

**THE IMPACT OF IRANIAN REVOLUTION ON WOMEN'S LIVES:
AN ANALYSIS THROUGH SELECTED WOMEN'S MEMOIRS**

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF IRANIAN REVOLUTION ON WOMEN'S LIVES: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH SELECTED WOMEN'S MEMOIRS

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This thesis analyzes five selected memoirs by Iranian women written after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 within the framework of the pre and post Revolution Period. These memoirs are thought as constituting a shift within the Iranian Literature by women. The memoir writing tradition in Iran which was absent before the revolution and boomed afterwards is the first topic of discussion with its catalysing factors. These memoirs are handled within the larger framework of Iranian literary tradition. The study mainly analyses the common characteristics and issues in these five memoirs, and the changes in the women's lives after the revolution as depicted within the memoirs.

Keywords: Iranian revolution, women, women's memoirs, changes in the society, disillusionment.

ÖZ

İRAN DEVRİMİNİN KADINLARIN HAYATI ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİ: SEÇİLMİŞ KADIN ANI KİTAPLARI ÜZERİNDEN BİR ANALİZ

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Bu tez 1979 İran Devrimi sonrasında İranlı kadınlar tarafından yazılan, seçilmiş beş anı kitabını devrim öncesi ve sonrası dönemler çerçevesi içerisinde inceler. Bu anı kitaplarının kadınlar tarafından üretilen İran edebiyatında bir değişim teşkil ettiği düşünülmektedir. Devrimden önce var olmayan ve daha sonrasında patlamaya uğrayan anı kitabı yazma geleneği ortaya çıkış nedenleriyle birlikte ilk tartışma konusudur. Bu anı kitapları, İran edebiyat geleneği çerçevesi içinde ele alınmaktadır. Çalışma temel olarak bu beş anı kitabındaki ortak özellikleri ve konuları ve kadınların hayatındaki devrim sonrası değişimleri anı kitaplarında aktarıldıkları biçimde incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran devrimi, kadınlar, kadınların anı kitapları, toplumdaki değişimler, düş kırıklığı.

To My Family

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Iranian Revolution of 1979, which attracted worldwide attention towards Iran, had significant effects on the citizens of Iran, especially women. It subsequently aroused interest in the academic arena and many studies have been made regarding this process. The Revolution also created many debates on the world arena. Halliday states that, “a balanced evaluation of the Iranian Revolution is not yet possible is, of course, because the processes involved have not yet run their course: such issues as the role of the army, . . . the fate of women . . . – are all ones on which the future alone will give us the full dossier on which to base a judgement.”¹ Therefore, it can be concluded that, even though some clear-cut definitions or solutions are made, the literature is still looking for alternative experiences and points of view towards the Revolutionary process.

It has also been a topic of discussion how the memoirs written by Iranian women have experienced a boom within the last two decades and created many discussions among scholars recently. Having taken these motives into consideration, this thesis set out with the belief that it is important to have a look at the revolutionary period from the memoir writers’ point of view. The aim of this thesis is to put one more brick on the wall of the Iranian Revolutionary studies. This study has mainly been influenced by the boom in the area of memoirs written by the Iranian women in the years following 2000, depicting the lives of the writers by focusing on the revolutionary period, and the rising interest and increasing number of discussions concerning the

¹ Fred Halliday, “Testimonies of Revolution.” *MERIP Reports* 87, (May, 1980): 27-29.

memoirs. Therefore, this thesis will analyze the Revolutionary process's effects on the Iranian women's memoirs.

This study will not be dealing with the 'history' of the Iranian revolution or the groups that existed during that period; it will rather focus on the comparative personal and private experiences and lives of the people, and try to see those experiences within their historical frame, and the changes they have been through during the great period of change in Iran.

Autobiographies of the Iranian women will be the primary sources of this study. There are a great many arguments about the usage of autobiographies as sources. To sum up, there are two perceptions of autobiography, the ones that accept memoirs as perceptions of reality and an important source to rely on when studying on historical events; and the others, who thought that they are only "text, even signs or ciphers of an author, his/her intentions and the text itself cannot be traced back to a specific point or entity"² This thesis have set out with the belief that autobiographies provide useful resources in studying history. Likewise, the critics like Barbre, Webster and Farrel, believe that;

far from encouraging our ability to think creatively about discovering the truths in personal narratives, our academic disciplines have more often discouraged us from taking people's life stories seriously. The disciplines have mainly done this by elevating some kinds of truth- the kinds that conform to established criteria of validity – over others . . . using such a limited definition of Truth admits only one standard at a time for the perception and interpretation of a small segment of a complex reality.³

They go on by stating that the personal narratives are useful in exploring the truths of experience, and history.

While working with memoirs, one thing that has to be kept in mind is that there are various kinds of autobiographies, ranging from classical autobiography and texts like *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* to various kinds of texts emphasising different topics, being historical, social, cultural, political,

² Fadia Faqir, *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*. translated by Shirley Eber and Fadia Faqir (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1998), 1.

³ Joy Webster Barbre and Amy Farrel et al, eds, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 262.

psychological...etc. The memoirs under question in this study have been chosen due to the fact that they all cover an important period in the history of Iran. Authors from different backgrounds have been chosen in order to have a comparative study of the period. Another important element while choosing these five memoirs among the thirty memoirs flourished after the revolution was the fact that these five covers both pre and post revolutionary period.

While relying on the memoirs as historical sources, another thing that the researcher should be careful about is recognizing the intention of the writer in writing her/his memoir. Giving attention to the possible purposes of the writers while writing the memoirs, as they stated in their memoirs, the study's selected group consists of a sample of specifically chosen five memoirs by Iranian women writers published between the years 2003-2004 and depicting the revolutionary period in Iran. The reason behind the selection of women's writings is the fact that they have long been neglected in the history of study especially in Iran.

With all these foreknowledges in mind, this study will focus on five memoirs by Iranian women writers, all of which were published abroad when the writers were, and still are, in exile and narrating their life stories and stressing effect of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 in their lives. These memoirs are; *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi⁴, *Journey from the Land of No* by Roya Hakakian⁵, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution and Leaving Iran* by Afschineh Latifi⁶, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah* by Farah Pahlavi⁷ and *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi⁸. These memoirs specifically selected among the others can also be categorized as 'Revolution

⁴ Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*. vol.1-2 (Paris: Pantheon Books, 2003).

⁵ Roya Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004).

⁶ Afschineh Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Leaving Iran* (New York: Reagan Books, 2005).

⁷ Farah Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah A Memoir*. trans. Patricia Clancy (New York: Miramax Books, 2004).

⁸ Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (New York: Random House, 2003).

memoirs.’ Within these five memoirs the transformations in women’s lives after the revolution are given, which is also another important factor that makes them significant cases for this study. One reason that the women’s works have been chosen is that as Milani also states in her book, “[n]o full-length study of women’s literary tradition in contemporary Iran was undertaken despite the popular attention women writers had elicited.”⁹ In general the studies worked with the works of men and this caused an enormous gap in the critical attention given to the male and female writers. This study aimed to focus on the experiences of women throughout that area.

Siegel states “autobiography is a selected, packaged product.”¹⁰ This is important for this study because selecting five works which depict the same period one of the major aims of the study is to trace the common experiences the writers are depicting. In the light of the accessory sources, this study will also try to discover the shared feelings and experiences throughout the revolutionary period. As the critics argue, “the truths of the personal narratives are the truths revealed from real positions in the world, through lived experience in the social relationships, in the context of passionate beliefs and partisan stands.”¹¹

The memoir writers subject to this research are all from upper- middle class backgrounds. There are two reasons behind this; first, as it will be clarified in the second and the third chapters in detail, lower class Iranian women, who have not produced remarkable written materials, have not entered into the field of memoir either. Therefore, all personal narratives, especially the ones produced after the revolution, are written by the women of upper-middle classes. Secondly, as many scholars also argued, the revolutionary process has mostly affected the upper- middle class families’ lives, especially the families living in Tehran. In this context, Howard states,

⁹ Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 1992) xv.

¹⁰ Kristi Siegel, *Women’s Autobiographies, Culture, Feminism* (New York, Washington et al: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), 21.

¹¹ Barbre and Farrel et al, *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, 263.

[w]hile the revolution changed many lives, throwing women and men out of their jobs and forcing whole families to flee into exile, for others it barely changed things. Village life continues as much as it always has, dominated by the sheer hard work of making a living.¹²

Likewise, in Friedl's book *Women of Deh Koh: Lives in an Iranian Village*, we are given, the anthropologist goes back to the village for years and not much about the revolution is mentioned in her book. Therefore, for a comparative study of the period, it seemed better to study the changes within the urban area. With this advance information in mind, Tehran, as an important place for the Iranian Revolution and as a city in which the changes in the society and the thoughts of the people can be pointed, is chosen as a setting of utmost importance for the memoirs. It is taken as another element for the selection of the memoirs.

In order to analyse the discussed points thoroughly, the thesis will begin by providing some background information about the era. In the second chapter, with the help of the historical sources, it will provide a framework of the era focusing mainly on the position of women and the writers in general throughout the revolutionary period. In this part, the cases that lead to the revolution and a brief history of the varying position of women throughout these periods will be analyzed.

The following third chapter will start with the general debates on the usage of memoir and then make a comparison with the memoirs under discussion. Throughout the history, the use of memoirs in researches has divided the scholars under two groups. This section will examine the thoughts hovering around these two groups by giving references to various scholars with different point of views. Then it will try to evaluate these questions in the light of memoirs under discussion. As this part will also add to the methodological aspects of the study; the reasons why these five books are chosen, and why this study is relying on them as a case study for the Revolution although they are originally written in a foreign language will be analyzed consecutively. With a

¹² Jane Howard, *Inside Iran: Women's Lives* (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishing, 2002), 20.

brief summary of each of the chosen memoirs, and the stylistic differences, which add to the selection of the memoirs, will also be explained in this chapter.

Memoir writing is not a common cultural tradition in Iran prior to the revolution. After the revolution in the literary arena, there was a boom of memoir writing by the Iranians. As understood from the memoirs there are various factors behind this explosion in the field of memoirs. There can be diverse reasons pushing the Iranians towards writing, such as Iranian citizens' witnessing tremendous valour, suffering and sacrifices, shown by its own people during the revolutionary process. The alterations in the Iranian political and cultural arena which have also taken international attention in return leaving many questions behind also seem to have forced the expatriates to share their experiences with the public. Many of the Iranian citizens living abroad are also taken as case studies and subjects by various media branches and scholars.

The fourth chapter will try to analyze the memoirs' the external and internal factors that prepared the basis for Iranian women to start writing about themselves. It will try to find out what the possible catalysts for the writers to write the memoirs were, by focusing on the previous restrictions and obstacles that prevented the women from writing in general. Then, this chapter will try to pinpoint what the underlying motives for memoir writing were by giving differing factors for the each writer, as they point out within their memoirs. This part will reveal the historical development of women writers first and then will go on with the memoir writers.

As Milani also points out in her book, although the memoirs are limited in number in Iranian literary history, they are making a highly heterogeneous group of works. There are memoirs written from every background and social group of people. "From political activist Ashraf Dehqani to princess Ashraf Pahlavi, from the Marxist revolutionary Marziyeh Osku'i to Empress Soraya Bakhtiar,..., their works include political allegiances from royalist to communist, from rightist to leftist, from reformist to revolutionary."¹³ Likewise, the memoirs chosen for this thesis, which are covering the same time period,

¹³ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 220.

have been chosen from people of different backgrounds in order to get a comparative analysis of the revolutionary period, and will reveal the experiences of the writers in relation with the period.

Even with the varying interests and backgrounds, the women writers who were born approximately during the same time and depict the same periods share some common characteristics within their lives and memoirs. The fifth chapter will focus on the common issues and characteristics discussed within the memoirs. It will reveal the important issues pointed out in the memoirs and will try to find the common discussions making references to the historical data of the period. First of all, the comparison between the pre- and post-revolutionary period and its depictions in the memoirs will be discussed within the common subsections. Then, it will try to find out how the Shah period is represented as it will allow the study to have a deeper look at the pre-revolutionary period. Afterwards, the depiction of the Revolution and its meaning for the writers will be examined. Moreover, being another common element in all of the memoirs, in the research the theme of separation and being an exile will also be discussed in different perspectives. The introduction of the memoirs raised the issue of exile within the international arena. The fact that all of the memoir writers are on exile and writing about “being an exile”, encouraged the critics to question the notion of exile in Iranian women’s lives. Especially after getting into interaction with the other women around the world the Iranian women started to define their experiences share them with the public. Finally, as the memoir writing is another step for the Iranian women to enter into the public arena and share their experiences, this part will also question the women’s becoming more politically aware and active citizens after the revolution. This theme will be analyzed both within the context of the memoirs and with reference to their historical and cultural context.

While analyzing the points stated above, this research will provide mainly a qualitative analysis as it will be dealing with the process and the results of the Revolution in women’s lives according to the Iranian women memoir writers. It adopts a micro theoretical approach as it tries to “understand social

life at the intimate level of individuals and their interactions”.¹⁴ From the narratives of the women writers, this study will have a look at the writers’ intentions of writing memoirs and reveal experiences they have been through, throughout the Revolutionary process and will make a comparison between the other writers’ experiences.

Throughout the research, methodologically the main goals are to be clear, consistent and coherent. The historical, sociological and anthropological books about the period at hand have also been scanned to help to put the research on firm grounds, as a researcher is “in danger of misinterpreting the present if historical sources are ignored”.¹⁵

David G. Mandelbaum suggested in his article that, ‘a life history like the life itself is not so self sufficient or self-contained, nor can it readily be deployed to prove or disprove any one hypothesis.’¹⁶ In order to cover up this defect of dealing with life stories, this research is also getting the help other side materials.

First of all, the historical sources that discuss the Revolutionary Period in Iran will be used. Basing the issues into their historical context will make the issues clearer for everybody to understand and will also put the arguments on firm grounds. Moreover, as Hart quotes Goethe who argues; writing of any autobiography “requires that an individual know both himself and his era.’ for an era shapes and determines an individual.”¹⁷ While studying on the historical material, utmost importance is given to cover a wide range of books having different perspectives and written by scholars from different parts of the world. By this way, this study tries to cover a number of scholars from all around the

¹⁴ Earl R. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* (Belmont, California: Thomson & Wadsworth, 2007), 33.

¹⁵ Robert G Burgess, “Personal Documents, Oral Sources and Life Histories”. *Field Research: Sourcebook and Field Manual*. ed. Robert G Burgess (London, Boston, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 131.

¹⁶ David G. Mandelbaum, “The Study of Life History”. in *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*. ed. Robert G. Bugess (London, Boston, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 148.

¹⁷ Kathleen Hart, *Revolution and Women’s Autobiography in Nineteenth- Century France* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi B.V., 2004), 11.

world, who have different perspectives on the events, and give an objective historical report and look towards the events. The books based on the interviews with the Iranian people and telling about the experiences of them throughout Revolutionary period are also included in order to make firm estimations and well-built judgments.

The internet blogs of the Iranian women, which became really popular among Iranian people, are also checked in order to get an overall comparison with the memoirs.¹⁸ As Abbas Milani also stressed, "...the inability of oppressive regimes to control cyberspace promised to increase the privileged status of exiled intellectuals. They could, unchallenged by native Procrustean authorities, enlighten the minds of Iranians back home."¹⁹ There are also weblogs written by the Iranian people living in exile. As the internet became more and more popular, the blogs and the internet sites started to gain more and more importance in the mainstream media. Recently, the studies made on the weblogs have also risen in number. Therefore, it is regarded as a reliable source to be used as an accessory source for the thesis.

The other Iranian memoir writers are also taken into consideration. Christopher de Bellaigue's memoir *In the Rose Garden of the Martyrs: A memoir of Iran* is an example of these memoirs that is used alongside with the other five memoirs. As Gottschalk, Kluckhohn, and Angell pointed in their book the writers like Bellaigue are good sources to compare the data at hand.²⁰ The fact that he is a total outsider to the events and the culture also makes his

¹⁸ Recently, internet is being hailed as a less restricted ground for the individuals to express themselves to the public. Iran has a population of approximately 70 million and the number of internet users is about four-five million in Iran. These in a way open a space for them to interact and share their experiences and thoughts in a freer space. In these blogs, people put their personal thoughts, essays, links for related topics and get commentaries for the posts if they want, and some people only use it as a public diary. They are giving anecdotes from their earlier lives and problems as well. For more information check; Erin Simmons, "The Impact of the Weblog: A Case Study of the United States and Iran," (A Senior Honors diss., Ohio State University, 2005), 13.

¹⁹ Abbas Milani, *Lost Wisdom: Rethinking Modernity in Iran* (Washington D.C: Mage Publishers, 2004), 167-168.

²⁰ Louis Gottschalk, Clyde Kluckhohn and Robert Angell, "The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology," *Bulletin 53* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1945), 91.

memoir a really important accessory source for this research. The memoirs of the other writers like, Nahid Rachlin, who are actually Iranian memoir writers, are also used to support the ideas and thoughts of the five memoir writers that are taken into the study. Their memoirs do not exactly meet the criteria of the study, as they are either depicting not exactly the wanted period or place, or excluded by other reasons. However, they are helpful in general when the researcher is looking for an extra eye for a specific issue.

Another source that the study has relied on is the theory and methodology books written on memoirs. In order to make the study legitimate on the theoretical field, as Benstock states in the introduction of her book, the researcher has to put the study on steady grounds.²¹ More importantly, in order to take a stance towards the study one has to search for the previous thoughts and definitions of the genre or the study that it is dealing with. Therefore, these books on autobiographical studies both helped to consider which points and research paradigms to focus on while studying with this genre, and what to include in and exclude from the study.

The interviews made with the writers of the memoirs, and the reviews of the books concerned are also among the accessory sources. By adding the interviews of the writers, the study gets the advantage of learning the frame and the background story, and the underlying factors that forced the readers to write their memoirs. These sources are important to draw a frame for the study and to show us the internal thoughts of the writers after their works are published.

