married and have children through both the educational system and the media. I know what it means to be counted as the second sex. All my life, I wondered about my identity as a woman and as a human being, and it led me to search for my role model, not in the figures the government presented to us in the schoolbooks or TV series, but in history. Also, I am from the Bakhtiyari tribe myself and as a Bakhtiyari female researcher, I strived to know about my ancestors more.

General Background

The Qajar era, spanning from 1789 to 1925, was an essential point in Iranian history, as the country dealt with the complications of modernization while trying to adhere to the principles of Shiism. The Qajar dynasty ascended and ruled Iran for over a century. One of the characteristics of this period was a gendered division of labor, and women were primarily circumscribed to domestic and childbearing and childrearing duties. Despite these limitations, some women challenged traditional and societal expectations and became agents of change. Nevertheless, the legacies of these exceptional women were often forgotten and marginalized in history. It is only

in recent times that historians and scholars have begun to understand and recognize the crucial role these women played in Iranian history during the Qajar era.

In this thesis, I intend to amplify the voices of two iconic figures during the Qajar era, namely Taj al-Saltaneh (1884-1936) and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari (1874-1937). Taj al-Saltaneh was a Qajar princess and the daughter of the fourth Qajar king, Naser al-Din Shah, and the sister of Muzaffar al-Din Shah, the fifth king of the Qajar dynasty. She was an open-minded woman, an advocate for women's rights all her life, a painter, and a writer. She wrote her memoir when she was thirty, included in *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity 1884-1914* (2003). Her writing style is moving, combining personal stories with social happenings, along with vivid descriptions and poetic touches. Moreover, Taj al-Saltaneh married three times and not only sought a divorce from her first husband, a taboo gesture across several dimensions, but also abandoned the hijab, which was a revolutionary turn for her time.

Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari was born and raised in the Bakhtiyari tribe and was a tribal woman, warrior, and a political activist. She was a passionate advocate of the Constitutional Revolution and participated in an armed battle against the king. Maryam directed a castle and its people and allied with Germany against the British army to restrict foreign invasion. She authored her memoir in a book published as *Kāṭerāt-e Sardār Maryam Bakhtiyārī* (2003) (Memoirs of Commander Maryam Bakhtiyari) when she was forty-four years old, narrating her personal life along with the social events happened during her lifetime. Her writing style is fast-paced, representing her nomadic lifestyle, with detailed descriptions of the people in her life and facts about her challenges with the family and the state. Through studying their memoirs in my research, I highlight their invaluable experiences and contributions to Iran's societal and cultural landscape and examine them from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Significance of the Study

My research project intends to highlight the unheard voices of women during the Qajar era and explores the causes of their marginalization. Through intersectional lenses, I seek to understand the position of women in family, society, and culture during the period. Through a comprehensive analysis of women's literature, such as memoirs, journals, articles, and essays, and examining the literature on women, my research project aims to elucidate how their identities were formed. I focus on studying the two women who challenged the conventional definitions of womanhood and femininity and exploring how they went beyond the pre-defined "normal" woman during the Qajar era.

Previously, there was a lack of literature on Iranian women in history, which caused their absence from the historical narratives. However, recently, scholars have begun to pay attention to the position and role of women in the past. Since the patriarchal system has been prevalent in many societies and cultures for centuries, it is necessary to focus on the efforts of women who have carved a niche for themselves in history through their unique contributions and their uncommon ways of practicing their being. By acknowledging the accomplishments and experiences of these women, I seek to support the empowerment of women, not only in Iran but also across the world. I believe that the emancipation of women can be made possible through providing a discrete history for contemporary women to solidify their sense of identity by looking at their peers in the past.

In my thesis, I attempt to amplify the voices of two iconic figures during the Qajar era: Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari. In my research, I use their memoirs, *Kāterāt-e Sardār*

Maryam Bakhtārī and *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity 1884-1914*, to conduct my research on exploring their deeds and impacts. I have incorporated three different angles in my study: literary, historical, and women and gender studies. These disciplines help me to understand the importance of their memoirs firstly as a subjective narrative style with selective reflections on specific personal, social, and historical events and their significance in women's studies by reviving their voices and their experiences, secondly the societal and historical contexts of their past and present, and thirdly to explore their contributions during the Constitutional Revolution and women's movements. In the following chapters, I examine their memoirs from these three perspectives in greater detail. Also, all the quotes from Bibi Maryam's memoir and *Tadīb-Al-Rejāl (Pāsoḡ be Ta`dīb al-Nesvān-e Zan Setīz)* from Persian to English are my translation. Taj al-Saltaneh's memoir was already translated to English by Abbas Amanat.

Research Questions

In my research project, I study Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh's memoirs and relevant primary and secondary sources from the Qajar era. Since I employed three different approaches, namely literary, historical, and feminist, the range of questions I attempt to answer is broad. I aim to answer the following questions in my thesis:

1. What is the significance of memoir as a literary style in Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's works?
2. To what extent were the societal and cultural circumstances of Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's environment reflected in their memoirs?

3. How did the patriarchal systems affect Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh during the Qajar era?
4. How are Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's contributions to the Constitutional Revolution perceived and reflected in their memoirs?
5. In what ways did Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh resist the societal and gender norms prevalent during the Qajar era?
6. Can we consider Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's memoirs as an act of resistance? Why?

Literature Review

Several remarkable works have been written on Iranian women during the Qajar era. These works primarily focus on analyzing the literature produced by women during this time, including essays and journals. In this section, I provide an overview of the most significant works on Iranian women during the Qajar era, focusing on their conditions and everyday struggles. Subsequently, I examine the literature on the memoirs of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh.

Gholamreza Vatandoust in *Zane Irānī dar Nashriāte Mashrūte* (2008) (Iranian Woman in Journals of the Constitutional Era) explores Iranian women's works published in different journals before and during the Constitutional Revolution. He discusses women's emerging literature, such as memoirs, articles, and journals. He also mentions women's associations and schools founded by women and for women. As Vatandoust mentions, most articles, journals, and associations did not adhere to gender equality; however, they covered numerous topics, such as women's education and proposed school curricula. For example, some suggested that topics such as mathematics, geography, physics, and history should be covered in schools for girls. In addition, the author

delves into some issues addressed in women's publications, including a comparative analysis of Iranian, European, and Japanese women's positions, education, and employment. Vatandoust also discusses that some women's writings covered Iranian women's limitations in education and financial independence. Vatandoust's book is important for my project as it illuminates Qajar women's concerns, struggles, hurdles, and their approaches to resistance.

Shaqayeq Fathalizade and Roqaye Aqabalazade have collected and edited two essays, "Tadīb Al-Nesvān" (Disciplining Women), by Khanlar Ehtesham al-Dowle, published in the last decade of Naser al-Din Shah's reign, and "Tadīb-Al-Rejāl" (Disciplining Men), in one book named *Tadīb-Al-Rejāl (Pāsoḵ be Ta'dīb al-Nesvān-e Zan Setīz)* (Disciplining Men (A Response to the Misoginistic "Disciplining Women")) (2016). "Tadīb Al- Rejāl" (Disciplining Men) by an anonymous author is an answer to a misogynist book, "Tadīb Al-Nesvān" (Disciplining Women); however, its publication date is not mentioned in the book. The text is dominated by a patriarchal culture in which women are expected to follow strict, predefined gender roles and prioritize the happiness and satisfaction of men over their own. It suggests that women are submissive to men and reinforces the idea that the primary purpose of their existence is to serve men and fulfill their needs. There are two books in response to this book: one is "Tadīb-Al-Rejāl" (Disciplining Men), by an anonymous author, and the other one is *Ma'āyeb Al-Rejāl* (The Defects of Men) by Bibi Khanum Astarabadi. The edited book contains the former.

"Tadīb Al-Nesvān" is in ten chapters; each covers topics such as how women should behave, talk, walk, eat food, keep their hygiene, dress, sleep, be in bed with their husbands, wake up in the morning, not complain, and not argue with their husbands. "Tadīb-Al-Rejāl" by the anonymous author, on the other hand, responds to the book mentioned above in a rather angry tone, asking how the writer of "Tadīb Al-Nesvān" expects so much of women whom he considers

having half the mental ability in comparison with men and criticizes the author's degrading treatment of women who give birth and raise children. The author provides a detailed description of women's daily lives during that time, focusing on their many responsibilities. Women were overburdened with various household chores and were required to take care of multiple children while dealing with an often unfaithful husband, who would usually engage in sexual relations with other young men or women. This act would lead to the spread of venereal diseases among women, as well. The author criticizes the era's cultural and societal norms, which prevented women from having the right to divorce their husbands and work to be financially independent and earn their own money. She laments the unfortunate reality that women had to deal with, which was to rely solely on their husbands, preventing them from independence and having agency in life. She criticizes the fact that despite men's knowledge of women's dependency on them and having no other means of support, they still mistreated women. The source is valuable since it delves into the male outlook on women and explores the experiences, challenges, and obstacles women encountered daily.

Janet Afary's book *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (2009) examines women's diverse roles in Iranian society, both within and outside marriage. In particular, Afary discusses women's roles in Iran's history such as mothers, wives, daughters, and mothers-in-law. The book also analyzes women from various social and economic backgrounds and explores their secret circumstances, dress codes, and how they presented their bodies in public and private spheres. The beginning chapters of Janet Afary's book discuss the status of women during the Qajar era and direct attention to those who were confined to the harem. Afary believes women in the Qajar harem were categorized into four distinct classes. These classes included formal wives, favorite temporary

wives, other wives from temporary marriages, and enslaved women. Afary also explores their various roles and social positions.

Moreover, Afary examines how women employed hijab, a dress code imposed upon them. She explains that women used hijab as a tool of resistance against prevailing social norms and cultural constraints, making them practically invisible. By concealing their identities, women could move around the city anonymously and engage in activities such as meeting lovers, visiting love brokers, or obtaining abortions without the fear of being recognized or caught. The book also discusses the topic of women who dressed as men, women slaves, and homosexual relationships between women. This book is a valuable source for my thesis as it provides insight into different gender roles and the conditions of women in harem during the Qajar era.

In the “Introduction” of *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic* (2004), Guity Nashat briefly introduces Iranian women from the Qajar era to the 1979 Revolution and afterward. In the Qajar section of this chapter, she discusses the conditions of elite, urban, and non-urban women and the societal norms and duties they expected to fulfill at the time. Nashat also addresses the level of literacy among men and women during the Qajar era, where she discusses that despite the restrictions imposed on urban women, examples of which are not being allowed to interact with male strangers and being confined to the *andaruni* (inner courtyard) of their homes, women were not entirely devoid of agency or power. They had a vast range of responsibilities, including household financial management and child-rearing. According to Nashat, non-urban women had more freedom of movement in comparison to urban women. They were not bound to employ hijab since they undertook various non-domestic, such as planting rice and weaving carpets. This chapter is essential for my thesis as it has substantially enriched my perspective on Qajar women by paying

attention to their involvement and position within society, their limitations, and the cultural expectations of them.

Nashat continues in another chapter, titled “Marriage in the Qajar Period,” which discusses marriage ceremonies, polygamy, temporary marriage, and intra-dynastic or royal marriages (members of one royal family marry members of another royal family). She discusses that most marriages were officiated by religious figures rather than the state during the Qajar era. Notably, a mullah would legitimize the marriage contract, known as *aqd*, in which the groom would assign a certain amount of dowry, or mahr, to the bride. Married women had limited chances of earning money from an occupation, and if they did, they did not receive the wages directly. Marriage between paternal cousins was widespread, particularly among wealthy families to maintain the circulation of wealth within themselves. Temporary marriages, also known as *sigheh*, were prevalent during that era. Within the Qajar dynasty, many marriages were to strengthen political alliances. Nashat also explains that temporary marriages were also common among ordinary people, mainly for sexual or financial purposes. This chapter has augmented my knowledge by shedding light on two crucial aspects: the institution of family and the influence of marriage and shaping it. These details are important to address the questions posed in this chapter.

Shireen Mahdavi, in her article called "Reflections in the Mirror—How Each Saw the Other: Women in the Nineteenth Century," examines the interaction between Iranian women and foreign women, such as Lady Sheil and Jane Dieulafoy, who visited Iran during the Qajar era. These women came to Iran as tutors, translators, teachers, medical assistants, or as wives of American or British missionaries and diplomats. Mahdavi examines the impact of foreigners on Iranian women and explores the different ways that Iranian women and foreign women perceived each other.

According to her, the global awareness during the 18th and 19th centuries and the augmented presence of foreigners in Iran impacted on Iranian women, particularly women in the royal dynasty. Because of the mentioned causes, women adopted new perspectives on life and ways of thinking. In addition to Mahdavi's analysis, the article also incorporates different parts of travelogues by Lady Sheil, a British ambassador's wife, and Carla Serena, a traveler, along with authentic and imagined letters written by Iranian royal women about their encounters with foreigners. A part of this article also talks about Taj al-Saltaneh, the king's daughter, who questioned Iranian customs and traditions and formulated a more modern lifestyle. This chapter is highly informative, as it discusses the relationship between Iranian and European women. This article is important for this thesis as it explores the pivotal role they had in shaping each other's perception of various aspects of womanhood, which, in turn, led to the expansion of their worldviews.

In a book called *Qajar Stories: From a Eunuch with a Crown to a Homeless King* (2005), Khosrow Motazed narrates the stories of the seven Qajar kings, namely Agha Mohammad Khan, Fathali Shah, Mohammad Shah, Naser al-Din Shah, Mozaffar al-Din Shah, Mohammad Ali Shah, and Ahmad Shah. The book presents a gripping narrative of the king's private and political lives, including their daily activities and their interactions with the general public. The section that caught my attention recounts the story of a Prince named Zel al-Sultan and his notorious reputation for being merciless and bloodthirsty. His actions had a significant impact on the Bakhtiyari tribe. The book provides details about his private and political life, his daily routines, and his interactions with commoners. This segment is of great value to my research, as Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari's memoir depicts the challenges her tribe faced at the hands of the ruthless Zel al-Sultan.

In her book titled *Gender Equality in Iranian History: From Pre-Islamic Times to the Present* (2006), Minoos Derayeh contends that there is a shortage of literature on Muslim and Iranian women since they were largely excluded from the accounts of historical canons, leading to their marginalization. She attempts to fill this gap by discussing the positions and conditions of women in pre-Islamic societies, different Islamic laws, women's position in the Quran, and enforcement of such rules and laws under Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic regimes in Iran. In the third chapter of the book, Derayeh delves into the Qajar society and highlights prominent characters such as Taj al-Saltaneh. This chapter, titled "Iranian Women under Islam," explores fascinating views on the position and treatment of women during this period. Furthermore, the chapter examines how certain literature, such as Shiite rules, fatwas, and poetry, shape the definition of a virtuous woman. However, individuals such as Taj al-Saltaneh, Tahereh Qurrat ul-Ein, and Zaynab Pasha challenged the norms created by such literature and offered a different definition of womanhood through their acts of resistance. This chapter is important for my research as it helped me understand how these three figures have disturbed the status quo.

Fatemeh Moosavi Viayeh in "Zan, Kanevāde va Nazm-e Jensīatī dar Aṣr-e Qājār" (Woman, Family, and Gender Politics in the Qajar Era) explores the position of women in Qajar society and economy. This article explores the various forms of economy in Iran, including nomadic shepherding, agricultural production, and retail production. She also analyzes the extent to which women were involved in these economic activities. The article also delves into the roles of women in education, their position in power relations and the legal system, and their roles in marriage. Moosavi Viayeh's work explores the various aspects of women's lives, including motherhood, domestic responsibilities, domestic violence, polygamy, and divorce, to name a few. Additionally, Moosavi Viayeh studies the suppression of women's bodies in both public and

private spheres and sheds light on the societal and cultural norms regarding women's bodies during the Qajar era. The author's discussion of various aspects in her article has been constructive for my thesis as it helps me understand women's circumstances at that time.

There is a limited number of works on the life and memoir of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari in English. Most of them are merely a general introduction to her life and contributions to the Constitutional Revolution. For example, Shadyar Omrani, in "Iranian Influential Women: Maryam Bakhtiyari 1874-1937," provides a summary of Bibi Maryam's role in the revolution, highlighting her contributions to the conquest of Tehran constitutionalists, her support for the freedom fighters, and her alliance with Germans against British and Russian forces¹. Moreover, in "Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari," the author covers the same topics. The author also mentions Bibi Maryam's memoir and the challenges she faced, such as lack of divorce rights, limited access to education, and unequal inheritance laws, which are portrayed in her memoir. These two short online texts are examples of the English works on Bibi Maryam. There are also other web pages discussing the life and bravery of Bibi Maryam; however, they are brief introductions to her life, her contributions, and her family, for the most part. These articles were insightful for this research as they provided general information on Bibi Maryam's life and contributions to society and the Constitutional Revolution.

¹ Some people supported Germany during this era as their "hope was that with the assistance of the strong German government they would be able to contain the imperialist aspirations of Great Britain and Russia" (Mousavian 13).

The number of works on Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari in Persian sources is still limited; however, the total is higher than in English sources. For example, in “Barresī-ye Naqš-e Zanān-e Mobārez dar Tahavolāt-e Sīyāsī-ye Ašr-e Qājār (Motāle'e-ye Moredī-e Bībī Maryam Bakhtšārī)” (An Examination of the Role of Women Fighters in the Political Developments of the Qajar Era (A Case Study of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari)), Hatam Mousaei and Somayeh Kamali discuss the conditions of women during the Qajar era, the position of women in the Bakhtiyari tribe during the Qajar period, and the role of Bibi Maryam in the political struggles. They argue that many women were politically active during Iranian history, but their contributions were not highlighted. Bibi Maryam was one of them who were both anti-colonial and anti-despotic, and a combatant of the Constitutional Revolution. Moreover, there is one book about Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari, compiled and authored by Parichehr Soltani Zaraswand, called *Sardār Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari Sardār-e Āzādgī be Ravāyat-e asnād-e montašer našode* (Commander Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari, Commander of Freedom: According to unpublished documents), which is a comprehensive source about Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari. The book is divided into two main sections. The first section is about her ancestors and lineage, her childhood and adolescence, her personality, her marriage and loyalty, her defense of women’s rights, her role as a mother, and her challenges as a daughter of a Khan and her attempts at keeping the unity in her family. Discussing all these topics heavily relies on her memoir and nearly all of her autobiography is quoted in the first section. The second part of the book covers the Constitutional Revolution, WWI, and Bibi Maryam’s involvement in them. It discusses her role in providing a refuge to patriots and opponents of the Russians and the British and the many awards and medals she received from Iran, Germany, and Turkey, to name a few, for her courageous attempts. This section also explores her role in different poems and written documents. These sources, particularly the latter, have been immensely insightful for my project,

as they extensively discussed Bibi Maryam's active social role during the Constitutional Revolution.

As for Taj al-Saltaneh, there has been a shortage of literature on her life and memoir; however, its number is higher in comparison with the literature provided on Bibi Maryam's memoir and life. In "Taj al-Saltaneh, an Emancipated Qajar Princess," Shireen Mahdavi studies Taj al-Saltaneh's life through her memoir. This article is helpful for my research as it is a summary and narration of her life, from her childhood to her marriage, her rebellious deeds, and finally, her death. Moreover, in "The Royal Harem of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (r. 1848–96): The Literary Portrayal of Women's Lives by Taj al-Saltana and Anonymous 'Lady from Kerman'", Piotr Bachtin has explored the Naseri harem and the experiences of the royal women through the narratives of Taj al-Saltaneh and Lady from Kerman. Bachtin asserts that in Taj's memoir, there is a sense of straightforwardness and lack of censorship both in the range of and expression of her feelings—a departure from traditional Iranian writing, which typically required modesty. Bachtin praises Taj's introspection, using her life as a starting point in social criticism, rejection of the harem life, and advocacy for women's liberation. Overall, apart from a comparative analysis of Taj and Lady of Kerman's literary work, the author recognizes the complexity of Taj al-Saltaneh's narrative and life, which is a helpful aspect to know for my research project.

Furthermore, in "Sabk-e zabān-e zanāne dar k̄āṭerāt-e Tāj al-Saltāne" (The Feminine Language Style in the Memoirs of Taj al-Saltaneh), Fatemeh Razavi and Maryam Salehi Nia analyze whether Taj's memoir has been written in a feminine linguistic style. The authors compare Taj's memoir with those of her male counterparts to examine whether hers is feminine. They consider a text to be feminine when it frequently utilizes expressive forms such as adjectives and modifiers, with an ambiguous and implicit language and emphasis through intensifiers, forms

contrary to Persian grammar rules, and incomplete sentences. The authors of this article argue that Taj's memoir is indeed feminine as it features the above-mentioned characteristics; however, they conclude that the high level of consciousness in her memoir and the usage of complex and dependent sentences indicate Taj's power and intricate mental processes, which stem from her unique social and personal position as a princess, making the memoir less purely feminine. It is an interesting article for this research as it provides insight into Taj's writing style. Lastly, "Barresī-ye rāvī-ye qābel-e 'etemād va ġeyr-e qābel-e 'etemād dar ketāb-e 'kātarāt-e Tāj al-Saltāne'" (Examination of the Reliable and Unreliable Narrator in the book "Memoirs of Tāj al-Saltāna"), by Shadi Ahmadi et al., study whether the narrative of the memoir is reliable based on descriptive-analytical approach and relying on the narrative methods of this memoir. The article concludes that Taj al-Saltaneh is an overt external narrator, meaning that she is an experimental and heroic narrator, and a self-appraisal narrator, meaning that the narrator uses exaggeration and lies to show herself as more beautiful and powerful; therefore, she is an unreliable narrator. However, the authors posit that by addressing her teacher all throughout the narrative, mentioning real places for narrating purposes, and representing herself as literate and knowledgeable, Taj attempts to hide the fact that she is an unreliable narrator. While I may disagree with the argument of this article, its discussion on reliable and unreliable narrators is helpful for my work as it gives me insight into some aspects of Taj's memoir and the way she represented herself in it.

