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Dānish—the First Women's Journal in Iran: A Contribution to the Study of the Discourse of the Early Iranian Women's Movement

Abstract In this article, I explore the content of Iran's first women's newspaper, *Dānish* ('Knowledge'), published in Tehran in 1910–1911. Using the method of close reading, I address the question of the model of womanhood that was presented in the pages of the weekly. In this regard, I examine selected articles that appeared in the surviving issues of *Dānish*, distinguishing three dominant thematic areas: the education of girls and women; marital relationships; child rearing, hygiene, and health care. By putting the journal's discourse in the context of the discussion on 'women's issues' that was ongoing in the press during the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911), I reflect on the relationship between the agenda of the early Iranian women's movement and the discourse of constitutionalist nationalism.

Keywords *Dānish*, Iran, press, women, feminism, nationalism, education, marriage, child rearing, hygiene

1 Introduction

Dānish ('Knowledge') was the first women's journal in Iran's history. The first issue appeared on 10 Ramadan 1328 (15 September 1910) on the initiative of Iran's first woman optician, Duktur Kaḥḥāl (Dr. Kaḥḥāl), also

referred to as Khānum-i Duktur Kaḥḥāl (Mrs. Dr. Kaḥḥāl).[1] Dr. Kaḥḥāl remained the head of *Dānish* until the end of its existence, that is up to 27 Rajab 1329 (23 July 1911), when the last, thirtieth issue of the weekly was released.[2] Issues two to four mentioned the name of ʿA. [?] Ṣafvat as the editor-in-chief. According to the information provided in the journal, its headquarters were located in Tehran on ʿAlā al-Dawlih street (now part of Firdawsī street).

Unfortunately, not much is known about Dr. Kaḥḥāl, although recent years have brought a major breakthrough in our knowledge about her life. Until recently, most sources stated that her first name was Maʿsūmih or Sumayih (ʿĀmilī Riżāyī 1389: 202; Bāghdār Dilgushā 1400a: 254). However, according to information provided by director and screenwriter Khusraw Sīnāyī (1941–2020), who claimed to be Dr. Kaḥḥāl's grandson, her real name was ʿIffat Sayyāḥ Sipānlū (Ibrāhīmzādih 2021). As she herself disclosed in the first issue of *Dānish*, she was the daughter of Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥakīm Bāshī Jadīd al-Islām Hamadānī[3] (*Dānish* 1: 2). Allegedly, after acquiring basic medical knowledge from her father, she attended a school for girls run by American missionaries from whom she obtained a license to practice as a physician. Afterwards, she opened her office in Jalīlābād Street. Some claim that she was married to Dr. Ḥussayn Kaḥḥāl, editor-in-chief of the *Istiqlāl-i Īrān* (*Iran's Independence*) newspaper (quoted in Hendelman-Baavur 2019: 14), but other sources argue against it (Iskandarī-nizhād 1399: 119). ʿIffat Sayyāḥ Sipānlū/Dr. Kaḥḥāl died in 1344AP (1965/1966) at the age of 84 (Ibrāhīmzādih 2021).

The emergence of *Dānish*, which marked the beginning of the women's press in Iran, would not have been possible without the profound political changes that occurred in the late Qajar era, and finally led to the establishment of the first parliament and the adoption of the first constitution in 1906. According to Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, 'that "knowledge" became this journal's mission spoke to the new status women had gained in the public sphere following the constitutional revolution' (Kashani-Sabet 2011: 126–127). However, a masthead included at the top of the first page of each issue of the journal indicated that the knowledge it propagat-

[1] *Kaḥḥāl* means 'optician' in Persian.

[2] All preserved issues of *Dānish* were published in: *Shukūfih bih inżimām-i Dānish.* 1377. Tihrān: Kitābkhānih-yi Millī-yi Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī-yi Īrān. A digitized version of the book is available on the University of Bonn website: http://digitale-sammlungen.ulb.uni-bonn.de/ulbbnioa/periodical/titleinfo/4147786. Accessed 26 April 2022. In this article, I make reference to this publication but the pagination given is that of the journal.

