



## Woman in Culture and Arts

### The Role of the Women's Organization of Iran in the Cultural Modernization of Women's Society through the Campaign against Illiteracy (1966-1979)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article type:</b> Research Article</p> <p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 2 October 2024 Received in revised form: 13 January 2025 Accepted: 20 January 2025 Published online: 2 October 2025</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Cultural Modernization, Elevation of Women's Status, Fight against Illiteracy, Women's Freedom, Women's Organization of Iran.</i></p>	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>With the preparation of the White Revolution Charter in 1962, achieving development was determined as the main strategy of the country. In this strategy, economic development was regarded as the cornerstone of a paradigm shift toward equitable development across all areas. The most significant impediment to economic development was the widespread illiteracy of the populace. On the other hand, this development brought about a new lifestyle that required a different worldview. The government's policymaking became increasingly focused on the issue of women and their position in the modernization and development of Iran following Reza Shah's reign. Various aspects of women's policy-making were addressed, including the fight against restrictive traditions, the transformation of unequal societal structures, the education of women about modern rights, the enactment of equal laws for men and women, employment, independence, and the increase in women's participation in political and social affairs to support the country's growth and reconstruction.</p> <p>In such a discursive atmosphere, the rapid resumption of the modernization program in Iran from the beginning of the 1960s led to the formation of large-scale programs and strategic policies for modernization and development by the government. Consequently, the intellectual and decision-making domain of the country concluded the conflict between the paradigms of tradition and modernity during this period in favor of the concept of a conflict between these two realms and a departure from tradition. Thus, the campaign against women's illiteracy was regarded as the first step in the transformation of cultural modernization in Iran and a significant stride toward the advancement of women's society. This campaign therefore required cultural reform and the replication of Western culture through women.</p> <p>Subsequently, the inquiry arose regarding the types of activities that Iranian women should participate in in order to appreciate their new rights. What is the ideology? Lastly, which strategies will assist women in accomplishing their goals? The answer to this question was not possible except through a specific and stable organization that would continuously and persistently pursue the aforementioned issues. The Women's Organization of Iran's inaugural general assembly was convened on November 28, 1966, and the organization's objective was established to ensure equal rights for women, defend their individual and social rights, and inform women of their individual and social rights and responsibilities, in accordance with the approved statute. In the initial stage, the Women's Organization of Iran acknowledged its responsibility for addressing the issues of low-income and illiterate groups, which were the broadest and most impoverished groups. It considered addressing the basic need of these groups, which was to achieve women's economic independence, as its work program and established literacy and vocational training as the primary axis of its activities for the target groups, based on the studies conducted at the time. In order to ensure the effectiveness of this activity, it also pursued ancillary and complementary activities and progressively focused on other areas of activity such as childcare, education on hygiene principles and family planning, legal counseling and social work, and job placement.</p> <p>As the executor of government modernization plans regarding women, this article addresses the issue of what role the Women's Organization played in the cultural reform and modernization of women's society. In order to reform the traditional culture of women's society, which strategies were the policies designed to implement? In what manner were the adult women's education program and literacy plan developed to aid in the attainment of</p>

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these goals?

### Methodology

This article employs a descriptive-analytical approach to explore the concept of cultural modernization. Initially, it elucidates the strategies and policies of cultural change, and subsequently evaluates the role and performance of the Women's Organization of Iran as the custodian of this modernization in women's society.

### Findings

Based on the research findings, "women's freedom" and "elevation of women's status" were two significant initiatives in the women's literacy programs. The primary goal was to establish a new image of women by increasing the number of literate women. This would consequently initiate the process of altering traditional roles of women and reproducing Western culture through them.

In these programs, the social, political, and economic roles of cultural education for women were considered. The main goal was to acquaint women with the function and performance of contemporary women. Financial and emotional independence, individuality, and the emphasis on the development of personal talents and abilities were the most critical attributes of this type of woman. Furthermore, the acquisition of reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, the expansion of one's understanding of technical innovations, the acquisition of proper budgeting and saving methods, enhancing awareness and understanding of new rights and responsibilities, and the acquisition of information about daily events and local issues were also incorporated. As a result, each of these objectives was designed to free women from the constraints of family, maternity, and wifery, and to align them with a new environment in which they were the focal point.

### Conclusion

Modernization, as a primary and strategic pillar of Iran's macro policies in the 1960s and 70s, caused women to become the focus of large-scale policymaking. The issue of achieving development was at the heart of these policies. Since economic development was considered the foundation for other areas of development, illiteracy was identified as a significant obstacle to realizing this goal. On the other hand, the transition from traditional to modern cultural foundations of society was regarded as a complementary factor in the pursuit of economic development. The development and modernization program considered combating adult women's illiteracy to be a critical aspect due to the significant number of illiterate women and their decisive role in cultural change and the internalization of modern values in the country's children. In addition, the most critical method of cultural modernization was identified as the transformation of traditional roles of women and the mental image of them in society, particularly among women. This transformation could only be accomplished through education and literacy. Accordingly, the educational and training units of these initiatives were influenced by the two major projects of "women's freedom" and "elevation of women's status," which served as a roadmap in women's literacy programs. The objective of literacy programs, besides teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic for achieving economic independence, was to attain women's intellectual and emotional freedom from the family unit and the maternal role, and to familiarize them with the new duties and roles that a woman, as a human being free from traditional values, could express herself in. This aimed at reproducing Western culture to develop a new lifestyle in society.

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