Saghar Sadeghian's "Expressing Selves: A Comparative Study of the Memoirs of Tāj al-Saltāna and Bībī Maryam Bakhtiyārī" delves into an exploration of memoirs and life experiences of Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari. The article approaches their memoirs through the concept of "docile body" by Michelle Foucault; even though they originated from different social backgrounds, one came from a nomadic tribe and the other grew up in the royal Haram. This

theoretical framework suggests that the studied women were subjects within misogynistic and patriarchal institutions, wherein they were either directly or indirectly being controlled. Sadeghian also discusses how male guardians were designated for these women and reinforced their social roles as instruments of reproduction. While most of the article is the narration of their life experiences and challenges, Sadeghian succeeds in examining their legacy through this theoretical lens. This source is of great value for my work, as it helped me understand Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's different writing styles.

In conclusion, numerous works that examine the experience of Iranian women during the Qajar era have been written and shed light on their daily struggles and living conditions. These works provided valuable insights into the lives of women during this period. There are also few literary works exclusively concentrated on Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh. I have found only one article, "Expressing Selves: A Comparative Study of the Memoirs of Tāj al-Saltāna and Bībī Maryam Bakhtiyārī," on both Taj and Bibi Maryam, which is mostly a representation of their life experiences and a comparative analysis of their memoirs.

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

In this research, I have incorporated a critical literature review approach. This method enables me to critically analyze various sources to find the answers to my research questions indicated before. I have also incorporated an unobtrusive research method. It is a data collection method that does not interfere with the subjects under study. Since I am probing history to conduct my project, this method is very suitable, as it allows an objective overview. I peruse content analysis, a research tool to determine the presence of certain words, themes, and concepts within

some qualitative data, such as a text. I also apply historical methodology and ethnographic content analysis, a qualitative research method combining the detailed, contextual understanding of ethnography with the systematic methodology of content analysis. This allows me to "minimize the influences of Eurocentrism, Orientalism, apologetic position, nationalism, and any other types of bias that might result in a 'Self/Others' perspective" (Derayeh 16). Moreover, I incorporate a symptomatic reading on the materials available. This method was proposed by Louis Althusser, a French Marxist, and focuses on the text's underlying presupposition. Since little literary and artistic work has been done by women in different social and economic classes, this is a very useful method to understand what a particular text was unable to say or represent because of prevailing ideological convictions. Through personal diaries, travelogues, and literary texts both in Persian and English, as well as various primary and secondary sources, I attempt to answer my questions and fill the mentioned gaps in the literature to add a new perspective to the history of Iran.

As for my theoretical framework, although I have utilized an interdisciplinary approach, which includes literature, history, and women's studies, to conduct my project, the ongoing theoretical structure is a feminist framework. I have adopted ideas from different feminists and scholars such as H  l  ne Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, Emira Derbel, Afsaneh Najamabadi, Abbas Amanat, and Minoo Derayeh to explain certain social and cultural events explained in the memoirs. From examining memoir writing and its significance to the position of women like Bibi Maryam and Taj and their defiant spirit, I employed a critical feministic lens to answer my questions posed earlier in this chapter.

Throughout this thesis, I cited sources according to MLA 9 citation style. Moreover, I followed Encyclopedia Iranica guidelines for the transliterations in text, except for *Taj al-Saltaneh* and *Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari*, which are more common ways of writing their names in English.

Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of five chapters. The current one is a concise introduction to the two memoirs by Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh, the importance of the present study, and the introduction of the theoretical and methodological approaches I have taken to study the memoirs.

Chapter two explores the essence and significance of “memoir” or “autobiography” as a unique form of literary expression. I focus on the interplay between memoir and memory. Moreover, I analyze memoir writing within the context of Iran, with particular attention to the inclination of the authors to adopt “masks” or “veils” within their narratives. Furthermore, chapter two explores memoir writing by Iranian women, examining their challenges in the patriarchal societal context in which they are often forced to omit gendered experiences within their texts. Finally, chapter two delves into the autobiographies of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh and their contributions to literature and history. I highlight their incredible mark on women’s history and history as a whole.

In the third chapter, I provide a thorough exposition of the conditions of women during the Qajar era. I start by delving into the history of the Qajar tribe, exploring the rise of its first king, Agha Mohammad Khan, to the throne and the subsequent kings. I then focus on the Bakhtiyari tribe and the social and cultural dynamics of its people. Subsequently, I study the lives and experiences of Bibi Maryam and Taj within the context of the Qajar era. I study the conditions of the harem and the experiences of women in the Bakhtiyari tribe as they played an integral role in their lives. Taj, a princess, lived in Naser al-Din Shah’s harem, a private space designed for the

king's wives and children. Meanwhile, Bibi Maryam, a tribal woman, lived among the Bakhtiyari people, a well-known and influential tribe during the Qajar era. Finally, I conduct a comparative analysis of Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari, claiming that despite their privileged positions, they were both constrained to a patriarchal system in which the exchange and traffic in women impacted their lives.

Chapter four involves a discussion of the Constitutional Revolution and its historical context. I highlight the unique roles of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh in the Constitutional Revolution and their fight for liberty, justice, and equality. Furthermore, I study the prevalent conventional femininity during Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's lifetime based on the descriptions in their memoirs and the concept of performativity. Moreover, I link their resilient characteristics by examining their actions, life experiences, and thoughts to Judith Butler's idea of drag, arguing that they are at the threshold of femininity and masculinity. Lastly, I explore Bibi Maryam and Taj's actions and deeds based on Minoou Derayeh's concept of "I act, therefore, I am."

Chapter five summarizes the main chapters and what is achieved throughout this research. It also introduces some suggestions and approaches for further studies on the memoirs.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEMOIR

Introduction

Autobiographies and memoirs are crucial literary modes that have complex significance. They not only have a fundamental role in the archival preservation of the authors' life narrative, including experiences, thoughts, and emotional dimensions, but also have historical importance as they offer insights into the contemporary time in which the author lived. They suggest valuable information about the cultural, financial, and social aspects of everyday living experience. Moreover, memoirs sometimes function as sources of inspiration for the next generations. Finally, autobiographies and memoirs are celebrations of individuality, as they vividly illustrate the different qualities of each person and their particular ways and strategies for navigating life's complexities and challenges.

In my quest for a comprehensive understanding of the literary contributions of Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari, both of whom wrote memoirs more than a century ago, this chapter functions as an exploration of this specific mode of writing. Primarily, I examine the essence and implications of autobiography or memoir as a distinctive form of literature, delving deeply into the detailed discussion of the connotations of “memoir.” Additionally, I explore the intricate relationship between memoir and memory. Subsequently, I discuss memoir writing within the context of Iran, trying to understand the cultural dimensions that affected this literary mode of writing. I discuss some of the authors’ tendencies to adopt metaphorical “masks” or “veils” throughout their memoirs, which is a practice deeply rooted in Persian literary tradition.

Furthermore, the chapter delves into the topic of memoir writing by women in Iran. It explores the unique challenges faced by women authors and highlights the critical importance of their participation in memoir writing, shedding light on gender experiences that are often omitted from conventional historical narratives. Lastly, this chapter examines the specific memoiric works of Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari, analyzing the historical and gendered implications of their contributions. In doing so, I seek to elucidate the enduring marks they have left on women’s history and also the broader historical narrative.

Memoir or Autobiography

Life writing is a genre that encompasses many different modes of writing, such as biography, diary, travel writing, and of course, memoir and autobiography (Sanders). The primary question that piqued my curiosity was about the precise definitions and the connotations that are associated with the terms “autobiography” and “memoir”. In Greek, the word “autos” means

“self”; “bios” refers to “life”; and “graphe” translates to “writing” (Smith & Watson 1). When they are combined in this sequence, these words collectively convey the concept of “self-life writing”, which is a concise definition of “autobiography” (1). My second question concerned the origin of these terms in English. The earliest recorded use of the term autobiography can be attributed to its introduction in the preface of a book of poems written by Ann Yearsley, who was an English working-class writer in the 18th century (2). However, most scholars typically refer to Robert Southey’s adaptation of the three Greek words in 1809 as the earliest English usage of this word (2). Before the 20th century, the term “memoirs”, which had had its roots in French as “les mémoires,” was frequently used to refer to a mode of writing that was about one's own life experiences and narratives (2). The term “autobiography”, which is now widely used for (self) life writing, originated during the early modern period in the West (2). The emphasis of this era was on self-interest, self-consciousness, and self-knowledge, and it highlighted the concept of the “Enlightened Individual,” which was widely described by philosophers and theoreticians during the 18th century (2). Moreover, while autobiography usually refers to a comprehensive account of one's entire life, a memoir instead focuses on a particular period of time and emphasizes the author’s emotions, experiences, and thoughts (Dukes). It is crucial to note that autobiography and memoir are literary modes written in diverse forms. Interestingly, one of the first examples of life writing in Iran is Darius’ inscriptions in Bisutun (4th century BCE), which chronicles the life and times of the second Achaemenid emperor. Autobiographical works include a diverse range of formats, from private records created during an individual's life, often without an initial intent for public publication (such as personal letters, diaries, journals, and recollections), to more structured and extensive autobiographical books (“Autobiography”). From the above definitions of autobiography and memoir, I conclude that the pieces of writing that Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi

Maryam authored were memoirs. It is due to the fact that they focused on a specific period of time and did not dissect all of their life experiences. Their memoirs included their emotions, experiences, and reflections on different topics and issues, as well.

Emira Derbel explores the differences between the concepts of “memoir” and “autobiography”, as she studied two memoirs by contemporary female Iranian authors in her book *Iranian Women in the Memoir: Comparing Reading Lolita in Tehran and Persepolis (1) and (2)* (2017). In a section of her book, “Why the use of “Memoir” as a Term?”, she presents a comparative analysis between memoir and autobiography, using ideas of theoreticians such as Helen Buss and Lee Quinby. She argues that autobiography is considered an umbrella term and memoir is a subgenre of it, making autobiography the center and memoir the margin, in most critics’ perspectives (39). She maintains that many view autobiography as “a continuous stable unitary subjectivity,” while memoir represents “a discontinuous shattered selfhood” (39). However, Derbel argues that memoir is a “form of discursive decolonization” (39). She asserts that the reawakening of women's life writing brings forth a powerful and liberating effect and offers a challenge to the conventional notion of autobiography (39). Currently, both academics and the general public are paying attention to the concept and form of memoir, as it resonates deeply with today's postcolonial and postmodern tendencies (39). According to Derbel, in contrast to traditional autobiographies, memoirs situate personal narratives in broader social, political, and cultural contexts (39). Interestingly, she notes that memoir writing presents an increasing platform for third-world women writer prisoners and other marginalized voices whose narratives are often not acknowledged and heard (40). Within this mode of writing, Derbel believes, authors can enjoy “the opportunity to fluctuate between the private and the public, the personal and the political” (40). She claims that non-Western female authors reevaluate the conventional rules that govern

autobiography writing by incorporating unconventional modes of writing like testimony and graphic memoirs (40). Memoir writing became more popular because of its “confessional nature ... its flexible shift from public to private, its accessibility to history, and its relational nature,” which created a change in the usage of this concept (Derbel 40). Memoir *became* a post-structuralist mode of writing, redefined as one that expands its connotation far beyond those determined by men in power (Derbel 40). Lastly, she argues that

Memoir is a non-gendered life writing form; it transcends the individualistic autonomous male ‘I’ and allows women writers to enjoy self-realization and recognition. It is a discursive safe space where memoirists are truly “saved by form” since memoirs inhabit stories of trauma that are healed through the narrator/protagonists’ testimonies (Bus 2002, 20). The act of writing is a savior and healer. Memoirs allow women writers to visit the dark corners of their past in order to live in the present. As today’s mostly preferred form of life writing by women, memoirs expose, examine, and unveil issues such as class, race, sexuality, and the body in relation to culture and even religion ... This augmentation in the number of memoirs written and read is due to their ability to manifest a female consciousness and to free the unsaid in a culture, such as the Iranian one, that has long opted for a censored version of women lives ... [Moreover], Iranian memoirs resisted Western individuality and adhered to a vision of female collectivity that elevates the feminine, previously acquainted with absence, to presence and agency. Therefore, Iranian memoirs redefined the ... [literary mode] by including new strategies in life writing. (41-42, 43)

I also believe that what Taj and Bibi Maryam did with their memoirs is congruent with Derbel’s argument on the connotation of the memoir today. Their memoirs went beyond the conventional

notion of autobiography in a number of ways, including moving from public to private and making history accessible. Through their memoirs, Taj and Bibi Maryam addressed, scrutinized, and unveiled topics such as class, race, and the body within the context of culture and religion. Therefore, considering the discussions above, I choose to use the term “memoir” over “autobiography” in this thesis.

Memory and Memoir

Undeniably, memoirs are heavily reliant on the recollections and remembrance of their authors. William L. Hanaway discusses that autobiographical memory research has shown that memory functions as a narrative that involves reconstruction rather than pure recollection (62). While different genres, such as history and fiction, acknowledge the failure of memory, memoir relies heavily on the author’s memory to recreate the past that might be true but not necessarily accurate (62). Humans’ definition of memory is categorized into three primary groups: procedural memory, which signifies the preservation of practical skills and abilities; semantic memory, which denotes the accumulation of factual knowledge and the ability to grasp and recall it, including factual details like geographical locations; auto-noetic memory, also referred to as episodic or experiential memory, which involves the recollection of past personal experiences (Clark 6). All these three groups give us the ability to reconstruct and mentally revisit events from the past (6). In the context of autobiographical memory, auto-noetic memory has the most importance (6). It can be divided into two distinct forms: field memories and observer memories (6). The former is characterized by first-person perspectives, giving the capacity to remember and mentally relive personal experiences; the latter, on the other hand, offers a third-person viewpoint when remembering one’s own past actions and experiences (6). This means recalling the events as though

they are witnessed from an external viewpoint (6). It is an important aspect to consider while studying a memoir which is the primary perspective that governs the author's narrative. Nevertheless, I believe that this aspect remains unnoticeable within the text and is filled with inherent unreliability, due to the weakness of memory. Moreover, in my opinion, there is a possibility of a mixture of the first-person and third-person perspectives in a memoir, which results in the interruption of the narrative and causes an inaccurate reflection of the reality of the author's experiences. Furthermore, from my perspective, as for Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam's memoirs, the autoethic and semantic memories are quite visible since both authors recount many factual details and personal experiences.

A memoir should not be considered as consisting of organic factual information. Instead, it should be regarded as a deliberately crafted and structured creation, like a work of art and a product of creativity (Clark 10). They serve as both a disclosure and a concealment of their creator (10). Similar to an artist, the autobiographer or memoirist demonstrates certain aspects of themselves, or their life experience involuntarily or intentionally portray other ones and retains some hidden and unreachable elements (10). I believe that Iranian authors' inclination towards veiled self-expression is fundamentally linked to the culture of the country. In the Persian literary tradition, authors tend to exercise more concealment in showing their personal identities to the public. This stems from a complex interplay of historical, societal, and cultural factors, which leads the writers and authors to often obscure their true selves. I believe that the memoirs of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh do not totally conceal the opinions and personalities of the writers within the text; however, it is crucial to note that as was mentioned earlier, memoirs are works of art and the artists may involuntarily conceal some aspects of themselves or the events happened during their life.

Memoir Writing in Iran

In Persian literature, memoir writing was an uncommon practice and memoirs were rare, with very few written by literary figures, and even fewer by women authors (Hanaway 61). Michael Craig Hillmann in “An Autobiographical Voice: Forugh Farrokhzad,” notices two concepts, namely “masking” and “veiling”, as they are used by literary figures in Iran. Masking is applied by both male and female writers (35). It means writers choose to withhold the private, personal aspects of their lives from the public and project a literary persona that diverges from their true selves (36). In contrast, veiling is exclusive to women and involves either society keeping a woman writer out of view or the writer herself yielding to social pressure to conceal her true identity (35). Certain Iranian authors do not conceal their gender but rather choose to selectively hide their private and personal aspects from the public view (36). They choose to project a literary persona that stems from their authentic selves (36). A notable example of this can be in the case of Ġolāmĥoseyn Sā‘edi, a distinguished playwright and author (36). Sā‘edi expresses his discomfort when discussing Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad's autobiographical essay, "A Stone on a Grave" (1981) (Hillmann 36). In this specific essay, Āl-e Ahmad openly discusses topics such as childless life, sterility, and sperm count, which made Sā‘edi very uncomfortable (Hillmann 36). It is for this reason that most of the writers prefer to conceal their true selves in their works and hence there were fewer memoirs in Persian literature. The practice of self-masking was not exclusive to men; women faced more social consequences when they chose to be open and honest in their writing compared to men (38-39). For example, Goli Taraqi, an Iranian female author, intentionally adopts various personas or masks in her texts (37). Hillmann mentions that within her novel "Sleep/Hibernation" from 1973, Taraqi utilizes these personas to demonstrate her own intellectual

and emotional encounters during her teenage years in Tehran amid social turbulence (37). Hillmann discusses veiling by Iranian literary figures, particularly women. He mentions Parvin E'tesāmi, a poet who was brought up under the influence of her father and encouraged by her brother and literary peers to maintain a low profile and adopt an impersonal writing style that hides her gender and avoids addressing the societal changes of her time (35). Her poetry lacked mentions of romantic love and different aspects of femininity (35). It is said that she was an ideal female poet within a patriarchal society because she did not challenge conventional gender norms (35). Hillmann believes that her recognition did not come from what she explicitly conveys in her poems but from what she chose not to express (35). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that Hillmann's perspective is not universally accepted; some other scholars disagree and argue that what truly distinguishes her is, indeed, her unique feminine voice and perspective. Thus, in my view, despite the difficulty of writing memoirs to represent the true self and identity of the author, self-masking is present in other literary writing modes as well, such as Goli Taraqi's novel. Moreover, veiling, which Hillmann attributes to the characteristics of female writers' texts, stemmed from the pressures of the culture and society to hide their gender and their gendered characteristics. By understanding the difficulties of writing biographies and literary texts, in general, and specifically by women authors, the importance and significance of the memoirs of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh are more noticeable.

Expanding on Hillmann's explorations of the factors regarding the reluctance among Iranian authors to engage in memoir writing, Farzaneh Milani, in her work "Veiled Voices: Women's Autobiographies in Iran," highlights a notable fact.² Milani mentions that despite the westerner's profound enthusiasm for autobiographical literature, Iranians have not paid as much

² "Memoir" and "autobiography" are often used interchangeably by Milani.

attention to this mode of writing (1-2). Based on Milani's claim, the scarcity of this literary mode may have its roots in a culture that values the separation between the private and the public spheres (2). It could be the result of various forms of censorship and social pressures that dissuade individuals from expressing themselves and promote conformity (2). Another significant social pressure prevalent in the Iranian culture, in my opinion, is the deeply rooted notion of *āberu*, which can be translated to English as "honor" or "dignity." I believe that this concept refers to the dual dimensions of personal and social aspects which serve as a protection of one's personal reputation among their families, neighbors, or the public. According to my observations, within the fabric of Persian culture, *āberu* holds a profound significance and limits individuals from openly revealing their genuine selves to society, fundamentally due to the fear of jeopardizing their *āberu* or honor. Consequently, I believe it is possible to posit that the culture of preserving *āberu* or honor, leads to the unwillingness of Persian writers to delve into the memoir literary writing mode in Iran.

Furthermore, Hillman studies Iranian female authors who engage in memoir writing and notices that these women can be categorized into two distinct groups. It is important to note that these two groups are very different in terms of the cultural and social support they receive. Firstly, a significant portion of these women authors belong to the upper class of society, where women have a unique level of protection and possibly the liberty to engage in individualistic activities such as memoir writing (39). These opportunities that they had were not readily available to other Iranian women (39). Secondly, the majority of these autobiographies are primarily justifications of or explanations for a life that was lived in a specific public manner (40). For example, Forūḡ Farroḳzād, a famous poet during the 20th century, stands out primarily because of her unique and boldly autobiographical approach in her literary works (40). Farroḳzād was one of the writers who brought a striking and challenging individuality to Iranian literature (51). In contrast, her

contemporaries in the literary world were reluctant to reveal their true selves and expose their distinct personalities to the public (51). Considering the cultural context of our time, Forūg Farroḳzād's dedication to demonstrating her authenticity through her autobiographical voice was revolutionary in the history of Persian literature and Iranian society (51). Unlike Taj al-Saltaneh, who was a Princess and had royal support, Farroḳzād did not enjoy a luxurious lifestyle and did not wait for decades for her thoughts to gain recognition (51). Unfortunately, her accomplishments are not fully recognized yet, due to the gender biases prevalent in many critical assessments of female poets (51). Regarding Hillmann's categorization of female memoirists, although Taj al-Saltaneh was among the royal family, her deeds mentioned in her memoir were so profoundly rebellious that, I believe, despite the protection and liberty she had, she was still an iconic figure in the Persian history and Persian literature. Moreover, considering Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari, who was a tribal woman, even though she was the daughter of the commander or Khan of her tribe, she was not a royal figure and did not enjoy the benefits of a princely lifestyle. Therefore, I believe that she cannot be a part of Hillmann's first category. However, both Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh lived a life that was different from the majority of women of their period, therefore, they can be a part of the second group that Hillmann mentions in categorizing the female memoirists.