[3] *Jadīd al-Islām* indicates that he was a convert. The title *ḥakīm bāshī* translates as 'chief medic'.

ed was, to quote Kashani-Sabet again, a 'domestically-focused knowledge' (Kashani-Sabet 2011: 127):

> Journal devoted to the moral/ethical issues, housekeeping, child rearing, and marital relationships [*shawhardārī*]. For the benefit of girls and women, completely avoiding the politics of the country [*politīk va siyāsat-i mamlikatī*].[4]

As Janet Afary has pointed out, the final note about disavowing any interest in politics '[p]robably (…) was a compromise with the authorities who had allowed the journal to function' (Afary 1996: 200).[5] However, the fact that the articles in *Dānish* shied away from politics does not mean that the journal's content cannot be analyzed against the political backdrop, or, more specifically, as part of the progressive narrative of Iranian nationalism at the turn of the 20th century, with its emphasis on progress and modernity, including the modernity of women. In considering the relationship between nationalism and feminism in the colonized areas of the 'Rest' in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Kumari Jayawardena noted that for the reformist nationalists

> education and freedom of movement for women, and monogamy, were (…) seen as marks of modernity, development and civilization. Reformers tried to embody these factors in their political platforms and activities, striving to make their own wives and daughters embodiments of the new ideal. (Jayawardena 2016: 12)

Also in Iran, progressives linked the lack of education for women, and polygamy, with backwardness and ignorance. On a symbolic level, the figure of the woman—usually perceived as a carrier of cultural values, be it 'traditional' or 'modern'—intertwined with the discourse of nationalism, and became associated in national(ist) imagery with the concepts of homeland (*vaṭan*) and nation (*millat*), both crucial to a new patriotic rhetoric that emerged in the late 19th century. According to Mohamad

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[4] The masthead of the second women's newspaper in Iran's history, *Shukūfih* ('Blossom'; 1913–1916), was remarkably similar. It additionally mentioned literature and the education of girls (although not as one of the topics to be discussed in the journal's pages): 'Journal about the moral issues, literature, children's health, housekeeping, and motherhood. A way of raising girls [*dūshīzigān*] and moral purification of women, intended for schools for girls'.

[5] Also, in a letter of commitment submitted to Anjuman-i Maʿārif (The Association for Education) to obtain a permit to publish the newspaper, Dr. Kaḥḥāl stated that 'politics shall not be discussed' (Karīmiyān 2017: 65).

Tavakoli-Targhi, although '[*v*]*aṭan* veneration and Shah adoration were the nodal points of a patriotic nationalist discourse that imagined the Shah as the father of *vaṭan*' (Tavakoli-Targhi 2002: 222), understood as a 'home headed by the crowned father' (Tavakoli-Targhi 2002: 218), in the counter-official 'matriotic' discourse *vaṭan* was compared to the sick, suffering mother who needed care and protection from her patriotic children: men and women of the nation (Tavakoli-Targhi 2002: 218, 225–228). Women of the nation (*zanhā-yi millat*) was an ambiguous term that could also be understood as 'wives of the nation,' since the Persian word *zan* means both 'woman' and 'wife'. As it was pointed out by Afsaneh Najmabadi:

> The linguistic ambiguity [of the term *zanhā-yi millat*] is compounded by a double political one. First, millat itself was a fluid notion at the time, meaning *mardum*, 'the people', but moving closer in meaning to 'the nation'. Second, the newly crafted national community was often conceived of as a brotherhood of male citizens, *baradaran-i vatani*. As women began to claim a political space and project themselves as sisters of the land (*khvaharan-i vatani*) the masculinity of millat was challenged to include women as citizens. (Najmabadi 2005: 208)

Women began to occupy an important place in the patriotic narrative of the constitutional period (1905–1911), even if, as observed by Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, 'the ideals of Iranian constitutionalism' in general were 'focused on man' (Kashani-Sabet 2011: 32). According to Najmabadi, the 'women's cause' became one of the crucial elements of the nationalist discourse because '[i]f the backwardness of the nation was a cause for national shame, the condition of women was a particularly egregious public display of that backwardness' (Najmabadi 2005: 153).

It was also during the constitutional era when women founded their first associations, participated in demonstrations and protests, and even fought in male disguise alongside resistance forces. At that time, next to the advocacy for monogamous marriage and women's right to divorce, the main area of activity of the newly emerging Iranian women's movement was the promotion of girls' education and the establishment of schools for girls.[6] Their objective was, most obviously, to educate, but at the same time they aimed at teaching good moral conduct and skills considered necessary for devoted wives and mothers of patriotic citizens. The women's press was to serve a similar purpose. In addition to disseminating 'dry

[6] It should be noted that the Education Act passed by the Majlis in 1906 made education up to the sixth grade compulsory and free for all, boys and girls (Matthee 2003: 124). However, this law was not enforced due to lack of financial measures.

knowledge' about child rearing, hygiene, and housekeeping, the mission of *Dānish* was to champion moral virtues considered essential for a 'new woman'.