Finally, as “listening to women’s voices, studying women’s writings, and learning from women’s experiences have been crucial to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding the world”²², this study will also get the help and opinion of the books written about feminist theory. They can be regarded as an illuminating side source, especially the ones considering women’s autobiographies. Feminist theory emphasizes the questioning of truths

²¹ Shari Benstock, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings* (London: Routledge, 1988), 2.

²² Barbra, Webster and Farrel et al, *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, 4.

that are taken for granted, stressing on the long term forgotten “other” in science, it “assumes the fact of difference and asserts that if Truth rests on generalization, it must take into account experience that has previously been ignored, forgotten, ridiculed, and devalued.”²³ They have argued that “the concepts of truth embodied in generalizations such as Mankind or the universal “he”, typically refuse to acknowledge gender differences and therefore are deceptive . . . [and w]omen’s personal narratives provide immediate, diverse, and rich sources for feminist revisions of knowledge”²⁴ Feminist theory also “postulates as a central tenet, the reality of a socially structured social hierarchy.”²⁵ It also gives importance to the power dynamics in the society and the inequalities in power in men and women relationships. Therefore, in a period where these power relations are highly shaken and transformed, getting help of the feminist studies seems like a must for the study. However, as the concern of this study is not the debates in feminism, this study will not be covering the extensive debates among the Feminist about of Islam and Feminism, veil and Islamic identity, orientalism, cultural relativism and so forth. It will only get the help of the feminist studies to clarify the debates.

All in all, this thesis will mainly cover the changes in the lives of the women after the revolution as depicted in the five selected memoirs. While dealing with these transformations in women’s lives, we will have a look at the memoir writing tradition and the women’s position in Iran as well. Firstly, regarding the usage of memoirs, in order to enlighten the historical discussions about the memoirs, and the place of memoirs within the historical and sociological studies, we will analyse the debates about memoirs in history. Secondly, we will analyse the condition of Iranian women and memoir writing and why women embarked on writing and decided to reveal themselves to the public after a long period of silence. In order to answer this question, different

²³ Barbre, Webster and Farrel, *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, 262.

²⁴ Ibid, 263.

²⁵ Ibid, 6.

motives behind memoir writing, and the possible catalysts of memoir writing by the Iranian women, and the influence of revolution in the boom of memoir writing of Iranian women will be taken into consideration. The third and main question the study will be dealing with is what the common characteristics and experiences of these memoirs written by women, depicting the same period of time are. As Bruner states; “when somebody tells you his life...it is always a cognitive achievement rather than a through-the-clear-crystal recital of something univocally given.”²⁶ Therefore, the writers cannot put every single detail of their life they are choosing among the particularities. While looking for the answer of the third question, the study will try to pinpoint the common particularities of the period chosen and stressed by the writers. These points will also reveal the common elements and characteristics of the memoirs discussed and complete the study regarding the Iranian memoir books on revolution. With the help of these common characteristics pointed in each memoir we will analyse the variations in the women’s lives after the revolution.

In the following Chapter 2 we will start the research with historical information regarding the period the memoirs are written in. This chapter is important as it will constitute a historical frame for the memoirs under discussion.

²⁶ Jerome Bruner, “Life as Narrative,” *Social Research* 71, no.3 (Fall 2004): 692.

CHAPTER 2

ISLAMIC REVOLUTION, WOMEN AND EMERGENCE OF WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

This chapter aims to constitute a framework of the time period of the memoirs. It will provide a brief analysis of the political and sociological background for the revolutionary process in Iran. Therefore, it will mainly address five phases of the revolution important for the memoir writers. The main focus is women's position throughout these periods. It will start with a brief description of the modernization efforts of Reza Shah Pahlavi, as it is widely believed to have affected the process which eventually led to the Revolution. Secondly, it will pinpoint the modernization efforts and the social scenery during the Mohammad Reza Pahlavi period focusing on the effects of these on women. Thirdly, it will focus on the changing social scene and the new groupings against the Shah regime. Then, the discussion point will be the revolution and what it has brought for women in the social and political arena. And finally, in order to form a unity with the following chapters, the effects of these procedures and changes on the writers in general and the memoirs in particular will be analyzed.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran was clearly one of the major turning points of the twentieth century history. It shattered the "myths of modernization and development theory, which presupposed the Westernization and secularization of society, and signalled the resurgence of Islam in Muslim politics and society."²⁷ Shortly after the revolution, the clergy consolidated their power in political, judicial, and educational institutions and dominated the

²⁷ John L. Esposito and R.K. Ramazani ed, *Iran at the Crossroads* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 1.

Islamic Republican party and the media. The Revolution that transformed Iran from constitutional monarchy under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini had an enormous effect on the Iranian citizens.

Most critics regard the Iranian Revolution as a large spontaneous movement, however; when the history of the country is analyzed carefully we can pinpoint the reasons of the revolutionary uprising of 1978-79, which date back to a series of events in 1906, and in which “the themes of democracy versus autocracy, secularism versus clericalism, and women’s emancipation versus tradition had played themselves out at several key junctures.”²⁸

Inspired by the 1905 Russian Revolution during 1906-11, a Constitutional Revolution occurred in Iran. The parts of the Iranian constitution, the Fundamental Law of 1906 and the supplementary Fundamental Law of 1907, which lasted until 1979 were largely taken from the Belgian constitution. The intention was to have a constitutional monarchy of a limited power, and to guarantee the freedom of speech, press and civil rights.²⁹ With this constitution, they set up a constitutional monarchy that limited royal and clerical authority and brought equal rights for all male citizens regardless of ethnicity and religion. It also gave women important gains especially in education. Within the new democratic public sphere, it opened the platform for discussions on the role and position of women in the society. The revolutionary period ended with the military intervention of Britain and Russia to help to restore the royal power in Iran.

Reza Shah, who came to power after a British supported coup in 1921 and declared himself Shah of Iran in 1925, also started a rapid forced modernization process inspired by Turkey’s reform acts. With these reforms, women could get a court-approved divorce and the marriage of girls under thirteen was forbidden. And the marriage law that was enacted in 1931 required

²⁸ Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 72.

²⁹ Nikkie R. Keddie, “Iranian Revolutions in Comparative Perspective,” *The American Historical Review* 88, no.3 (Jun. 1983): 593.

the registration of all marriages. The biggest innovation was placing the law under the control of the state rather than of the clerics or ulema. However, as Keddie states, this could not stop the continuing ulema influence on the gender issues. This can also be an example of Iran's putting less restriction of financial and other powers of ulema than any other Middle Eastern countries.³⁰

Another considerable event in the history of Iran is the time when Reza Shah outlawed veiling in public for all women. This act also involved some of the police forces' taking harsh measures, like tearing off women's chadors, on the grounds of their acting against the code.³¹ This code got some negative reactions when Reza Shah was abdicated from the throne in 1941. Then, even the most modernized bazaari women returned to chadors. Later on, a similar negative reaction was observed in Khomeini's imposition of head and body covering after the revolution.³²

The Reza Shah period is criticized by their cosmetic, temporary forced changes in general. As an example, Najmabadi states that, at the end of the 1930s, women were not forced to enter the labour force, but urged to go to universities, and become teachers as an extension of the newly forming state bureaucracy. The new state was built on the modern norms eliminating what is labelled as backwardness. Moreover, she also criticizes the reforms made in this era being "limited" in content, and "brutal" in practice.³³

In 1941, Mohammad Reza Shah succeeded to the throne at the age of twenty-two. During the years 1941-53 leftist and democratic agenda flourished. Moreover, Pro-Soviet Tudeh Party appeared as an effective opposing force

³⁰ Nikkie R. Keddie, "Iranian Women's Status and Struggles since 1979," *Journal of International Affairs* 60, no.2 (Spring- Summer 2007): 20.

³¹ The veil was abolished in 8 January 1936.

³² Nikkie R. Keddie, "Iranian Women's Status and Struggles since 1979," 20.

³³ Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," in *Women Islam and the State*. ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Hong Kong: Machmillan, 1991), 54-55.

during this period. The more relaxed political climate also caused the Ulema to re-emerge in the political scene.³⁴

In the years between 1951- 53, the left-of-centre Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeg was leading a nationalist and social democratic coalition. He is later overthrown in 1953 after a conflict with the United States and Britain, regarding the nationalization of the oil. His campaign of Nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was against the interests of the two companies and they allied with the military and part of the clergy to topple the government and help Reza Shah to gain power.³⁵ As Bill and Leiden also state, it is hard to ignore the fact that the International forces affected the domestic and foreign policy of Iran constantly.³⁶ During this period, the discussions and programmes on the gender issues came to a halt as Mohammed Mosaddeq and the National Front he leaded did not include women's rights and pro-women legislation. During this period, nationalization of oil was the main concern for the Iranians.³⁷

Afary and Anderson are of the same opinion with the feminist historians Parvin Paidar and Maryam Matin- Daftati in that in the breakdown of Mossadeg's coalition, another important factor that was not taken into consideration most of the time was the newly emerging movement for women's right to vote.³⁸

After 1953, the modernization process assumes a different stance. This is affected first by the United States trained political police SAVAK, and secondly, by women who gained new rights. SAVAK forces were strictly punishing every opposing force in the society. This, in return, was making the

³⁴ Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, 73.

³⁵ Ibid, 73.

³⁶ James A. Bill and Carl Leiden, *Politics in the Middle East*. Second Edition (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown Company, 1998), 282.

³⁷ Ibid, 198-199.

³⁸ Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, 73.

masses angry towards the ruling regime, as it will also be exemplified in Chapter 3 while giving brief summaries of the memoirs.

On the other hand, women started to gain a more visible place in the private sphere. They started filling in important positions. In the media and cultural level the pictures of women wearing fashionable clothes, short skirts flourished. This led to the discussions among the clerics and many “first generation university students” about infiltration of the “western corruption” into the Shiite Muslim Culture.³⁹

We have to take into account the discussions and arguments about the modernization process when we are talking about change and modernization in Middle Eastern countries. In Middle Eastern countries the discussions on modernization are always followed by the arguments of “maintenance, or safeguarding, of cultural integrity.”⁴⁰ The modernization is always associated with Westernization and this makes the initiation and appliance of the reforms even harder for the modernist regimes. In the discourse as dependence on the West is associated with Western culture which is seen as decadence, people turned to idealized indigenous Islam as a way to salvation.⁴¹

Moreover, when we look at the pre-modern Middle Eastern women in general, it is easy to say that interpretations of law and custom always put strict restrictions on women. Although there were several cases and periods when women even became the “de facto rulers” in Iran, Ottoman Empire, South Asia and Mamluk Egypt,⁴² increasing effect of clergy in the area also introduced some strict rules and behaviour codes for women.

³⁹ Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, 74.

⁴⁰ Monica Ringer, “The Discourse on Modernization and the Problem of Cultural Integrity in Nineteenth-Century Iran,” in *Iran and Beyond*. ed. Rudi Matthee and Beth Baron (California: Mazda Publishers Inc., 2000), 57.

⁴¹ Nikkie R Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 188.

⁴² Nikkie R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), Chapter 3. also see, Guity Nashat, “Introduction” in *Women in Islam: From Medieval to Modern Times*. Walter Wiebke (Princeton and New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1993), 4-5.

Shah enacted a series of reforms in 1963, named as the “White Revolution”. This program had six important points in economic and social arenas. It also included building a new election law and women’s suffrage in its content. According to many researchers and critics, although in the referendum most women voted⁴³ in favour of the execution of the laws, the process afterwards is a little complicated with the peripheral effects.

On the other hand, according to Keddie, the reforms brought by the Shah during the years 1960-1977 also made some groups concerned about their future advantages. Landlords, clergy and the bazaaris, who were affected in a negative way by the reforms, started criticizing the Shah regime. Moreover, these reforms turned out to be a failure in economic terms. The military spending rose in considerable amounts. The income gaps widened during the 1960s and 1970s. According to GNP per capita the rich got richer, and seeing the enormous consumption rate beside them, the complaints of the people rose.⁴⁴

Concerning the gender issues, the Shah was convinced that it was efficacious both in terms of economy and his modern image to bring women into the labour force. Independent women’s organizations united under the name Iranian Women’s Organization, and was given the patronage of Princess Ashraf. The foundation of this organization triggered the Family Protection Law in 1967 – later passed in a stronger form in 1975. The law was not totally egalitarian or universally applied; however, it is seen as an important step toward changing the unequal treatment of the sexes. With the new law, female-initiated divorce became possible and after 1975 revisions, it also gave women a limited right to child custody. However, as Keddie states, these laws were associated with “Western-style mores” of the Shah regime and opposed by the religious traditionalists.⁴⁵

⁴³ The number of the votes is given in detail in the fourth part.

⁴⁴ Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 148-164.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 167.

On the other hand, Shah's attitude towards women's rights was also criticized by many scholars. Najmabadi defines, "[a]ll women's initiatives, even of a charitable nature, had to be absorbed and controlled centrally by the state—the sole authority to decide the timing of initiative."⁴⁶ Likewise, she also argues Ashraf Pahlavi's leading the Women's Organizations as an extension of this attitude.

Many groups that were against Shah's policies thought these new policies for women were another excuse for the Shah regime to create a façade of the progressiveness. In an article by an Iranian leftist journalist it is interpreted as:

Following in his father's footsteps, the last Shah attempted to force women into 'emancipation' by imposing other changes from above. But these new measures while progressive on paper, were for the most part not transformed into reality. Although some archaic laws were changed, others were not. Most women were unaffected by these laws.⁴⁷

Thus, the reform programs made for women's emancipation and improvement of the social status were seen as an extension of Pahlavi dynasty's window dressing procedure for the international arena and could not get the necessary support from the society.

Another important point made by Najmabadi is that, after 1960s, the environment of 1950s started to change for women. Women from the mid- and upper classes that were previously only taking part in charitable works, started working in lots of areas from highly professional works to government posts, as the writer also states, "paid work had become respectable."⁴⁸ However, as everything became "centralized" as mentioned, Shah was the sole judge to

⁴⁶ Najmabadi, "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," 60.

⁴⁷ Hammed Shahidian, "The Iranian Left and the 'Women Question' in the Revolution of 1978-79," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no.2 (May 1994): 10.

⁴⁸ Najmabadi, "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," 62.

decide what to grant when. Therefore, “no reform was allowed even to be perceived to have resulted from women’s own initiatives.”⁴⁹

The society started to criticize Shah more and more about what could have been done instead and the sovereign was suppressing society more and more in various ways, such as giving little freedom of speech and press, exiling and jailing important opposing figures like Khomeini.

On the other hand, the opposition groups started to gain power and concentrated abroad and spread out their ideas within the country with the help of the cassettes, leaflet of the talks and writings. During the 1970s, the opposing parties like Khomeini and Ali Shariati started gaining more supporters among the urban and educated youth. Crushed by the Shah’s refusal to democratic openings, National Front and the Tudeh Party sympathizers either chose to comprise with the regime or to join the direction of new Islamist opposition. The leftist groups also adopted an anti-imperialist politics stating the Shah was backed up by the United States. They are of the opinion that Shah’s gender reforms are an example of Western imperialist influence rather than being a step towards equality of the sexes.⁵⁰

Moreover, it was not until the 1967 laws that women got tangible rights under the Family Protection Law (FPL). Only then, the rights in marriage, custody and divorce improved. This law was revised and strengthened in 1975. Minimum marriage age rose first to fifteen in 1967, and then to eighteen in 1975 for women. Temporary marriages were discouraged in both of the codes. Mahnaz Afkami, the director and minister of the Iranian Women’s Organization at that time was both criticized and praised by many people. However, in retrospect their performances in FPL and many matters are regarded as positive developments.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Najmabadi, “Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran,” 62.

⁵⁰ Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, 74.

⁵¹ Keddie, “Iranian Women’s Status and Struggles since 1979,” 21.

Moreover, on the political arena women got the right to vote and to be elected to parliament in 1963. During the monarchy these changes did not only affect the women in the large cities but it spread across the country through education and women's organizations.⁵² In Farah Pahlavi's memoir we also notice the queen working and promoting the activities of women in various parts of the country.⁵³ These codes and developments were not long lived or put in order however, they helped to raise the awareness of the citizens to these issues, and it enabled contemplation on things that were taken for granted.

However, leftist and nationalist women faced a dilemma as the anti-Shah movement gained strength around 1978. As the autocracy used a westernised and Iranian nationalist culture, the opposition turned to the elements of culture that were considered as Islamic. Some secular women even used chador or more modern hijab as a form of opposition to the Shah in the 1970s. At the same time, to secularists, Khomeini and the clerics were also "incapable of ruling", however, many still backed their movement as the only way to form a critical mass to change the "dictatorial and unpopular rule of the Shah".⁵⁴

After 1979, when Khomeini came to power, he and his followers broke their connections with their secular allies after some time. Within these years they were also using the power of moderates and leftist groups, who were then their allies, to restore the Islamic courts and law.⁵⁵

The aftermath of the revolution shows a great paradox with the commitments of the revolution. The revolution was promising improvement of the rural and the urban poor, and speaking in the name of the "deprived". However, Khomeini and his follower clerics later showed that they did not have egalitarian views regarding women. They quickly changed most of the laws that

⁵² Haleh Esfandiari, "The Politics of the 'Women's Question' in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999," in *Iran at the Crossroads*, ed Esposito, John L. and R.K. Ramazani (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 79.

⁵³ Farah Pahlavi, *Anılar*. çeviri Rukiye Öke, Baskı 2 (Istanbul, Paris: Dünya Yayıncılık, 2003),

⁵⁴ Keddie, "Iranian Women's Status and Struggles since 1979," 22.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 22.

has given some freedom and rights for women as FLP, in favour of Islamic law.⁵⁶

During the establishment of the Islamic Republic not many people heard of the guardianship of the jurists. Khomeini adopted and enlarged the principle of Sheikh Morteza Ansari with the help of the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad and Imams. According to the new principle, the whole Islamic community became ‘orphans’ and the Jurists were the “guardians of the society”.⁵⁷ After the country voted for the Islamic Republic the clerics started to favour the idea of the guardianship of the jurists. The 1979 constitution was made by an assembly two- third of which was comprised of mullahs. It described the new regime with its accordance to Islam. As Bellaigue states, at first glance it gave the impression that “power emanates from the people”; however, when examined carefully, it can be seen that the top of the pyramid was barely connected to the people. “The senior jurist- the Guide- might just as well have been transplanted from heaven.”⁵⁸ Bellaigue also gives reference to Montazari who states, “[t]he ruling jurist was not meant to be above the law, [however], Khomeini was not only above the law; his word, literally was the law”.⁵⁹ Hence, with the newly established order, Iran actually entered into another oppressive regime while trying to escape from the Shah regime. The government of the Islamic republic was established under the shadow of the Islamic Revolutionary Council (IRC), which acts as a guide for policy and the codes. “The IRC’s policy was not formally made public; it was weighed down with mullahs, and arrogated to itself the right to enact ‘legislation’. The army was shadowed by the Revolutionary Guard- the mullah’s militia.”⁶⁰ Therefore, what makes the Iranian constitution Islamic is the central role given to the

⁵⁶ Keddie, “Iranian Women’s Status and Struggles since 1979,” 23.