Memoir Writing in Iran by Women

The practice of memoir writing in Persian literature has been limited due to the pervasive influence of cultural and societal norms in Iran. This limitation is characterized by self-concealment or self-masking among both male and female authors (Hillmann 35). In this literary context, the act of veiling in literature is associated with female writers, according to Hillmann,

who tried to navigate mechanisms for dealing with the societal constraints imposed upon them, which are rooted in an idea that considers women writers as not accepted by society for their creative endeavors (35). Following the same idea, in “Half-Voices: Persian Women’s lives and letters”, William L. Hanaway discusses that in Persian literature, women had limited opportunities to express themselves due to the predominance of male influence. In Iran, the public sphere was primarily the domain of men, while women were secluded from public life behind veils (Hanaway 55). Men perceived women's public speech as rebellious because societal norms denied them public visibility and vocal platform (55). Until the end of WWII, Persian society’s traditional gender norms restricted the public engagements of women (55). However, in the following three decades until the 1979 Islamic revolution, important social changes happened (55). Opportunities such as education, travel, and engagement in public life occurred for women, particularly in Tehran (55). Women began to actively participate in various activities such as writing, acting, and politics (55). Although they gained more liberty and presence in the public sphere, they still had to navigate the boundaries between their public and private roles (56). However, despite all these improvements, memoirs written by women and biographies about women by male authors remained uncommon during this period (56). Therefore, I find this fact highly noteworthy that the majority of women's liberty happened only very recently and not in the time when Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari lived. In recent times when women had more opportunities to express themselves publicly, Hanaway mentions that it was still hard for women to navigate their ways in the cultural and social challenges; therefore, I conclude that it was even harder for Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh to express themselves through writing memoirs and talking about their identities, experiences, and beliefs.

It is evident that cultural and societal factors play significant roles in women's ability to articulate and assert themselves. Farzaneh Milani argues that women's self-representation in literary writings is inseparable from the cultural context they live in (5). Emphasis on women's physical and vocal concealment, limited access to the public sphere, and idealization of their silence are only a few examples of societal norms that pose significant obstacles to the development of female memoir narratives (6). As a consequence of the separation of men and women in society, women become more restricted in their interactions, and it also separates what can be revealed about women from what must remain hidden (6). Throughout history, women's personal lives have been confined to the private sphere, which made their experiences deeply private and often secretive (6). In this cultural plight, writing female autobiographies faced obstacles and consequences. Breaking the silence and challenging established norms of self-representation could lead to adverse outcomes for women who chose to engage in the public unveiling (6). Women tried to subvert societal expectations and resisted by disassociating themselves from the idealized image of a silent and self-denying woman (6). Therefore, I conclude that writing, particularly memoir writing by women, is considered as a form of resistance to the cultural and societal norms. I believe that through their texts and writings, women authors can interrogate, reinterpret, or undermine the prevalent cultural ideologies in the way they are perceived and treated in society.

Moreover, since memoirs are essentially from individuality, it is worth mentioning the difference between individuality and individualism. Karl Joachim Weintraub in *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (1978) distinguishes between “individualism” and “individuality.” He states that:

Individualism has to do with the conception of the appropriate *Relationship* between an individual and the society. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, in contrast to collectivism, as “the social theory which advocates the free and independent action of the individual” ... *Individuality*, however, had best be restricted to a personality conception, the form of the self that an individual may seek. (xvii)

It can be concluded from this passage that the impact of composing memoir narratives goes beyond the assertion of individuality. Memoirs establish a link between individuality and the broader concept of individualism. Women authors who engage in memoir writing not only inscribe their personal experiences within the cultural and social settings, but also, regardless of the inherently solitary nature of the writing process, they participate in a collective attempt to make an influence on such contexts. By documenting their own life experiences, thoughts, and perspectives, women authors contribute to a broader dialogue that reshapes the cultural and societal narratives and influences the collective consciousness of their time. This mixed effect of individuality and collectivity highlights the profound impact of memoirs as they transform society.

Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam’s Memoirs

Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh are notable and influential women in the 19th and early 20th century and have left permanent marks on Persian literature through their memoirs. This section of the chapter delves into a comprehensive exploration of Taj al-Saltaneh’s and Bibi Maryam’s life narratives. Moreover, this section highlights the paramount significance of their memoirs in Persian literature, illustrating how their literary endeavors have contributed to the broader discourse and understanding of the sociocultural fabric of their time.

Taj al-Saltaneh

Zahra Khanom Taj al-Saltaneh (1884-1936), whose name translates to “crown of the monarchy”, was the daughter of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, and her birthplace was Tehran. She spent her formative years in the harem, a secluded section of the royal court, where her primary caregiver was a black woman (Amanat 9). By the age of seven, a tutor and a eunuch were assigned to Taj al-Saltaneh to oversee her education and ensure her safety (8, 9, 10). It is noteworthy that Taj’s mother displayed a preference for her son rather than her daughter, and she sometimes subjected Taj to severe physical punishment (55, 63). In contrast, her father, who had several wives and offspring, maintained a more distant but affectionate relationship with her (13, 39). Taj’s marriage was pre-arranged when she was only eight years old although her parents had declined different potential suitors (26, 27). The wedding took place when she was fourteen years old and subsequently the assassination of her father happened (73). Her spouse, Amir Hussein Khan Shoja’-al Saltaneh, was the only son of the commander of the royal special guard, and yet despite his noble offspring, he was immature and lacked self-discipline (76).

Taj al-Saltaneh’s marriage was characterized by consistent dissatisfaction and conflict (Taj Al-Saltane 77). From the first day of their marriage, Taj al-Saltaneh and Hassan demonstrated incompatibility toward each other. She thought of him as narrow-minded and mean, while her in-laws actively attempted to prevent any emotional connection between the two out of jealousy (77). Hassan was also involved in several extramarital relationships with other women, boys, and men, which resulted in the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases to his wife (78, 90). Taj al-Saltaneh, too, engaged in a passionate but platonic relationship with another man early in her marriage (85). Financially, they struggled with considerable debts caused by their extravagant

lifestyle, including Hasan's passion for horses (90). Also, Taj had an excessive interest in luxury and frequently hosted grand parties featuring music and poetry (78). In the end, they got divorced in 1906, primarily because of Hasan's refusal to support her feminist and nationalist ideas, in addition to his debauchery (110).

In his introduction to Taj al-Saltaneh's memoir titled *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity 1884-1914*, Abbas Amanat stresses the considerable importance of the memoir in the context of Persian literature. He meticulously highlights its remarkable contributions and ever-lasting impact within the literary field, saying:

Taj's memoirs are unusually self-revealing. Her language and mode of expression are iconoclastic, for she not only voices the flaws of her social class but those of her family and herself. Even compared to the liberated upper-class western feminists of her time, Taj appears less inhibited. A sensitive observer, she narrates the story of her life with the lucidity of an intimate conversation, a style mastered by the matriarchs of the old families ... Having acquired something of the candid language of the womenfolk, the cultivated as well as the common, Taj echoes in her narrative a refreshing divorce from literary formalism. (9-10)

Amanat's analysis underlines the honest and unreserved nature of Taj's narrative. His stress on this quality underscores that her memoir became a window into the socio-cultural environment of its time.

Afsaneh Najmabadi, too, explores Taj al-Saltaneh's memoir in "A Different Voice: Taj os-Saltaneh," arguing that her memoir stands out in its category because it presents itself as a memoir rather than a social history or commentary (21). She discusses that in Persian literature, it is one

of the few writings in which the author assigns essential value to discuss her own life as it is (21). Her writing style attempts to mirror European novels, in which they focus on character development and vivid descriptions of natural and societal settings (22). Najmabadi also observes that throughout Taj's memoir, she consistently provides rational and psychological interpretations for her emotions and tensions, including those that may appear contradictory (22). Taj's ideas were shaped by early exposure to diverse literature and knowledge (23). She was proficient in both French and Persian and since childhood preferred reading novels and classical poetry such as Hāfez and Sa'di instead of playing games (23). Additionally, Najmabadi posits that Taj al-Saltaneh regularly attended drama plays, including popular European plays in translation or Persian adaptations (23). Furthermore, Taj's knowledge extended to European history, as she demonstrated in her memoir an understanding of late 19th-century French political debates (24). Similar to some Iranian women of her time, she was informed about suffragette movements in Europe and the United States, as well as about women's reforms in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt (24). From Najmabadi's meticulous observation of Taj al-Saltaneh's life and knowledge, I conclude that thanks to both her life environment, as a royal Princess, and her own characteristics, as a woman very curious about freedom and the world around her, Taj al-Saltaneh managed to author a memoir that is rich in many aspects, such as her bold representation of herself, her life experiences, and her thoughts, as well as linking it to her rich source of knowledge.

Najmabadi continues to explain that Taj al-Saltaneh's life significantly turned in the early 1900s during a period of intensive study (23). This change is noticeable in the personal changes she describes in her memoir and the conflict she felt between her earlier beliefs and her doubts (23). Before this shift, she often portrayed herself as a privileged and frivolous princess, in contrast with her later voice, which was occasionally bitter and reflective, as she contemplated her

disappointments in the broader societal context of her time (23). Her new perspectives and ideas on society and women's rights fueled her willpower to break free from traditional constraints imposed on women, particularly within the *andaruni* (24). Although she was the king's daughter, her privileged status created a conflict between her aspirations and available opportunities (24). Despite being protected from the typical societal repercussions otherwise faced by ordinary pioneering women, her privileged background limited her from pursuing tasks like establishing a school, publishing women's journals, or becoming a doctor (24). Interestingly, her writings extensively discussed the importance of employment for women across social classes, an activity that was seldom allowed in the societal context of her time (24). I think Najmabadi's analysis of Taj al-Saltaneh's life is fair and accurate. Najmabadi examines how Taj's privileged background had affected her desire to be free, along with the benefits it had brought her. Another fact that I appreciate in Najmabadi's analysis is that she emphasizes how Taj's perspectives have changed through her own effort, which was the result of pursuing knowledge and nurturing her curiosity. It is an important fact since she gives agency to Taj by thinking differently and acting rebelliously while shouldering the burden of being a princess.

Bibi Maryam

In the realm of Persian literature, Bibi Maryam's memoir holds great importance. This significance is not merely in the literary domain, but her personality and character have had great significance in the history of Iran. Here, I have selected some parts from her memoir to summarize her life experiences. Bibi Maryam was born in a renowned family, in which her father was a khan or the leader of her tribe (Bakhtiyari 49). He was very progressive for his time and emphasized her literacy skills and taught her equestrianism, shooting skills, and military strategies, and, as a result,

she received an exceptional education. This unconventional upbringing shaped Bibi Maryam into an intellectually open-minded woman. However, despite her family's progressive views on education, Bibi Maryam was forced into an arranged marriage when she was only fifteen years old (54). Her husband, who was much older than her and already married, was chosen by her father for political reasons (54). Her husband died in a tribal conflict, and she returned as a widow with three sons, facing social restrictions (88, 92). After that, she resisted the pressure to remarry for five years; however, eventually, she was forced to marry a distant cousin, named Fathollah Khan (111). In her marriage to Fathollah Khan, Maryam faced challenges because of her husband's engagement with multiple partners and extramarital affairs (112). Additionally, she was unable to relocate her children from her previous household to the new one due to disagreements between the ex-husband's family and the present one (117). Furthermore, she contracted sexually transmitted diseases from her spouse, which resulted in the loss of multiple offsprings through illnesses and miscarriages (115). Despite all these formidable challenges, Bibi Maryam managed to break free from the oppressive constraints of her marriage and established an independent residence in a separate castle, while choosing not to pursue a formal divorce (161).

Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari was loyally dedicated to the advancement and the progress of her nation, assuming a crucial role during the Constitutional Revolution in 1905, despite facing opposition from the king Muhammad Ali Shah. She actively supported this freedom movement and catalyzed the resistance, while engaging in correspondences with influential leaders and participating in armed conflicts (Bakhtiyari 182-183; Soltani Zaraswand 252, 255, 256). She contributed greatly to the advancement of a progressive and equitable nation through her commitment to equality. Remarkably, she turned her home into a sanctuary for those who sought refuge from the oppressive reign of the king. Her resistance, as a result, became the focus of

attention for progressive politicians as she hosted notable figures such as Vahid Dastgerdi, who was a renowned poet (Soltani Zaraswand 311-313, 345). Bibi Maryam's persistent opposition transcended her country's borders, as she had allied with Germany in resistance against the Russian and English forces invasions during World War I and, consequently, was merited the German Iron Cross as an expression of appreciation by Germany because she provided shelter to German nobility (361-363). Maryam has received a multitude of gifts, medals, and certificates of acknowledgment from Germany, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire, throughout her life, which, I believe, are testaments to the widespread recognition of her strategic and heroic deeds (360-361). It is because of these profound recognitions that she was given the title of "Sardar" (general) Maryam Bakhtiyari (360). In summary, her devotion to Iran's development and independence made her an outstanding figure in Iranian and women's history, in my opinion.

In her memoir, Bibi Maryam writes about her childhood and adolescence, her personality, her marriage and loyalty, her defense of women's rights, her role as a mother, and her challenges as a daughter of a Khan, and her attempts at keeping the unity in her family. Throughout her memoir, she courageously challenged both written and unwritten societal rules that denied women the right to divorce or have equal inheritance compared to their male equals. She strongly expresses her belief that if she had received the same inheritance as her brothers, she would have never entered into marriage and instead would have relied on her own financial resources. Bibi Maryam also opposed patriarchal ideologies and advocated for the education and literacy of all women. Despite all the struggles and limitations her family and society imposed on her, the main concern of her life apparent in her memoir was the improvement of the country. To me, her actions and efforts toward this cause make her an admirable figure. She participated greatly in the constitutional revolution, whose objectives were to bring progress to the country and establish a

new judicial system that treated all individuals, including the king, as equals before the law. During the subsequent period known as The Minor Tyranny, she encouraged her brother to join the fight in Tehran against the king, sent letters to tribal and familial leaders, and delivered passionate speeches advocating for the revival of constitutional rules and laws. She even joined a cohort in Tehran and engaged in an armed conflict against the supporters of the king. Bibi Maryam's literary work was an important contribution to Iranian history and a fascinating example of self-representation.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous emphasizes the importance of women writing themselves into society's fabric, saying "[w]oman must write herself ... woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and in history – by her own movement" (875). Bibi Maryam, too, etched her presence into both the narrative of her own life and the broader historical context. Throughout her resistance in the face of societal norms, Maryam represents new ways of being, showing that women can shape their identities beyond the prescribed roles. She, as Cixous puts it,

un-thinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield. As a militant, she is an integral part of all liberations. She foresees that her liberation will do more than modify power relations or toss the ball over to the other camp; she will bring about a mutation in human relations, in thought, in all praxis. (882)

In "The Newly Born Woman," Cixous argues that the expression of femininity by women results in the demolition of the alliances between logocentrism, meaning the dominance of language and knowledge, and phallogentrism, signifying the domination of male perspectives and power structures (350). Women can challenge and ultimately overthrow these systems by asserting and expressing their feminine identity, thereby disrupting the prevailing hierarchies and introducing

transformative changes within the context of society (350). Cixous continues to argue that through this predicted scenario, a deep transformation would take place, wherein history and narratives of the past would be reinterpreted from a fresh perspective (350). As the established historical forces would go through significant changes, the future would become unpredictable and new dynamics and possibilities would be possible (350). I believe that the impact of writers such as Bibi Maryam has been transformative for Iranian women, shaping their experiences and realities in different ways, as Cixous described in her work. Through her writing, Maryam contributed to changing the trajectory of history by meticulously analyzing the prevailing societal conditions and expressing her criticism in a courageous manner, in my view. Consequently, she paved the path for change and made society more prepared for a progressive future by acknowledging the shortcomings and deficiencies of the cultural and societal context of her time. In my opinion, her work fostered better awareness and a collective determination to make Iranian society more equitable and enlightened, resulting in a profound impact on Iranian women's lives, both for the present and future generations. She shook the foundations of the prevailing logocentric and phallogocentric ideologies by questioning the conventional power structures and advocating for a more equitable and free future.

Conclusion

Memoir writing, specifically for women, can be regarded as an act of resistance in cultures and societies such as Iran, where most women were confined to the private sphere and were expected to conceal themselves from the public sphere.³ Through writing about their personal lives

³ There are some exceptions to these women, such as Bibi Maryam herself and Taj al-Saltaneh after her marriage, which will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

and experiences, women expose their inner selves to society. Throughout this chapter, I explored the unique qualities of memoirs and autobiographies as literary forms. I discussed that I prefer the term memoir over autobiography because of its unconventional nature. Additionally, I explored the relationship between memoir and memory. Furthermore, I examined memoir writing within the Iranian context, by paying attention to the tendencies of the authors to adopt “masks” or “veils” in their narratives. Moreover, this chapter explored the memoir writing of Iranian female authors and examined their challenges in the patriarchal societal context in which they are often pushed to exclude their gendered experiences from their works. Lastly, I delved into the memoirs of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh and their contributions to Iranian literature and history by highlighting the incredible mark they have left Iran’s history in general and Iranian women’s history in particular. I conclude that despite various limitations for women during the Qajar era, some women, such as Maryam and Taj, resisted the prevailing patriarchal ideologies of their time and impacted the narration of history through their courageous deeds, as one of them was writing about their life experiences and thoughts.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that both Bibi Maryam and Taj practiced *écriture féminine*—a term coined by Hélène Cixous to refer to a style of writing that seeks to express the unique experiences, perspectives, and voices of women—the two have very different writing styles. Sadeghian states this difference beautifully:

Tāj’s text demonstrates an education well grounded in high Persian literature. Maryam’s text reads like a transliteration of a dialect, peppered with misspellings, grammar mistakes, and broken slang. She does not cite poets and such. Tāj’s memoir is framed by literature and her readings; Maryam’s memoir is framed by her life and what she experienced and explored: one is more philosophical and the other practical. Comparing the tenor of the

writing and the events and subjects each of these women mentions, one can sense the rapid pace of Maryam's life as compared with the languid pace of Tāj's life. Tāj recounts a single event over several pages whereas Maryam mentions numerous events on a single page.

(39)

This difference is rooted in their completely diverse cultural and familial backgrounds. Their memoirs and their style of writing give us a glimpse of their identity, education, and the rhythm of existence.

Although Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh understood their social and cultural limitations, they courageously documented their lives and experiences and asserted their presence within the narratives of society and history. However, it is important to consider how much these memoirs are reliable in such a restrictive environment. How did Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam shape their self-representation to align themselves and their characters with societal expectations of their own time? To what extent did their memories accurately recall the events they described? Which aspects of their narrative might have unintentionally changed, and which remain the same, and what motivated these variations? Examining these questions is crucial when analyzing memoiristic works.

In the next chapter, a comprehensive account of the conditions of women during the Qajar era will be discussed. I will examine the history of the Qajar and Bakhtiyari tribes with a focus on their social and cultural dynamics. Moreover, I will explore the conditions of women in harem and Bakhtiyari women, as they affect the experiences of Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh. Finally, a comparative analysis of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh is provided, highlighting the effects of the prevailing practice of exchange and traffic in women on their lives, despite their privileged position.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF A TRIBAL WOMAN AND A PRINCESS

Introduction

Knowing the history and the social background of the time of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh is very important. By knowing the social and historical contexts, we can get a clearer vision of their living environments and how they were affected by the societal conditions during their time. Also, it would be possible to study how they deviated from the societal norms of their time and resisted the ideologies prevalent during the Qajar era. I tried to answer questions regarding the origin and social dynamics within the Qajar and Bakhtiyari tribes, along with the extent to which the Qajar's societal and cultural circumstances were reflected in their memoirs as also seen in the different lives of Qajar women. It is also interesting to understand how Bibi Maryam and Taj were affected by the patriarchal systems in their communities and how they resisted. By employing a critical literature review approach and the ideas of Gayle Rubin and Luce

Irigaray, along with analyzing different sources regarding women's situations during the Qajar era, I delved into the social and historical aspects of their environments and circumstances to find answers to my questions.

In this chapter, I study the historical aspects of the Qajar tribe by tracing its progress into being a dynasty, along with Taj and Bibi Maryam's opinions on it. Furthermore, I explore the Bakhtiyari tribe and its social dynamics. Moreover, the general conditions experienced by women during the Qajar era are examined, exploring how Bibi Maryam and Taj were different from a normal Qajar woman. It is followed by an investigation into Bakhtiyari women and the women living in harems, focusing on the contextual circumstances Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh experienced and how they challenged the prevalent customs of their time. Lastly, a comparative analysis is conducted between a tribal woman, namely Bibi Maryam, and a princess, Taj al-Saltaneh, discussing that despite their privileged positions, both were subject to the constraints of a patriarchal system in which the exchange and traffic in women significantly impacted their lives. I tried to conduct a top-down approach in this chapter, starting my investigations from Qajar and Bakhtiyari tribes, narrowing it down to study the general condition of women, then focusing on a specific group of women, namely women in harem and Bakhtiyari women, and lastly zooming in on my two figures: Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari.