2 The education of girls and women

The origins of the Iranian women's movement can be traced back to the end of the 19th century. It was then that two women authors wrote their pamphlets in response to a misogynist guidebook on good conduct of wives entitled *Taʾdīb al-Nisvān* or *Taʾdīb al-Nisā* ('The Education of Women' or 'Disciplining Women'), written by Khānlar Mīrzā Iḥtishām al-Dawlih (d. 1861), grandson of the second Qajar king Fatḥʿalī Shāh (r. 1797–1834). The printed edition of *Taʾdīb al-Nisvān* from 1886/1887 must have echoed widely among the educated women in Tehran, as it was quickly answered by two satirical treatises: anonymous *Taʾdīb al-Rijāl* ('The Education of Men' or 'Disciplining Men') from 1886/1887, and *Maʿāyib al-Rijāl* ('The Vices of Men') written by Bībī Khānum Astarābādī (1858/1859–1921) in 1894. These earliest known writings by Iranian women that protest against the misogyny and violence to which higher-class wives were subjected by their husbands are proof of an important change in the understanding of the functions of marriage, and the roles of women and men in its framework, that started to occur in the late Qajar era.

Bībī Khānum Astarābādī was among the crucial figures for the development of the modern education of girls in Iran. She was the founder of one of the first new-type schools for girls, Dabistān-i Dūshīzigān (The School for Young Ladies), established in Bībī's house in Tehran in 1907. A notice about the opening of the school, published in the newspaper *Majlis* from 9 Ṣafar 1325/28 March 1907, detailed the curriculum, including 'Writing, History of Iran, Reading, Cookery book, Law, Religion, Geography, Arithmetic'. Furthermore, '(...) a room has been set aside for teaching in manual arts, such as knitting, gold embroidery, silk embroidery, sewing, etc.' (Javadi and Floor 2010: XXIII).

The number of girls' schools grew rapidly and in 1910 there were about 50 of them in the capital (Jayawardena 2016: 63). It should be noted that before establishing these schools upper-class women could receive basic education at home, but, as Hamideh Sedghi observed, 'they could not use it for public service' (Sedghi 2007: 52). There were also traditional clergy-run schools, called *maktab* or *maktab-khānih*, that offered very basic education and were attended by girls too.[7] However, as Sedghi noted,

[7] *Madāris* (plural of *madrasih*) was the term applied to the new-type schools, to distinguish them from *makātib* (pl. of *maktab*).

> under this system, the clergy taught classes, but most teachers were 'nearly illiterate'. Teachers offered some lessons from the *Qoran* in Arabic but girls rarely learned to read or write in Persian (Sedghi 2007: 52–53).

Furthermore, in the eyes of some Shi'i clerics and conservative men, the education of girls was perceived as dangerous. According to Haideh Moghissi, '[w]omen's literacy was such a social stigma that literate women had to hide their education' (Moghissi 1994: 27). To quote Sedghi again:

> It was widely believed that educated women would threaten the morality of the society, for once women learned the art of writing, 'they would write love letters' and generally undermine the existing social order. Although most women were unschooled, their education, even minimal, represented a challenge to many men who were anxious not to lose their privilege over women's mind and body. (Sedghi 2007: 53)

It comes as no surprise, then, that the students of the first-ever school for girls, Nāmūs (Honor), founded by Tūbā Āzmūdih shortly before Dabistān-i Dūshīzigān, fell victim to assaults (Sedghi 2007: 53). Also Bībī Khānum's school became the subject of attacks from some conservative clergymen (Javadi and Floor 2010: XXII).[8]

It was in such an atmosphere that Dr. Kaḥḥāl resorted to religious arguments in the editorial of the first issue of *Dānish* to prove that the right to learn should not be gender-based: '[Women] must become learned [*ʿālim*] because it was said: (…) "The search for knowledge [*ʿilm va dānish*] is desirable [*vājib*] for every man and woman". [It was also said:] (…) "Seek knowledge even in China"'.[9] As she argued, the Creator of 'reason and wisdom' (*ʿaql va dānish*) charged women-mothers with the duty of raising children. Since children ('especially girls who in the future will become mothers themselves') imitate the morals (*akhlāq*) of their mothers, the poor moral attitude of mothers leads to the development of a poor moral attitude in their children. 'So what must be done for mothers to fulfill well this duty [of raising children]?' asked Dr. Kaḥḥāl. The answer was education, because it would make (future) mothers learned (*ʿālim*) (*Dānish* 1: 2).