⁵⁷ For more information regarding the issue Christopher de Bellaigue, *In the Rose Garden of the Martyrs: A memoir of Iran* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004), 100.

⁵⁸ Christopher de Bellaigue, *In the Rose Garden of the Martyrs: A memoir of Iran* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004), 101.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 102.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 102.

clergy through the position of faqih, or supreme Islamic Jurist, and the Council of Guardians.⁶¹ The foreign ministry was also under the effect of mostly clerical representatives. Therefore, it is clear that clerics has had a great power upon every level of the law making and executing process in Iran. This is in fact not very different from the centralized state policy of the Shah the masses were struggling to topple for.

Therefore, with the introduction of the Sharia Laws declared with the announcement of the Islamic Republic, the new laws started to govern both public and private lives of people, especially women's living within the State.

Another significant change for women is the "Islamization of the previously secular politics."⁶² An important part of the clergy was politicized and the Islamic organizations and movements started to rise in number. Examples to this trend were the Liberation Movement of Iran, and popularity of intellectuals as Khomeini, and Shari'ati.

Therefore, as Farhi also argues the most affected gender group from the Revolution are women. During the period of power struggles and revolutionary state building;

the representation of domesticated women came to symbolize the search for authenticity and cultural revival...women's behavior, appearance, and range of activities, as well as public speech about women, came to be defined and regulated by the political and cultural objectives of various political movements, the state, and the leadership.⁶³

The clerics defined a traditional role for women under the new order. They imagined women primarily as housewives and mothers, "committed to

⁶¹ "The council of Guardians consists of six Islamic Jurists, experts on Islamic Law, and six lay people who are experts on constitutional law. The supreme leader selects the six Islamic jurists and consults with the parliament on the six laymen. The council's role is to examine the actions of the parliament and to veto bills that are viewed as against Islamic tenets." in Grant Farr and Harold R. Kerbo, eds, *Modern Iran: A Volume in the Comparative Societies Series* (Boston, Burr Ridge, IL Dubuque et al: McGraw-Hill College, 1999), 59.

⁶² Najmabadi, "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," 60.

⁶³ Farideh Farhi, "On the Reconfiguration of the Public Sphere and the Changing Political Landscape of Postrevolutionary Iran," in *Iran at the Crossroads*. ed Esposito, John L. and R.K. Ramazani (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 65-66.

raising children and ministering to the needs and heeding the wise guidance of husbands, fathers and brothers.”⁶⁴ Another factor, as Mottahedeh also argues, was that in Iranian national history women’s bodies have been politically charged symbols, not just in their relations with the west but also within Iran’s National History.⁶⁵ However, the regime could not foresee that the ‘women’s question’ will become a somewhat central issue in the Islamic Republic and that a new generation of women that is “imaginative, demanding and pursuing education, jobs, legal reform, expanded rights, and participation in almost all areas of public life”⁶⁶ will emerge. As Esfandiari mentioned in her article, it was actually the revolution which made the women political. During the last year of the monarchy they mobilized the society against the old order, they encouraged women to demonstrate with men on the streets and attend to the rallies and marches.

Under the Islamic Republic, without consulting women, the state started to force them into the roles that they expected from them both in the public and private space. The intervention was in every aspect of women’s lives; the areas of education, the dress codes and even the manner they may interact with men. It gave men the role of the “provider, decision maker, and master of the household” and they suspended the Family Protection Law and the Family Courts.⁶⁷ All of the rights gained with the laws were taken back. Even the promotions of the temporary marriages were prevalent especially during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88. Segregation in all of the public places is introduced. The government’s initial social policy was really hard towards women. However, their efforts to change the lifestyles of women were not quite successful. Women who were fighting continuously managed to keep the question of women’s rights as an unforgotten issue for the government agenda.

⁶⁴ Esfandiari, “The Politics of the ‘Women’s Question’ in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999,” 75.

⁶⁵ Negar Mottahedeh, “Off the Grid: Reading Iranian Memoirs in Our Time of Total War,” September 2004, http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/mottahedeh_interv.html

⁶⁶ Esfandiari, “The Politics of the ‘Women’s Question’ in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999,” 75.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 80.

Women gained comparatively more rights in politics than in the social and legal sphere.⁶⁸ As a further note, during the Rafsanjani's presidency, women gained more rights in the political and legal sphere. Women's nongovernmental institutions, whose activities comprised of a wide range of areas from domestic to international, charity to education, environmental issues to literacy, have also grown in a remarkable way.

During the years, 1980-1988, Iran was engaged in the Iraq war and the whole country was involved in the procedure as a body. According to many critics, and as it is also recounted in the memoirs, the war helped the revolutionary government to legitimize its power and codes all around the country. The war period added to the sorrows of the country. During and after the revolution; the images of martyrs and the need to be a union against the wicked powers were among the emphasized elements of the regime. The war ended leaving a devastated economy and a lot of casualties that affected the feelings of every citizen in Iran behind. Moreover, many early supporters of the revolution have discredited or were disenchanted by the "excesses of the revolution".⁶⁹ During the war period the women also affected by the process and could not engage in any prominent activities asking for more rights or freedom on behalf of themselves.

In retrospect for comparison, on the social scene, as Esfandiari called it, the first two decades of the republic were full of contrasts and contradictions. The government could not succeed in imposing *hejab* universally. However the black chador, referred as the 'superior hejab' had become the official uniform of women working in the decision making positions. Although there were harsh punishments, younger women did not hesitate to show some parts of the hair or to wear makeup and nail polish.

So far, the important issues and changes in the pre and post revolutionary period in Iran have been examined. When we look at the women in the society of Iran from a different point of view, it is important to note,

⁶⁸ Esfandiari, "The Politics of the 'Women's Question' in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999," 80-82.

⁶⁹ Esposito, *Iran at the Crossroads*, 2.

women have been systematically denied from social initiatives because of their sex. Most of the time, women's struggle for unveiling or literary voice has been associated with being masculine or culturally exogenous. Their wishes are always regarded as items that belong to the male domain. Likewise, the reforms that are favouring or opposing women's rights, or including or excluding the women from the labour force are portrayed as "cosmetic reforms or Islamic fundamentalism", and they were all reforms from above both in the pre and post revolutionary period.⁷⁰

Moreover, even though it is not legally forbidden for women to enter into the economic arena, to sell or buy goods, still the women in Iran are extremely excluded from the public, economic and political arena. As a general rule, women also were excluded from education until the turn of the twentieth century. It was seen as an agent of corruption for women. The girls were not admitted to even primary school then, and some families who wanted to educate their children were hiring private tutors or home educating them by themselves. In 1874, the first girls' school was established in Iran and until 1891, only non-Muslim girls were attending the school. After sixteen years *Namus*, the first Iranian school for girls was founded. This was followed by some other girls' schools and they all experienced severe difficulties and antagonism. These centres were associated with prostitution and corruption. Later, in December 1979, the minister of education, Mrs. Farrokhru Parsa, who was the first Iranian woman to serve in the cabinet between 1968- 1974, was executed "on the charge of 'expansion of prostitution, corruption on earth, and warring against God'."⁷¹ Given these highlights from the history of Iran, it is not hard to imagine the difficulties and complexities of the environment the women are struggling to have some more rights in the public and private sphere. Becoming a writer was even a greater challenge. Segregated from the public sphere, and excluded from most of the public art forms, it was even harder to develop their creative skills for women.

⁷⁰ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 12-13.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 57.

Despite all these restrictions put on the society, men and women continued to oppose the authorities by going out to the public places together. The number of the women writers, translators, painters, film directors...etc has multiplied in the last two decades. In their works they express the feelings and thoughts of the women in the Islamic republic and they have gained international recognition. A large number of novels and stories written by women have been translated into different languages.⁷²

In the writings of female authors after the Revolution, we see that the main theme is the problem of gender hierarchy, and women's suffering is either expressed via figurative language⁷³, or directly within the memoirs or the interviews and blogs. Through these media, women find the chance to reveal their feelings and their thoughts openly. There has been a rise in the number of the memoirs published after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Within these works, the private and personal experiences of the Iranian women have become public. These books are published outside the country away from the censorship of the state, especially in English and French by the writers. Therefore, it can be argued, behind the veil of each woman, there is a different character who tries to express herself in the public arena.

A decade after the revolution most of the critics were complaining about the scarcity of the autobiographies written by the Iranian women. They blame the intense state control against the freedom of speech and literary expression. For most of the critics, this control affected the women's feelings. Farzaneh Milani wrote, "Avoiding voluntary self-revelation and self-referentiality, most Iranian writers have turned their backs on autobiography."⁷⁴ In the later decade there has been a boom in the publishing of women's

⁷² Esfandiari, "The Politics of the 'Women's Question' in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999," 84-85.

⁷³ Kamran Talattof, "Iranian Women's Literature: From Pre-Revolutionary Social Discourse to Post-Revolutionary Feminism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 4 (Nov. 1997): 531-558.

⁷⁴ Farideh Goldin, "Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs," *Iran Chamber Society* (Fall 2004), http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/iranian_women_contemporary_memoirs.php

memoirs. Farideh Goldin states in her article that after 1990 there were twenty five books of *khaterat*, which is a word used in Persian to refer to any autobiographical narrative. “Khaterat can be poetry by Forough Farukhzad, or Homa Sarshar's *In the Back Alleys of Exile*, which is a collection of essays and poetry, or Zohreh Sullivan's *Exiled Memories*-all very important and ground breaking books, but not memoirs as defined by western literary standards.”⁷⁵

There are also many books that can be categorized as memoirs, mostly published by Qajar and Pahlavi royal families, for example, Farah Pahlavi's *An Enduring Love*, Ashraf Pahlavi's *Faces in the Mirror*, Soraya Esfandiari's *The Lonely Palace*, and Satareh Farman Farmaian's *Daughter of Persia*. Their aims while writing these books are mainly to re-write history, and to correct the misunderstandings and give the writers' perspectives on the events.⁷⁶

To sum up, this chapter gives the brief summary of the situation of women within the pre and post revolutionary period of Iran. The main idea that has been reached is that, the way to recognition from the ones on the top and having an appearance on the public scene has always been bushy for women. It is also argued that the revolution was a result of an ongoing discontent of decades on the part of the Iranian citizens. First, it is given that most of the population was against the harsh policies of the Reza Shah Period. The Pahlavi era created a highly authoritarian and centralized government supported by militarism, censorship and state propaganda. These left not much space for the individuals to act freely, and led to the diversion of the views of the people and groupings against the regime. It is also argued the efforts for modernization of women were mainly cosmetic, limited and not very effective during the Reza Shah period. Therefore, it is stated the gains of the women from the modernization policies of the Shah period was very little. However, as it is also pointed out in this chapter, what the people were hoping and experienced was also another disappointment for the Iranians after the revolution. Secondly, it is expressed, with the revolution they entered into another oppressive regime, this

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

time relying on Islamic principles, which created another difficulty especially for the Iranian women. Throughout these periods, the women have been on the centre of discussion trying to be promoted or demoted from their situation. Their roles have been associated with the regime's appearances and policies. Therefore, women are forced into the political arena within these policies. That is mainly the reason why women are dealing with these experiences in their lives even in the literary works they produced. Another point that is given in this chapter is the difficulty of becoming a writer within these circumstances. The exclusion of women first from education for a long period of time and later from the public and economic sphere made it harder for them to legitimize her appearance in the literary arena. Yet, women managed to get some appearance in public despite these policies against them. As stated, many literary works of personal narratives emerged after the revolution. In the coming chapters five of the memoirs published after the revolution will be examined in detail. The coming chapter will provide the general debates about the memoir studies and the five memoirs under discussion.

CHAPTER 3

DISCUSSIONS ON THE MEMOIRS

This chapter will provide an account of the main arguments and discussions about the memoirs. While providing peripheral information about the memoirs the thesis will be dealing with, this chapter will also give some methodological information about the thesis. This chapter is comprised of three main parts. The first part will deal with the main debates regarding the memoir studies by giving references to different scholars with different point of views about the subject and compare them with the memoirs under discussion. It will explain the arguments about the use of memoirs in researches and the points to be noted while studying with the memoirs. After getting a general overview of the memoir studies' debates, the second part will go on with the first question about the five memoirs that the thesis will be dealing with. The reasons why these memoirs are taken under the label of 'Iranian' although they are not written in Persian will also be given. The third chapter will reveal the reasons why these five memoirs are chosen for this study among many other Persian memoirs. Therefore, this part is designed to complete the methodological part of the study both by revealing the main memoir studies debates, underlining the issues to be noted in memoir studies, and by providing a basic introduction to the memoirs under discussion.

3.1. The Use of Memoir as a Historical Source:

Throughout the history different examples of autobiographies have been used for different purposes such as in historical, anthropological or sociological

researches. Men have a central position in the history of autobiography, however; contemporary women writers and the studies on the autobiographies of women have also been used widely by the researchers of the historical and anthropological studies, as they provide valuable records of the women's inner lives, their images of themselves, and their relationship to the society. However, their usage brought many discussions and questions into the academic fields. This part will give an overall analysis of these discussions and the usage of memoirs in this thesis.

Scholars mainly divided into two groups when talking about the use of memoirs. One group supports the great contribution of memoirs within the other research areas. Burgess is the first example of this group. He states that according to Samuel (1981)⁷⁷ by using the official documents we only possess the one perspective of the past. However, as Burgess has shown, another perspective can be obtained by 'elite documents',⁷⁸ if we question them in a wider perspective. Barbre, Webster and Farrel also state in their book; "the personal narratives are marked by historical context."⁷⁹ Burgess likewise, argues the importance of personal experience and oral testimony in order to interpret the past successfully.⁸⁰ Likewise, Burnett is another scholar who suggests;

accounts of personal experiences need to be gathered from autobiographies and diaries as; they are direct records of the person involved in the situation from which he or she writes at first hand. There is no intermediate reporter or observer to change the situation.⁸¹

⁷⁷ R. Samuel, *People's History and and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

⁷⁸ Personal documents such as letters, diaries, biographies, autobiographies, sermons, poems, plays are mentioned under 'elite documents' by Robert G. Burgess in "Personal Documents, Oral Sources and Life Histories," *Field Research: Sourcebook and Field Manual*. ed. Robert G Burgess (London, Boston, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 131.

⁷⁹ Barbre, Webster and Farrel et al, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, 100.

⁸⁰ Burgess, "Personal Documents, Oral Sources and Life Histories," 132.

⁸¹ John Burnett, *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 10.

Therefore, these documents indicate the way in which the individual perceives the situation. Salman Rushdie also defends the truth of memory by stating that every memory has its own way of understanding the reality, however, in the end he states “it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events.”⁸²

Furthermore, Angell states, besides the variety of ways the personal documents are used, they can also be used to verify hypotheses, to obtain an historical understanding of a person, group, or institution and/or provide an exposition.⁸³ This is also really important for this research as it will try to analyze the common characteristics and issues the individuals experienced during the revolutionary period. Moreover, Reid also states in her book that she has written her memoirs in order to leave her descendants a family history and memories of the traditions, way of life, and customs.⁸⁴ Therefore, she can be given as an example to Angell’s hypotheses.

Although, Okely argues these studies can lead to a gap in literature on women as they have rarely produced such materials. This research is prosperous in this respect, as women’s memoirs have exploded in numbers two decades after the Iranian Revolution.⁸⁵ Iranian women who previously avoided publishing or revealing their personal thoughts and experiences decided to break that tradition after the revolution. A good number of Iranian women from different backgrounds decided to write their memoirs after the revolution. It is also stated in Mason and Green’s research on autobiography that, women all across the world have been writing autobiography for a long time and one should not discard their contributions in the genre.⁸⁶

⁸² Salman Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children* (New York, London: Penguin Books, 1980), 253.

⁸³ R Angell, “A Critical Review of the Development of the Personal Document Method in Sociology, 1920-1940: The Use of Personal Documents in History, Antropology and Sociology,” *Social Science Research Council Bulletin* 53 (1945): 177-232.

⁸⁴ Mehry M Reid and Thomas R. Reid, *Snake’s Marble: A Persian Memoir* (Veradale: Vantage Pr, 1995), chapter 1.

⁸⁵ Goldin, “Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs,” http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/iranian_women_contemporary_memoirs.php

Burgess also points the issues, a researcher working with the autobiographies and personal documents should consider when working with these sources. These are also the questions that will be asked throughout the research. While working with the materials one should consider;

Is the material trustworthy? Is the material atypical? Has the material been edited or refined? Does the autobiographical material only contain highlights of life that are considered interesting? Furthermore, it could be argued that the material is automatically biased as only certain people produce autobiographies and keep diaries; there is self selectivity involved in the sample of material available; they do not provide a complete historical record.⁸⁷

At this point, a previous research about the reasons why the memoirs are written is needed.⁸⁸ As mentioned before, memoirs are written with different purposes. Goldin states, there are books written under another purposes in order to achieve political aims like Farideh Diba's *My Daughter, Farah and Khaterat-e Taj Ol Moluk*.⁸⁹ However, the existence of this genre in abounds also claim that memoirs are widely read and have an impact.