The Qajar Tribe

The Qajar dynasty governed Iran from 1789 to 1925; however, it is possible to trace its lineage back to the 11th century (Richard 1). Similar to the Safavids, Qajars were of Turkmen origins and spoke a dialect of Turkic language (1). They emerged from a nomadic lifestyle in the

northern parts of Iran, with a population of approximately ten thousand individuals (1). Aqa Mohammad Khan, the progenitor of the Qajar tribe, had aspirations for the revival of the Safavid rule (2). He initiated the dynasty in 1789 and designated Tehran as the capital (2). Within a decade, he successfully consolidated Iran's territories, including the areas that had been invaded before, such as some parts of Georgia (2). Among the Qajar rulers, Aqa Mohammad Khan is known for being immensely brutal and merciless (Kamrava 12). Robinson, in describing Aqa Mohammad Khan, says, "many stories are told of the cold and implacable cruelty of Aqa Muhammad ... he had the hairless emaciated face of [a] eunuch" (297). Before initiating the Qajar dynasty, he was imprisoned by the previous king in Shiraz for a while. Despite receiving relatively decent treatment while in captivity, the Zand court castrated him, which limited his enjoying the courtly indulgences that were a typical characteristic of subsequent rulers (Kamrava 12). This physical limitation had a significant impact on his mental state, as he had chronic depression, and was inclined towards religious passion plays that depict the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (12). Moreover, the geographical distance he maintained from the central palace and the capital city was also because of his personal challenges (12). However, his rule was abruptly ended in 1797 when he was assassinated by a released servant whom he had previously sentenced to death (Richard 2). It can be said that Aqa Mohammad Khan initiated the Qajar dynasty, Fathali Shah, his successor, asserted its nationalization, Naser al-Din Shah embellished its image, and the next three kings, namely Muzaffar al-Din, Mohammad Ali, and Ahmad, led the dynasty to its gradual decline (Kamrava 4). The fall of the Qajars was accelerated by the Constitutional Revolution that marked an unprecedented moment of coming of age in Iranian history (4). Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh had written about the Qajar kings and their ways of governing Iran in their memoirs. Bibi Maryam tended to disapprove of all the Qajar kings because of their incompetence and cruelties throughout

her memoir. For instance, in a section contemplating the responsibilities of the kings, she mentions, “usually the kings perform great services for their countries. But the Qajar kings have acted differently. They have lost the great country of Iran to the foreigners so that they can remain in power” (24, translation is mine). Bibi Maryam was clearly dissatisfied with the way Qajar kings managed the country. Taj al-Saltaneh, as well, regarded the kings as irresponsible and murderous and I believe her ideas originated from her observations in the royal kingdom. She says:

Kings and rulers, leaders and great men often murder, pillage, torture, imprison, tyrannize, or commit sinful acts. This is not because they do not know what they do. Oh no! They are fully cognizant of their deeds, but they act out of habit ... They were deprived of true educators—knowledge and humanity. So most of them ended up murdered or overthrown, having bedecked history with mementos of their savage and bloody deeds, and leaving a foul name to posterity. (Taj al-Saltana 109)

I believe that her description of the destiny of the kings came from her knowledge of her family's history and also studying other kingdoms in the world. It is interesting to notice that neither of them, Bibi Maryam and Taj, approved of the way kings, in general, and Qajar kings, in particular, govern their nation and country.

Although the Qajars were able to make some sophisticated political decisions because of their association with the Safavid court, their governance continued the tribal tradition which is characterized by centralized and personalized leadership (Kamrava 8). The ruler, who had the title of *Shah*, meaning *king*, had concentrated political authority and patrimonial support and allegiances (8). According to patrimonialism, the king embodied the national values and receiver of cultural heritage (8). Their state mirrored the structure of the royal household and operated under imperial approval and ruling, with the king having the most important position that was legitimized

by historical and literary works, including the Iranian national epic, “Shahnameh”, “The Book of Kings” (8). This monarchy tradition extended through Naser al-Din Shah’s reign, the period in which Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh lived, when the king's authority was perceived as divine, which gave the monarch religious sanctity (8). However, although the king had absolute power, his actions were circumscribed by the shari'a law (8). During Naser al-Din Shah’s reign, a gradual shift towards political institutionalization happened as he tried to formalize different aspects of his governance (8). Initially, the Qajar governance was patriarchal, but it evolved into patrimonialism, with the shah giving certain prerogatives to specific ministers and advisors (9). Although Naser al-Din Shah still possessed imperial rule, he took measures like the appointment of ministers, the encouragement of some reforms, and the initiation of some social and political changes (9). Even though his efforts towards change decreased in the later years of his reign, the nation’s desire for social transformation initiated during his rule and ultimately contributed to the downfall of the Qajars (9). Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh also talked about Qajar kings, their ways of governing the country, and Naser al-Din Shah in their memoirs. Bibi Maryam vehemently criticized the divinity given to the kings. She argued that:

What does the existence of a king mean for his country? ... Truly, the king should be considered the servant of the nation. But unfortunately, in some nations around the world, including Iran, the king is regarded as a divine gift, and God is considered as the king’s servant. They think of the king as someone who is above humanity. If only people had the awareness to ask the Qajar kings what they do with the nation's money, are they spending it for lavish lifestyle and their women? ... So, if we truly think about it, this person is the nation's servant, not its God ... Particularly Iranians consider themselves as the servant of the servant of God, and their thoughts have not evolved into thinking that the kings are

meant to serve the nation tirelessly, not be revered as gods. Therefore, whenever these servants act in the best interest of the nation, they should be praised, and whenever they fail to do so, they must be held accountable and removed from power. (106, translation is mine)

Taj, too, believed that kings, including her father, did not serve the nation. Despite the fact that Naser al-Din Shah took some measures for change and reform, Taj believed that he spent most of his time entertaining himself. In a notable section of her memoir, she says:

How much better it would have been if, for instance, my imperial father had devoted himself to the cause of humanity, to the betterment of his nation and of education and the arts, rather than to an animal? Had he not been so uxorious and so corrupted with carnal pleasures, and instead spent every hour of his life in governance and advancement of agriculture, how much better off we would be today! And rather than being compelled to describe his cat to you in this history, how much more grand it would be if I wrote off his kindness to his subjects, of his quest for learning, of the principal royal accomplishments! And if I could inscribe him as fortunate rather than miserable, how glad my heart would be at this hour! Alas, my dear teacher! In that day and age everyone wallowed in ignorance, deprived even of the breath of humanity. So tainted were they by baseness and evil that the damage they have wrought cannot be remedied for centuries to come. (Taj al-Saltana 90)

Since I am conducting research on Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari, who were both prominent figures during the Naseri era, it becomes imperative that I explore Naser al-Din Shah's reign in greater detail. E. Yarshater in "Observations on Naser al-Din Shah" discusses that a major part of Naser al-Din Shah's era was tranquil and in relative peace within the country and with other countries (4). He was inclined towards reform and upholding the nation's reputation.

This is evident in his support of Amir Kabir during his initial years of rule (6). Amir Kabir played a pivotal role in instituting the Council of Ministers and the State Council and facilitated the introduction of complaint depositories, which were referred to as “justice boxes,” where individuals could post their complaints (6-7). Despite all his efforts and his attempts at modernizing Iran, Yarshater states,

the net result of his rule does not measure up to the opportunity that Persia was afforded in the half-century of relative peace during his kingship. In fact, Persia's inner erosion and moral and cultural decline continued under his rule; his reformist measures were hardly adequate enough to stop a decline which had its roots in Persia's past ... and in spite of his good intentions and reformist measures, Naser al-Din's primary interest in life lay in having a good time rather than a good government ... he lacked application and tenacity of purpose where reform, social justice, and good government were concerned ... [h]is absorbing passions were eating, drinking, sex, haunting, riding, and money. (7)

Naser al-Din Shah's ultimate baseness is described by Taj in her memoir, describing his interest in a cat. Taj recounts:

I feel compelled now to describe this beloved cat ... viewed through the lens of impartiality, this omnipotent Sultan whom we considered the most well-favored man of his time was, in fact, exceptionally unfortunate, for he had succumbed to a weakness for women, accumulating a large number of them in his harem. Owing to the petty jealousies with which womankind has been endowed by heaven, a Sultan as mighty as this dared not display his love to his wife or children. So overcome was he by his passions and carnal desires, and so absorbed in his worldly delights, that he had even forgotten his regal privileges. Since every human being needs a confidant or a friend who will be uppermost

in his affections, this powerful yet overpowered sovereign, out of regard for his wives, had directed all his love to this animal, even preferring it to the rest of his family. I have seen pictures of the cat in all the royal apartments: a bristly calico with beautiful, dainty eyes. This cat was decked with all manner of fine, expensive trimmings and fed with sumptuous foods. Waited on like a human, it had servants and paid attendants. (Taj al-Saltana 88-89).

Naser al-Din Shah's assassination on May 1st, 1896, coincided with his Golden Jubilee in the lunar Islamic calendar and was a profoundly significant event for all the women in the harem (Amanat 35). Taj al-Saltaneh describes this event as follows:

That day at noon there was a major commotion in the seraglio. Despite the Grand Vizier's explicit instructions that the news should not be spread in the harem just yet, the eunuch had been unable to restrain himself. Word had gone out that the Shah had been fired upon but the bullets had missed. All the women, with disheveled hair and frightful looks, poured out of their rooms in a torrent and ran to the government house. "We want to see the Shah," they screamed.

We were told that he had been wounded and was in the White Hall. The women's screams rose to a higher pitch. The eunuchs came in and said, "the Shah is well. Any moment now he will come in through the large door of the harem." The wretched women ran as fast as they could to the door, and their cries abated somewhat. After waiting for a while, they saw that there was no sign of the king. Without either chador or veil, they were prepared to run out into the streets. There was no way for the eunuchs to restrain this firestorm of anguish, this lightning bolt of grief ... all that night one could hear weeping and moaning everywhere. No one had any peace or respite until the morning. Then all the ladies congregated in Anis al-Dawla's house and the outpourings of grief began anew. While they

were thus engaged in bemoaning their husband's loss, word spread that the assassin was Mirza Reza of Kerman. (Taj al-Saltana 151, 154)

The scene vividly describes the harem's reliance on the Shah's presence and the impact it had on the entire government, courts, government, and political system (Amanat 35). This event had broad consequences, including a transformation in the state and society that led to the Constitutional Revolution about a decade later.

Except for expanding some parts of Iran, the Qajar kings did not bring significant progress to the country. This fact was understood by both Taj and Bibi Maryam, as they criticized Qajar's ways of governing the country harshly in their memoirs. The fact that they had the knowledge to distinguish the right and wrong ways of government, and having the courage to write about it, was an act of resistance and quite avant-garde in its nature, in my opinion. Their endeavors to read, study, and admit that the prevalent conduct of the kings of their time, and in Taj's case, her own father, was wrong was rebellious. Bibi Maryam was highly affected by the unjust way of governing the country and Taj was immensely impacted by his father's carelessness about his nation and his engagement with carnal entertainments. I believe that observing the situation in the Qajar tribe left them angry with the dynasty and led them to take action. Their social endeavors are discussed in the next chapter, as I will discuss the Constitutional Revolution in greater detail.

Social Dynamics and Challenges in the Bakhtiyari Tribe

This section focuses on the Bakhtiyari tribe in the Zagros region, which was governed indirectly by the Qajar state. An examination of the societal structure and dynamics of this nomadic tribe during the 19th century is presented with a special focus on Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari. She was

a member of the Haft Lang division and her upbringing and pivotal role in the Constitutional Revolution gives us insights into the social dynamics and challenges in this tribe.

The Qajar era spanned from the 19th century to the early 20th century and the Qajar kings attempted to consolidate their power in Iran (Garthwaite 145). While they tried to expand their territories, they faced defeats and territorial losses (146). In this period, Russian and British intrusions in Iran's affairs increased, which caused a change in the trajectory of the nation (146). The state government in Iran had an indirect rule over the peripheral regions, without applying a consistent policy for the tribal populations (Khazeni 4). The tribes provided military support for the state and paid minimal taxes while maintaining a significant degree of autonomy (4). In spite of the occasional military interventions and forced relocations by the state, certain tribes, including the Bakhtiyari tribe, thrived on the periphery of the empire, operating beyond the reach of their dominance (4). During the beginning decades of the 19th century, about fifty percent of Iran's population had a nomadic lifestyle (4). During the 1850s, the Bakhtiyaris became a significant political force, both as individuals and as a growing confederation (Garthwaite 146). Several factors shaped Bakhtiyari's prominence, including the influential leadership of Husain Quli Khan (Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari's father), the construction of the Bakhtiyari road in 1898, the discovery of oil in the Bakhtiyari territory, and the crucial role the khans and rulers of the Bakhtiyari tribe played in the revolution and the subsequent government (146). Although the British supported the Bakhtiyaris in establishing their own government on two occasions, internal tribal divisions deterred the khans from establishing a sustained dominance (146). For example, Bibi Maryam explains in her memoir that when one of the king's sons murdered her father, the khan of the Bakhtiyari tribe, and imprisoned her eldest brother, her uncles, instead of supporting them and fighting back, took advantage of the circumstances and became the khan of the tribe (30-31).

Eventually, the government centralized power and established a nation-state, which laid the foundation for the gradual erosion of the tribes' authority (Garthwaite 146).

Bakhtiyari tribes, like other pastoral nomads in the Zagros region, exhibited segmentation socially and politically (Garthwaite 146). In this societal structure, each segment has its own roles and activities (146). The fundamental unit in the Bakhtiyari society, as well as in other tribes, was the family (146). Families were recognized as both the productive unit and the lowest level of political and social organization (146). As segmentation increased, families began to regroup and redefine themselves under various designations for different purposes, sometimes based on genealogy and sometimes based on political affiliations (146). These larger groups included the Rīš-sefid (sage men or old wisemen, also a term used for elders), kalāntar (headmen), k̄an or khan (chiefs), and, since 1867, an Īlkānī (146). The Bakhtiyari tribe, in particular, is a comprehensive unit including individuals who live or have lived within the territory, speak the Bakhtiyari dialect (a variant of Luri), and recognize the authority of the khans and Īlkhānī (147). The Bakhtiyari tribe is divided into two primary divisions: Haft Lang and Chahar Lang (147). These divisions are subdivided into various named tribes and subtribes (referred to as tayafah and/or tirah) (147). Khans led larger and more significant divisions, while Kalantars, often appointed by khans, led lesser divisions (147). Bibi Maryam was a member of the Haft Lang division in the Bakhtiyari tribe. Her father, Husain Quli Khan, held the position of khan or Īlkhānī, within the Bakhtiyari tribe. In describing her father, Bibi Maryam says:

My father was a devout Muslim. He took his religion seriously, engaging in midnight prayers regularly. Even during his time in Khuzestan⁴, despite the intense heat, he observed

⁴ Khuzestan is a tropical province and temperature can reach sometimes above 40 C. Fasting with no food and water for sometimes over sixteen hours becomes a challenge.

fasting on Thursdays and Mondays throughout the year. He would wake up very early in the morning and would have his meals indoors ... he would give a lot of money to the poor ... He always showed respect to the Bakhtiyari people despite being the boss of everyone ... he had good relations with head officials ... but he was a little hot-tempered, he wouldn't tolerate insults, not even from the king. (26-27, translation is mine)

Bibi Maryam was brought up in the khan's household; however, with her father's demise, when she was only seven years old, a power struggle between his sons and brothers began. She was also the victim of the exchange of women as gifts between men, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Women and Societal Challenges

I have explored three works that examine how women perceived and understood themselves and their political, social, cultural and family environments. This has helped me to comprehensively understand the overall circumstances and experiences of women during the Qajar era. These works particularly address the literacy levels of women, their beliefs, and the strategies they employed to manage the challenges of their lives. The first article is by Guity Nashat and Lois Beck, which is the "Introduction" of the book *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic* (2004). This section examines the Qajar era and meticulously studies the diverse circumstances experienced by women from elite, urban, and non-urban groups, exploring the prevailing societal norms and the expectations from women and the literacy rate among them (4-20). They discuss that there were only a limited number of schools for girls, primarily located in Tehran, Esfahan, and Shiraz (20). The resources required for the establishment of other educational institutions for

girls were rarely available, which resulted in the low levels of education among women until the end of the Qajar period (20). Notably, in the 1920s, the literacy rate was two percent for women (20). This chapter significantly enhances our understanding of the limited opportunities for most of the women and girls during the Qajar era to learn how to read and write and get educated.

As I mentioned in chapter one, Shaqayeq Fathalizadeh and Roqayeh Aqabalazadeh compiled and edited two noteworthy essays, “Tadīb Al-Nesvān” and “Tadīb-Al-Rejāl,” combining them into a single book titled *Tadīb-Al-Rejāl (Pāsoḳ be Ta’dīb al-Nesvān-e Zan Setīz)*. In “Tadīb Al-Nesvān,” there are ten chapters giving guidelines to women regarding their conduct, communication, diets, personal hygiene, attire, sleeping patterns, marital interaction, and morning routines (21-66). For example, in the first chapter, he mentions, “[A woman] should wholeheartedly submit to her man and not hesitate to obey him. She must adhere to his commands, acknowledging that this obedience is a moral obligation” (32, translation is mine). In chapter three, he also mentions that “[a woman] should refrain from expressing complaints to a man, even if she undergoes hardship due to his actions” (36, translation is mine). Furthermore, in chapter nine, he discusses the expected conduct of women during intimate relations with a man, saying:

[A woman] should not be inert or burdensome in bed; rather, she should embody a gentle, feather-light conduct. If a man desires to share a bed with her, she ought not to resist or refuse abruptly. Instead, she should approach his bed with warmth, softness, and a willingness to attend to his needs. (59, translation is mine)

It is apparent that the author of “Tadīb Al-Nesvān” did not perceive women as equal to men, regarding them as an instrument to enhance a man's life. Consequently, he wrote pamphlets to prescribe and “train” women on proper behavior. This source offers valuable insights into the male perception of women and how prevailing these thoughts and ideas were during the Qajar era, as

this essay was translated into several languages, including French, English, and Russian (Fathalizadeh and Aqabalazadeh 10).

In another scholarly work, titled “Motāle'e-ye Jensīyatī Bāvarhā-ye ‘āmmīāneh dar ‘Aṣr-e Qājār” (A Gender Study of Folk Beliefs in the Qajar Era), Somayeh Sadat Shafiei examines key folk beliefs in Iranian society during the Qajar era. This research aims to study the instances of gender-based discrimination through these beliefs and explain their practical appearances in the daily lives of individuals during this period. Throughout her research, the author focuses on folk beliefs about gender-specific issues such as infertility, childbirth, childcare, and child-rearing (89-101). Additionally, this study delves into cultural practices and superstitions about maternal bonds with infants and safeguarding children from mythical and superstitious creatures (92-95). It is interesting to mention that the deeply rooted beliefs of men during the Qajar era were concerned with business prosperity, agricultural productivity, and water resource abundance (90-91). During this historical period, these beliefs had a significant influence on the daily lives of both men and women, which shows how integrally interwoven they were in that sociocultural setting. I believe that this article is significantly important due to its conclusive observations. According to Shafiei, societal structures reflect the prevailing power dynamics of the Qajar era (107). As a result of their functional roles, men sought success across different domains, including business (107). Women, however, were confined to domestic roles, prioritizing familial and caregiving responsibilities (107). These categories, which were based on gender roles, trapped men and women within the power dynamics (108). Arranged marriages, usually devoid of emotional bonds between the couple, impelled women to seek help from sorcerers for matters related to love and enchantment (108). The widespread illiteracy highly contributed to the prevalence of folk beliefs that limited logical thinking (108). With the escalation of epidemic diseases and reproductive infections,

women grappled with infertility (109). Therefore, women had to turn to unconventional methods, such as getting assistance from sorcerers, despite their financial constraints, to manage their daily challenges (109). In conclusion, the societal, economic, and gender dynamics in the Qajar era's society were immensely influenced by pervasive ignorance and adherence to folk beliefs.

The three books and articles that I mentioned in this section serve as examples to demonstrate how women perceived and were perceived in society during the Qajar era. As it was mentioned, the literacy rate among Iranian women was extremely low, demonstrating their little chance to gain knowledge and understand their position as a woman within the context of society. This fact, coupled with women's folk beliefs during that time, illustrates their dependency on superstitions and illogical thinking, which solidified their inferiority. Moreover, the duties and responsibilities of women and how they were perceived through men's eyes were discussed by analyzing "Tadīb Al-Nesvān." Women were expected to serve and please men by fulfilling their domestic, child-rearing, and marital responsibilities and were fundamentally seen as the second sex. My intention in raising all these points is to portray the general position and role of women at that time. Indeed, there were exceptions to these women, such as Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh, but the widespread condition of women was as I illustrated. I believe that through understanding the general conditions of women during the Qajar era, the significant importance of the existence of figures such as Maryam and Taj can be highlighted. They were truly iconic figures since despite the fact that they were raised in a society in which women had nearly no literacy and were supposed to merely serve men, they made history through their unique way of being and their deeds.

Women in harems

Because my thesis centers on the examination of Taj al-Saltaneh's life and circumstances, it is essential to delve into the environment in which she lived. Her residence was within the harem, a designated space exclusively for the royal Qajar women. In the "Introduction" part of *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity 1884-1914*, Abbas Amanat describes the Naseri harem:

The Golestan palace in central Tehran, the principal residence of the Shah and his family, was surrounded by the high walls of Royal Citadel (Arg-e Saltanati). Like Beijing's Forbidden City, Delhi's Red Fort, the Ottoman Topkapi, Cairo's Citadel, or even Vienna's Borge, the Arg was a self-contained complex of some magnitude. Built in the eighteenth century and extensively rebuilt in the Qajar era, the Arg was situated in the central part of old Tehran. The business district, the bazaar, with its labyrinth of shops, trading houses, workshops, and caravanserais lay to the south, where there were also the reconstructed market square (Sabza Maydan) and the royal theater (Takiya Dawlat), built in an innovative style for the annual performance of Shi'ite passion play, the ta'ziya. (11-12)

During Naser al-Din Shah's reign, the harem consisted of approximately seven hundred individuals, including around eighty wives (Amanat 12). In light of these demographics, it has been argued that his preoccupation with harem affairs may have diverted his attention from state affairs (12). The situation in the harem is also described by Taj al-Saltaneh, saying:

His Imperial Majesty, my father, had about eighty wives and concubines, each of whom had about ten or twenty maidservants and domestics. The number of women in the harem

thus reached some five or six hundred. Moreover, every day the wives, concubines, or domestics received numerous relatives and visitors, so that there was a constant flood of about eight or nine hundred women in the harem. In addition, each lady had a residence, a stipend, and the requirements-maidservants, menservants, and all the household necessities-to live outside the harem. Seldom did two ladies share the same house; the exception was when new wives, chosen from villages in the vicinity, were committed to the care of other ladies to be educated in etiquette. Later, they were given houses of their own. (Taj Al-Saltana 88)

Taj continues to mention that in the aforementioned group of women, only a few women, approximately seven or eight, bore offspring and the rest of the women remained childless (Taj Al-Saltana 88). Moreover, the royal concubines lived within a distinct courtyard which was overseen by a supervisor (88). These concubines, who were mostly from Turkoman or Kurdish backgrounds, were captured during Turkoman conflicts, mostly because of their beautiful appearance (88). Not only did they play a role as concubines, but also, they functioned as temporary wives for the king (88). The supervisor of the concubines, named Aqol Baga Khanum, was a Turkoman woman, with excellent competency, extensive education, and proficiency in effectively managing them (88). She controlled their financial affairs and incomes, as each concubine received a specific amount of money from the government to cover their supplementary expenses (88). Therefore, it can be concluded that the harem was an extremely busy site and all the royal women had the opportunity of having someone to serve them. In this luxurious lifestyle, even though there were more opportunities to gain knowledge and literacy, women were more occupied with their clothes and how they looked, along with different entertainments, as Taj

describes in her memoir (94). Taj, as well, enjoyed good clothes and parties; however, she dedicated a lot of her time to studying, reading, and expanding her intellectual horizons.