[8] Under the pressure of the clergy, Bībī Khānum was forced to close the school. However, after having spoken with the minister of education, Mukhbir al-Salṭanih, she reopened it, for some time limiting the instruction to the youngest students between the ages of four and six (Javadi and Floor 2010: XXII).

[9] I omitted the Arabic quotations provided in the original text.

The reasoning of Dr. Kaḥḥāl was not grounded on the premise that the education of girls and women ought to be recognized as a human right that does not require additional justifications. Although the quote from the Quran she provided could be interpreted as a claim for the egalitarian nature of the right to acquire knowledge regardless of the intended purpose of that knowledge, she explicitly argued for the education of girls and women *because it would make them better mothers*. Such a view prevailed in the progressive press of the constitutional era. Quoting the newspaper *Āmūzigār* ('Instructor') from 1911, Kashani-Sabet noted that '[w]hile the acquisition of knowledge was in itself a noble aspiration, for women 'what matters after receiving an elementary education is the learning of ethics and living (*ʿilm-i akhlaq va zindigani*)'" (Kashani-Sabet 2005: 32). This purpose was to be served, firstly, by the modern schools (*madāris*). As Dr. Kaḥḥāl observed, '[i]t is known that children acquire knowledge at schools', which, 'thank God', have been 'to some extent' established in the capital 'for the sake of these children and their mothers' (*Dānish* 1: 2). For those lucky enough to already be educated, newspapers constituted a reliable source of knowledge, because '[w]hoever in their free time studies them with concentration, becomes wise in all fields' (*Dānish* 3: 8). Therefore, illiterate women were urged to 'immediately learn to read and write, and acquire knowledge, for an illiterate woman will not become a lady of reason' (*Dānish* 3: 8). In that endeavor, they could be helped by their educated husbands:

> It is recommended for those women who are illiterate that their husbands read this newspaper to them every week, lest they be deprived of its benefits. Perhaps it will encourage them to learn to read (*Dānish* 1: 2).

In addition to disseminating gendered knowledge about childrearing, hygiene, health, and housekeeping among the 'honorable womenfolk of the homeland and dear mothers, wise and learned [*khānumhā-yi muḥtaramāt-i vaṭan va mādarhā-yi ʿazīz-i ṣāḥib-i ʿaql va fatin*]' (*Dānish* 1: 2), the journal promoted gendered moral values. The emphasis on the moral aspect of the education of girls frequently recurred in women's writings from the constitutional era. For example, ʿIṣmat Mustawfī, who used the *nom de plume* Ṭāyirih, wrote in one of her letters published in the newspaper *Īrān-i Naw* ('New Iran')[10] in 1909–1910 that the most important thing in life was to learn morality (*akhlāq*), without which the acquisition of knowledge (*taḥṣīl-i ʿulūm*) was meaningless (Bāghdār Dilgushā 1400b: 128).

[10] On *Īrān-i Naw*, which had a radical pro-democratic character, see for example: Bāghdār Dilgushā 1400b.

A letter by an anonymous woman, printed in the newspaper *Ḥabl al-Matīn* ('Strong Cord') from 23 Rajab 1325/1 September 1907, criticized traditional schools and praised the modern schools for girls for using new books (*kutub-i tāzih*) that not only teach husband-keeping, planning expenses, cooking, and taking care of the health and hygiene of children, but also instill good morals (*akhlāq-i ḥasanih*) in girls (ʿĀmilī Riżāyī 1389: 264). Ṭāyirih, among others, praised patriotic women for establishing schools for girls (Bāghdār Dilgushā 1400b: 120), and the schools themselves for teaching moral virtues (Bāghdār Dilgushā 1400b: 126) which she considered to be the sources of humanity, namely: honesty/piety (*diyānat*), kindness (*muḥabbat*), and good manners (*adab*) (Bāghdār Dilgushā 1400b: 123). The matter of building a solid moral stance among girls was also discussed in an article included in the fourteenth issue of *Dānish* that contained advice for 'nursemaids who want pretty girls'. Apart from recommending that the nursemaids look after the girls' hygiene (*ḥifẓ al-ṣaḥḥih*), cleanliness, and decent appearance 'with all attention and expertise', it advised them develop in children 'a moral attitude [*akhlāq*] by cultivating honesty/piety [*diyānat*], good manners [*tarbiyat*], and purity [*kamāl-i taṣfiyih*]' (*Dānish* 14: 3).