Mandelbaum is another prominent scholar who made researches about the use of the biographies in sociological and anthropological works.⁹⁰ He states anthropologists have recorded life histories since the beginnings of the discipline. He believes in the necessity of the life stories in order to understand a culture better. He also points to the issues to be careful about while studying personal narratives. He gives reference to John Dollard and states that, he has formulated seven criteria for the study of life history material. The most important one is the one that the "subject must be understood in his social and

⁸⁶ As it happened in the male writers, women started writing memoirs first for religious purposes. Later, they became abundant in every type and started to be used by researchers for different purposes. For further information see; Mary Grimley Mason and Carol Hurd Green ed, *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women* (Boston, Massachusetts: G.K.Hall& Co., 1979), vii.

⁸⁷ Burgess, "Personal Documents, Oral Sources and Life Histories," 132.

⁸⁸ The reasons of the memoir writing and mainly the five memoirs at the focus of this study will be evaluated in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

⁸⁹ Farideh Goldin, "Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs," http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/iranian_women_contemporary_memoirs.php

⁹⁰ Mandelbaum, "The Study of Life History," 147.

cultural context.”⁹¹ This research tries to be particularly careful about this criterion, and evaluate the memoirs within their cultural and historical context. The social position and manner of the writers and the changes they experienced is also another element taken into account throughout the research.

At this point, it is important to refer to another discussion that Hart puts forth in her book. She supports the idea that different descriptions of autobiography can be made, relying on the autobiography that is taken into account. She states, the description of autobiography made for Rousseau’s confessions cannot be used for the memoirs that she is using in her study. She states the researcher should be aware of the different types of personal narratives like “spiritual autobiography” and “historical memoir”.⁹² When thought in these terms, the memoirs that are the concern of this research can be placed under the historical memoirs. She also states that the historical memoirs are “represented as a ‘fact-based’ discourse, the women memorialist risked her reputation by going public.”⁹³

Moreover, according to Becker, studying with life history materials can provide us basic evidence about “social interaction and process” and they will give us the true-to-life feelings for what it means to be a certain kind of person.⁹⁴ Likewise, Mandelbaum argues in political science although autobiography is generally accepted as a vital; it has been much neglected as a result of the discipline’s preference for group rather than individual studies and manifestations.⁹⁵ After seeing the positions that the life histories are put into, in

⁹¹ Mandelbaum, “The Study of Life History,” 147.

⁹² Hart, *Revolution and Women’s Autobiography in Nineteenth- Century France*, 14-15.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 25.

⁹⁴ H.S. Becker, “Introduction,” in *The Jack Roller: A Delinquent Boy’s Own Story*. C.R. Shaw (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix edition, 1966), vi-vii. / v- xviii.

⁹⁵ Mandelbaum, “The Study of Life History,” 148.

Moreover, when the individual ideas is the focus of the researcher, Arberle’s study of a Hopi Indian can be given as an example. It reveals different aspects of the Hopi Culture, and the possibility of interpretation of the same culture by different observers. D.F. Arberle, “The Psychosocial Analysis of a Hopi Life History,” *Comparative Psychology Monographs* 21, no 1 (1951).

the scientific uses this data started to gain more and more importance in most of the studies.⁹⁶

Besides, Edgerton and Langness explain, life history material is really useful when we are looking at the cultural changes occurred during a period of time. It gives the reader an insider's view of the culture, the ways the various cultural patterns come together and are linked in the life of an individual, the cultural patterns significance to the individual and his/her reactions to them in return.⁹⁷ It has to be stated that all of the memoirs in question start with an account of pre-revolution period and the reader is both introduced to the revolution and afterwards. Therefore, these memoirs show us the changes before-during- and after the revolution. The reader is introduced to the cultural, political and social changes within the society, which happened during a course of two decades.

On the other hand, Faraday and Plummer⁹⁸ are sceptical about the use of personal documents in sociology. However, they also believe that life histories enable the writer to speak through the published work to communicate with their own society. Boas is another anthropologist who is doubtful about the scientific value of the personal documents and in 1943 stated that "they are valuable rather as useful material for a study of perversion of truth brought about by the play of memory with the past."⁹⁹ Here, we can argue that even this – seemingly – defect of memoirs is important for this study as it also aims to compare the experiences and the feelings of the individuals within this important time period. Therefore, the fact that the people are speaking of their own truths is not a disadvantageous factor. For, this research aims to detect the common particularities of the individuals, rather than scratching about the already known historical truths about the revolution.

⁹⁶ Becker, "Introduction", vi-vii. / v- xviii.

⁹⁷ Robert Edgerton and L.L. Langness, *Methods and Styles in the Study of Culture* (University of California, Los Angeles: Chandler & Sharp Publishers, Inc., 1964), 77.

⁹⁸ A. Faraday and Plummer K, "Doing Life Histories," *Sociological Review* 27, no.4 (1979): 773-98.

⁹⁹ F Boas, "Recent Anthropology," *Science* 98 (1943): 335. /311-314, 334-7.

The notable French thinkers such as Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault are among the scholars who are of the opinion that “a text cannot be traced back to a specific author, and both the text and the author becomes fictive.”¹⁰⁰ According to Barthes, the self and the life have become fictitious once it is written by its author. However, another thing that has to be kept in mind is that although there is a problematic issue going on in terms of autobiographies’ representation of self and reality, there are lots of autobiographies all around the world studied and assumed with its historical value. Faqir asserts, Arabic world is full of examples of autobiographies that can be examples of “historic autobiography”, like Abd al-Rahman Munif’s *Sirat Madina*.¹⁰¹

On contrary, Roland Barthes writes at the beginning of his autobiography, “[n]othing is more a matter of the image system, of the imaginary, than criticism. The substance of this book, ultimately, is therefore totally fictive.”¹⁰² However, we have to remember that he states this note in regards to self criticism, and self criticism is not under the scope of this study. Still, one thing that has to be kept in mind, as Farzaneh Milani states, is that “there is still a fundamental distinction between autobiography and fiction. It is autobiography that generically claims more than any other literary form the correspondence between the writing and the writer.”¹⁰³ Bearing all this in mind, this study will try to get the advantage of this correspondence and study the period and the memoir studies through the Iranian women writers’ eyes.

Some scholars also underline the issues to be taken into account while working with personal narratives. Kluckhohn is one scholar who reached different conclusions in his research. He pointed the problems of reliability,

¹⁰⁰ Faqir, *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writer*, 2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰² Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 119.

¹⁰³ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 204.

validity and interpretation while working with life stories however, he also pointed their;

Potential advantages for studies of social change, as clues to implicit themes, as documentation on roles as demonstration of socialization and enculturation as an entry into understanding personality, as a view of the 'emotional structure of a way of life, as a means towards understanding variations within a society, and also seeing the 'common humanity' among peoples.¹⁰⁴

Bearing in mind the time period of the memoirs that are the concern of this thesis are covering, the above given points by Kluckhohn are extremely important.

As Langness and Frank also point out, while dealing with autobiographies we only have the text itself to return with our questions.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, there are some extra things that we have to know in advance in order to understand the things we are told.

The first thing that we have to keep in mind is that, in the autobiographies the author and the subject are one and the same person. Exceptional experiences, like the case of the revolution, which forces the writer to lead a particular life, are narrated in detail. Moreover, Langness and Frank add that personal documents like autobiographies collected cross- culturally are important in that they give a clear concept of the individual's 'self' as constituted by his or her culture.¹⁰⁶ According to Goldin, it is modesty and secrecy that prevented Iranian women from writing memoirs before. For Iranian women writing about self is frightening and has consequences.¹⁰⁷ Most of the people that are actors in the memoirs do not want their names to be mentioned in the memoirs.

¹⁰⁴ Clyde Kluckhohn, "The Personal Document in Anthropological Science," in *The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology*. Gottschalk, Louis, Clyde Kluckhohn and Robert Angell. *Bulletin 53* (New York: Social Science Research Council. 1945)

¹⁰⁵ L.L. Langness and Gelya Frank, *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography* (Navato, California: Chandler and Sharp Publishers, Inc, 1981), 89.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 90.

¹⁰⁷ Goldin, "Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs," http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/iranian_women_contemporary_memoirs.php
This factor will also be analyzed in detail in Chapter V.

According to Langness and Frank, autobiography writing is a process of self creation. They also argue, among the contemporary women writers there is this consciousness that autobiography writing can be a revolutionary act. Many of the writers feel what they are writing is not separable from their lives. As mentioned before, the Iranian Revolution seems to have forced people to be more political and while writing their memoirs Iranian women are also becoming political, as they are examining the politics of their own personal situation realizing the common experiences with the others.¹⁰⁸ Later, some critics also argue that growing wide world awareness and interest has caused the emergence of a feminist aesthetic in literature with the writings of the women.

Another issue as Gottschalk, Kluckhohn, and Angell also stated is that, there are two general criteria while working with biographical materials. First, whether the data presented are treated in scientifically respectable fashion, “is the reader given the information necessary for judging the trustworthiness of the document? Is the document integrated with other research materials on the people in question?”¹⁰⁹ and whether the interpretations made are coherent. From this point of view, it can be said that all of the memoirs that is the concern of this study are the nearest approximation to the reality. Their thoughts and ideas and the historical data they included in their works are supported by other writers and historians. Moreover, depicting the same era, one can clearly see common issues and thoughts within all of the memoirs, which is also an evidence for the accuracy and the consistency of the data given. Second issue to be discussed, “is the document itself sufficiently comprehensive to give more than a schematic picture of an individual’s life, with perhaps some few details of great intrinsic interest.”¹¹⁰ When the memoirs are judged under this criterion; we can say that even if one can not be enough, if we make comparisons with the other materials, like other memoirs and historical documents; they are sufficient

¹⁰⁸ It must be mentioned here, it was Simone de Beauvoir who awakened women to the idea that the “personal is also political”.

¹⁰⁹ Gottschalk, Kluckhohn and Angell, “The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology,” 91.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 91.

sources for a researcher to understand the traditional motives and themes of the culture. As the authors also added, “three recently published autobiographies . . . attain sufficient length to give the reader a solid purchase upon a person-in-a-culture.”¹¹¹ However, given the criticisms and reviews of memoirs, they are all true to the customs and lived experiences of that time. The historical data given in each memoir is coherent with the historical resources.

Finally, when we look at the importance of the autobiographies in history, America is a really good example of this genre. In American culture, autobiography has a special place. Benjamin Franklin’s *Memoirs* (1790) which is written at the same time with Rousseau’s *Confessions* are regarded as one of the first books of the new nation.¹¹² According to Langness and Frank, James M. Cox¹¹³ is right in his statement about the American and French Revolutions’ effect on the individual as a potent political entity, and caused the continuous emergence of the memoirs.¹¹⁴ The same issue can be applied to the Iranian memoirs, since there is a boom in the number of the memoirs written after the revolution.

3.2. Iranian Women’s Memoirs: Persian or Not

We have examined the usage of the memoirs and main debates revolving around them in world history and compared them with the memoirs under discussion. Now it is time to examine the first discussion about the usage of the Iranian memoirs that are chosen for this research.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 91.

¹¹² The writers also added that most of the books regarded as classics in American Literature are autobiographical. Among these they have also counted Henry David Thoreau’s collection of essays from his journal, published with the name *Walden* (1849), the poems written by first person singular by Walt Whitman (1855). For more information see; L.L. Langness and Gelya Frank, *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography* (Navato, California: Chandler and Sharp Publishers, Inc, 1981).

¹¹³ James M Cox, “Autobiography and America,” in *Aspects of Narrative*. ed J.H Miller (New York: Colombia University Press, 1971), 252-277.

¹¹⁴ Langness, and Frank, *Lives: An Antropological Approach to Biography*, 92.

As many of the critics pointed out, most of the memoirs written after the revolution are written not in Persian but in another language, mostly in English. Among the memoirs that are chosen for this thesis, apart from Pahlavi's and Satrapi's memoirs, all of them are written in English. Before we go further on this topic it is important to note foreign languages had a great effect on the cultural and educational arenas of the Middle Eastern Countries at least from the eighteenth century until after World War II.¹¹⁵ This influence is also seen within the memoirs, most of the writers are enrolled to a foreign school in Iran, with the belief that the foreign language education could be better. Farah Pahlavi and Marjane Satrapi are enrolled in French Schools, Roya Hakakian and Latifi are sent to Jewish schools.

Moreover, Kaufman states in his article in a quotation from Persis Karim¹¹⁶ that all of the Iranian Americans confided themselves in the English Language rather than Persian.¹¹⁷ Goldin is another critic who arouses the issue, and she states the writers choose to write in the language that they are feeling most comfortable. Furthermore, it is also important that all of the memoir writers were educated in a foreign country at some point in their lives. Marjane Satrapi goes to Vienna for education at the age of 14. Roya Hakakian has been in the United States since the mid-1980s and has received most of her education there, Farah Pahlavi is educated in a French primary school and then she leaves for France for her university study. Afschineh Latifi, is sent to a German School in Austria and then leaves for the United States afterwards, where she gets her high school and University degrees. Azar Nafisi, also went to England at the age of 13 and went on her studies in the United States. Therefore, we can also deduce that in their memoirs, they use the language they are used to express

¹¹⁵ Nikkie R. Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 233.

¹¹⁶ Persis Karim is an associate professor of English and comparative literature at San Jose State University in California.

¹¹⁷ Stephen Kaufman, "Iranian Women in Exile Finding Voices Through Literature," 06 November 2006, <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfileenglish&y=2006&m=November&x=20061106154851esnamfuak0.9135706>

themselves with due to their education abroad. Moreover, Goldin's article states that most of the international writers including the Iranians think that they can reach a wider audience by using a widely known language in their works.¹¹⁸

Another issue is that they wrote the memoirs in a foreign country which made them free from the restraints and rules imposed by the government. Their choice of writing in English or French can also be a result of the country they choose to live in. Still, the issue that should not be ignored is that these memoirs depict the writers' lives in Iran and the revolutionary period which resulted in their departure from their homelands. Nafisi states in Goldin's article that;

I wanted to write this story when I lived in Iran, but I could not. There are many reasons why this book could not be written in Iran, not all of it political. There are too many restraints ... imposed by the government and many of the readers. I do not know if I would be writing the same story.¹¹⁹

Therefore, what can be said is that writing in another language which they are feeling more comfortable in the literary terms, and writing their memoirs in a country away from the censorship and constraints of Iran also made it easier for them to build up the memoir which is fully fledged Iranian without any cut off piece from their work in the fear of something. Moreover, in an interview Nafisi states that her book is not allowed in Iran. The only way the Iranians read her memoir is either by downloading the parts from the internet, or through the Iranians that visited the foreign countries.¹²⁰

Another positive side of writing in English for the writers as Goldin states is that, in English they can be more direct with their expressions. She is also an Iranian memoir writer who has written her memoir *Wedding Song* in English. She states, "Persian is a circuitous language. Centuries of oppression and foreign rulers taught Iranians to evade direct responses in order to keep their

¹¹⁸ Goldin, "Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs," http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/iranian_women_contemporary_memoirs.php

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Robert Birnbaum, "Interview with Azar Nafisi" Feb. 5, 2004, <http://www.identitytheory.com/interviews/birnbaum139.php>

heads. I cannot imagine a book as direct as mine would be translatable into Persian, and if it is ever translated, I fear it will be called vulgar.”¹²¹

In the memoirs, the writers are writing their experiences during the revolutionary period. In Abbas Milani’s words “exile is when you live in one land and dream in another.”¹²² These writers are writing about their homelands in exile. As Milani also points out,

[o]ppression at home – a constant fact of twentieth-century life in Iran - had meant that those who suffered the pangs of exile were at least rewarded with the feeling that their ideas, thoughts and theories were the cherished vanguard of cultural, literary and political developments in Iran.¹²³

In each one of the memoirs, the reader is given samples from the writer’s life in Iran; the background history, the writers’ childhood, description of traditional holidays, customs and morals in the society. The effects of the historical events like the Revolution and the Iraqi War is given in detail. Therefore, these memoirs written in English away from the restraints put on them actually provide detailed and uncut information about the writer’s homelands. These are the main reasons why these memoirs can be labelled as Iranian.

3.3. Selection of the Memoirs Studied

This thesis started with the realization that there has been a boom in the number of Iranian memoir writers after the revolution. After reading some of these memoirs by Iranian women writers, and what the critics wrote about them, I realized there have not been many studies analysing these memoirs. Therefore, this research emerged in order to fill this gap in the academic arena.

¹²¹ Goldin, “Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs,” http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/iranian_women_contemporary_memoirs.php

¹²² Milani, *Lost Wisdom: Rethinking Modernity in Iran*, 155.

¹²³ Ibid, 167.

There are about 30 memoirs I was able to reach written after the revolution. Most of them are written by people from upper-middle class families, in a language other than Persian and published in foreign countries. All of these writers published their memoirs in exile, as status which they maintain to this day. As all of these autobiographies cannot be analyzed in a master's thesis, five among them are carefully chosen according to certain criteria. First of all, I focused on women's memoirs, with the writers of different backgrounds. In order to get an overall perspective of the period, writers that have different characteristics and perspectives on the Revolutionary period are chosen. It was pointed out a variety of beliefs is important to get an overall idea of the period. Moreover, I also tried to cover the experiences of the same generation in order not to enter into the discussions of the differences in the experiences of different generations and generation gap problems. I tried to pay particular attention to this in order to narrow down the research question. The writers I have chosen were all born in around the same period in Iran. The eldest being Farah Pahlavi was born in 1938. All the other writers were born between the years 1955 and 1969. Furthermore, the stylistic differences and worldwide interest towards the memoirs, which also added to their choice, was also another factor in the selection of the memoirs. In order to focus on one region, Tehran region, being the focus of the revolutionary movements and transformations after the revolution became another element of attention.

Apart from the reasons above, there are various reasons I excluded the other memoirs and focused on these five. After laying down all the memoirs they are compared in terms of content and writers background. As the main focus is the women's memoirs and experiences in the revolutionary process, men are excluded beforehand. Afterwards, the writers that are depicting both before and after the revolutionary period in their memoirs are selected among the others. The memoirs written with co-authors such as Shirin Ebadi are also excluded as they cannot be included as the revelation of self. Among the remaining memoirs I also excluded some of the memoirs which can also be categorized under the category of prison and resistance memoirs like Ashraf

Dehghani who is depicting her struggles against the Shah Regime and tortures in the prison. Some other writers who can be viewed as part of the growing movement of Iranian female memoir writers after the revolution are left out of the study as these writers mainly focused on their adaptation difficulties in the countries they migrated and after being an exile, rather than focusing on the changes within Iran and the changes the revolution brought into their lives.