In contrast to popular belief, the women in the royal harem were not as secluded as commonly believed (Amanat 12). They actively participated in different activities, including observing fireworks and the vibrant city life during ordinary days and festivals, from the Shams al-‘Emara tower (12). Moreover, they accompanied the king on some of his trips, including his hunting expeditions and visits to the residences of other prominent noble figures (12). Additionally, these royal women were allowed to visit their relatives and spend some time with them (12). Also financially, they got paid regular pensions, which came from different sources such as taxes and money from foreign countries (Gholam Niarami 95). Moreover, according to Amanat, the harem was connected to the external world through servants and attendants who regularly commuted in and out of the harem to fulfill various service duties (13). Among these servants were professionals such as physicians, tailors, merchants, etc. who played a key role in forming channels of communication between the women in the harem and the external society (13). It is very important to notice that they were financially independent to some extent, along with the fact that they could have a connection with the world outside of the harem. However, I believe that they were not truly free since they had to abide by the rules of the harem system. They could not commute or act in the way they truly may have wanted, as it could cause them punishment or worse. Harem was in fact a secluded place for the royal women's luxurious lifestyle, and it did not give them the freedom to act or be otherwise. Therefore, their financial independence and the opportunities they had to communicate with the outside world were not significantly noteworthy, in my opinion.

However, after the demise of Naser al-Din Shah, a transformation happened in the structure of the harem. The succession of Muzaffar al-Din Shah started a new era that caused tension for Taj and other women in the nursery harem (Amanat 35). In a description of his brother, Taj says:

So shy, meek, and prone to embarrassment was he that the hardest of hearts would bleed for him. Very changeable, he listened to everyone; weak-willed, he allowed himself to be guided by the will of others. He was timid and simple, worshipped flatterers and loved sycophants. His retinue and court were comprised entirely of base, vile, vulgar, and contemptible young men, simple and rowdy; himself fearful, irresolute and extremely gullible. (Taj al-Saltana 157)

Muzaffar al-Din Shah and his large group of supporters rushed to obtain the resources, while trying to assert his power (Amanat 35). He removed childless wives from the harem and housed widows with younger children separately, including Taj's mother (35). Taj describes this incident, saying:

Finally, after a week, an edict came down from the new king: all the ladies had to leave the harem with all their possessions, except those who had children . . . The unfortunate women, now widowed, left their seat of grandeur and comfort en masse, with a thousand sighs and groans. (Taj al-Saltana 158)

These actions and deeds were typical for a new ruler; however, it afforded shocks of personal animosity (Amanat 35). Nevertheless, Taj was sent to her husband's house after having a customary wedding ceremony and receiving a substantial pension (35). In my opinion, the treatment of Muzaffar al-Din Shah with women demonstrates how women were deeply powerless within the confines of the harem. It is true that they were privileged to enjoy many facilities, but they did not have full control over their life when it came to the word of the king. I believe that the

royal system, which was built on the edicts of the king, determined the destiny of harem women, as demonstrated in Taj's memoir.

Despite all the limitations and privileges that women had in the harem, Taj was a rebellious figure both in the society and in the harem. As I mentioned above, most of the women during the Qajar era were illiterate and were confined to the private sphere, limited to domestic chores and child-rearing. Taj, however, was a writer and painter and knew several languages such as French. While her intellectual pursuits did not belong to any particular era or culture, she exhibited knowledge of historical figures like Caligula, which showed her engagement in a vast variety of knowledge beyond her own background (Taj al-Saltana 132). In a part of her memoir, she mentions, "I wish I were a competent writer like Victor Hugo or Monsieur Rousseau and could write this history in sweet and delightful language. Alas, I can write but simply and poorly" (96). Furthermore, she abandoned her belief in religion and committed to a scientific perspective, decided to seek a divorce from her husband, and abandoned hijab which was a highly rebellious act during that era⁵ (Taj al-Saltana 215, 216). All of these emphasize the fact that she was a rebellious figure, challenging the pressures of society on women to be the second sex.

Bakhtiyari Women

Inspired by Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari's life, I conducted research on Bakhtiyari women. My research elucidates the environments and situations in which she lived. However, the resources studying Bakhtiyari women are very limited. Nevertheless, I successfully found two sources—a book and an article—that give insights into Bakhtiyari women, particularly those who lived within

⁵ I discuss her rebellious deeds in greater detail in the next chapter.

the household of khans. One of the resources I have found is the book titled *Persian Women and Their Ways* by C. Colliver Rice. This book was published in 1923 and is about Rice's firsthand observations during her journey to Iran as she studied and documented the lives of Iranian women. In a chapter called "Tribeswomen—the Bakhtiaris," different aspects of Bakhtiyari women are explored and analyzed. Rice discusses that Bakhtiyari women were highly valued by their male counterparts, therefore occupying a prominent position within the tribe (67). The wives and daughters of khans, who were commonly referred to as *bibi*, had an uncommon influence among their counterparts (67). Bibis, in the absence of khans, who may have been away in Tehran or remote provinces, managed all business affairs and oversaw the lives and activities of their dependents (67). Rice also mentions that in their native land, Bakhtiyari women did not wear hijab (68). Moreover, in their own community, Bakhtiyari women had the freedom to interact and converse unveiled with men who had lower social status than them (68). Considering the responsibilities they had, these engagements were inevitable (68). What Rice recounted about Bakhtiyari women aligns with the truth about Bakhtiyari's lives in Bibi Maryam's memoir. For instance, Rice correctly mentions that women in the Bakhtiyari tribe are highly valued by their male counterparts and have a great influence on them. Bibi Maryam mentions in her memoir that before her brother and other soldiers departed for Tehran to fight for the Constitutional Revolution, she gave a very passionate and effective speech that highly motivated them. She recounts:

I cried, grieved, and shouted a lot ... because I could see that my dearest brother would probably die ... After all the bawling and crying, I addressed my brother [and other soldiers], in a loud voice, saying: "Of course, nothing can break the indestructible love of a sister towards her brother. I witness with my own eyes that not only my entire family, but the entire Bakhtiyari tribe, are in life and financial danger. But since this death is for the

freedom of the nation, I wholeheartedly praise and support you and regret the fact that I am a miserable woman that cannot die for the freedom of my nation and why I cannot be like European women who participate in wars and care for the young people who are fighting. What does my existence mean now that I cannot participate and this committed and manly work. If all the brave Bakhtiyari men are martyred, I will gather all the Bakhtiyari women and we will move toward the camp of tyranny, armed with guns to defeat the enemy, and we will kill ourselves before we are caught by the enemy. But my dear brother, God stands with the righteous people. Your faith is sacred, and your intention is appreciable. I hope that with God's mercy and Morteza Ali's (first Imam in the Shiite faith) grace, you uproot the corrupt tyranny with your wisdom and deep thought, along with the force of the fiery swords of brave Iranian youths. Today is the day to avenge the blood of my ilkhani father, who was unjustly killed." As I mentioned my father's name, tears filled Sardar Asad⁶'s eyes, and all the brave Bakhtiyari youth who were present, whether they were family members or leaders, became stirred with excitement, shouting, "Long live sardar Asad!" and raised his good name. Sardar Asad responded, "Long live my dear sister, who, after crying and lamenting, delivered this impassioned speech, which showed the love of a sister and the nobility of an Iranian. (182-183, translation is mine)

It is true that women were highly valued by their male counterparts and had a great influence on them; however, they were never counted as equal to the men and were often subjugated to the dominant patriarchal ideology within their society. I will discuss the manifestations of this ideology in the next part of this chapter.

⁶ Bibi Maryam's brother.

Another source I have found examines the perspectives of women outside Iran regarding Bakhtiyari women. In an article titled “Three British Ladies in Bakhtiariland,” Caroline Mawer analyzes three travel narratives of Isabella Bishop, Elizabeth Ross, and Vita Sackville West. Since Vita Sackville West does not extensively discuss Bakhtiyari women, this section will focus on Mawer's discussions of Isabella Bishop and Elizabeth Ross. From 1890 to 1927, these British women wrote about their journeys through the Bakhtiyari territory. The first narrative that Mawer examines belongs to Isabella Lucy Bird Bishop, who authored *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* (1891) (29). According to Mawer’s analysis, Isabella Bishop was granted access to *andarūn* (women's quarters), since she was a woman, even though sometimes her male interpreter had to remain behind a curtain or was denied entry completely (32). However, despite this privilege, Bishop consistently expressed her “disappointment” with the monotonous lives of elite Bakhtiyari women in her travelogue (32). Despite their apparent apathy, she criticized these women for showing a rude “persistent curiosity” regarding what she deemed as “remarkably frivolous” matters (32). Bishop was not interested in what she perceived as a “[b]abel of intriguing women and untutored children” and found the presence of “servants, negro slaves, old hags, and young girls crowded around” disturbing her intellectual endeavors (32). Consequently, she declined invitations to spend the night in *andarūns* (32). I believe that there is some truth to what Bishop was observing; because of the fact that the main job of women was child-rearing and doing domestic chores, the main part of the *andarūns* would be filled with the sound of babies and children. However, I think her disapproval of the Bakhtiyari woman's lifestyle becomes interesting when we compare it to the next author that Mawer studies.

The second writer among the three was Dr. Elisabeth Ness MacBean Ross, renowned for her work *A Lady Doctor in Bakhtiariland* (1921) (Mawer 34). In an interesting contrast to Bishop,

Ross presented a different perspective, explaining the pivotal role Bakhtiyari women played in the social context (34). She explained that, based on her analysis, the most important aspect of Bakhtiyari's lives was the status of their women, who were the primary driving force behind everything that happened within the region (34). Ross was a physician for bibis and discussed Bakhtiyari women from different perspectives, such as their domestic and intellectual life in her travelogue (36). She had a comprehensive understanding of the significance of different titles and names in the Bakhtiyari context, which shows her great knowledge of their history (36). Ross acknowledged the pivotal role of women in the tribe, particularly in managing the possessions when the male members of the tribe were absent (38). This management, which demonstrated their administrative skills in the absence of men who were often away in Tehran or governing other distant provinces, was an essential responsibility specifically in the castles where they resided (38). According to Mawer, Ross, contrary to Bishop, understood the significance of Bakhtiyari women within the complex power dynamics of the tribe (38). It is stated in Ross's book that mothers held a preeminent position in their sons' household as long as they lived (38, 39). Elder sisters, too, had considerable influence on their brothers who tended to prioritize their opinions over their wives' (39). In contrast to the indifference that Bird reported, Ross observed that Bakhtiyari women actively engaged in politics and expressed their concerns for the current situation of the country (39). They showed a noticeable interest in ongoing affairs and pursued newspapers enthusiastically (39). It was noteworthy for Ross that the bibis were fascinated by history. For example, Ross was surprised that a patient right after surgery, inquired about General Monk's fate after the restoration of Charles II in 1660, expressing her curiosity about it (39). Bibi Maryam was a true example of a woman who was knowledgeable in history and persistent in following the country and the world's news, as she was one of the freedom fighters in the Constitutional

Revolution. As Rice mentions the independence of Bakhtiyari women during men's absence, it is interesting to mention that Bibi Maryam controlled and managed a castle and all its attendance while her husband was away in another city⁷. She resisted the normal concept of women of her time, which was illiterate, confined to the private sphere, and limited to domestic responsibilities and child-rearing duties. She was a rebellious figure, persisting in rebelling against conventions and introducing a new definition of womanhood during the Qajar era.

The Tribal Woman and the Princess

Earlier in this chapter, I examined the historical context and background surrounding the Qajar and Bakhtiyari tribes. They laid the foundation to explore the circumstances of women within these societies. The last three parts of this chapter particularly discussed the general status of women during the Qajar era, the conditions of the harem, and the experiences of Bakhtiyari women. Overall, these discussions suggest that women in general suffered from an unfavorable environment during this time period. The prevalence of low female literacy rate, societal expectations of women to serve men and remaining limited to domestic responsibilities, and reliance on superstitions because of limited scientific knowledge together reduced women's agency.

However, a subtle contrast is observable when examining women in the harem and in the Bakhtiyari tribe. These women enjoyed certain privileges, in contrast to their peers in broader society. They had more chances to gain a decent education, ranging from literacy to learning different forms of art and horseback riding. It is important to acknowledge that despite their better

⁷ I discuss this more in the next chapter.

conditions, it was not completely ideal. Nonetheless, important female figures such as Taj and Maryam, who emerged from these very contexts, made a difference in the world through their noteworthy contributions and carved their presence in history.

When I was examining Taj's and Maryam's lives, I came to an interesting understanding—despite their privileged status, both women were treated as commodities, subject to exchange between men for different purposes, only because of their sex. I understood the deeply rooted nature of the system of exchange and traffic in women in the societal ideology. In the subsequent section of this chapter, I present the concept of women's exchange systems, discussed by Gary Rubin and Lucy Irigaray, and analyze their manifestations in the memoirs of Taj and Maryam.

Gayle Rubin analyzes the perspectives of Claude Lévi-Strauss as portrayed in “Traffic in Women” in order to examine how Lévi-Strauss enriches the primitive reciprocity theory by emphasizing marriage's crucial role as a mechanism for gift exchange (777). Lévi-Strauss discusses that women are considered gifts in the primitive societies (777). While it is generally believed that incest taboos primarily aimed to prevent close genetic pairings, Lévi-Strauss gathers that their universality serves a societal purpose, which is to facilitate exogamy and solidify alliances between families and different social groups (777). Rubin explains that the incest taboo, according to Lévi-Strauss, directs marital exchanges between different groups effectively and determines acceptable and unacceptable categories of sexual partners (777). The exchange of women as gifts is far more important than other modes of gift exchanging because of the fact that it establishes both a mutual connection and a familial one (778). Rubin discusses that according to Lévi-Strauss, the result of giving women in marriage is the formation of blood connections (778). Therefore, while other gift exchanges may result in subsequent conflicts, marriages would establish a lasting bond (778). As Lévi-Strauss believes that this system was for the primitive

societies, Luce Irigaray in “Women on the Market” argues that the present society and culture are fundamentally dependent on the act of exchanging women (779). She argues that the lack of this exchange would lead to a regression into chaos or unpredictability that is seen in the natural world or in the animal kingdom (799). The only way to secure the social and symbolic order, which is the foundation of the society, is through a controlled circulation of women among men that is based on the principles of the incest taboo (799).

Throughout history, men have been viewed as active participants in sexual exchanges while women have remained mere as semi-objects or gifts in these transactions (Rubin 780). This perspective signifies diverse cultural practices, stereotypes, and individual characteristics, such as the tradition of a father giving away the bride to the groom in a wedding ceremony (780). In addition to merely exchanging women, kinship systems, too, include elements like sexual privileges, genealogical statuses, lineage names, ancestors, and rights for men, women, and children within a tangible social network. (780). The term “exchange of women” conveys that within these kinship systems, men possess specific entitlements over their female peers, whereas women do not enjoy the same rights over themselves or their male kin (780). Fundamentally, the concept of the exchange of women signifies a deeply rooted system where women lack complete autonomy and control over their own rights and selves (780). Moreover, in order for this system to function efficiently, women must not strongly assert their personal preferences regarding their sexual partners (783). For example, when a girl is promised in infancy by her male kin to another family, her reluctance to participate in the marriage as an adult would potentially disrupt the kinship system (783). From the system’s standpoint, the ideal female sexuality is the one that is receptive to the desires of others rather than pursuing their own personal desires (783). Therefore, overall, the establishment and sustainability of such a social structure are only guaranteed through

the exchange of women (Irigaray 807). Circulation of women among men is the fundamental element in such a system and ensures the operation of society, especially in patriarchal frameworks (807). I believe that Rubin and Irigaray's ideas on "women as gifts," "traffic in women," and "exchange of women" are all very clearly visible in the lives of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh. Both figures were the victims of such ideologies that prevented them from having autonomy and control over their lives.

The life and circumstances of Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh clearly reflect the discussions on the traffic in women and the exchange of women in the kinship system. As for Bibi Maryam, I believe that while it is important to mention that she was deeply involved in these ideologies and sometimes benefited from this system, she was aware of how this system made her position subordinate to her male peers. The fact that Bibi Maryam was not treated as an equal to men disturbed her significantly. As it was mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Rubin believes that men traditionally play a proactive role in sexual transactions, while women have a subordinate position, acting as semi-objects or gifts (780). Rubin believes that this observation highlights the prevalence of these cultural practices and stereotypes, which is exemplified by the customary act of a father giving her daughter away as a bride to another man (780). This specific event is evident in the memoir of Bibi Maryam. She recounts:

When I turned forty days old, my father arranged my marriage to the son of Mohammad Ali Khan, a significant and skilled man who had been opposing the Qajar government for years. In the Bakhtiyari tradition, my father fostered alliances with other groups by exchanging wives. He married me off as a service to Mohammad Ali Khan's son and as a contribution to the state ... In those days, we were quite ignorant and unaware. I didn't realize that I could object to the marriage my father had promised when I was just forty

days old. I couldn't express my objection or refuse to be his wife ... At the age of fifteen, I had no desire to get married. He was nearly forty years old, already having many other wives, daughters, sons, and brides. To my dear reader exploring my memoir, you now grasp the fate of Iranian girls, especially Bakhtiyari girls. They compel a fifteen-year-old girl to marry a forty-year-old man with two wives and five or six children. (53-54, translation is mine)

Bibi Maryam functioned as a gift that was intended to bring unity to the tribe. Her father had the authority to make such arrangements and she was left with no agency, relegating to a mere object. Since this was a prevalent practice of her era, Bibi Maryam, like numerous women of her time, served as a transactional medium between the male figures within her tribe. This event, which was described in Bibi Maryam's memoir, is a clear manifestation of Rubin's concept of the "exchange of women" where men have entitlements over their female relatives, while women are deprived of such rights for themselves (Rubin 780). The notion of the exchange of women, in essence, manifests as a systematic lack of complete autonomy and control for women over their own rights (780). Bibi Maryam, who was the emblem of this system, found herself deprived of any autonomy in preventing her predetermined marriage. She was exchanged like a symbolic gift to fortify the bonds between the male figures in her tribe and between her tribe and the broader social context. However, the lack of control and autonomy inflicted immense hardship upon her. Despite the fact that she resisted persistently, she was again forced to enter a second marriage after the death of her first husband. Her second husband's infidelity gave Bibi Maryam syphilis and consequently, she miscarried several babies. She narrates this situation as below:

Every day, the doctors came to consult and treat me, but their efforts proved ineffective. Eventually, an English woman was able to provide the right treatment for my female-

specific ailment. With the guidance of other medical professionals, I began to experience gradual improvement. Meanwhile, my dear husband was indulging in pleasure with another woman in our own building. (157)

According to Rubin, the societies in which women are either literally or metaphorically exchanged significantly put marital obligations on the females' shoulders (783). Women are expected to fulfill their marital responsibilities by playing the role of a sexual partner for men (783). This prevailing social structure, which is seen in the extract from Bibi Maryam's memoir, subjected her to experiencing different marital challenges and forced her to accept her role as a sexual partner in order to maintain unity in their tribe. It is very noteworthy that the apparent masculine societal structure is highly dependent on women who are exchanged between families. Also, societal unity is highly dependent on the passivity of women, and if one decides to reject the imposed marriages, she could shake the structure of the society.

Although different hardships were imposed on Bibi Maryam by this system, she acknowledged her role in fortifying the tribe's unity. In the context of her marriage, she felt an obligation toward her spouse, as she expressed it in this way: "honor and nobility consistently reminded me that, however disdainful and scoundrel-like my husband may be, he is still my husband. I have children with him, and I can use his money to live ... so it becomes imperative for me to protect his wealth and property" (129-130). She relatively understood her role as a gift and simultaneously recognized the importance of the underlying purpose of this exchange. Additionally, she tried to bring unity to her family by overlooking different transgressions by her family members and tribe members. In one incident that involved her own family and her uncle's family, she was deeply disturbed by a behavior from her uncle's wife (38). Nevertheless, shortly after narrating the incident, she says:

I thank God that today in our family, there are no arguments, and we all feel as if we are one soul in a single body. Personally, I can swear that I perceive no difference between my own brothers and my cousins; I consider my father's children equal to my uncle's children. Today, we are living a good life. (38, translation is mine)

Her immense willingness to overlook disagreements and resentments illustrates her understanding of this societal system. Of course, there were other motives for her emphasis on the unity of her family and tribe; I, however, analyze that another reason for her inclination towards unity within the family and tribe is because of her understanding of this system and her reluctance to disturb it.