Moralistic content was at times directed towards men as well. A short text entitled *Akhṭār bih mardān va javānān* ('A Note to Men and Youths'), included in the second issue of *Dānish*, warned men against committing immoral behavior towards women. As it remarked, such indecent comportment, which was becoming more and more prevalent among Iranian men, had even been reproached by foreigners (*bīgānigān*). The article appealed to manliness/manhood/masculinity (*mardānigī*), which should be the source of honorable conduct and, in the case of indecency on the part of women, ought to command men to 'cover [their] face[s] with the blush of shame', resist temptation, and abstain from immoral activities (*Dānish* 2: 2). Foreigners (that is, Europeans), here viewed as a source of embarrassing moral judgment, might also have been treated as an inspiration for the ethical conduct: in the first issue's editorial, Dr. Kaḥḥāl noted that the excerpts from European novels that would be printed in the pages of *Dānish* were intended not only to provide entertainment (*tafrīḥ va tafannun*), but first of all to teach *akhlāq-i ḥasanih*—good morals (*Dānish* 1: 2).

3 Marital relationships

The sixth issue of *Dānish*, mainly devoted to housekeeping, included an article titled *Zandārī* ('Wife-keeping') that was intended for husbands and gave advice on how to treat wives. The anonymous author argued that neatness, order and tranquility at home depended on wives, towards

whom husbands should behave kindly, trying to resolve any possible conflicts in a gentle way. While husbands were supposed to look after their wives' well-being, because it determined the stability of the household, the duties of the wives were strictly related to the home and the family sphere and consisted of raising children, taking care of the house, and pleasing their husbands. 'A poor wife' (*zan-i bīchārih*) was pictured as one whose happiness and sense of accomplishment depended on making her husband happy. Arguing that it was the passivity and weakness of women that provided a reason to treat them delicately, the writer quoted imam ʿAlī: 'A woman is delicate like a flower, not active and courageous' (*Dānish* 6: 8).

A similar idea about wives' obligations towards their husbands was shared in the article *Rasm-i shawhardārī* ('The Way of Husband-keeping'), printed in the first issue of the journal. The author, referred to as 'the honorable lady' (*khānum-i muḥtaramih*), claimed that the main concern of a good wife should be to provide comfort (*rāḥatī*) to her husband by giving him meals on time, heating the stove in winter, and keeping the house tidy. Thanks to these efforts, he will want to return home after the whole day spent at work. Furthermore, it was argued that wives should hide any potential discontent, in order not to spoil the mood of their tired husbands: 'God forbid the poor man [*mard-i bīchārih*] will be in a bad mood for another reason, and you, instead of lifting his spirit, will make him even more upset when he gets back home' (*Dānish* 1: 6). Similar advice, although addressed to unmarried girls, was included in the article *Khiṭāb bih dūshīzigān* ('To the Young Ladies'), whose author stated that 'joviality [*khush-khalqī*] makes many friends and chases away pain', and advised: 'Be always cheerful and smiling [*khush-rū*], for such a disposition takes away the power of the blows and hardships [of life]' (*Dānish* 1: 4). Ironically, the journal's advice recalled that given by Iḥtishām al-Dawlih in his misogynist treatise when he wrote, for example, that '[a] wife should never sulk, however much hardship she has to endure; she has to see the positive side and be patient' (Javadi and Floor 2010: 21).

However, although the gender roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives were considered natural and unquestionable, the ideal of marriage promoted in the journal was founded on mutual respect and kindness/affection/love (*muḥabbat*). For example, in the article *Rasm-i zandārī* ('The Way of Wife-keeping'), it was argued that wives, too, can become upset and nervous due to their responsibilities of housekeeping and child rearing: serious, tiring, and often frustrating activities. Husbands were advised to tell their wives what happened to them during the day and to bring them news from the outside world. It was also noted that any disagreements should be resolved through a polite exchange of opinions, and that a husband, while

he is the head of the family (*malik-i riqāb va ṣāḥib-i ikhtiyār-e khānih*), should respect his wife and not interfere in her affairs, as long as she is 'competent and learned [*kārdān-i dānishmand*]' (*Dānish* 3: 8).