According to Langness and Frank¹²⁴, we can take life history as a text which contains the selection of elements from life. Then, we have to ask ourselves, what is the underlying reality that is represented, what does a person choose to include while writing their own life, and is there anything comparable between one life and the other, especially when the individuals are from different backgrounds and from different classes. The answers to these questions can only be given after a close reading and analysis of each memoir. After comparing the Iranian women memoirs written after the revolution this research decided to focus on five of them. In this part we will try to explain the reasons why these five memoirs are especially chosen. This part will compare them mainly in terms of style and background of the writers that affected the choice of these memoirs.

Five memoirs is chosen for this research; these are the memoirs of Iranian women who are from different backgrounds: one, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis 1-2*, the other, *Journey from the Land of No* from Roya Hakkakian, the third one Afshineh Latifi's *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution and Leaving Iran*, the fourth one, from Farah Pahlavi *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah* and the last one from Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. Women's memoirs are selected especially as they have been neglected in the study of Iran for a long time. Moreover, given the fact that women have had more unfortunate experiences, and are seen as the most disadvantaged group to emerge from the revolution, it seems as an important part of the study to see the revolution from their point of view.

¹²⁴ Langness and Frank, *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography*, 88.

In terms of style, as Langness and Frank states, the writings of women have traditionally been very “immediate in describing the intimate details of daily events and domestic emotions.”¹²⁵ According to Stanley and Wolfe, women writers of the 20th century speak out of a “tradition of invisibility, a tradition of closely guarded, personal, revelatory language of diaries and journals.”¹²⁶ This reminds us the fact that in order to understand memoirs better, we should learn more about the authors of the memoirs and their style of writing that they decided to reveal their experiences with.

3.3.1 *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi:

While reading the memoirs, one discovers that although everyone seems to be complaining about the revolution and the rules it introduced to the country, in the memoirs it is proved that the people were not comfortable with the lives that they had been living before as well. In Satrapi’s memoir, we see that she has given a large place to the dissatisfaction of the people and the protests and the strict regulations going on during the Shah period. Therefore, within these memoirs we are actually introduced to the disappointments of the Iranian people within their lives. While they were fighting for a better life, trying to be free from the restrictions and the pressure the monarchy had on them; they have fallen into a completely harder lifestyle.

In the book we also experience the revolution from a different perspective than the history books. We are given an account of the changes and the experiences in the private sphere. We are witnessing the changes and the relations within the family before and after the Revolution. We see that after the complexities of adjusting to a new life in the public sphere, the private sphere is also affected a lot by the revolution.

Satrapi’s memoir starts from the year 1978. The writer starts telling the story from the demonstrations against Shah. However, this time first, we see the

¹²⁵ Langness and Frank, *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography*, 94.

¹²⁶ Julia P. Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe, “Toward a Feminist Aesthetic,” *Chrysalis* 6 (1978): 62.

tired mom and dad, who cannot show concern for their children after demonstrating all day in the streets¹²⁷; then, a girl questioning the meaning of “went for a vacation”¹²⁸; later, the family is separated from each other¹²⁹ because of the impossibilities and obstacles the revolution period put on the people. Therefore, apart from the social and political changes that the transformation period witnessed, in the memoir we are presented with the inner dynamics and the changes within the private sphere. She gives us the dissatisfaction of the people with the Shah regime. Within the graphic memoir we observe the protests and the feelings of the people towards the Shah regime in a livelier description.

After the revolution, we see a great change in the family neighbourhoods as well. In the memoirs another big important issue is that the society pressure, the community forces the people that were previously supporting the Marxist reforms to become strict supporters of the Islamic regime or at least to behave as if they are supporting the new regime.¹³⁰ Right after the Iraqi war that started with the invasion of Iraq in September 1980, it is seen that the people’s attention is directed towards other issues rather than questioning the new regime and what it will bring into the lives of the people in Iran. The hard conditions of the war; lack of food supplies and tension among the society come one after another. These conditions are also deteriorating the family tensions, the individuals become more sensitive and feeble against the opposing forces. With the effect of the war added, it is seen that the regime has an easier way to interfere into the private lives and the daily routine of the people. With the pressure of the war on the country, the fundamentalists find it easier to change the customs and the

¹²⁷ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 18.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 48. The parents are generally telling the children that somebody went on a trip, when he is caught by the Savak.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 147.

¹³⁰ For more information; Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 75.

traditions. In Satrapi's memoir it is clearly stated that the war has helped a lot to the survival of the regime.¹³¹

Towards the end of the memoir we see that the further the war goes the more people flee away from their homeland. At the age of 14, Satrapi has experienced more than a person in her own age should; lost many of her relatives and neighbours and friends as victims to the new regime and the ongoing war. As a result she became more aggressive and rebellious against the events around her. She is expelled in her school as a result of her inconvenient behaviours.¹³² In the end, the fate of separation from the family, is awaiting Satrapi. Her family sends her to Vienna for reasons of safety and better education.

In *Persepolis 2*, Satrapi presents her struggle of existence in Europe as an outsider and her return to her parents and her homeland. In her second episode, Satrapi starts her graphic novel in 1984, after she goes to Austria. We are given the feelings of a girl who has just left her country under attack and her thoughts towards the ongoing life. She tells the reader about her adaptation difficulties in her first days about language, money, school, friendships and so forth as she starts school in the middle of the semester.

Afterwards, she goes back to Tehran. This part provides us with the changes after the revolution. From the point she enters Tehran airport she gives us a detailed list of the things that has changed in the life of the Iranians.¹³³ The first time she walks around the city she finds it really hard to readjust. Everywhere is covered with Martyr's posters and symbols. She feels as if the streets are haunted by the dead people.¹³⁴

She mentions the disappointment of the people and her family's feelings about the eight-year war with Iraq.¹³⁵ Marjane is puzzled after hearing all about

¹³¹ Ibid, 116.

¹³² Ibid, 143.

¹³³ Ibid, 93.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 96.

what the people has experienced when she is away. That thought makes her feel like an outsider in everywhere she goes. In Europe she was an easterner and in her own country missing 4 years of war period with Iraq, she is feeling as an outsider again. She closes herself to the outside world more than ever and even tries committing suicide. However, her survival after committing suicide bonds her to life strongly and she starts taking measures to raise her life standards.¹³⁶

Some of the taboos forced on the people after the revolution were absurd for most people and agitating at the same time. The writer provides us with lots of examples; having a walkman, a loud laugh, red socks...and many others. She talks about the executions between 1980- 1983 and the “fear factor” used in order to bond people more to the new regime. According to the writer, the new government is successful in making people lose the urge to fight for their ideals through the use of oppression and fear.¹³⁷ However, in reality the behaviours of the people in private and public life was completely opposite.

In order to be free in public space too, the writer makes an early marriage with her boyfriend Reza which ends up in failure. On the other hand she starts questioning her marriage, later she realizes she should first face with the social restraints on the divorced women. Apparently it is not only the government who is restricting people but the people themselves who get used to living within the given conditions.¹³⁸ With the force they get from the society the restraints of the government have started growing in different spaces as media, domestic law and so forth. Within those restraints and in her own doubts she decides to divorce and leave the country. She makes her last goodbyes to her beloved places, and people and this time leaves Iran for good. She currently lives in Paris.

Satrapi’s memoir is, first of all, different from the others as it has already been written in a different genre. She chooses to express her life story in the

¹³⁵ Ibid, 99.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 119.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 148.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 178.

form of a graphic novel which also adds to the imagination of the reader. As one critic also discusses, it has become “the most influential graphic novels in the past ten years.”¹³⁹ It later gained so much attention that in 2007 they released an animated movie version of the memoir. Receiving great acclaim in the international arena, it was later listed by *Time Magazine* among the best comics of 2003 and was described as “a comix- style memoir by a woman who grew up during the Iranian Revolution. Totally unique and utterly fascinating, Satrapi’s simple style reveals the complexities of veiled-off world.”¹⁴⁰ In another review, Andrew D. Arnold states, this memoir

provides a unique glimpse into a nearly unknown and unreachable way of life. It has the strange quality of a note in a bottle written by a shipwrecked islander. That Satrapi chose to tell her remarkable story as a gorgeous comic book makes *Persepolis* totally unique and indispensable.¹⁴¹

Another critic Theokas has stated; “[t]he fact that she is able to portray such a vast range of emotions with a few simple strokes of pen is impressive.”¹⁴² Her drawing style and sentences are really simple and the figures are really basic, however, she has adopted a really good way of putting a lot into simple figures. The memoir also offers a faithful picture of Iran of those times. Moreover, as the critics also argue, *Persepolis* is by no means a comic book, “yet Satrapi’s humour pervades it just as it might pervade a prose work on a similar subject. None of the humour is without its pointed commentary which often only makes it funnier.”¹⁴³ Therefore, having taken attention on the work

¹³⁹ International Information Programs, “Book about Wartime Iran a Statement Against Dictatorships,” 6 November 2006.
<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfileenglish&y=2006&m=November&x=20061106155121esnamfuak5.242556e-02>

¹⁴⁰ Andrew D Arnold, “The Best Comix,” *Time*, 2003.
<http://www.time.com/time/bestandworst/2003/comics.html>.

¹⁴¹ Andrew D. Arnold, “An Iranian Girlhood,” May 16, 2003.
<http://www.time.com/time/columnist/arnold/article/0,9565,452401,00.html>.

¹⁴² Christopher Theokas, <http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/iran/satrapim.htm>

¹⁴³ Debbie Notkin, “Persepolis: the Story of a Childhood,” *The Women’s Review of Books* 20, no.9 (Jun 2003): 8.

itself from all over the world as well, Satrapi's book seemed like a must for this study.

Apart from this fact, Marjane Satrapi's family background and stance towards the revolution, her life story is also a prominent case study for this research. Her parents were left-oriented intellectuals, and were against the Shah regime, and her uncle was a Marxist. Having grown up in a leftist family, and chosen a different style of writing the memoir, Satrapi exemplifies a different perspective for the research.

Satrapi describes her purpose of creating the graphic memoir at the very start of her book; in her words she states, "one can forgive but one should never forget."¹⁴⁴ Therefore, according to her, one should remember the past and know the history to comment on a country. Milani also states that, "[o]ne of the concerns that recur frequently in these works, the most common is the desire to destroy a "false" image."¹⁴⁵ In the recent years, Iran has come to be viewed,

as a terrorist state, a country of religious fanatics. Iranian Culture has seemingly rejected everything western and turned in a different direction . . . Yet there is another part of Iranian story that is unfortunately largely unknown in the Western world. This is the story of a country of great poetry and literature, of an enlightened society with important philosophers and learned scholars. Another part of the story no heard in the West is of an Iran that values family ties and views community obligations as critical to the well- being of the society . . .¹⁴⁶

Moreover, she states, *Persepolis* is important for her, in that she wants to show the other countries, which has associated Iran with "fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism", that this image is not the real Iran. She is against the idea that "an entire nation is judged by the wrongdoings of a few extremists".¹⁴⁷

Therefore, with these different and striking characteristics in its style and content Satrapi's memoir is also an important source for this study.

¹⁴⁴ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, introduction.

¹⁴⁵ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 13.

¹⁴⁶ Farr and Kerbo, *Modern Iran: A Volume in the Comparative Societies Series*, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, introduction.

3.3.2 *An Enduring Love* by Farah Pahlavi

Farah Diba was born in Iran in 1938. In her memoir starting from her childhood she tells the reader her childhood life, her life as an Empress and the process that paved the way to the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

The memoir starts from 16 January 1979 which, according to the Empress, is the day she remembers with lots of pain. She explains the complicated situations in the country has forced them to “go on a journey”¹⁴⁸ which later turned out to be a complete departure.

The first part, which starts in 1939, is a very important part of the memoir as it tells us the life Farah Diba, before she meets the Shah. It gives us the chance to see Empress’s life as a normal citizen. It is easy to realize the family is an open-minded, modern and wealthy family who has servants and gives importance to their only daughter’s choices and education. Moreover, from her descriptions one can see that there is a destitute society left behind the scenes in the memoir.

In this chapter, we are also getting a better knowledge about writer’s family background. Pahlavi states her grandfather is a diplomat who can speak French and Russian fluently and they were from Azerbaijan. Her mom studied in Jeanne d’Arc which she will also attend later for studying. We are also given that her mom and dad are Muslims, her mom, being more conservative, sometimes attending the religious meetings.¹⁴⁹ At the age of nine she loses her father who dies because of an illness. At the age of eleven she starts reading Ferdowsi, one of the greatest poets of Iran and his work *Shahnama*. She also gives us a short history of the period when Reza Shah came to the throne. She states the country was like a headless middle aged country in which neither the army nor the economy was in a good state.¹⁵⁰ She later compares it with the Iran

¹⁴⁸ Pahlavi, *Anılar*, 19.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 30-33.

¹⁵⁰ As Ardeshir Zahedi, who was then Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, states in Taylor’s book, during the World War II, for strategic reasons Iran was occupied by the Allied Powers after August 25, 1941. On January 29, 1943 Iran joined the Allies and on September 9 of the

of 25 years later which has made a good improvement in terms of education, infrastructure, and law.¹⁵¹

The second chapter starts with the marriage preparations of Shah and Farah Diba in Paris. In December 21 1959 they got married with the Shah. She tells the wedding traditions and ceremony in detail.

After getting married with the Shah of Iran she realizes a very busy agenda is awaiting her. From the letters that ask for help we understand there are many people in the country struck by poverty. She gives the reader a brief description of the situation after Reza Shah takes the throne in 1925. The country was suffering in every term, led by the landlords. Later Mohammad Reza Pahlavi takes over the throne of the country with a centralized rule and newly established economy. She also reveals that apart from the developments the country is still an underdeveloped country in terms of transportation, agriculture, education and health.¹⁵²

She states during their rule the clergy were also trying to agitate the citizens of Iran in which they were not successful. In this part we encounter the name of Ruhollah Khomeini for the first time. In a letter to the Shah, he is criticizing women's right to vote. She says the clerics were against the newly made reforms and the landlords who were suffering from the new reforms were also supporting them. She mentions there were some protests in the New Year's celebrations in the city of Qom in 1963. It is also the year the government arrested Khomeini because of the rising number of rebellions around the country. Later, he is sent to exile to Turkey and then to Iraq in which he went on with his preparations for dissolving the regime in Iran.¹⁵³

same year, officially declared war on the Axis Powers. After the peace settles the area, after the Americans and the British left in accordance with the terms of the Tripartite Treaty of Alliance, the Shahanshah ordered the imperial army to liberate Azerbaijan, as the Russians refused to conform to the necessities of the treaty. This was an important event for the Diba family as their ancestors were from Azerbaijan. Geoffrey Handley Taylor compiled. *Bibliography of Iran*. Coronation Edition (London: Thomas Rae Ltd, 1967), xii

¹⁵¹ Pahlavi, *Anılar*, 42-43.

¹⁵² Ibid, 107.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 130.

Another important event is the writer's appointing as the regent of the country and subsequently, coronation with the King in 1967. This coronation was a step on the way to the improvement of the position of women in the society. The Empress also gives a detailed summary of the coronation ceremony.¹⁵⁴

After moving to their new place, she goes on with the assistance and exploring excursions. In these tours she has the chance to see the needs of the citizens living in the far parts of the country. In these visits the reader also realizes that although there are lots of developments in the country, Iran still has many poor and dissatisfied citizens. She also mentions that throughout these visits she never sees anyone from the clergy complaining about the reforms.¹⁵⁵ This seems awkward if one thinks about the following events. She tells about the affections and sympathy of the citizens towards Shah and herself during these visits.¹⁵⁶

She later tells the difficulties of the women that she encounters in her visits or hears from the letters that are written to her. From her notes it is easy to see that; despite the reforms, there are many women suffering from polygamy, are held away from school and does not have a right to travel and so forth. Moreover, it is also evident that even at the beginning of 1970s the reforms are still bound to the power of the clergy to some extent and the clergy has a huge influence on the decisions and judgments of the society.

According to Pahlavi, Iran has developed in a sensible way within a few years; she also gives evidences for this belief from the articles published in the foreign media. In the foreign press they were also showing Iran as a country which has a rapid development pace. However, the journalist also adds that in general he observed that the people are looking not really happy. She makes a quotation from the French Journalist Edouard Sablier;

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 151-160.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 169.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 172-178.

This is a fast developing country. Towns have grown like mushrooms after a storm . . . Although they do not equal Tehran, the other towns in Iran are developing at a rapid rate . . . The standard of living keeps improving . . . Persian nationalism has reason to be glad . . . But the general impression has some gloomy overtones. Naturally a nation cannot develop without encountering along the way the drawbacks, the frustrations, and the unrest that are part of the modern times.¹⁵⁷

She also talks about the international cultural and social festivals they also arranged. She states these kinds of activities also affected the young generation to work in the fields of cinema, theatre, or music. However, most of these areas are used as an instrument for the opposing groups to openly criticize the Shah regime. According to her, these groups continue their activities without getting any warning from the regime.¹⁵⁸ Pahlavi also states that she is later also criticized for making ill-timed liberal thoughts. She also criticizes the police for misusing its force. She states the SAVAK forces are overreacting and arresting or ill-treating the people with the excuse that they are making anti-regime propaganda.¹⁵⁹ Pahlavi also states that then there seems to be a lack of coordination between the SAVAK security forces and the head of the state, as most of the arrests and the accusations of the people.¹⁶⁰

The third part starts with the news of Shah's illness, Waldenström, which is a blood disease. Pahlavi is later told by the doctors that the treatment for the disease has started in 1973.

She also mentions the exaggerations of the revolutionaries, which they were showing everyone dying even the ones that die as a result of a sickness or age, as a victim of SAVAK. She gives reference to the Mohsen Rezai, then chief of the Guardians of the Revolution Army, who states;

¹⁵⁷ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah A Memoir*, 215.