Taj al-Saltaneh, too, was treated as an object of exchange. In her memoir, she provides a detailed description of the circumstances surrounding her role as the object of exchange. Her narrative sheds light on the societal and power dynamics that led her to be commodified in the cultural and familial framework:

My dear teacher! Even at this hour, then almost twenty-two years separate us from that day and age, I cannot control the nervous trembling that I feel as I write this. Perforce I must lay down my pen for an hour or so and heave wrenching but unveiling sighs. Truly, what greater misfortune could one suffer than to have to take a husband in childhood, at the age of eight? Especially if it was not her heart and mind that had chosen him but rather the wishes of her mother and elders, who nurtured empty and illusive hopes. It seems to me that in my lifetime I have lived under a cloud of misfortune and vexation, all of it beginning from that ill-fated day. A point which I have mentioned before bears repetition: throughout my life, believing in intimations of the heart, I have had premonitions of everything that was to happen to me. That day I began to feel an incredible oppressiveness and heartache that has been with me since; I have always been sorrow stricken and depressed. I had a

sense then that this marriage would be followed by profound misery. The thought of that lady and her son produced in me a headache, a quivering of the nerves, and a knot in the heart that reduced me to tears. (Taj al-Saltana 104)

Subsequently, Taj recounts her emotional response upon realizing that she was forced to get married as a child. In her memoir, she describes the intense psychological impact of being coerced into marriage, which is a clear description of the traffic in women and the exchange of women as gifts during her time:

Two or three days passed, but I continued to feel dejected. Nothing could take away my unhappiness—not my mother's kindness, or my nanny's caresses, or excursions and amusements and games. I could not even smile. Finally, my delicate constitution could not endure this agony any longer. I fell ill and was confined to bed with what the ladies referred to as chicken pox. My smooth, pretty face was spangled with red pockmarks. As I lay sick and almost unconscious with a high fever, my mother was negotiating the terms of the marriage. Since it was Anis al-Dawla who was asking for my hand on behalf of the bridegroom's mother, my father also gave his consent, albeit with reluctance. He did stipulate, however, that while we could celebrate the engagement right away, the nuptials would have to wait until I was at least twenty. Satisfied with this arrangement, both parties quickly made plans for an engagement ceremony and began work on the preparations. (Taj al-Saltana 104)

She continues to describe a detailed account of her wedding. Although such ceremonies were commonly considered happy occasions, Taj's experience was a spectrum of negative emotions because of the fact that she was forced into the marriage through her father's decision to maintain the unity of his royal kingdom:

The arrangements for the betrothal, to be celebrated with a lavish spread of confections, were concluded and the ceremony began; the day that I had dreaded with hopelessness had arrived. While the members of my family were busy enjoying themselves and having a grand time—and, indeed, for a child of eight such music and singing and celebration and noise can be enormously entertaining—I was dumbfounded, turning this way and that like a drunkard. Wholly insensible to what I felt, people construed my behavior as bashfulness and embarrassment, and, satisfied with this explanation, they left me to myself. The true reason for my suffering, however, was unknown to all, myself included. (Taj-Saltana 106)

Amanat also discusses that in high society, as described by Taj, unmarried females served as commodities who were produced in the harem to be traded for money or loyalty for the king (34). Taj was a pawn in the harem as her future husband served his father's political ambitions, and so he forced Taj to marry him (34). Taj al-Saltaneh also acknowledged that her marriage to Hassan was a way to escape the confining atmosphere of the harem; however, she later realizes that her expectations about married life were idealistic and simplistic, not giving her the freedom she wanted (34). It is noticeable that Taj, similar to Bibi Maryam, was treated as a gift between two families; her father promised her and married her off when she was only eight to another family to reach his own political goals. Therefore, the exchange of women and traffic in women was present both in the royal harem and the Bakhtiyari tribe, which demonstrates how prevailing this system was to span from the innermost to the outermost parts of society. Although Taj al-Santana and Bibi Maryam came from very different backgrounds, they were both the victims of this patriarchal ideology that subordinated their roles as mere commodities, particularly in marriage. Nevertheless, I believe that despite the fact that they were constrained by limiting patriarchal ideologies, they exerted their autonomy wherever they could. They were resistant in the private sphere, as well as

in the public sphere, and were reluctant to obey what was forced on them. I will discuss their defiant spirit in greater detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the history of the Qajar tribe and its metamorphosis into a dynasty. I explored the Bakhtiyari tribe and the intricacies of its social fabric. Women's conditions during the Qajar era were meticulously examined, as well, with a subsequent focus on the Bakhtiyari women and women in the royal harem. This exploration provides insights into the contextual realities of Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's lives. In this study, Maryam, a tribal woman, and Taj, a princess, were examined through a comparative lens, showing despite their privileged status, they were both constrained to patriarchal ideologies.

It was also pointed out in this chapter that both Bibi Maryam and Taj were immensely cognizant of history and the ongoing events of their time, as they mentioned their thoughts and ideas on the kings. It was an act of resistance for them to discern the right and wrong ways of government, let alone to write about it. The fact that Taj, in particular, admitted that the conduct of the king, who was her father, was incorrect was a rebellious act on her part. Moreover, despite the prevailing illiteracy and the general belief that women are created to serve men, Taj and Maryam challenged the norms and rebelled against them. For instance, Bibi Maryam managed and governed a castle and Taj al-Saltaneh abandoned her job and divorced her husband, all tabooed deeds during the Qajar era. My aim in this chapter was to give a general societal and historical background to the era they lived in and the situation and circumstances they experienced, and to

illustrate how patriarchal ideologies, such as the concept of traffic and women and women as gifts, limited and constrained them, despite their privileged positions in the society.

It is also important to think about other historical and social issues of their time during the Qajar era. For instance, what was the detailed structure of the Qajar state and how did it affect the minority groups, in particular? Did some policies restrict them further or liberate them from certain constraints? How did the center, that is the Qajar state, and the periphery, the Bakhtiyari tribe, dialogue with each other? Why were patriarchal ideologies so prevalent in Iran and what was the origin of such beliefs? Taking a closer look at these questions would provide more insight into the era and the ideologies of the time.

Essentially, this chapter serves as a fundamental basis that paves the way for a deeper understanding of the next chapter. The next chapter will delve into the complexities of Bibi Maryam and Taj's experience in the social events of their era, such as the Constitutional Revolution. Their efforts, contributions, and acts of resistance, along with the challenges they had during this important moment in history, together with other women were discussed. Although women like Taj and Bibi Maryam were confined and limited to certain patriarchal power dynamics, they rebelled and resisted them in numerous instances.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION

Introduction

Throughout history, moments of social transformation are often achieved through the convergence of diverse and passionate movements. The Constitutional Revolution of Iran is an example of such transformations. This revolution, which happened at the beginning of the 20th century, was an important step for Iran towards modernity, democracy, and social justice. This revolution, spanning from 1905 to 1911, was a departure from Iran's traditional governance structure of absolute monarchy and autocratic rule. Initially, the movement pursued the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, limiting the powers of the monarch and instituting a framework for the new government. However, beneath the surface of this revolution, there was an immense desire and struggle for social and cultural change, especially for women's rights. Women played an integral role in this key shift in the Iranian history.

For centuries, Iranian women had wrestled with systematic inequality, limited access to education, and few opportunities to participate in public life. However, the Constitutional Revolution opened the window for women to assert their agency and demand recognition as equal citizens. Women with diverse backgrounds, either in urban or rural areas, attempted to assert their presence in the public sphere. This chapter seeks to delve into the role of women, Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh, in particular, in the Constitutional Revolution and examine their contributions, challenges, and long-lasting legacies. It explores how these women grappled with complex social dynamics and patriarchal norms in the pursuit of liberation.

Initially, this chapter presents a discussion and explanation of the Constitutional Revolution and an examination of its historical context. Subsequently, I highlight Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari's and Taj al-Saltaneh's unique contributions to the Constitutional Revolution and their resistance to gain liberty, justice, and equity. Following that, I examine the conventional femininity in the context of Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh and the social dynamics of that time period, as articulated in their memoirs. I approach this critical exploration through Judith Butler's concept of performativity. Furthermore, I explore their resistant spirit by analyzing their actions, life experiences, and thoughts based on Judith Butler's concept of drag, arguing that their characters are at the threshold of femininity and masculinity that challenge the naturalized concept of binary genders. Lastly, I examine Taj and Bibi Maryam's deeds in light of Minoo Derayeh's "I act, therefore, I am" concept.

Revolutionary Prelude

To fully understand the role of women in the Constitutional Revolution, specifically Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam, a thorough study of the historical context surrounding this event is necessary. Studying the roots of this revolution is important as it provides insight into the socio-political dynamics and cultural backgrounds in which women actively participated to bring about a transformation. Eliz Sanasarian, in *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (1982), delves into the history of the Constitutional Revolution. She mentions that the primary aim of the constitutional revolution was to limit the absolute power of the monarch (18). The revolutionaries wanted constraints on the kings' power and other requests such as the National Assembly's approval for the court budgets, restrictions on kings' power to assign his relative for cabinet positions, and the kings' assigning

only half of the senate members (18). The intellectual class initially opposed royal despotism, clerical dogmatism, and foreign imperialism, identifying them as social advancements (15). On the other hand, while the ulama, or religious leaders, prevented progressive reforms, they resisted the westernization initiatives by the Qajar monarchy (15). They employed mosque-based communication channels to mobilize public sentiment against foreign dominance (16). Bazaar merchants and guilds joined this collaboration because of economic dissatisfaction and mutual ideological perspectives (16). One of the important moments of this alliance was during the Tobacco Crisis of 1891 to 92, which demonstrated collective opposition to the existing monarchy (16). The constitutional framework was the combination of the religious beliefs along with elements of Western thoughts drawn from French, Belgian, and Dutch constitutions (18). However, the process of writing the Constitution brought to light the ideological oppositions between liberal and traditional social groups (17). Tensions between these two groups persisted until 1911 when a shift in focus happened because of foreign invasion (17). This external threat brought about unity in Iran against Britain and Tsarist Russia (17). The constitution conferred legitimacy to religious authority, although some provisions were not strictly followed in the subsequent years (18). However, in the end, the constitution represented a unique mixture of conflicting concepts such as Muslim religious law, secularism, and Western constitutional principles (19). Nonetheless, the constitution failed to present any rights to women and deprived them, along with individuals who were deemed as insane or criminal, of the right to vote (Sanasarian 19). In the initial phase of the women's movement, women opposed the way the government was handling foreign colonial influences and national tyranny, and actively participated in the constitutional movement and received support from their male counterparts (Ettahadieh 289). While initially aligning their goals with those of men, women subsequently

engaged in different endeavors to indicate an evolution in their perspectives and aspirations (289). However, their movement encountered resistance due to the societal reluctance to change the established norms (289). Women's movement faced several obstacles including opposition to the establishment of girls' schools, withholding the right to vote from women, and the disapproval of the establishment of women's associations in the national consultative assembly (289). Despite all the difficulties faced in improving their condition, women did not surrender to the status quo. They fought and resisted the limiting ideologies of the time in various creative ways. In the next section, I will discuss Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's unique ways of contributions to the Constitutional Revolution.

Women's Defiant Spirit

Women demonstrated active defiance in different public spheres during the Constitutional Revolution, resisting through tangible actions in the streets. Interestingly, women were highly inventive in their modes of resistance against the prevailing ideologies, as they engaged in protests and asserted their ideas about what they perceived as just and equitable. Women organized a variety of actions, both violent or non-violent, that aligned with the support for the constitution and also resistance against foreign powers (Sanasarian 20). As an example, a woman shot a pro-royalist mullah during a constitutional pursuit (20). Also, women established a secret society to express nationalist views (20). As for non-violent actions, activities such as selling jewelry to finance government bonds and supporting boycotts of foreign goods can be mentioned (21). The objectives of the women's movement were aligned with those of the clergy, intellectuals, and guilds (21). In spite of endorsements from nationalists, certain actions by women faced disapproval, highlighting the challenges confronted by the women's rights movement (22).

Educated women, especially the ones who were actively involved in the constitutional and nationalist movements, had an important role in supporting women's rights and advocating reforms in society (22). These literate women, who became familiar with democratic and secular ideas through their active participation in society, acted as catalysts in the early evolution of the women's movement in Iran (23). Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam were important figures in the women's movement during the constitutional era. They have fought for freedom and resisted the conventional norms that constrained women from various aspects. In the next paragraphs, I will delve into their social endeavors and sacrifices before and during the revolution.

Despite facing fierce opposition from the king and the foreign forces, Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari was committed to the progress of her nation. One of her courageous deeds was an armed attack on the king Mohammad Ali Shah, who was against the constitutional revolution and had bombarded the Persian parliament (Majles), in order to re-establish the constitution. There is an excerpt on her bravery on this occasion, recounted in a magazine that Soltani Zarasvand had mentioned in her book:

Hussein Saghafi Azaz, who was one of the most prominent constitutionalists and writers of the late Qajar era and the son of Alam ol-Dowleh, has written in Yadegar magazine: “Muhammad Ali Mirza, who was very angry with the activities of Alam ol-Dowleh, flared up when he got informed that he was hosting a group of Bakhtiaris in his own house. The late Alam ol-Dowleh had left his residence to Bibi Maryam, the late Sardar Asaad's sister, before leaving for Europe. That courageous woman settled there with a group of Bakhtiari riders. at the last minute of the reign of Mohammad Ali Shah, when the nationalists were approaching Tehran from different parts of the country and Liakhov was trying desperately to save the capital city, Bibi Maryam started shooting the Cossacks along with her gunmen

from Alam ol-Dowleh's rooftop, which was in the southeastern corner of the garden.” (244-245)

Soltani Zarasvand also mentions that “before the arrival of Sardar Asaad in Tehran, his sister, Bibi Maryam, and a number of Bakhtiari gunmen were in Hussein Saghafi's father's house in Tehran. As soon as she got informed that Sardar Asaad is coming to Tehran, she barricaded the roof and started fighting against the Cossacks with her Bakhtiari gunmen. She had a gun herself and was shooting along with men” (246). Moreover, she provided refuge for those who were running away from the king’s forces. There were many famous and renowned people among them such as Vahid Dastgerdi, a famous Iranian poet (Soltani Zarasvand 309).

Bibi Maryam not only did actively fight for the revolution against the king, but also defended her country against invading forces, such as Britain and Russia, during WWI. During the war, the Bakhtiyari tribe allied with Germany against British and Russian armies. It is mentioned that in January 1915, there was a time that Bibi Maryam “became the leader of the German soldiers in Bakhtiari” (Soltani Zarasvand 295). She also provided refuge for the people who were running away from British and Russian forces. Regarding Bibi Maryam’s hosting the migrants, Soltani Zarasvand collected Bastani Parizi’s account of this event:

It's interesting to know that the one who took care of this group was a Bakhtiari woman, and I deliberately focus on this issue due to my respect for the tribal women.

During WWI, the patriot Iranians, who were threatened by Russia and then invaded by Britain, got forced to migrate inside Iran so that they could flee foreign oppression. As they could not settle in Qom and Isfahan, where the British embassy was active, they were

forced to take refuge in Bakhtiari Mountains where Bibi Maryam, the daughter of Hussein Gholi Khan Ikhani, was residing.

This outstanding woman sheltered all of them and took care of some of them for several years, that is, she fed them and kept them safe and when they decided to migrate to the west of Iran, she provided transportation for them. (308-309)

Lastly, the reason she is called “Sardar (commander) Maryam Bakhtiyari” is because of the fact that she has received several medals and badges from different countries:

- ❖ A gem-set imperial badge
- ❖ A[n] imperial badge of the Emperor of Germany
- ❖ A monetary gift from the government of Germany
- ❖ A diamond brooch from the Emperor of Germany
- ❖ A diamond medal of honor from the Sultan of Ottoman Empire
- ❖ A medal of honor from the Emperor of Austria ...
- ❖ A Medal of Honor from the Sultan of Ottoman Empire [...] An award from the Ottoman Empire's commander in chief (Enver Pasha). (Soltani Zarasvand 342)

Taj al-Saltaneh, too, contributed greatly to the Constitutional Revolution. Not only did she found a women's association, but also rebelled against the conventional norms of the time, such as abandoning the hijab and getting a divorce. She had great ideas about the constitution and thought about it deeply, which are reflected in her memoir. Amanat talks about Taj’s support of the women's rights, saying:

Taj thus saw herself as a genuine voice for women's social grievances and in the years following the writing of her memoirs remained an advocate for women's rights. She was

one of the founding members of the Society for the Emancipation of Women (Anjoman-e Horriyat-e Nesvan), established in the late 1910s. Other women of the nobility, including Taj's sister, Eftekhar al-Saltana, were among the members. One of the earliest associations for women in Iran, it evolved from the revolutionary societies of the Constitutional period and was an heir to the diffused emancipation trends during the Revolution. European and American women's charity organizations also served as models for the Anjoman whose aims were not unlike those Taj delineated in her memoirs or those that appeared in the progressive literature and press of the post-Constitutional era. (68-69)

Taj deeply ruminated about the Constitutional Revolution and also the freedom of women. She recounts in her memoir that a militant posed some questions about the constitution and the responsibility of Iranian women. She narrates:

During the Minor Tyranny a Caucasian Armenian named Bakianov, a militant and freedom fighter for Persia, sent a questionnaire to several Persian ladies of birth and a few aristocrats, including me. I will share the gist of it with you:

I request the venerable Persian princess to answer the following questions:

1. What is the meaning of constitutionalism? 2. Which is better: despotism or constitutionalism?
3. What is the path to progress for Persia?
4. What duty do the women of Persia have?

In response I wrote the following:

1. Constitutionalism means acting under conditions of national freedom and advancement, without self-interest or treachery.
2. The restitution of its people's rights is the duty of every progressive nation. When can it have its rights restored? When the country functions under constitutionalism and a proper system. What brings forth progress? The rule of law. And when are laws implemented? When despotism is overthrown. Therefore, we see from this that constitutionalism is preferable to despotism.
3. Once individual self-interest, destructive intrigues, and the pursuit of profit are overcome, advancement lies in the building of factories and roads, the facilitating of agriculture, the sinking of mines, the balancing of the country's budget, the regulation of its financial affairs, the suspension of salaries to idle, undeserving people, the freedom of women to lay aside the veil and to support and cooperate with men as equals.
4. The duties of Persian women consist of: insisting on their rights, like their European counterparts; educating their children; helping the men, as do women in Europe; remaining chaste and unblemished; being patriotic; serving their kind; eradicating laziness and a sedentary lifestyle; removing the veil. (Taj al-Saltana 202)

Based on this excerpt, it is clear that Taj was deeply involved in thinking and forming ideas regarding the Constitution. She was concerned with the liberty and progress of her country and its nation and knew that this progress happens with developments in infrastructures, regulating the country's economy, and treating women equally. She insisted on removing the veil or hijab by women. She then explains her idea regarding how removing the hijab relates to the progress of the country, saying:

A Persian wage-earner makes two qerans a day. He has to support his mother, his sister, his niece, his wife, and his daughter. If we divide two qerans by five, we get seven shahis a day. With these seven shahis, how can one person provide for clothing and food as well as have a savings? Thus it is that necessity corrupts people. In order to gain comfort and ease, they will submit to any gross indignity, prepared to perform any wicked deed. Now if these five women and children were not forced into a veil, they would have to be educated. After education, each of these five could take a job in a store, a teahouse, a shop, a school, or an office. Then every person would have an income of two qerans a day. Six people making twelve qerans a day could feed and clothe themselves comfortably, without the need to degrade themselves or change their lifestyle. And they could preserve their conscience, their honor, their chastity, and their family and national pride. In addition, there would be a spiritual unity within this group, and many great benefits accrue from unity.

The same is true for the aristocracy. This nobleman, this prince or that minister, even on a very generous salary, will earn no more than three hundred tumans per month. The earnings from his properties and commissions, however great, cannot total more than seven hundred tumans in such a poor country as this. That adds up to one thousand tumans a month.

Let us suppose that such and such a nobleman marries a woman whom he does not know at all. The lady is now married to an aristocrat or a minister. The gentleman wants a harem, a chief overseer, a doorman, a pantry, a butlery, a treasure house, a coach house, a stable, a page boy, a servant, a coachman. The lady wants a maidservant, a household menial, a singer, a musician, a chief attendant, a satin gown made in Europe. She has a spouse and everything she needs. She hosts parties, receptions, social baths. She wants a wet nurse.

As for the poor gentleman, who has not been affectionate or on good terms with his wife from the first day, owing to the lovelessness between them, he has married the daughter of such and such military commander or shah in exchange for fifty thousand tumans from his inheritance or ten thousand tumans in dowry. In order to get away from this distasteful life he wants a garden outside; he wants a mistress, a confidant, a private servant, cratefuls of wine and food in his private retreat.

Meanwhile, the poor lady, scorned by her husband, wants five or six women of humble means to talk to, so she will not be lonely. And sometimes, on the advice of these aforementioned busybodies, she will want a large sum of money to spend in the Jewish quarter on casting a spell over the gentleman so that she can win his affection.

When the gentleman comes home late, the lady loses patience and smashes some of the dishes and household furniture. In this way she vents her anger, as well as hears a sound other than the voices of her gaggle of busybodies in her confinement. Such being the case, will a thousand tumans a month suffice this lord or this so-and-so-Saltana, so-and-so-Dawla, so-and-so-Molk? No, it will not. He has no choice but to steal, despoil, sell his country and wreak its ruin, receive bundles of cash from a certain source in a midnight tryst. Ultimately his life will amount to nothing. His shame brought to light, he will be left with an inward blemish on his soul, bewildered, with nowhere to go.

Now, if the women were unveiled and, as in all civilized societies on the planet, husband and wife saw each other and tied the knot of eternal union before their Lord with love, thereby living their lives in spiritual tranquillity, would that not be better? If they lived like the aristocrats and nobility in Europe without harems and armies of menservants and maidservants and excessive, unnecessary expenses would that not be nobler? This husband

and wife who have chosen one another out of love, these two companions whose hearts are the surest guarantee of their fidelity and chastity and union-are they not worthy of commendation and praise? Yes, they are!

The source of the ruination of the country, the cause of its moral laxity, the obstacle to its advancement in all areas, is the veiling of women. Owing to fatalities, the number of men in Persia is always smaller than that of women. In a country where two-thirds of its population has to remain idle at home, the remaining third has to exert itself to the utmost to provide the comforts, sustenance and clothing for the others. So they cannot attend to the affairs of the nation and its progress. Now if these two-thirds were employed in meaningful work, the nation would make twofold progress, and everyone would be wealthy⁸. (Taj Al-Saltana 202-204)

It is interesting that Taj perceived the veil or hijab as a tool to degrade women's positions in comparison with men's. She believed that if women were unveiled, they could get an education, work alongside men, and be treated as equals in society and marriage. Consequently, she opposed the veil as it hindered women's progress, thus hindering the progress of the country as a whole since women were unable to contribute as much to society. Her ability to retain her scientific neutrality is even more amazing. She supports her statements with concrete demographic facts. This demonstrates just how well she comprehended the circumstances at the time.