In the pages of *Dānish*, as well as other newspapers of that time, the issues of women's education and marital relationships were described as interconnected. Education was intended to make women 'competent and learned' so that they would perform well as wives and mothers. Being 'competent and learned', in turn, gave women the right to demand respect from their husbands. The 'modernity' of women, whose sign was their education, had to be fulfilled within the family sphere. In a certain sense, then, a 'modern woman' was no different from a 'traditional woman,' who was similarly defined by her familial relationships with men: father, husband, brother(s), or son(s). What distinguished the 'traditional' woman from the 'modern' one—that is, the 'modern' wife and mother—was that the latter was educated and lived in a monogamous marriage. The intertwining of the issue of women's education with the newly postulated ideal of marriage, whose basis was monogamy, was summarized by Najmabadi, who referred to Ṭāyirih's criticism of polygamy:

> Men had to accept monogamy; to encourage men to remain faithful to one good woman, women had to be good, that is, educated. Only when men learn to value monogamy and women become worthy companions would men and women become partners for life. (Najmabadi 2005: 203)

Ṭāyirih urged men to monogamy referring, among other things, to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, she blamed women and their ignorance for men's tendency to marry more than one wife: 'It is unfortunate that due to the enormity of immorality, ignorance, and lack of education, we, the womankind, have forced men to [take more] wives' (Bāghdār Dilgushā 1400b: 127). *Dānish* also criticized arranged marriages: in an article describing the wedding customs in various countries, it was noted that in Russia, 'as in France and Iran', parents arranged the marriages of their children, while in England (and in Turkey that had followed the example of Europe), it was the future spouses themselves who made the decision to marry (*Dānish* 14: 4–6).

4 Healthcare, hygiene, and child rearing

Given that Dr. Kaḥḥāl was an ophthalmologist and her father a medic, it may seem unsurprising that *Dānish* often featured topics related to medicine, healthcare, and hygiene. The same topics were also discussed in *Shukūfih*, whose editor-in-chief, Maryam ʿAmīd Simnānī (Muzayyin

al-Salṭanih; 1881/1882–1919), came from a comparable background: she was the daughter of Mīr Siyyid Rāzī Simnānī known as Raʾīs al-Aṭebbāʾ (Head of the Medics), the physician to the Shah Nāṣir al-Dīn. However, there was more behind the frequent coverage of hygienic issues in the pages of these two journals than the similar familial and educational background of their founders and editors-in-chief. Beginning in the late 1800s, the hygienic narrative became part of Iran's patriotic discourse, and '[m]any of the same thinkers who promoted hygiene also placed emphasis on patriotism as a hallmark of modernity' (Kashani-Sabet 2011: 27). The success of the constitutionalists was followed by an increased interest in hygiene and healthcare, and important steps were taken to improve living conditions and raise awareness of disease prevention among the Iranian population. In 1906, *Ḥifẓ al-Ṣiḥḥat*, a newspaper dedicated to hygiene and healthcare, began to appear. A year later, the Society of Physicians as well as a Society for Cleanliness (Anjuman-i Niẓāfat), whose aim was to 'oversee sanitation of public baths in the capital', were established in Tehran (Kashani-Sabet 2011: 29).

The fourteenth issue of *Dānish* included an announcement regarding the opening of a medical practice by an American woman doctor 'who from morning to night treats all types of diseases of women and men alike'. The notice was accompanied by a comment that the presence of the doctor was 'valuable to every Iranian woman not only because of [her] ability to treat illnesses, but also to deliver babies'. Much of the commentary focused on the positive change that would be brought about by the presence of a qualified midwife in Tehran. Previously, as we read, people had relied on the services of 'unlearned women' (*zanān-i bī-ʿilm*) who 'with their hands full of microbes infected these unfortunates [that is, women in labor] with thousands of diseases'. Due to their 'ignorance', they were powerless in the event of complications in childbirth. The article quoted 'one of the doctors' stating that many postpartum women had been infected with contagious diseases by midwives and died. Finally, the presence of an American doctor was called a 'great grace' for which God was thanked (*Dānish* 14: 2).

It was not only midwives who were described as embodying ignorance, one manifestation of which was a life-threatening lack of hygiene. In a two-episode article *Dāyih az mādar mihrabāntar nimīshavad* ('The Wet-nurse Does Not Get Kinder Than the Mother'), wet-nurses and nursemaids were presented as such, too. The very first sentence of that tellingly entitled article warned readers against giving their 'only child [*farzand-i yigānih*]' to a wet-nurse to be fed with a 'stranger's milk [*shīr-i bīgānih*]' (*Dānish* 3: 2). Playing with the similarity of the words *yigānih* and *bīgānih*, the anonymous author dramatically stated that 'a foreign woman's milk

makes the only child a stranger!' (*Dānish* 3: 4). Addressing her 'dear sisters', the writer argued that even she-wolves feed their cubs and then teach them to hunt, whereas a 'kind mother [*mādar-i mihrabān*]' prefers to surrender her child to a wet-nurse who is 'uneducated and pitiless [*bī-parvarish va bī-raḥm*]' (*Dānish* 5: 3).