¹⁵⁸ In the memoir the writer also tell the reader about the 2.500 year celebrations of the Iran's monarchy after the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great. The celebrations, which are made at the ancient city Persepolis near Shiraz, become the biggest event in Iran's history, which involved royalties and the heads of many states from all over the world. However, the Shah regime is also criticized for lavishness during the celebrations. Pahlavi, *Anilar*, 213-224.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 233-234.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 235.

Organization of sham funerals to be widely reported in the media. The coffins should contain weapons, especially knives, that can be used immediately if the forces of law and order intervene. Mourners of both sexes permanently stationed in cemeteries as a politico-religious weapon in the triumph of the Revolution . . .¹⁶¹

These examples actually prove that the Islamic Revolution was a really organized and well-financed uprising and that the people had been working on a Revolutionary process for long before.

The unrest in the society continues as time goes by and most people advise the Shah's family to stay away from the country for a while until the country calms down. Finally, on January 16, 1979, taking the advice into account, they decide to leave the country which turns out to be an eternal farewell for the Pahlavi family.

Their first stop in this journey is Egypt, afterwards they are forced to travel Morocco, Bahamas, Mexico, America, Panama for various political reasons. In this period the condition of Shah deteriorates as he could not get a systematical treatment. After accepted in Egypt they finally decide to make surgery which goes well however, even this is not helping to overcome the disease which has spread around the liver. On July 27, 1980 the Shah dies.¹⁶²

On January 20, 1981, the hostages of the American Embassy are finally released in Iran and the newly elected president declared that the Shah's family is welcomed in America whenever they want. Later, they are settled in America and the children are sent to new schools where they can go on with their life after that tiring two years.

Farah Pahlavi's memoir has been criticised as presenting a partial point of view towards the Shah's regime and reflecting on the country's situation from an ivory tower. However, Farah Pahlavi's memoir is a useful resource for the purposes of this thesis because, firstly, it recounts the story of the revolution through the eyes of a member of the royal family and; secondly, this account is

¹⁶¹ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah A Memoir*, 276.

¹⁶² Pahlavi, *Anılar*, 374.

written by a woman who comes from a different background than the other sources that can be taken as a resource.

She is also chosen for her supportive stance of the Shah Regime. Her background forces her to write in an informative and supportive manner of her life story. It can be argued that, being the only person who knows all about the live history of the period from their reign, she adopts the role of the advocate for the royal family and reveals the history from their point of view. Her memoir lets the reader to make a judgment between the memoirs and acts as a balancing factor. She is defending her family and the old regime her family ruled. Therefore, her personality is embedded into the legitimacy of the loyal family.

Milani talks about an issue that is seen in the Iranian women writers' memoirs, which is the fact that, the self is represented with its relations with men. Ashraf Pahlavi' memoir *Faces in a Mirror*, in which she defines herself with her relationship to her twin brother Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. This is also seen in Farah Pahlavi's memoir, apart from the part until her marriage with Shah, where she tells the history of pre-marriage times, she stresses the achievements of the regime and the Shah more than her own. As Milani states, she shows herself as the "ideal woman, like moon, revolves around a sun in her life and takes her definition from him."¹⁶³ Therefore, it can also be deduced that the individuality of the other writers is not seen within Farah Pahlavi's memoir.

Thus, as the ex-empress of the country that has lost her crown as a result of the Revolution, it can be argued that her first catalyst while writing the memoir was to tell the Revolution from her own perspective.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, according to her, in the name of her grandchildren, she wanted to address the people who were opposing their regime, and to remind them that the history has treated them unfairly and that actually they have to be proud of being an Iranian.

¹⁶³ Farzaneh Milani, "Veiled Voices: Women's Autobiographies in Iran," in *Women's Autobiographies in Contemporary Iran*. ed. Afsaneh Najmabadi (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 15.

¹⁶⁴ At the end of her memoir, she states that her grandchildren ask her about those times, and she tells them that she was the queen and they are the children of the crown prince. As a claim for that and in order to tell them the story of their ancestor, mainly their grandfather and their aunt (in her words), who killed herself as a result of the experiences she has been through at an early age, she states she has decided to write this memoir.

Furthermore, she is the only one among the memoir writers, who bears responsibility in the revolutionary process. Therefore, she is in a way using the memoir for her right to defend against the accusations made for the Shah regime. She seems to be trying to legitimize the acts of the Shah regime in the worldly arena. Finally, as a member of the Royal family, she tells the story of her now lost history to the people to make it available without prejudices made on them. Therefore, with these elements her memoir distinguishes itself from the other memoirs with its supportive stance for the Shah regime. Thus, it stands out as an important memoir to be studied.

3.3.3 *Journey From the Land of No* by Roya Hakakian

Roya Hakakian is an Iranian-American writer, journalist and film producer. She is also among the leading voices of new Persian poetry listed in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*. She was born in 1966 into a Jewish family in Tehran and in 1984 she came to the United States on political asylum. Her memoir was nominated among the bestsellers and won the Persian Heritage Foundation's 2006. Latifeh Yarshater Book Award and has been nominated by the Connecticut Center for the Book as a finalist in the memoir category.¹⁶⁵ Her memoir has been translated into different languages and has a great effect on different fields in Iran and outside Iran especially among the women and Iranian studies.

In her memoir we are introduced to a broad range of topics related to Iran, from family relations, to cultural traditions and politics. She also gives the reasons why she decided to write a memoir like Satrapi. Marjane Satrapi also points out that she decided to make her memoir in order to show the true Iranian civilization which is now mostly discussed with its connection to “fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism.”¹⁶⁶ When we look at the critics’

¹⁶⁵ Roya Hakakian, <http://www.royahakakian.com/bio.html>

¹⁶⁶ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, introduction.

views about the memoirs they also agree that these documents are helping to destroy the prejudices against the Iranian society and culture.¹⁶⁷

Hakakian starts her story from the year 1975, when she was 9 years old. Her father is a teacher in a synagogue and nearly everyone calls him Father, she has three brothers and she is the only daughter of the family. From the very beginning of the memoir the reader is exposed to the different identity of the family; the Jewish identity is abundantly present all through the memoir. She is the youngest of the family, her brother Bez 5 is years older than her, Javid is seventeen and leading the Jewish Iranian Students Organization.¹⁶⁸ The oldest of her brothers is apparently the most brilliant one according to Hakakian. Albert who broke the record for being the youngest cartoonist and at the age of nineteen, he was on the editorial board of the Iran's leading satire magazine Tofigh. However, his works published in different places are seen as a threat by the Shah's intelligence service, Savak.¹⁶⁹ The family sends him to America for his safety and continuance of his education. This was the first element for Hakakian to become mature even at such a young age.

In the third chapter, we are introduced to the Jewish customs in general and Muslim- Jewish relationship in the city of Tehran. This chapter also gives a good account of what it means to be a Jew in Iran. One metaphor that attracts attention while describing the nature of the Jewish- Persian Relations is when the writer states: "Being with family and among the Jews was effortless, like being in my pajamas. Being among Muslims, friends or neighbors, was like being in my party dress. I was careful not to stain or wrinkle it."¹⁷⁰

In the next chapter, we are given a detailed portrayal of the engagement meeting of Farah, Roya's cousin. Here, the role of womanhood and motherhood

¹⁶⁷ Homa Nasab, "Poetry and Revolution," January 18, 2005, <http://www.iranian.com/Books/2005/January/Journey/index.html>

¹⁶⁸ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 30.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 37.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 56.

connection to suffering and pain is also emphasized.¹⁷¹ Later, when Farah abandons the idea of marrying with Johan and gets a refusal from their parents she has a tantrum and collapses to floor in spasms. The real concern was not the health of the girl but what to say to the to-be groom's family. In all these, women's being trapped in the traditions is shown with different examples.¹⁷² Towards the end of the chapter, she describes the social climate during that period. The hatred growing towards Shah was shown in different ways like graffities.

Another significant part in the chapter is the part when she starts telling about the sessions of praying Bibi¹⁷³ and the Great Uncle entered under the basement. They are secretly listening the sermon cassettes of Agha¹⁷⁴ and they were truly against the shah regime. It says;

We have no objective other than saving the oppressed from their oppressors. All that made me accept the leadership of the community is Almighty God's instruction that the clergy should not remain silent in the face of greed and the crushing hunger of the downtrodden. The Shah is saying that he is granting liberty to the people. Hear me, you pompous toad! Who are you to grant freedom? It is Allah who grants freedom...¹⁷⁵

These sermons are told from one to each other in private. Bibi tells the children about her great hopes from the expected revolution. More importantly, in the end of the chapter, we see the great influence of Khomeini publicity.

The next chapter is important for the records of the protests against the Shah it includes. This chapter is also important in that it gives a good account of the atmosphere of the pre-revolution. She also recounts the feelings of the people which are hard to find in any other sources; she adds when everything started going worse, the people were blaming everything on Shah.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 74- 76.

¹⁷² Ibid, 84- 87.

¹⁷³ She is the sister of Roya's best friend Zaynap. Here we are also given the Muslim-Jewish relations again.

¹⁷⁴ "Agha is Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini." Hakakian, Journey from the Land of No, 110.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 106.

She also gives a poetical description of the Revolution. She tells even at that age, even if she cannot understand anything she can see the changes all around the city – Tehran- and she can see the change in the movements of the people.¹⁷⁶

Later on while describing the crowd in Ayatollah Khomeini's arrival she mentions: "Next to the 'Down with the Shah' on the wall a new graffiti appeared: 'Johouds Get Lost.' " which is humiliating the Jewish people. This question also grows in the following pages with the description of the anti-Jewish sentiments within the society.¹⁷⁷ With the revolution the people who show their hostility towards the Hakakians increased.

Hakakian also gives us a good account of the transformation period. She describes the transformation in the official quarters, in media, arts and everyday life. The writer also gives an account of the executions after Shah. She mentions about the extrajudicial killings and the immediate changes in the everyday life. As an example, she mentions the changes at her school after the revolution.

In the next chapter we come across another important theme which is the men- women relationship. Hakakian gives us the essentials of the common way of new Iranian common thinking from the point of their new neighbour Mrs. Ferdows. According to her, the most important thing was the reputation and being the only parent of three unmarried girls she has been doing everything to protect their reputation. According to her opinion: "Men are fire, and women, heaps of cotton. Can't put the two next to each other. Ever."¹⁷⁸

She also mentions women's forcing into the Islamic Dress Code and she gives the different opinions about why women should wear the veil from the opinion polls:

The high school student from Qom: 'I agree with the Islamic dress code because Islam, as stated by Agha, has ordered it so.'

The university student from Tehran: 'In Algeria, even the Marxist women wore veils, and now, to fight imperialism, our women must

¹⁷⁶ Ibid,121.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid,135.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid,172.

wear the Islamic uniform so we can prove the world that we are a sovereign nation.'

The cabdriver from Isfahan: 'By following the Islamic dress code, women help the nation by preventing men from sexually stimulated.'

...¹⁷⁹

Therefore, everyone has their own justification for the usage of veil. The women however, have not given the choice of acceptance. They have to act according to the patterns that are shaped for them.

In the chapter called 'the dreamers', the writer introduces us the changes in the common laws and the general way of living. In this chapter we also find out there is in fact a strict control of the rules all around the country. Moreover, we are also given the extent of the censorship in this and the following chapter. This part also contains the ways the new government leaks into the private lives of the people. People's detention from free-education and freedom of knowledge caused a limited access of information for the Iranian citizens. Even if they had the funds to reach the intended activities, the new regulations have avoided them to enter those arenas.

These harsh security controls and the changing way of life make it impossible for the people, who still have a chance to leave the country, to live in Iran. Therefore, Hakakians were also among those to leave the country without any more damages.

Roya Hakakian's book is a distinctive and special work for this study with her detailed and strong style of writing and her ethnic background. She is from an Iranian Jewish family, who experienced the revolution in a different way from the Muslim population. Her memoir is also different from her parallel writers, like Farideh Goldin's *Wedding Song*, which also narrates the Revolutionary Period, however within a self-centred way. Goldin chose to describe about the Jewish traditions and customs which are now lost in Iran. Her memoir was not suitable to the needs of this study due to its content, which mainly focuses on the Jewish struggles and family backgrounds. Hakakian's memoir was more compact with her discussions about the characters; like

¹⁷⁹ Ibid,175.

neighbouring families as an example their Muslim neighbours and every member of her own family is described in detail, in terms of beliefs, ideas and background information; and traditional customs, morals and behaviours. Another factor was that I tried to concentrate on the region Tehran and Goldin's memoir was occurring in Shiraz.

In the memoir, Hakakian devotes a huge place for the Jewish customs and traditions, which have now mostly vanished in Iran. She gives the reader a detailed description of the preparations for the Passover and how they celebrate the Passover. She also explains the state of Jewish- Muslim relations, which were close and decent before the Revolution. Later, she also depicts the changes coming with the revolution and the school's new principal's attempts for converting the Jewish students. Therefore, it can be argued that her memoir has plenty of examples from the Jewish culture and their experiences of the revolution. Therefore, it can also be claimed that Hakakian has tried to tell the reader of a now mostly missing culture in the Iranian History. As a member of that community, after seeing the urges from outside she has put on the role of the mediator to raise the consciousness of the public towards her society.

Hakakian also adopts a different style in her memoir with her lyrical narrative. She has included parts of traditional poems and parts of the book *The Little Black Fish* into her memoir. The critics are convinced that she has a "moving, lyrical style". In her book she offers a revealing voice of an innocent child and a confiding tone. She tells the story from the eyes of a child; however, then adds what that event actually means in between, without making the reader disturbed. The best example of this is in her observance of Bibi and her uncle's, meetings in the downstairs to listen to the cassettes of the Ayatollah Khomeini.¹⁸⁰ The reader is given the details smoothly and gradually, without breaking the course of her writing.

¹⁸⁰ Roya Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 103-110.

3.3.4 *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* by Azar Nafisi

Azar Nafisi's book *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, is another prominent work, giving a compact account of the revolution, showing many of her students' thoughts and feelings alongside with her family. It gives us the chance to see the waves and transformations in the university environments of that time and their inner paradoxes. Her book has been translated into many languages and became the bestseller in the United States.

Azar Nafisi was born in Tehran in 1955. She is the daughter of former Major of Tehran, whom the Shah imprisoned in 1970s as a result of conflicts and rivalries by the elite. Her mother, who is seen intermittently throughout the book, was among the first women to be elected to the Iranian Parliament. Her book stands out with her different style of approaching the problems and telling the events. Different from the other writers the characters narrated are not in constant action, yet she generally telling the events with flashbacks and anecdotes given as examples of the events.

Nafisi's memoir starts from the date 1995, she gives us the details behind her resignation from her position from the University of Allameh Tabatabai as an academician in the English Language and Literature Department. She states everything was "unpredictable" under the new regime. She states: "Universities once more become the targets of attack by the cultural purists, who were busy imposing stricter sets of laws, going so far as to segregate men and women in classes and punishing disobedient professors."¹⁸¹ She also gives striking examples from censorship at school;

How well could one teach when the main concern of the university officials was not the quality of one's work but the color of one's lips, the subversive potential of a single strand of hair? Could one really concentrate on one's job when what preoccupied the faculty was how to exercise word *wine* from a Hemingway story, when they decided not to teach Brontë because she appeared to condone adultery.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 9.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 11.

After experiencing these difficulties in her teaching life, she states her greatest dream was teaching in a school with a freedom of thought and behaviour. This is why she has built private group of discussion after retirement.

In the first chapter she presents the students that the reader will be learning in detail in the coming chapters. The first character she attracts our attention is Mahshid. Her family is a good supporter of the revolution and she was wearing the veil even before the revolution. In this part we are also given the segregation before the revolution as well. This time Mahshid is the one who is ignored and neglected as she chooses wearing the veil. She is banned from school for two years because of her affiliation with a religious group during the Shah period.¹⁸³

Another important theme we encounter in most of the memoirs, but obviously articulated in Nafisi's memoir is the action of "lying". As Thoreau asks in his essay *Civil Disobedience* "Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?"¹⁸⁴ Iranians choose to transgress them with the coverage like obeying them with lying. By doing this, they implicitly practice disobedience against the regulations of the new system. Nafisi adds: "Can we call the Revolutionary Guards the truth? We lie to them; we hide our satellite dishes. We tell them we don't have illegal books and alcohol in our houses."¹⁸⁵

Throughout the first chapter, she makes a comparison with Vladimir Nabokov's book *Lolita*, and the way the Islamic Republic and the new system behaves towards people. She states, they are both like defence attorneys who dazzle the people with their rhetoric and appeal to their higher sense of morality. Nabokov gives his villain in such a way that people get confused about the result of the actions, as does the Islamic Republic of Iran. As an example she

¹⁸³ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 13.

¹⁸⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*, <http://thoreau.eserver.org/civil2.html>

¹⁸⁵ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 17.

has given: ““We are not against cinema” Ayatollah Khomeini had declared as his henchmen set fire to the movie houses, ‘We are against prostitution!’”¹⁸⁶

She mentions the “shared intimacy” created within the class in her house. She states her students all shared their feelings for the class. They state coming to this Tuesday classes is like a pause from the real life and with these breaks in which they discuss literature and their lives secrets and confidantes helps them to recover and move on with the real life in a stronger way.¹⁸⁷

In the second chapter called “Gatsby” she goes back in time and tells about her first experiences after she turns back to Tehran for the first time. The first thing that she realizes is the big change even at the airport. The country that she has been looking forward to coming did no longer seem really welcoming anymore.

Moreover, we are given that after the Revolution everything that is acting as an opposing force to the new system has been destroyed. She states giving an example from one of Khomeini speeches: “We will close all parties except the one, or a few which will act in a proper manner . . . we all made mistakes. We thought we were dealing with human beings. It is evident that we are not. We will not tolerate them anymore.”¹⁸⁸

With the serious trials and accusations against the people who are thought to be acting against the regime after the revolution, it is suggested in the memoir that everyone in the society has growing concerns and fears about their everyday life. People are no longer able to pursue the life they were used to. Everybody is forced to change internally and externally at the same time in order to adapt to the new regime. Even some of the people that were wearing the veil eagerly before the revolution were not happy as they think that, the veil once the symbol of sacred relationship between God and them has become an instrument for power; turning the women into political signs and symbols.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 42.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 57.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 93.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 103.