In the last parts of her memoir, Taj became a trailblazing figure, as she turned her ideas into actions that defied the norms of the Qajar society. Her transformation is characterized by abandoning religion and committing to scientific perspectives. Taj slightly challenged societal

⁸ This is a long quotation from Taj's memoir; however, I insist on quoting her own words, as a symbol of giving voice to her in this thesis.

conventions by disregarding her hijab and adopting European clothing which were rebellious acts in the era she lived in. Moreover, Taj al-Saltaneh's actions went beyond hijab and religious practices, as she decided to seek a divorce from her husband. Essentially, Taj's memoir is a powerful testament to her revolutionary character and her unapologetic pursuit of intellectual and personal freedom. In the last pages of her memoir, she talks about her transformation from being a religious person to a naturalist and her desire to divorce her husband, saying:

As I progressed in my studies day by day, my irreligiosity grew, until I was a complete naturalist myself. Since these ideas were all new to me, I was eager to impart them to my mother, my relatives, and my children. As I would begin to talk, however, my mother would curse at me, "You have turned Babi!" My relatives would invoke God's forgiveness and keep their distance, refusing to listen. The only ones who were happy about it were the mischievous flatterers and enemies, goad me on, "Yes! This is the path to progress."

The whole person benefits from knowledge, like most people; I suffered a loss for having knowledge. Bereft of any basic understanding of the world, of life and of humanity, I consequently adhered to no set of beliefs, and neither depended on anyone nor feared anyone. Lacking fear of anything and freed from any particular beliefs, there was nothing with an individual's life are themselves incapable of understanding the pleasures of life. They are jealous. Or they're simple and stupid and don't understand."

Now I was inundated with new ideas, casting out all the old. Formerly I had believed that if I did not obey my husband or disregarded my mother's wishes, I would burn in hell. Therefore, out of fear, I accepted it as an article of faith. Now things were different. I would say, "Man has been created free and invested with free will. Man has been created to eat, sleep, enjoy himself, partake of pleasure, and live free." Thus, little by little, the idea of

freedom gained strength in my mind. All the European histories and novels that my teacher had read to me, all his descriptions of the world's beautiful cities (accompanied by the reminder, "The world is not confined to Tehran!") made me long desperately for Europe. This desire ultimately, grew to a point at which it became the cause of my separation from my husband. (Taj al-Saltana 215-216)

As she mentioned in her memoir, despite the hardship and the difficulties she faced due to her knowledge and decision on her irreligiosity from her family and friends, she insisted on pursuing her beliefs and became a naturalist. Her bravery in abandoning her old beliefs and accepting new ones, even though it made her an outcast, is immensely laudable. In addition to abandoning her religion and hijab, which was taboo at the time, Taj al-Saltaneh divorced her husband and formed a women's association to defend the rights of women. She was an active participant in the Constitutional Revolution and practiced its ideas of freedom in her own life.

Royal and Tribal Gender Performativity

To examine the resistances of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh, it is necessary to explore the conventional femininity that was prevalent during their time. Therefore, I decided to examine this issue by first discussing Judith Butler's idea of performativity and, subsequently, their idea of drag. According to Butler, two factors, namely the normalization of sexuality and the establishment of binary sexes coupled with the enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality, resulted in the emergence of two distinct genders (*Gender Trouble*, 30). It is wrong, however, to think of a chronological sequence for the appearance of all of the mentioned concepts. The system of power is not a singular and coherent unity, and it works in complex ways. Both institutionalized

heterosexuality and the binary gendered system need each other to create the heterosexual matrix (30-31). In this matrix, masculinity and femininity are being differentiated, and through the practices of heterosexual desire, this distinction becomes more consolidated. Therefore, the concepts such as sex or gender that were seen as the origin, are in fact the effect of the system of power (31). Thus, if gender is the effect of power, how is it mobilized? Butler believes that gender is performative, which means that it is a constant “doing but not by a subject that consciously chooses his/her acts and preexists the deed” (33).

Performativity is a repetition and a ritual that is practiced and normalized in the context of the body (xv). The repetition of a certain set of acts and gestures constructs an illusion of the existence of a gender core that would discursively aid the regulation of sexuality within the discourse of heterosexuality (173-174). Explaining such a repetition more, Butler says,

this repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this ‘action’ is public. (178-179)

In order to clarify performativity, Butler notes that the individual's acts and performances are not personal or voluntary. Their origin is beyond the scale of people. They are deeds that have been practiced over a long period and ritualized. The assumption that such acts originate within the doer's self conceals the genealogy of gender and the political regulations that the system of power is seeking to universalize through the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality. However, each individual's add gestures consolidate such definitions (178-179). Thus, it is crucial to note that Butler does not agree with the foundationalist rationale of identity politics that contends there must

be a self behind an action, but she argues the doer is unevenly constructed in and through the deed (118).

Is it possible to claim that gender is a construction? If so, by whom is it materialized and performed? The grammar used to ask these questions is deceptive. If something is constructed, it should be *constructed by* someone, and identically, if something is performed, it should be *performed by* someone. Thus, it seems that all these questions must have a subject. However, this is not the case for the gender construction Butler has in mind. Gender is indeed a construction, but not necessarily by an I or a we who stands before that construction (*Bodies that Matter*, 7). Similarly, a person does not preexist the notion of gender and then, given the formula, starts acting and performing his/her gender. Throughout history, gender has been constructed by mixed and complex power relations, and the subject performing gender is himself/herself the product of the heterosexual matrix or the matrix of gender:

The 'activity' of this gendering cannot, strictly speaking, be a human act or expression, a willful appropriation, and it is certainly *not* a question of taking on a mask; it is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition. In this sense, the matrix of gender relations is before the emergence of the 'human'. (7)

Thus, performativity is not a set of performances or acts that are done by an individual or a subject (7). It is a set of complex discourses constructed throughout history and has been etched onto the public's unconsciousness (7). Moreover, there is a difference between *expression* and *performativeness* of gender. If gender actions and gestures are performative, it means that "there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured" (*Gender Trouble*, 180). Hence, there is no original gender identity, no one or no agent that can represent the authentic man

or woman, and as a result, genders can be neither true, original, nor real nor false, derived, and apparent, which demonstrates the phantasmal essence of gender (180).

In seeking to understand gender performativity during Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's era, I delved into their memoirs, looking for hints that shed light on gender performances, particularly female performativity, within their texts. My focus is on the portrayal of female gender performativity, to first understand what the norm during their era was and secondly how they resisted such a norm. It is crucial to note that my research focuses on the intersectional gender performativity that explores Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's perspectives as a tribal woman, whose father was a wealthy and renowned khan, and a princess, living a royal life. Therefore, their positionality significantly influenced their views on gender performances, which may have resulted in a limited understanding of specific situations and conditions faced by other women. In other words, it is important to note that I am examining female gender performativity only through Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's points of view.

Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari, in her memoir, describes her siblings to the reader and draws a comparison between one of her brothers and herself, saying:

I love my brother. He is three years older than me, and we've grown up together. When we were kids, I was smarter than him, and I'd beat him up. But now, since Iranian women, unfortunately, do not progress and their strengths should always remain hidden, he has improved, and I, deteriorated. In Iran, women are expected to either think about cosmetics and makeup day and night or focus on sewing and spinning the bobbin; these are deemed their only significant deeds. Alas! Although millions of women exist in Iran, nobody seems to care, and this ignorance prevails. The only responsibility they are assigned is to make cucumber or eggplant pickles. They also force women to resemble an eggplant and wander

in the streets. Only God knows when they wear their hijab and walk in the alleys while wearing veils on their faces, they look like a big eggplant. This is precisely why Muslim women have degenerated, exactly because of wearing such ornaments. (42-43, translation is mine)

It is evident from this section of her memoir that she thought that Iranian women were mostly confined to the private sphere and domestic roles. According to her point of view, women were expected to hide their identity and individuality when they were in public spaces. Also, in the passionate criticism of Iranian women, particularly the ones in the Bakhtiyari tribe, she mentions:

O you miserable woman! O you Iranian woman! O you oppressed and miserable one! Aren't you a creature of God? Aren't you human? Until when will they buy and sell you like an animal? Especially Bakhtiyari women, who don't have any status. Women worldwide should weep for Bakhtiyari women. (159, translation is mine)

Later on in her memoir, Bibi Maryam admits that:

Bakhtiyari women do not possess any rights. If I knew I could inherit enough money to sustain myself from my father's inheritance, I would get a divorce in an instant. But alas! I must go live with my brothers and be a housemaid to have something to eat. What miseries Bakhtiyari women go through ... [My brothers] make us get married. They buy and sell us like animals. We have no right to divorce, no inheritance, no land ... God has made us miserable, an asset to fulfill men's lust. (159, translation is mine)

Turning to Taj al-Saltaneh's memoir, I have found sections that illustrate the female gender performativity during her era. Taj addresses the hardships of women who were confined to the

domestic sphere, in a sad tone and laments the suffocating circumstances that deprive them of various opportunities. She says:

My teacher! Do not weary of the fact that I often digress into historical narrative, for I do so involuntarily. It disheartens and grieves me to think that my fellows that is, the women of Persia are ignorant of their rights and make no effort to fulfill their obligations as human beings. Completely deficient in character and unsuited for any task, they crawl into the corners of their homes and spend every hour of their lives indulging [in] wicked habits. Excluded from the community of civilization, they roam the valley of confusion and ignorance. For instance, now that the path to progress has been opened somewhat to women, and families can afford to send their daughters to school and thereby brighten their futures with the light of learning and accomplishment, most of them still say: "We consider it an abomination for our daughter to go to school!" Even in this day and age, they bring up these poor girls in the abyss of doom and ruin, ignoring the fact that these girls will become mothers and their children will be trained under their care. (Taj Al-Saltana 84)

Taj showcases her acute awareness of the circumstances of women in different countries around the world. She compares the status of women in Iran to their counterparts in other nations, saying:

My teacher! If the women in this country were free as in other countries, enjoyed comparable rights, could enter the realm of government and politics, and could advance their lives, then without a doubt I would not seek the path to my progress through a ministerial position, through trampling on the people's rights and usurping the property of fellow Muslims and selling away my beloved homeland. I would choose a legitimate way and a determined plan for my advancement. Never would I spend the people's wealth to

buy myself a mansion, a garden, household furniture, carriages and automobiles. These I would obtain through hard work and service. (Taj Al-Saltana 200)

Taj continues to lament the precarious condition of Persian women, comparing their plight to that of animals. She admires the suffragette movements in Europe, highlighting the differences between their progress in women's rights in Western societies and the oppressive circumstances Persian women endure. She mentions:

Alas! Persian women have been set aside from humankind and placed together with cattle and beasts. They live their entire lives of desperation in prison, crushed under the weight of bitter ordeals. At the same time, they see and hear from afar and read in the newspapers about the way in which suffragettes in Europe arise with determination to demand their rights: universal franchise, the right to vote in parliament, the right to be included in the affairs of government. They are winning successes. In America their rights are fully established and they are striving with serious determination. The same is true in London and Paris.

My teacher! How I wish I could travel to Europe and meet these freedom-seeking ladies! I would say to them, "As you fight for your rights happily and honorably, and emerge victorious in your aims, do cast a look at the continent of Asia. Look into the houses, where in walls are three or five meters high and the only entryway is a door guarded by a doorman. Beneath the chains of captivity and the resistless weight of subjugation you will see a mass of oppressed cripples, some sallow and pale-faced, others bare and hungry, yet others endlessly expectant and mournful." I would add, "These are women, too; these are human, too. These are also worthy of due respect and merit. See how life treats them." (Taj Al-Saltana 200-201)

In another section of her memoir, Taj discusses the customary practices, daily routines, and behaviors of women in the harem. Her text depicts the characteristics of the lives of harem women and sheds light on their habits and the cultural attitudes that defined their existence during the Qajar era. She recounts:

These ladies often banded together in friendship two or three at a time. They spent most of the day entertaining and playing laskana. (Laskana consists of playing with colorful and ludicrous masks cut out of cardboard.) Talking and laughing together, they would pass the day until it was time for dinner. All of them were religious and dutifully observed the prayers and the fast. Each tried to outdo the others in dressing up, primping and trying to appear extraordinary so as to attract the attention of the Shah. Every evening, without fail, they would spend two or three hours on their colorful clothes and toilette, turn themselves into goddesses, and appear in His Majesty's presence. He found no distinction in any of them, however; except for one who was the beloved of his heart and who enjoyed his special regard. (Taj Al-Saltana 94)

As it was illustrated in the excerpts from Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's memoir, the circumstances for women during that time were far from ideal and were characterized by a lack of rights and agency in shaping their own lives. According to prevailing social norms, women were subordinated to their male relatives, whose decisions influenced their autonomy. These cultural and social expectations forced women to have a submissive and domestic role, which left them with limited choices in determining their own lifestyle. This restrictive environment was in fact the female gender performativity during the Qajar era, which is a concept constructed by a long history of societal norms and expectations that prescribed specific roles and behaviors for women. This widespread culture imposed a set of norms that limited women to predefined roles, reinforcing

a system that curtailed their choices and opportunities. These limitations and constraints that were placed upon women were deeply integrated into the fabric of society. Female gender performativity not only influenced the behaviors of all women but also shaped the collective understanding of gender roles. Such norms restricted women's participation in public life, limiting their access and exposure to education, employment, and decision-making processes.

Agents of Resistance

In the previous section, I laid the foundation to elucidate the female gender performativity during the Qajar era. I explained the societal norms and expectations that determined how women should behave and simply be. In this section, I intend to explain why I believe Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh were rebellious and resistant characters. I will use Judith Butler's idea of drag to connect this concept to their own unique ways of being. Firstly, I will explain the concept of drag according to Butler in detail and, subsequently, I provide several sections from their memoirs and their life experiences to prove that they are drag figures, who exist at the threshold of masculinity and femininity and therefore question and challenge the normalized definitions of femininity.

Judith Butler states their opinion in *Gender Trouble* that the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and “a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies” (174). According to them, there are no true or false genders, and they are the effect of a discourse. Therefore, drag is destabilizing because it demonstrates the illusion of such discourses and “mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity” (174). There is no such thing as the natural, original, or true gender—gender is nothing more than the parody of these

ideas (41). Cultural reproduction of identities happens through repetition and ritualization of certain acts and gestures (42). The repetition of drag appearances subvert the gender identity regulations. According to Butler, drag and drag culture reveal and highlight the gender masquerade and, consequently, resist the heterosexual discourse. Drags unveil the unnatural naturalized discourse by being at the threshold of femininity and masculinity. Essentially, Butler sees drag as a resistant factor that discloses the meaninglessness of seemingly natural genders and sexualities. My interpretation of Butler's idea of drag is dual. First, they believe in actual drags, with exaggerated costumes, and second, the bodies that expose the boundaries defined for each sex. In the case of Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh, they may not dress in their opposite sex's clothes, but their attitudes epitomize the fact that they do not comply with the characteristics the society has set for their anatomical sex. As Butler suggests “[i]n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency” (175); therefore, by illustrating some attitudes that are not normally connected to men or women, these characters reveal the performative construction of genders. A notable example of this resistance is seen in the characters of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh, whose actions and performances demonstrate both feminine and masculine qualities. By illustrating that a woman can engage in traditionally masculine conducts, they challenge and resist the prevalent ideologies that confine people with limited gender roles. In doing so, Bibi Maryam and Taj destabilize the masculinity and femininity binary and reformulated gender as a fluid and socially constructed concept.

There are several instances in Bibi Maryam's memoir in which her performances served as a critique to male/female binary oppositions. Bibi Maryam constantly challenged the boundaries that society placed on gender, through her actions and her way of being. In her memoir, she portrayed herself as a very strong and proud person (48). She was a highly self-reliant and

independent person, to the extent that her husband depended on her and took her advice on different matters (85). She was also highly respected and feared among others (86). For example, in a specific incident, she described that her husband wanted to kill his own brother, persuaded by the idea that his brother wanted to undermine him (85-86). Despite Bibi Maryam's disapproval of discord between brothers and her advocacy for familial unity, her husband imprisoned his brother and allowed others to confiscate all his possessions (85-86). When Bibi Maryam understood what her husband had done, she visited her brother-in-law's home and explained her observations as below:

I went to Nasr al-Allah Khan⁹'s house, where people were busily plundering. Nasr al-Allah Khan's son was resisting arrest. Ten people, including Ali Qoli Khan¹⁰ on horseback, surrounded his brother's son, continuously cursing him. Upon my arrival, I inquired, 'What's happening?' They explained that Ali Qoli Khan had imprisoned Nasr al-Allah Khan and now intended to apprehend his son. I briefly cursed Ali Qoli Khan, utilizing the potent curses typical in our tribe. I then took Nasr al-Allah Khan's son by the hand and declared, 'If anyone approaches this poor child, I will take action!' When people realized that Ali Qoli Khan had not consulted me and that I disapproved of his actions, they scattered. Unfortunately, they had already taken most of their belongings ... I appointed someone to announce that whoever possessed Nasr al-Allah Khan's furniture must return it within an hour or face severe consequences! ... In less than an hour, all the furniture was returned. The fear instilled by me was so profound that they couldn't even show their faces when returning the furniture, let alone withhold it. (86, translation is mine)

⁹ Bibi Maryam's brother-in-law.

¹⁰ Bibi Maryam's husband.

According to this excerpt, Bibi Maryam was highly influential among her people to the point that she was feared. If her orders were not followed, the people of her tribe knew that they would get into trouble. While she was firm and occasionally provoked a sense of intimidation among her peers, her generosity made her community hold high regard for her. In a segment of her memoir, she narrates that despite the financial challenges they faced, she made an effort to help others to the best of her ability:

Although I was not yet twenty years old, I treated people well and was immensely generous with them ... I would even give them my own clothes ... One day, [someone] came and said, 'We don't have bread today; give us something so that we can buy wheat.' I didn't have any money, but I had my watch, so I said, 'Sell it and buy wheat' (97-98, translation is mine)

Moreover, she simultaneously managed the administration of a castle and safeguarded it against potential enemies. She adopted diplomatic strategies to engage in negotiations with adversaries. In her memoir, she recounts an incident where several khans wanted to forcefully seize control of Surshjan castle. During this time her husband, who was in another city with his lover, showed indifference to the danger Bibi Maryam was facing (Bakhtiyari 168, 170). Bibi Maryam herself tried to take control of the castle and narrated:

I sent a group to bring two leaders of the khans' army and asked them why they had come to my land. They explained that they were responsible for taking half of Surshjan castle. I responded, 'I don't want to fight a fellow Bakhtiyari. I respectfully ask you to prepare and leave immediately. If you stay for another twenty-four hours, you will be to blame for the consequences.' They acknowledged this and departed ... I returned home, fortified the castle and its surroundings, and gathered all the servants in the center of the castle. In the

upper part of the Surshjan field, there was a secure place where I had built a trench years ago for me and my brothers. I repaired it and prepared myself in every possible way ... Then, I commanded [my people] to disarm their soldiers completely. Within two hours of issuing this command, they confiscated their weapons, horses, and cartridges and expelled them from the village without any resistance or fighting. (170, translation is mine)

As it is evident in various excerpts from her memoir, Maryam resisted the societal norms of her society and rejected the conventional expectations of femininity. Her character is a form of a drag, lying at the threshold of the definition of masculinity and femininity. Bibi Maryam's deviation from societal expectations challenges conventional gender norms and promotes a reevaluation of the established definitions associated with gender identities and the meaning of femininity. Her personality and character serve as a catalyst for us to question and redefine gender constructs.

The actions and performances of Taj al-Saltaneh, as well, criticize the established binary of male/female. Through her deeds, thoughts, and unique way of being, she constantly challenged the societal constraints imposed upon gender roles. One of the very interesting facts about Taj is her commitment to thinking and developing her own ideas about different matters in life. The depth of her contemplation on different subjects, such as existential matters, in her memoir is invaluable since they originate from an extensive amount of studying and reading. Throughout different segments of her memoir, a discernible philosophical theme dominates her narrative, as she ruminated about her own life, and more broadly, the existential aspects of human existence. In her memoir, Taj al-Saltaneh's contemplations on individual responsibilities and obligations evolved into abstract reflections on these matters. She thought about the responsibilities of people with authority or guardianship and how they should fulfill these duties:

Everyone has an obligation to his subordinates, whether high or low, whether king or minister or lady. What I mean is that anyone who becomes lord of a realm or a city, or mistress of a household, has a certain responsibility, and must make every effort to be good-natured and strong-willed. Determination and perseverance are important, priceless strengths. Resolve and nobility these exist in order to produce results and benefits. What result do these two virtues bring about? Uprightness and dutifulness. Can one find two words higher and finer than these? (Taj al-Saltana 114)

Further, she argued that a precise definition of duty is difficult to determine and suggested the reliance on conscience to navigate the true sense of responsibility. Moreover, she argued that the obligations that are determined by the legal framework, including refraining from harm or respecting property rights, are important for the preservation of human society. She mentions:

Man responds to this simple impulse with utmost audacity and cheer of heart, and, when necessary, with perfect resignation and acquiescence. A definition of duty, such that it corresponds to reality, is impossible. We look for our sense of responsibility within our conscience. So long as we resist the idea that "From the vantage point of law and conscience, duty is something which we are bound to fulfill," or incline to another theory which says, "That law whose existence and realization are determined by rationality consists of the actions based upon our character and customs," we will fail to apprehend the more profound connotations of duty as we should.