The article presented a number of arguments that surrendering children to wet-nurses and nursemaids led to many 'harms to the [child's] body and mind'. Quotations from the Qur'an and the Hadith emphasized the importance of the bond between mother and child (*Dānish* 2: 3). It was also stated that 'for a child there is no food more suitable than their mother's milk', that mother's milk is the work of God, and that God made women's bodies a 'storage' for it (*Dānish* 3: 3). It was claimed that the greater the share of the mother in the child's upbringing, the stronger the bond between them. Otherwise, the child will become attached to their wet-nurse and milk-siblings. As it was argued, being raised by wet-nurses and nursemaids, children were not only deprived of 'moral and bodily health' but also of familial love. Why then, it was asked, do mothers deprive their children of their own milk 'on a selfish whim' and give them to strangers 'about whose morals, conduct and health [they] have absolutely no idea?' (*Dānish* 3: 4).

The writer argued that '[mother's] milk affects everything in man and animal' and 'impure milk' (*shīr-i nāpāk*) fouls the nature of a newborn. Therefore, 'the milk of a woman of evil nature makes the child evil; and diseased milk places the disease in the child's body'. In turn, the milk of an impudent and audacious woman would make the newborns she feeds such (*Dānish* 3: 3). This claim was supported by several pieces of anecdotal evidence: about the Sassanian king Bahram Gur who was given to an Arab wet-nurse and because of that drank camel milk and rode camels for the rest of his life (*Dānish* 3: 3); a girl who got strabismus because she was fed by a cross-eyed wet-nurse (*Dānish* 3: 3–4); or a noble-born woman who would wet herself at night until old age because her wet-nurse suffered from the same issue (*Dānish* 3: 4).

While this article did not reach into the political vernacular, it was part of a broader, patriotic narrative that included not only the figure of the mother, but also the motif of mother's milk. Najmabadi quotes a letter published in *Īrān-i Naw* (15 September 1909), in which the issue of education and the theme of breast milk intertwined:

> A letter from the daughters of Shams al-Maʿali informed the readers of the establishment of two schools for 'daughters of vatan so that in future every household will be headed by a knowledgeable woman who well knows home-management, education of children, sewing, cooking and hygiene

> and from her breast the milk of love of homeland [*shir-i ḥubb-i vatan*] will be fed to her newborns such that they will be prepared to offer their services and sacrifice [their lives]'. (Najmabadi 2005: 126)

The assumption that dangerous diseases were spread by women of the popular class, among whom there was no knowledge of microbes whatsoever, can be read between the lines of the article about midwives discussed above. In the article about wet-nurses, it was explicitly stated that a wet-nurse, who often visits her low-born friends and relatives, infects children with various diseases while touching them with her hands full of microbes, that 'the houses of common people [*avāsiṭ al-nās*] are full of' (*Dānish* 5: 2). How come, wonders the writer, the high-born mothers let their own children be fed 'poisoned milk' (*shīr-i zahrālūd*), if they would not eat the food touched by a wet-nurse (*Dānish* 3: 3)?

It was claimed in the article that the low social status of wet-nurses carried moral hazards to the development of children, too. For example, the inappropriate vocabulary used by wet-nurses and nursemaids would lead to the children becoming 'without dignity and honor [*bī-sharaf va bī-ghayrat*]' (*Dānish* 5: 2). It was also claimed that wet-nurses and nursemaids would sometimes resort to putting children to sleep using drugs (*Dānish* 3: 4) or araq (*Dānish* 5: 2). The cunning nursemaid, when she saw that the child had become attached to her and that their mother was no longer producing milk, would use tricks and deceptions: although she herself would beat the child when they cried, she would lie to the mother that the bruises on the child's body were the result of playing with other children. In addition, she would become capricious, insolent, talkative, and smug. The author warned the readers: 'Beware of nursemaids! A nursemaid is a weird thing' (*Dānish* 5: 3).