In the second chapter called Gatsby, the writer tells us the dates that she was teaching *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald at the university. Here, she both tells about those years at the university which is right after the Iran hostage crisis in 1979. With the help of the book, she both discusses the changes in morals in Iran like the activities seemingly bourgeoisie and decadent now. She states the changes in morals of the people made it easier for the ruling elite to pass some of the reactionary rules. These include women's prohibition from acting on stage and singing.¹⁹⁰ She later discusses on the Revolution as a dream of the people which has come true and she states Islamic Revolution has done more harm to Islam than any other factor, by using it as an instrument of oppression.¹⁹¹ She also makes a commentary of the veil issue. She states since the prohibition of veil by Reza Shah in 1936, veil has gained a symbolic significance. Therefore, according to the writer, it was an important move for the ruling clerics to bring it back to the agenda among the first issues to be discussed.¹⁹²

The third chapter "James" starts with the annunciation of war with Iraq. After giving the reasons that lead to the Iraqi war she starts analyzing the backstage of the events. She states with the help of the war the country that has divided into different groups has united. As in the other memoirs we analyze, she is with the same idea that the war helped the conciliation of the regime by its citizens. She also puts a quotation from Ayatollah Khomeini saying: "This war is a great blessing for us!"¹⁹³

We also observe the implementation of the new regulations on clothing. With the new rules forced on women, she states she starts feeling like irrelevant and lost in her own home. With these confused feelings, she also starts thinking

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 108.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 109.

¹⁹² Ibid, 112.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 158.

about leaving the country or a way out of these everyday miseries, like we see in the other memoirs.¹⁹⁴

After the Iraqi war Tehran became a battle field between the two countries. In the memoirs the writers are also accusing the government for not doing anything except raising the propaganda effort boasting the Iranian people's eagerness for martyrdom.¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, she also mentions the changing psychology of the people with the effect of the war. The suffering of the city is also reflected on the faces, attitudes and behaviours of the people. The number of the students attending the universities has decreased as a result of the bombing attacks to the city.¹⁹⁶

She states, with the revolution they were actually looking for more rights for women, and that's the reason why many women supported the revolution. However, what happened was on the contrary. "Sharia Law replaced the existing system of jurisprudence and became the norm."¹⁹⁷

Later, in her descriptions of her private lessons with some of her students, we are also introduced to the other people's private lives and problems. Azin, who is kind of confused because of the regime's restrictions put on women. It is not hard to see that she feels so imprisoned with the strict rules put towards women that even wearing bright red nail polish under her gloves is something important for her.¹⁹⁸ She also gives us the account of her marriages and the physical and mental abuses she has been through in her marriages. These excuses were considered as insufficient for divorce by the legal courts and the writer states there were even cases "in which the judge not only refused the wife's request for divorce but tried to blame her for her husbands beatings..."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 172-173.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 206.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 207-209.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 261.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 266-271.

In the following pages another issue that attracts attention is the issue of love and relationships. The norms and the morals of the society make it impossible to observe love in the public space. It is all pushed backwards to the private sphere where it is hard to obtain love. She later also comes to the conclusion that as everyone is alienated from their own bodies they are somehow alienated from physical attraction. She states “We had always segregated sex from feeling and from intellectual love, so you were either pure and virtuous ... or dirty and fun.”²⁰⁰

The decision of leaving the country was a sudden one for the Nafisi family. She states the years of waiting, resentment and anger had suddenly caused an explosion in the reactions and this led their immediate decision to leave the country. She also concludes her closeness to her students and classes has also caused her to be detached from Iran.²⁰¹

She also criticizes the regime in that they are even putting restrictions on the usage of the imaginary works and she states: “To have a whole life, one must have the possibility of publicly shaping expressing private worlds, dreams, thoughts and desires, of constantly having access to a dialogue between the public and the private worlds.”²⁰² She supports with the boundaries drawn by the state; the people who are living a pre-set life in the public space are also interfered by the state in their private lives as the state is deciding on what they are reading, watching; therefore, thinking and dreaming as Nafisi calls it.

Nafisi’s memoir makes the reader think about the seriousness of the prohibitions and the censorship that is followed by the Iranian state. The writer leaves Iran in 1997, and in her last chapter she also makes a comparison of today with the past; which seems a little bit calmer and more looser however not really different in the main texture.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 273.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 304.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 315-317.

²⁰² Ibid, 339.

As a professor in literature, Nafisi has completely a different style of writing from the other writers. Connecting her own life story with the classical books, adds to the story's richness, makes her book more intense and more interesting. Some critics called her style as "densely layered" as it is woven with the novels *Lolita* and *The Great Gatsby* and the works of Jane Austen and Henry James turning her memoir into an artwork as well.²⁰³ Moreover, as she is also including her students' feelings and stories into the novels with the flashbacks of her life before she becomes a teacher and her family, the reader has a wider view of the culture and the people. Moreover, by putting samples of the classic books, she tries to make the reader discover the relation between those books and their lives, and urges her students to describe their own characteristics and wishes; instead of living the life they are given or forced into by the culture. She is hopeful towards the future, and wants her seven private students to be strong and hopeful.

Milani states, "self analysis, regarded as essential in some autobiographies is not the favoured objective of most of these works." She shows *The Memoirs of Taj os-Saltaneh* as an example. However, in the five memoirs under consideration, it can be said, the writers are also giving their self analysis, or at least a questioning of themselves; however, it should also be pointed that, this is not the same self revelation that we can see in the western autobiographies.²⁰⁴ It can be seen in Azar Nafisi's book more clearly. In her memoir, in her discussions with an old friend which she calls as her magician, she gives us the fears and paradoxes of her own self. She states, "You know, I feel all my life has been a series of departures." In the same page, she adds,

I told him that I wanted to write a book in which I would thank the Islamic Republic for all the things it had taught me – to love Austen and James and ice cream and freedom... He said, You will not be able to write about Austen without writing about us, about this place you discovered Austen... This is the Austen you read here, in a place where film censor is nearly blind and where they hand people in the streets and put a curtain across the sea to segregate men and women.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Nan Levinson, "Literature as Survival," *The Women's Review of Book 20* (Jul 2003): 24.

²⁰⁴ This issue will be exemplified in Chapter V while talking about the aims of the writers.

Therefore, it is evident that she is putting her thoughts and complexities in the memoir with the help of the dual discussions mainly with her magician. Among the memoirs we discussed, she is the only one who gives a self-scrutiny also with the help of another character in the novel. Her magician is also the person who helps her to believe the fact that she should leave Iran.²⁰⁶ The magician acts as a common sense for her inner conflicts. Therefore, Nafisi with her ornamented and rich way of narrating reveals a completely different style of writing.

With this memoir the writer has given a taste of the intimate thoughts and wishes of three generations in Iran. Therefore, she is both informing the reader about the gains of the struggles for women, and the path that led to those gains. Moreover, towards the end of the memoir while she was preparing for leaving Iran we are told that she recorded every detail in her journal.²⁰⁷ Therefore, according to the writer, this memoir is acting as a reminder for the writer and the people who have been through those years, and at the same time a depiction for others to learn about the feelings of the people who experienced the revolution.

Moreover, in an interview, Nafisi states, she says she is against the stereotypes drawn for all the nations especially for Iran. She states,

[f]irst of all, there are aspects of culture which are really reprehensible, and we should [all] fight against it. We shouldn't accept them. Second of all, women in Iran and in Saudi Arabia don't like to be stoned to death. It is not part of their culture. There are other things that are part of their culture that should be cherished and exchanged.²⁰⁸

Therefore, like Satrapi she also narrates her story in order to break the stereotypes drawn by the other societies. In all of these memoirs, the reader can see the urge to reveal their rich culture and history and customs, which are

²⁰⁵ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 338.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 320.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 334.

²⁰⁸ Birnbaum, <http://www.identitytheory.com/interviews/birnbaum139.php>

depicted in detail and cherished. Contrary to the general prejudices, in these memoirs the writers seem to be revealing another Iran, which is in love with literature, embracing their old poems and literary works and traditional days.

Thus, with these given points her memoir is also another important source to compare and analyse the transformations and changes after the revolution both in the public and private sphere with her precious analysis in her private class sessions with her students.

3.3.5 Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution and Leaving Iran by Afschineh Latifi

Another important memoir is *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution and Leaving Iran* by Afschineh Latifi. The memoir starts after the establishment of the Islamic Republic in February 13 1979.²⁰⁹

It is understood from the memoir that she has written the memoir in order not to forget those days and in order to tell the people what they have been through as a family. However, her memoir is still insufficient in making a generalization with the people who have lived the similar faith with them. Her memoir is more self-centred when compared with the others. Meanwhile, her memoir still richly involves Iranian customs and traditions, describing them in detail which can also be seen as another purpose for writing the memoir. Besides talking about their experiences of the Revolution she wanted to raise the consciousness of the people towards the culture of her nation. As an example, she has included a detailed description of how her parents met, and their wedding ceremony.²¹⁰ She describes her family relations with their friends and their life in Tehran during and after the Shah period. Therefore, her memoir is very informative for the reader to get a glimpse of the everyday life of Tehran during and before the revolutionary period, within their family circles.

In the first chapter, the reader is given the last four months of, her father,

²⁰⁹ Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution and Leaving Iran*, 2.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 23-27.

Colonel Mohammad Bagner Latifi, who was charged with several counts of murder from a demonstration in 1978 September; "when a number of antigovernment protestors were killed by gunfire."²¹¹ He is accused of complicity in their deaths. During the portrayal of the trials, the prejudiced manners of the revolutionary judges and the courts are emphasized. Despite all the evidence that prove the colonel was not in Tehran at that time, the court did not count the evidence.

The first chapter is also important as it presents the transformation period. We are provided with hints that under the pressure of the regime the people are somehow changing even if they are resistant to it. Later, we witness the change slightly entering into the lives of the families. Later, in a letter her father, who is in prison, starts to put some praising for Khomeini in order to impress the guards in the prison. He states: " 'Everything is good under the shadow of the Imam.' This last part was for the benefit of the guards, who clearly read the notes."²¹²

The second chapter named as 'family history' goes back to the time when her parents met. The story here starts in 1938 in Tehran when Iran is still under the leadership of Reza Khan, who tried to modernize Iran and remove antiquated laws "like the one requiring women to be veiled in public- a decision that would eventually come back to haunt him."²¹³

In this chapter, and the following third chapter, we realize her dad has managed to reach to the higher ranks in the army after working very hard. In September 1976, her father is transferred to Tehran from Kermanshah "to take over as commander of the engineering unit of the Guard'e Shahanshahi, a prestigious division of the military."²¹⁴ We also see in these chapters that she has devoted a large place to the explanation of the customs. One can easily learn about the engagement and marriage traditions. As an example; she states while

²¹¹ Ibid, 11.

²¹² Ibid, 6.

²¹³ Ibid, 20.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 38.

describing the wedding of her parents:

Mom and dad sat on two small stools in front of a Muslim clergyman, with the engagement cloth, the *sofreh'e aghd*, spread out in front of them. Two silver candelabras and a silver mirror were laid out on the cloth, along with a copy of the Koran, a small dish of honey, almonds wrapped in white lace, a tray of bread and sweets, and freshcut flowers.²¹⁵

In the part quoted above, if we try to read between the lines, it is also clearly seen that the religion and the traditions are playing an important role also during the shah period.

Writer is coming from a family who is highly educated and their social status is above the average level. She and her siblings have been educated in the best private schools in Tehran and they live in a huge palace-like house with nice belongings inside. In these chapters, we are also given hints from the daily life activities like, having meals, watching television and movies. During this chapter she also accepts the fact that she was spoiled as a child who gets whatever she asks for.

The unrest that had been brewing for many years was coming closer to its peak point. The Shah was accused of running a repressive regime, and resistance that began with the mujahideen groups followed by the students and the *bazaari* who ran the city's markets and the bazaars.²¹⁶

The writer's father was under the command of Shah and within the family nobody was against the Shah regime or criticizing it. However, even within those circumstances and at the age of nine, she realizes the other side of the country where there were people who were working two or three jobs to earn their living however, still not successful, when, at the palace, "the life remained as lavish as ever".²¹⁷ Another accusation for the Shah by the fundamentalist side was that they believed under his rule with the quest for modernization, he has turned the people away from God.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 27.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 49.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 50.

The next chapter is about the period the Shah and his family left Iran. On January 16, 1979, after he left the country, contrary to some believes, he could never turn back. In this chapter called “the revolution” the author tells us about the transformations in daily life routine and rules. She also explains the ways that her family is running away from the new regime; the change of house they are living in, the change of the car they are using and finally the changes in mundane daily living styles; like banning make up of women, the obligation to wear chador for women and long sleeved shirts for men. Everything that symbolizes western attitudes was banned by the new regime.

In the following chapter, the tough life waiting for the family after the departure of Shah is recounted. The military is one of the first targets of the new regime and it does not take so long for Afschineh’s father to be arrested and executed as already told with details in the first chapter. After that a life of tortures is awaiting the whole family. The *pasdars*, Khomeini’s self styled enforcers, who has mainly came from Palestine to support the new regime, were searching the family belongings – house and car- over and over again with the suspicion that the family is smuggling. The family was under constant surveillance by the pasdars and the people supporting the new regime. Even someone tried to burn their house once.²¹⁸ After all these the closure of the girl’s school makes it even harder for the family. After that their mom searched for the other options in the foreign countries and decided to send the girls to a German school in Vienna which is told with its reasons and process in detail in the chapter called “flight”.

The chapters seven and eight named “Austria” and “Sacré Coeur” successively, narrate the orientation process and the sisters’ new school in Austria. Their mother cannot afford the money for all and dealing with the legal case that their grand-mother opened against them in order to get the half of the money her son Bagher Latifi left behind to the family in his will. According to the then adopted Islamic law, the mother of the deceased son was entitled to part

²¹⁸ Ibid, 62.

of the heritage.²¹⁹ The writer narrates the hard times and siblings getting close to each other during those times.

In the eighth chapter, she illustrates their alienation from the public and the struggle to get acceptance from the others in the school. During that period they have given themselves to spending money without even realizing the amount of it as little children. These expenses together with their mother's losing the case against her mother in law, caused them to have huge financial worries about the future. Their mother decides to send them to America to live with her brother for a while as she is in no state to provide the money for the school in Sacré Cour.

In the chapter named "America" we are given an account of the new hopes and dreams of the family since they think the new land is the land of opportunities which later on turns out to be nothing but dreams. In this chapter we are also presented with the new changes within Iran. The war going on with Iraq has made everyone concerned about the future of the families. Therefore, most people are trying to migrate to other countries. After settling in America new difficulties are waiting for the sisters. Having almost no friends at all within a totally different environment first they give themselves to watching TV waiting all the time for the Sunday calls from their mother who stayed in Tehran with their two brothers. She has been struggling to get visas for the boys, which is a huge struggle as the U.S embassy in Tehran has long since been closed. Later, she manages to get a tourist visa for herself from Turkey but the demand for her sons is denied. Therefore they have to wait one more year to see their mother.

In the next chapter, we observe an improvement in the sisters' lives as they are both happy with the works they are in. In the twelfth chapter, the writer decides to become a lawyer.²²⁰ On the other hand we are given the situation in Iran which is deteriorating. Not being able to get any visa for the boys to

²¹⁹ Ibid, 82.

²²⁰ Ibid, 208.

America, their mom takes the boys outside the country via France in 1986.²²¹ The family life in Paris is also devoid of luxury and they are trying to get visas to America. In the meantime, the boys start a local school and the girls who have already had their green cards are also stuck in America as they lack money.

In these chapters, a recurring problem they face in their relationships is the problem of communication with the opposite sex. She gives examples from her encounters with the opposite sex. She states; “I’d notice a cute guy, but dating wasn’t even in the realm of possibility. I had never had a boyfriend in my life...”²²² Her sister who is two years older is also having the similar problems as she is not “experienced” either. The writer states once she met with a boy, however could not find what to share even when talking with him.²²³ The opposite sex relations was a real challenge for them.

Later, the family manages getting visa for the boys and the girls move to a bigger house in Virginia Beach.²²⁴ The next chapter tells the hardships they have been through in their new life. The fact that they are too crowded makes it harder for them to find a house. The house expenses and the crowded family makes everyone work very hard to cover the expenses.²²⁵

The writer also describes her mother’s personality of not showing her real feelings to outside. Even when she is so tired and anxious she seems happy to the outside world.²²⁶

In 1995, they are visiting Tehran after fifteen years. We are given a glimpse into her thoughts and feelings years after she left home. She visits the places with a huge astonishment as everything has changed a lot. These feelings also represent alienation for her. As they travel around the country they are

²²¹ Ibid, 211.

²²² Ibid, 217.

²²³ Ibid, 218.

²²⁴ Ibid, 219.

²²⁵ Ibid, 237-238.

²²⁶ Ibid, 240.

faced with the new rules among the country; like not giving rooms to unaccompanied females in the hotels. She is also revealing her feelings towards the new regime in Iran in this chapter.

In the last chapter named 'home', the setting is America again. With their savings they buy a house with a garden, which was a dream of their mother since the beginning. The story ends with their becoming together under their new "home" which is America now.²²⁷

Afschineh Latifi's *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution and Leaving Iran*, is a book which is harshly criticized in the reviews. Although she has been through the same things as the other writers, she describes them in a different way. Her father was an officer who was working for the Shah Regime, her father and her family in general had a positive attitude towards the Shah regime. Her father was later executed by the Islamic republic. This also puts her memoir into an important position to include into the thesis. This memoir is chosen as it tells the story of the revolution from a different perspective and the experiences that the family has been through are also different from the other writers.

Latifi supports the Shah regime as her father was a member of his army. She is the daughter of a Persian Shiite family whose fortune has totally changed after the revolution. However, instead of telling the miseries and difficulties the family has been through, which could have been an interesting memoir with a background of hers, she chooses to describe their survival in Europe and America as students and their feelings about that. Still the first half of the memoir gives a good account of the effects of the revolution on the family and a good family history with references to cultural and traditional events. Secondly, this memoir is also answering the question what the writers are thinking about the Iran after the revolution. She also includes a chapter which gives us their visit to Tehran again with references to the current feelings.