Man finds himself hamstrung by the idea of duty, though the fair-minded and trustworthy person is always prepared to discharge it. One could say that fulfilling one's duty is often easier than knowing it. We can be sure that determining one's duties ranks among the indispensable requirements of life. The duties and tasks that the law sets forth in this regard

are the primary political responsibilities of the first importance in preserving human society. These include: "Thou shalt not kill another!" "Thou shalt not usurp what belongs to another!" "If married, thou shalt deal honestly and honorably with thy spouse and educate thy children!" (Taj al-Saltana 114)

Taj al-Saltaneh's contemplation on human existence continued in her memoir as she brought to light the intrinsic challenges of human experiences in evolving from primitive conditions to the development of civilization. In her memoir, she emphasizes the enduring spirit of resilience that played a driving force in the historical progress of human beings. She narrates:

What is life but a trail of fast-sinking hopes and desires? A sage Arab poet-philosopher has said. "Life is pain and torment from beginning to end. I wonder not, except at him who wishes to prolong this lifetime of suffering" A momentary pause shows us that this definition is not an exercise in fantasy or oratory. Not a day or an hour passes without numerous proofs and reinforcements of its validity. Has not everyone passionately explored life's battleground of struggle? Day and night people are mounted on the lightning steed of effort and action, striving to find ease in unease, happiness in suffering, safety in danger. Yes! These struggles, these suicides, these reversals are the foundation of the world's equilibrium and the *raison d'être* of order in the mill of creation. Were it not for mankind's perpetual struggle, the thread of order in the world would have snapped, creation would have ceased to make progress, the great and the insignificant would have been indistinguishable, and the beautiful could not have been told apart from the ugly. (Taj al-Saltana 126)

Aside from her concern for fundamental questions of life, Taj contemplated Persian women's plight, influenced by the limiting discourses of her era. During the period of minor tyranny, she

narrates a time when she responds to a question with an emphasis on the importance of constitutionalism and the crucial role of women in advancing the country. Taj passionately criticizes the practice of veiling women, highlighting the fact that the emancipation of women would lead to societal progress, which was a radical idea in the time when women were confined to burqas, concealing their faces, hair, and bodies. She recounts:

Again I would say, "The lives of Persian women consist of two things: the black and the white. When they step outdoors to take a walk, they are frightful images of mourning in black. When they die, they are shrouded in white. I am one of these ill-starred women, and I much prefer the whiteness of the shroud to that hideous figure of mourning: I have always demurred from putting on that garb. The counterpart to this life of darkness is our day of white. In a corner of my house of sorrow, I comfort myself with the thought of that day, yearning for its advent with incalculable joy, as though it were an eagerly-awaited lover."

(Taj Al-Saltana 201-202)

In this excerpt, she talks about the colors black and white. By mentioning the black color, she refers to the hijab the women used to wear in the public sphere that was entirely black; by the white color, she means the shroud the dead people are wrapped in before they are put in their coffins. It is discernible that in various parts of her memoir, Taj emerged as a figure who challenged societal feminine expectations. Her character was a unique form of gender expression that went beyond the traditional binary opposition of male and female.

As it was mentioned in the previous sections, women during the Qajar era were deprived of numerous rights. The societal and cultural norms of that time forced them to limit their lives to the private sphere and engage in activities like child-rearing and domestic responsibilities. However, through studying the memoirs of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh, we

understand that their actions, thoughts, and unique ways of being significantly deviated from the societal expectations imposed on women in Qajar society. Bibi Maryam and Taj embodied a distinct resistant identity, contrary to the prescribed roles for women, which positions them at the threshold of male/female binary opposition. In my perspective, Bibi Maryam and Taj transcended beyond the defined boundaries of traditional femininity and personified qualities that were characterized as both traditionally feminine and masculine. This interpretation aligns with Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and the idea of drag, which challenges the perception of gender norms. Butler believes that gender is constructed and inscribed on the surface of the bodies and argues that gender identities are merely the products of discourse (*Gender Trouble*, 174). According to Butler's frame of thought, Bibi Maryam and Taj were resisting agents through their actions and demeanor. Butler's notion of drag as a subversive act that exposes the illusion of normal gender identities aligns with Bibi Maryam and Taj's unconventional behavior. Drag, according to Butler, mocks the notion of fixed gender identities and normal gender expressions (174). The natural, original, or true gender is exposed as a mere parody of the established ideas of originality or naturalness through being drag (41, 42). As Butler emphasizes, repetition plays a key role in the cultural reproduction of identities, and Bibi Maryam and Taj's persistent defiance of social expectations became a subversive act that questions gender identity regulations. It is important to mention that Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's characteristics did not subvert the heterosexual discourse, rather they unveiled and highlighted the naturalized frameworks of thought. The actions of Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh align with Butler's concept of drag as an act of resistance, as they challenged societal expectations and contributed to a broader discourse on how gender identities are constructed in the context of the Qajar era.

I act, therefore, I am

In “De-hyphenate and De-theorize my voice: ‘I act, therefore, I am,’” Minoo Derayeh states that “Iranian women’s efforts in challenging the dominant culture through their efforts [are] theorized in the slogan: ‘I act, therefore, I am’” (99). She argues that many scholars have adopted a universal approach to discussing issues such as human rights, hijab, and family law for Muslim women (100). However, this universalist perspective has failed to accurately represent the experiences of many Iranian women and, thus, they were silenced (100). Derayeh highlights the slogan “I act, therefore, I am” to emphasize the importance of individual agency and action in their struggles toward gender equality (100). She mentions the historical roots and continuity of Iranian women's resistance to gender-based injustice by referring to prominent Iranian women from the 19th century, including Zaynab Pasha, Tahereh Qurrat-ul-Ein, and Taj al-Saltaneh, who expressed their feminist ideals “with both their fists and their pens” (100). Moreover, in explaining the de-hyphenation process, she indicates that women had their own goals and agency that were independent of all male-dominated movements and emphasizes on recognizing the collective efforts of women that were separate from male-oriented ideologies (102). Quoting Shahla Lahiji, Derayeh further states that Iranian women expressed their individual and cultural identities through their actions and reactions in various fields and their works are genuine reflections of their lives and experiences that embody the slogan “I act, therefore, I am” (103-104). From my perspective, Minoo Derayeh in this article offered a new viewpoint to discuss women’s, Iranian women’s in particular, resistance to the patriarchal system. She invites the readers to approach Iranian women's conditions and struggles through what they do and write and avoid theorizing their situation from male-oriented perspectives. Derayeh highlights women's actions and invites scholars to pay closer

attention to the agency and self-expression of Iranian women, theorizing the slogan “I act, therefore, I am.”

I believe that Derayeh’s “I act, therefore, I am” theory can be seen in the lives and experiences of Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh. These two women asserted their agency and autonomy through “both their fists and their pens” (Derayeh 100). As for their pens, I have mentioned in chapter two the importance of their memoir writing and etching their presence in history. Their act of memoir writing made history more accessible, by presenting a genuine version of women's lives and perspectives and making them more present in the historical narrative. Both of them also criticized the king’s rule and behaviors in their memoirs, proving their courageous spirit and rebellious characters. As for their actions or fists, they have done extensively. As it was mentioned in the current chapter and chapter three, Taj al-Saltaneh was a very knowledgeable woman who knew several languages and was a painter and a writer. She established a women’s association during the Constitutional Revolution, abandoned hijab, and divorced her husband. Bibi Maryam bravely participated in an armed battle against the king during the Constitutional Revolution, controlled a castle, allied with Germany in WWI, gave refuge to many during the war and revolution, and won numerous acknowledgments and medals from different countries from different countries around the world. All they wrote and did adhere to Derayeh’s theory of “I act, therefore, I am” by asserting their individuality and agency through their unique way of being in Iranian history.

Conclusion

Primarily, in this chapter, I discussed the Constitutional Revolution and examined its historical context. I highlighted Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari's and Taj al-Saltaneh's unique ways of fighting for the Constitutional Revolution and resisting the societal norms to gain liberty, justice, and equality. Following Judith Butler's concept of performativity, I examined conventional femininity in the era in which Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh lived. Furthermore, I argued that their characters are at the threshold of femininity and masculinity, challenging the naturalized notion of binary genders, by analyzing their actions, life experiences, and thoughts, using Judith Butler's concept of drag. Lastly, I examined Derayeh's "I act, therefore, I am" concept and discussed that Taj and Bibi Maryam's deeds follow this idea.

Throughout this thesis, this chapter has mainly focused on the main argument that Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh performed admirably despite many constraints and limitations during the Qajar era. It answered the questions posed in the first chapter regarding the Constitutional Revolution and the contributions of Bibi Maryam and Taj in the social movements and their reflections in their memoirs. There are, however, some questions that are left unanswered in this chapter, and answering them would help clarify the subject. Questions such as: Is connecting Judith Butler's ideas, who is from the fourth wave of feminism in the West to Taj and Maryam in the Qajar context, relatable? Or, how did women's movement in this period, in general, and Taj and Maryam's contributions, in particular, affect the next generation of women? Examining these questions would give us a broader overview of the accuracy of the approach taken in this chapter and the enduring impacts of women's resistance.

In the next chapter, I will provide a summary of my discussions in this research project, offering an overview of the topic covered throughout this thesis. Moreover, I will discuss the

findings and results of the project, along with suggestions and recommendations for further studies. I will discuss my positionality in relation to my topic and the possibility of being biased. I will also suggest some questions to have in mind in further research and studies on exploring the voices of women during the Qajar era.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Summing Up

The Qajar era in Persian history is a complex period as the country was at the threshold of modernity while maintaining its independence during the age of Western imperialism. The global awareness of people during this era was augmented due to factors like the increased number of travels to European countries and the emergence of new technologies such as printing houses. However, the conditions of women were not ideal, as the gendered division of labor limited women to domestic and childrearing and childrearing duties. However, despite the existence of such constraints, some women challenged traditional and societal expectations and became the pioneers of transformation. These exceptional women, however, were often unrecognized and overlooked in history. The importance of these women in Iranian history during the Qajar era has only recently been recognized by historians and scholars.

In this thesis, I focused on two remarkable characters during the Qajar era, Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari and Taj al-Saltaneh, who were trailblazers in many aspects. Taj al-Saltaneh, a royal Qajar princess, was the daughter of Naser al-Din Shah, the fourth king of the Qajar dynasty, and Muzaffar al-Din Shah's sister, Qajar's fifth king. Taj al-Saltaneh was a bright, progressive woman and a women's rights activist who wrote and painted extensively. She narrated her life story when she was thirty years old, which was published in a book titled *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity 1884-1914*. Her memoir is quite touching, as she mixes her personal life stories with historical and social events through vivid descriptions and in a

poetic tone. Furthermore, Taj married three times in her lifetime and sought divorce from her first husband, which was a social taboo during her time. She also abandoned the hijab and religion altogether and became a naturalist.

A tribal woman warrior and a political activist, Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari was an exceptional woman who was born and raised in the Bakhtiyari tribe. She had done many courageous deeds throughout her life, from being a passionate supporter of the Constitutional Revolution and participating in an armed battle against the king to directing a castle and its people and uniting with Germany against the British armies to prevent a possible invasion. She recounted her life story in a memoir, which was published as *Kāṭerāt-e Sardār Maryam Bakhtīārī* (Memoirs of Commander Maryam Bakhtiyari), when she was forty-four. In this book, she describes her life stories along with the historical and social events happening throughout her life, in a fast-paced tone that represents her nomadic lifestyle. Her memoir is full of descriptions of the people in her life and the challenges she faced with her family and the state as a woman and a rebel.

My initial interest in Taj al-Saltaneh came from the fact that her memoir was like a novel, and she was struggling with the issues that have persisted as problems in the period we are living in. Moreover, my interest in Bibi Maryam was initially because she was a Bakhtiyari woman from the Haft Lang division, and I, too, am a Bakhtiyari woman. Therefore, she is counted as my ancestor, and I was curious about my possible great-grandmother. I understand that because of my positionality, being a Persian Bakhtiyari woman living in a period where women cannot be free in their own country, I may have looked at these two figures with a touch of bias. However, I felt the urge to raise the voices of women in the past and acknowledge their existence so that contemporary women could have even more role models to look up to.

My ardent goal for this research project was to highlight the unheard voices of women during the Qajar era and investigate the reasons that led to their marginalization. I have adopted an intersectional perspective to understand the position of women in different dimensions, including familial, social, and cultural settings, during the mentioned period. I have examined the literature on women and analyzed different forms of women's literature, such as memoirs, journals, articles, and essays, to explain how their identities were formed. My focus was on the two exceptional women, namely Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari, who challenged the traditional definitions of femininity and womanhood and exceeded the pre-defined "normal" woman during the Qajar era. I studied the voices of these iconic figures through their memoirs to conduct my project. By incorporating three different disciplines, namely literary, historical, and women and gender studies, in my research project, I attempted to explore their deeds and impacts. These standpoints helped me grasp the significance of their memoirs as a subjective narrative style, their selective reflections on certain personal, social, and historical events, and their importance in women's studies by amplifying their voices and experiences. Additionally, I examined how these disciplines relate to the social and historical contexts of their present and past, as well as their contributions to the Constitutional Revolution and the women's movement.

Women were absent from historical narratives for a long time due to a lack of literature on Iranian women in history. It is only recently that scholars and historians paid attention to the position and role of women in the past. Because of the prevalence of patriarchal systems in various societies and cultures for centuries, it is important to acknowledge the contributions and practices of women who carved out a niche for themselves in history through their unique ways of living and being. As a result of acknowledging the accomplishments and experiences of these women, I aim to empower women across the globe, as well as in Iran. I believe that by providing

contemporary women with a discrete history, we help them to solidify their sense of identity by looking at their peers in the past and thus gain emancipation.

At the beginning of this thesis, I posed six questions to be investigated throughout my research. I sought to answer them and conduct my research by incorporating a critical literature review approach. Moreover, I used an unobtrusive research method and content analysis to study the memoirs as qualitative data. I have also applied historical methodology and ethnographic content analysis, which allowed me to combine a detailed and contextual understanding of ethnography with the systematic content analysis methodology. I incorporated a symptomatic reading on the materials I had, as well, as it is a suitable method for understanding what certain texts could not portray or express because of prevailing ideologies. I have utilized personal diaries, travelogues, Persian and English literary texts, along with various primary and secondary sources, to answer my questions and fill the mentioned gaps in the literature. Furthermore, even though I have employed an interdisciplinary approach, including literature, history, and women's studies, this project is grounded in a feminist theoretical framework. The concepts and ideas of different feminists and intellectuals, such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, Emira Derbel, Afsaneh Najamabadi, Abbas Amanat, and Minoou Derayeh, assisted me to employ a universal feminist lens and answer my research questions on Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiyari.

Findings

I began this thesis by posing six main questions. The first problem that occupied my mind was the significance of the mode of memoir as a literary style in Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's

works. To approach this question, I have compared two writing styles, namely autobiography and memoir, in the second chapter of this thesis. I have argued that in contrast to autobiographies, memoirs tend to focus on a specific time period and emphasize the author's feelings, experiences, and thoughts (Dukes). Moreover, I have explained that, based on Emira Derbel's arguments, memoir writing gives third-world female writers an opportunity to express themselves in both the public and private spheres, discussing personal and political matters (39, 40). The memoir writing gives women a chance to distance themselves from "the individualistic autonomous male 'I'" and "enjoy self-realization and recognition" (41). Therefore, as "memoirs expose, examine, and unveil issues such as class, race, sexuality, and the body in relation to culture and even religion," this writing style is a significant mode of writing for Bibi Maryam and Taj al Saltaneh since it provides them with the opportunity to express themselves both personally and in the context of culture and society.

The second question that occupied my mind was about the extent to which the societal and cultural circumstances of Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's environment were reflected in their memoirs. Mainly in the third chapter, I discussed how Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh wrote about the Qajar kings, particularly Naser al-Din Shah, and their ways of governing in their memoirs. Bibi Maryam strongly condemned the divinity given to the kings, talked about her father as the influential leader of the Bakhtiyari tribe, discussed the tribal divisions that refrained them from establishing their own government, explained the conditions of Persian and Bakhtiyari women in Iran, and recounted her courageous deeds, such as managing a castle independently for a certain period of time. Taj al-Saltaneh also wrote about Naser al-Din Shah, the fourth king of the Qajar dynasty, and her father, who she believed did not serve the nation. She talked about how Naser al-

Din Shah spent most of his time entertaining himself, mostly with women and cats. She also recounted Naser al-Din Shah's assassination and its impact on the women in the harem. Moreover, she discussed Naser al-Din Shah's successor, Muzaffar al-Din Shah, his personality, and the changes he brought to the structure of the harem. In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I extensively discussed that both Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh talked about the conditions of women during the Qajar era and their thoughts on and engagements in the Constitutional Revolution. Hence, I contend that they have extensively discussed the societal and cultural environments in their memoirs.

Another question I considered closely was how the patriarchal systems affected Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh during the Qajar era. To find out the answer, I first examined three books and articles about the conditions of women during that era. I came to the conclusion that the literacy rate among Iranian women was extremely low; they were expected to serve and please men by fulfilling domestic, child-rearing, and marital responsibilities, and they were dependent on superstitions and illogical thinking, all of which led to their inferior position in the society. I then argued that even though Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam had privileged positions, Taj being a princess and Bibi Maryam the daughter of a khan, they were still affected by the patriarchal cultures of their time. Through studying Gayle Rubin and Luce Irigaray's ideas on traffic in women and women as gifts, along with studying Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's conditions through their memoirs, I understood that they were both treated as commodities, subjected to be exchanged between men for different purposes, only because of their sex. They were both forced to get married at an early age because of their fathers' decision to maintain unity in their tribe or dynasty, money, or loyalty to the king. This led them to experience intense psychological impacts.

Therefore, I believe that both Taj al-Saltaneh and Bibi Maryam were affected by the patriarchal cultures during the Qajar era.

The other two questions I pursued were about the ways in which Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh resisted the societal and gender norms prevalent during the Qajar era and their contributions to the Constitutional Revolution. I discussed that women organized different violent or nonviolent ways to resist the norms and support the Constitutional Revolution. For example, a woman shot a pro-royalist mullah, or they established secret societies and associations to express their nationalist views or sold their jewelry to fund government bonds and support foreign goods' boycotts (Sanasarian 20, 21). Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh were also very active in their rebellious acts and supporting the revolution. Bibi Maryam participated in an armed attack against the king, allied with Germany against invasive forces, and offered refuge to people fleeing from the king and also WWI. Because of all this, she received several gifts and medals from different countries. Moreover, Taj abandoned her religion and hijab, divorced her husband, and established a women's association to defend the rights of women. These courageous deeds and other rebellious acts described in their memoirs made them resistant figures during the Qajar era. Furthermore, I discussed that Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's actions and performances demonstrate both feminine and masculine qualities which, I believe, can be related to Judith Butler's idea of drag. In chapter four, I discussed that both these figures destabilize the masculinity and femininity binary and demonstrated that gender is a fluid and socially constructed notion. For example, Bibi Maryam was highly influential among her people to the point that she was feared, and she managed the administration of a castle and safeguarded it. Also, Taj, in her memoir, contemplated serious and existential issues such as individual responsibilities and obligations determined by the legal framework. I argue that their identities were contrary to the prescribed roles for women, which

positions them at the threshold of male/female binary oppositions. Therefore, they are resistant figures against the traditional concepts of femininity and masculinity. They also assert their autonomy and individuality through their deeds and actions based on Derayeh's notion of "I act, therefore, I am."

My last question was whether we could consider Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh's memoir writing as an act of resistance and why. To answer this, I have discussed the notions of "masking" and "veiling" in Persian literature. I have explained that "masking" is for both male and female writers, as they hide their personal and private lives from the public and create a literary persona that differs from who they really are (Hillmann 35, 36). "Veiling," on the other hand, is exclusively for women and is done either by society or the writer herself to conceal her true identity (35). Some female authors have tried to either hide their gender in their texts or selectively demonstrate their personal and private aspects to the public through their words (36). Thus, the act of "veiling" is rooted in the societal and cultural pressures on women to hide their genders or gendered personalities and experiences. Farzaneh Milani also discusses that since women's lives have been confined to the private sphere, their experiences have become deeply private and secretive, leading to the fact that writing memoirs and self-representing could have had adverse consequences for women (6). Therefore, I conclude that, based on the points mentioned above, memoir writing, especially for women, was a form of resistance to cultural and societal norms. Particularly, it was a rebellious act for Bibi Maryam and Taj al-Saltaneh, who lived more than a century ago, because writing about oneself was not prevalent until recently.

Suggestions for Further Study

I believe that women's history offers a wide range of possibilities to conduct research on. The Qajar era was on the verge of modernity, and the ideologies prevalent during and before this era were relatively pure from Western thoughts. The issue of whether we can look at the Qajar era through 21st-century lenses should be discussed, too. Ideas such as women's rights or women as citizens are among 21st-century concepts. Future scholars can also focus on looking at Iranian women's history through the lens of different West Asian theoreticians and feminists, such as Nawal El Saadawi and Haideh Moghissi. Additionally, other female figures during the Qajar era did fascinating deeds, including Mahin Banoo, Zainab Pasha, and Tahereh Qurrat al-Ayn. Willing scholars can look at their lives and experiences through critical points of view and discuss their roles in making history. It is also important to examine the role of religion in women's personal, social, and political lives and their history.

Considering other minorities in history, including eunuchs or non-binary groups, and their roles in shaping history is crucial since their names have been forgotten, similar to women. As Kia, Najmabadi, and Shakhsari mentioned, "every remembering requires a great deal of forgetting," thus urging an exploration into the reasons for omitting non-binary genders from most existing literature. It is crucial to critically analyze the factors contributing to this exclusion and consider the implications of such selective remembrance in shaping our understanding of history (178). By doing this thesis, I hope we distance Persian literature on women in history from what Kia, Najmabadi, and Shakhsari called an "add women and steer" approach, which means to regard women or other minorities apart from the history and assign only a chapter or two in history books to mention them (179).

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