However, the journal's narrative on wet-nurses/nursemaids was not uniform, as can be seen in the article *Dastūr al-ʿamal-e dāyigān* ('Instructions for Nursemaids') where it was claimed that it was the responsibility of nursemaids to ensure the proper physical, moral and psychological development of children: 'Any impairment in health in adulthood depends entirely on the [improper] upbringing by the nursemaid'. Later, the focus was specifically on girls. It was argued that all mental and moral defects in girls are due to the fact that from birth to the age of seventeen they were not properly supervised by wet-nurses and nursemaids who did not take care of their health and hygiene. The role of nursemaids and mothers was to develop good habits in girls and to teach them how to distinguish between right and wrong. On the day of judgment, nursemaids and mothers will answer before God, as to whether and how they fulfilled their duty (*Dānish* 14: 2).

Although the journal's intended readership was middle- and upper-class urban women,[11] *Dānish* transcended social class and gender. The journal's prejudiced stance on wet-nurses and nursemaids, and its negative image of 'unlearned women', were clearly class-biased. Indirectly, however, *Dānish* tried to reach out to those 'unlearned women' from the popular classes: as one might guess, their literate mistresses were to familiarize them with its content to help them perform their duties in a better (that is, more 'modern') way. Wet-nurses and nursemaids, on the one hand pictured as the epitome of 'ignorance' and 'backwardness', could be therefore shaped and educated by their progressive breadwinners. The same, as we recall, was also the case with illiterate wives, to whom the newspaper was supposed to be read by their educated husbands. This first Iranian women's newspaper thus also functioned in the space between textuality and orality.

5 Conclusions

In the words of Suhaylā Turābī Fārsānī, *Dānish* aimed at the 'empowerment of women within a traditional framework' (Turābī Fārsānī 1397: 82). The scholar observes that:

> *Dānish* presents the relationship between man and woman within this traditional, normative framework [that is, it sees the role of women as wives and mothers—PB] and seeks only to help women fulfill their traditional roles and responsibilities by adding elements from the discourse of modernity [*guftimān-i mudirn*], that is, scientism [*ʿilm-garāyī*] and rationality [*ʿaql-garāyī*], and master these modern tools; *it seeks* [thus] *to optimize the traditional woman.* (Turābī Fārsānī 1397: 83; emphasis added)

Also, the failure of *Dānish* to address important social issues leads scholars to consider it a moderate or even a conservative periodical.[12] Maryam ʿĀmilī Riżāyī observes that the journal tended to be criticized for its indifferent attitude toward important social issues, as well as for advertising foreign products at a time when the fight against foreign goods flooding the Iranian market was an important element of patriotic activism (ʿĀmilī Riżāyī 1389: 204, after: Khusraw Panāh 230–231) and domestic produc-

[11] Which may be seen as quite obvious given the extremely low literacy rate at the time: in 1900, it was estimated between 1 and 5 percent for the entire population of Iran (Amirahmadi 2012: 120).

[12] Bāghdār Dilgushā refers to it as 'moderate' (Bāghdār Dilgushā 1400a: 260), and Nāzlī Iskandarī-nizhād as 'entirely moderate', contrasting it with the radical *Īrān-i Naw* (Iskandarī-nizhād 1399: 119).

tion was supported by women's associations, such as Anjuman-i Himmat-i Khavāṭīn (ʿĀmilī Riżāyī 1389: 154).

The journal's agenda can be seen as part of a maternalist discourse, to use the term proposed by Kashani-Sabet, who defines maternalism as 'an ideology that promoted motherhood, child care, and maternal well-being not only within the structures of family but also in consideration of nationalist concerns' (Kashani-Sabet 2011: 4). On the other hand, *Dānish* encouraged women to work (*Dānish* 6: 3),[13] and the articles on marriage printed in its pages (similarly to those included in *Shukūfih*) advocated for unions based on a 'reciprocal partnership between women and men' (Kashani-Sabet 2011: 62).

This earliest women's periodical in Iran's history can be considered as the nucleus of a more radical feminist discourse that developed later. Speaking of the early Iranian women's press, it was only the *Zabān-i zanān* ('Women's Voice', 1919–1921), founded by Ṣadīqih Dawlatābādī (1882–1961) in Isfahan, that began to challenge patriarchal sociocultural norms and came up with more radical content (Turābī Fārsānī 1397: 92–96).

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[13] As it seems that incentive was aimed at urban women from the upper middle and upper classes, as many women from the popular class worked, whether in the villages or among nomadic communities and urban areas.

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