Latifi also offers a different way of sharing her memories with the reader. Starting from the death of her father, which is, in a way, the climax of

²²⁷ Ibid, 312-320.

the story for their family history, she explains the other parts of the story by flashbacks and flash forwards. Her memoir is really strong with the style and the story in the first half. However, in the second half she adopts an informative style giving the events in an order. It can be argued that her memoir lacks the sincerity that it has at the beginning. The story of her parents seems more important than her education life in Vienna which she has given a large place in her book. She is also criticized by not dealing with the hardships her family has been through, and telling the story of her education and shopping in Vienna.

Thus, we have examined the reasons why these five memoirs are chosen one by one in detail. It has been claimed that these memoirs can also be called bildungsroman as they show the writers' lives from childhood to adolescence. The first change in the private experiences the reader will realize is that, the memoirs portray the altering attitude of the writers towards the environment they are living in. These writers were all born around the 1960s, the eldest being Nafisi, born in 1955 and the youngest Latifi and Satrapi, both born in 1969. As Wanner states in her review for Hakakian's book, these books also "follow a personal passage to womanhood."²²⁸ During the revolutionary period, these writers were all youngsters and experienced their adolescence in a noteworthy and turbulent period of Iran. The memoirs have also given writers changing attitudes towards the events around them. The writers grow up to be conscious individuals from the child that was trying to give meanings to the various changes around them. As the writers change into conscious individuals, they start to question the political and social environment around them and their relationship with and feelings towards it.

Endowed with different characteristics and interests; all of these writers are prominent figures among Iranian writers. Given these facts, it can also be argued, living in a different country for a long period of time has also given these writers time to estrange themselves to think about what they have been through. Moreover, they can write their memoirs with the knowledge of the

²²⁸ Irene Wanner, " 'Journey from the Land of No' : Memoir Paints Child's life in Shifting 1970s Iran," *The Seattle Times*. August 22, 2004, http://www.royahakakian.com/newsletter/seattle_times.html

world other than theirs which makes the memoirs richer in style and multi-dimensional while making judgements on the events.

When looked at the memoirs as a whole, as Milani states; "...most of the works have the manifest intent of recording the unfolding of a specific event."²²⁹ In the memoirs taken as cases for this research, that specific event that appears as the external force for the writers to reveal their memories is the Revolution; and the traumas, the consequences and the transformations that it entailed. Milani also states that "[t]he very act of writing these personal narratives is presented at times as a sort of duty, a mission sometimes divinely planned, sometimes politically or socially mandated."²³⁰ In the writing of the memoirs, it is implied that the writers are somehow feeling responsible to reveal the events that they have been through.²³¹

Another issue is that autobiographical writing was not abundant in Iranian Literature. There are few examples of writers before the revolutionary period, therefore, it can be concluded that these women are also placing their writings within an all-women tradition. In the memoirs, they are giving references to other literary works of Iran as if in an attempt to put themselves in that literature. As Milani states in her book, the novelist Shahrnush Parsipur states;

I write...because I have a limited ancestry- Rabe'e 'Adaviyee [the eighth-century Muslim Saint], a few mystics, half-famed, half-crazed, Tahereh Qorratol'Ayn, Parvin E'tessami, Forugh Farrokhzad, Simin Daneshwar, Simin Behbahani, and those of my own generation: Mashid Amirshahi, Goli Tarraqi, Ghazaleh 'Alizadeh, Mihan Bahrami, and possibly a few others who constitute the whole repertoire of my written and attempted literary tradition.²³²

When looked from a different perspective; as Shari Benstock states, like in most of the women memoirs, these memoirs also include the

²²⁹ Milani, "Veiled Voices: Women's Autobiographies in Iran," 13.

²³⁰ Ibid, 13.

²³¹ The effect of this feeling of 'social commitment' will also be analyzed in Part VI, as it can also be counted among the issues that are turning women into activists within the society.

²³² Milani, *Veils and Words*, 12.

expected issues of women's autobiography, women situated between conflicting and mutually constricting roles (wife, mother, daughter, sister, lover); women placed in strict societies that make rigid distinctions between 'men's world' and 'women's domain', between the public sector and the domestic, . . . , public women defying patriarchal definitions to open new avenues of professional and personal experiences for women.²³³

These common issues that are seen in the women's memoirs in general, are also mentioned in the memoirs that are the focus of this study. However, these elements are also shown as a form of oppression of the culture and the regime; it is evident that these women have complaints about the wider dominant culture. Their complaints do not rise from a feministic sensitivity. They are derived from sociological and ideological restraints put on the individual in general and women are also shown as the more downtrodden and the injured part from the regime ideologies. Therefore, it appears that, these writers are not in the pursuit of feminist criticisms, or not looking for or supporting gradual changes within the society while writing their memoirs. The mentioned elements are also found within the memoirs as cases for depiction of the oppressive and patriarchal society they are living in then. With these in mind, it can be said that the memoirs we examine are giving good accounts of women's positions and lifestyles in Iran, showing the struggles of the women under the regimes; however, it is also true that these memoirs are not written as an account for women's suffering in Iran. They are depicting the struggles of the whole family and nation in general, during the revolutionary period.

Thus, within the three parts under this chapter, first of all, the main debates about the memoir usage in the different fields of study and the points to be noted while working with memoirs are mentioned. Firstly, I divided the scholars under two headings one supporting and the other opposing the usage of memoirs in researches. The first group, including the scholars like Mandelbaum, Burnett, Angell, Becker and Burgess, points the importance of the usage of personal narratives within the other researches. They point the importance of

²³³ Benstock, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, 5.

their usage in history, anthropology, sociology and international relations although they sometimes were previously neglected. Among the positive inputs of the memoirs, mainly the issues; that they give another perspective to the official documents and help the reader to interpret them successfully is argued. Moreover, that the memoirs are the direct records of the periods giving the truths of the writers and providing a better understanding to the cultures is also underlined. Finally, the importance of these kinds of sources while studying the cultural changes is noted. With further reference to Kluckhohn it is stated that memoirs are very important when studying the transformation periods within history. This element is important as this thesis is also studying the Revolutionary period in Iran, which ended up in great changes for the politics, culture and social life of the country. The second group, including Faraday, Boas, Barthes, Lacan and Foucault are sceptical about scientific value of the memoirs. They argue that the writers of the memoirs are playing with the past and revealing the fictitious truth. Thus, with the given examples, the importance of working with memoirs while studying the changes in the society is noted. With these discussions, it is revealed that the memoirs can especially bring new perspectives in the studies on the Iranian Revolution and that they are prominent sources while studying the changes in the society.

In the second part, the first debate about the five memoirs under discussion is stated. The reasons why these memoirs are taken as Iranian although the writers are narrating their stories originally in a foreign language are given. Firstly, the writers are narrating their stories with the language they feel most comfortable is argued. Moreover it is also stated that, writing in a foreign language and country also sets them free from the restraints of the Iranian government, and this makes it easier for them to mention whatever they want without worrying about censorship. Moreover, English is seen as a direct language which simplifies for the reader to understand the writer without getting confused.

On the last part, the reasons why these five memoirs are selected for this study is explained in detail. Within the brief summaries of each book, it is

argued that the main factors are; firstly they all are examples of different points of views, written by the people coming from different backgrounds and using various style of revealing themselves. Secondly, they are all depicting the same time period and finally, their revealing their personal opinions about the revolution and changes in Iran which provides a different view towards the revolution. Finally, that in general that these writers' families are prominent figures in that period is argued. It is also pointed that these five memoirs constitute good cases for this study as they cover both pre and post revolutionary period and the transformations in the society. In all, we have covered the discussions of first priority about the memoirs concerning the research in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

WHY THE IRANIAN WOMEN STARTED WRITING MEMOIRS

This chapter will try to analyze various reasons that lead to the boom of women's memoir writing in Iran. The Islamic Revolution has put women into a very prominent position both in its ideology and practice. Likewise, women writers put the Iranian Revolution at the core of their memoirs. As Georges Gusdorf states, "The genre of autobiography seems limited in time and in space. It has not always existed nor does it exist in everywhere ... It asserts itself only in recent centuries and only on a small part of the map of the world."²³⁴ Therefore, in the memoirs discussed, the time period and the events narrated are limited. The Islamic Revolutionary process is at the core of each memoir. That also seems to be the most important catalyst for the writers that persuaded and caused them to write their memoirs.

In the same way, critics are of the idea that the contemporary movements around the world have increased the importance given to the memoirs. There have been many examples which prove the number of autobiographies increase after the mass social and revolutionary movements. Barbre, Webster and Farrel et al state that,

[c]ontemporary political movements have capitalized in life stories in their efforts to transform society and women within it. In the course of the Chinese Revolution, women came together to 'speak bitterness', recounting lives of pain and persecution at the hands of patriarchal families.²³⁵

Another point is made by Hart, according to her, "there occurred in the

²³⁴ Gusdorf Georges, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. James Olney ed (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 29.

²³⁵ Barbre, Webster and Farrel, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, 261.

twentieth century a ‘renaissance’ of women’s autobiography in relation to movements for social change.”²³⁶ The changes in the world like the Second World War and the revolutionary movements raised the interest towards marginal and different voices which in return give an importance to the women’s autobiographies. Therefore, it can be concluded that revolution is the prominent element that forced the writers to narrate their life stories.

In the memoirs discussed writers talk about the revolution in detailed analysis. The writers start from the general discussions about the revolution and then reveal extra information that the researcher cannot find in research books. In general, also as a result of diverse causes and intentions, the writers devote themselves to writing their life stories. Apart from the Revolution there were also some other side factors that forced and gave way to the emergence of the women writers in Iran.

This chapter will trace the historical evolution of women writers in general in Iran and the path that led to the start of women’s memoir writing in Iran. It will also give a brief analysis of the previously written women prose writings and debate on the different causes of memoir writing as they also have a great influence in the Iranian memoir writing in order to provide a framework for the context in which the memoirs emerged.

4.1.The Possible Reasons Behind the Emergence of Memoirs in Iran

“Autobiography... is an attempt to represent the self through writing,”²³⁷ Milani states in her article. Iranian women’s memoirs, which were previously poor in numbers, gained an explosion after the Iranian Revolution, especially in the last decade. The memoirs mainly depict the experiences of the writers and their surrounding community giving a priority within the revolutionary process. However, apart from that triggering factor, each memoir has its own way of depicting the history of the writer by emphasising some elements more than the

²³⁶ Hart, *Revolution and Women’s Autobiography in Nineteenth- Century France*, 173.

²³⁷ Milani, “Veiled Voices: Women’s Autobiographies in Iran,” 1.

others. According to Vanzan these autobiographical writers are actually emancipated women, who are now away from the restrictions of the culture. She also argues being written originally in a foreign language, these memoirs actually aim at the foreign audience at the first glance. What can be said is that they show the reality in order to erase the biased opinions given about their culture and country. Given these and many other examples, we can come to the conclusion that, escaped from the restrictions of the regime, the Iranian women writers in exile are also pushed by the contentment and comfort of the environment around to write their memoirs. However, they each have other side effects that pushed them to embark on writing their memories. Before entering into the discussion of the possible reasons behind the sudden boom of memoir writing we will examine the evaluation of women writers in Iran.

4.1.1. The Evaluation of Women Writers

New Critics around the world were concerned with separation of literary works from the authors' identity and the questions surrounding the author and the relationship of the work to its author. They regard the text itself as a "quasi-sacred edifice" and dealt only with the text itself. In our time however, this idea of the new critics has been highly challenged. With the emergence of the new movements and revolutions all around the world now it is more important to ask the question "who is speaking?"²³⁸ Text is thought to be attached to the material structures of its production. The stance of autobiography is described as "a representative of the time, a mirror of its era."²³⁹

These ideas gave an importance to the study of the autobiographies. Moreover, as Summer also points out, autobiographies, which gained importance after the renaissance and reform periods in the world scene, are not

²³⁸ Janice Morgan, "Subject to Subject/ Voice to Voice: Twentieth Century Autobiographical Fiction by Women Writers," in *Redefining Autobiography in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction: An Essay Collection*. Janice Morgan, and Colette T. Hall eds (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc. 1991), 3-4.

²³⁹ Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 2.

only individual works but also give great accounts of the community and the society that the writer is living in.²⁴⁰ She also gives a reference to Paul de Mann, who states “[w]e assume that *life* produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life...”²⁴¹ Therefore, upon these discussions autobiographies started to gain importance in the literary area.

On the other hand, when the literary history of Iran is examined, there are really few examples of women’s personal narratives. According to the critics the main reason for this delay in writing the personal narratives of Iranian women is mainly a result of the Iranian culture “that creates, expects, and even values a sharply defined separation between the inner and the outer, the private and the public.”²⁴² The Iranian culture manifests “deindividualization” and protection of the self against the public. Even the proverbs of the culture like “save face”, “protect appearances” uplifts and glorifies maintaining respect and self respect.²⁴³

Among the rich Persian Literary history, prior to 1931 there is only one mention of a female writer, Sheherezad -the mythical storyteller of the book of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Ansari and Martin also state that until the 1940s women writers were “virtually non-existent on the Persian literary scene. The country’s culture, which developed in a patriarchal contest, did not allow female writers to emerge; therefore, in the literary history of Iran we find only sporadic female names.”²⁴⁴ Between the years 1924-1941 even though there were few

²⁴⁰ Doris Summer, “Not Just a Personal Story,” in Brodzki, Bella and Celeste Schenck. *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography* (Ithaka and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 107-118.

²⁴¹ Summer, “Not Just a Personal Story,” 119.

²⁴² Milani, “Veiled Voices: Women’s Autobiographies in Iran,” 2.

²⁴³ Ibid, 2.

²⁴⁴ Anna Vanzan, “From the Royal Harem to a Post-Modern Islamic Society,” in *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran*. Sarah Ansari and Vanessa Martin (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), 88.

changes in the legal position of women in Reza Shah Period²⁴⁵, the emphasis given on education as an extension of the modernization process gave important pace to the education of women. This led to a rise in the opening of the girl's schools and at the same time created chances for the educated women to work as teachers in the schools. According to Sabahi, with the implementation of Literacy Corps, who were specially aimed to reach the rural areas, the illiteracy rate in Iran was successfully decreased after the mid-1970s.²⁴⁶ Therefore, the new breakthroughs like the secularization of the civil code and the implementation of the civil organizations have given way to the education of women, and appearance of the prose writing by women in public subsequently.²⁴⁷ During the following years it can be said that the women were struggling for the basic rights which in return caused them to think literature not as a priority. During the 1940s and 1950s as Basmenji states, fifteen women writers entered literature. However, their works were not very different from the predecessor male writers, and did not have considerable literary value according to the critics.²⁴⁸

At the same period with the growing social position of women in the domestic and social arena, women writers started flourishing in Iran. After they achieved success in these arenas more women started dealing with arts. In the 1960s Iran had experienced a boom in the number of women writers and the creativity of their work was also considerable.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ These historical developments are already discussed in the second chapter.

²⁴⁶ Farian Sabahi, "Gender and the Army of Knowledge in Pahlavi Iran, 1968-1979," in *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran*. Ansari, Sarah and Vanessa Martin (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), 99-113.

²⁴⁷ At this point, a small note has to be added regarding the inpecularity of the issue to Iran. According to critics, the middle-class women born around the world in the 1890s and 1915, started working as clerks and teachers. The working for them is not only an issue of economic independence, "but also the primary basis for the psychological and sociological identity." (Barbre, Joy Webster and Amy Farrel, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, 195.) Therefore, in the worldly arena also the importance on the education of women and the rise in women's entry in the literary arena follows a proportional course.

²⁴⁸ Kaveh Basmenji ed, *Short Stories by Iranian Women* (London: Saqi Books, 2005), 10.

²⁴⁹ Basmenji, *Short Stories by Iranian Women*, 10.

Another important point is that, although there are no legal restrictions on women in the economic field, - i.e. Islam is not restricting her economic independence, or she is not banned from buying or selling goods, or engaging in any transaction. - However, she is mostly excluded from the economic and public arena and her “theoretical independence” could not become true. As Milani quoted from Virginia Woolf, authority and respected privacy are the prerequisites for a woman to be a writer, and they were not easy to get in the Iranian Society.²⁵⁰ When we examine the history of the memoir writers in question here, it is easy to realize that all of these writers have got their economic freedom and they come from a family which gives importance to the educational and economic rights of their daughters.

Between the years 1970 and 1990, the ratio of the women writers to men stayed the same: one to five. However, the transformation of the political scenery and the social uprisings caused the introduction of new considerable writers into the literary scene. Shahrnoosh Parsipour is among those notable writers, whose writings are about women who are trying to escape from their boring lives, bored from pressures. She “describes the anguish rooted in the historical and traditional legacy of women as the inferior sex from the viewpoint of a disturbed, distorted mind.”²⁵¹

Afterwards, from the early works that were produced, from classical literature, to Forugh Farrokhzad, it can be deduced that women writers have been lamenting on the restrictions put on their personal expressions. As Milani points out in her essay, Leyli says: “He is a man, I am a woman! ... He can talk and cry and express the deepest feelings in his poems. But I? I am a prisoner.”²⁵² As for the themes; Vanzan states that women were narrating the stories of their lives in their fictional works as well. The themes of the fictional works included women and the family in general. Women express their life struggles, thoughts and fears in their fictional works. As most scholars point out,

²⁵⁰ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 54-55.

²⁵¹ Basmenji, *Short Stories by Iranian Women*, 12.

²⁵² Milani, “Veiled Voices: Women’s Autobiographies in Iran,” 4.

their stories revolve around the domestic sphere in general. Women and the family and the “the veil” is among the leitmotifs in those fictional works produced before the revolutionary period.²⁵³

4.1.2. Unveiling and Going Public

After giving the history of the evolution of the women writers in Iran briefly, now we will go on with the discussions that reveal why it is hard to become a woman memoir writer in Iran. According to Basmenji, when the works of women writers in Iran in the fiction genre is observed, it is interesting that “the sufferings of women in a patriarchal, male dominated society, [are] mostly depicted in a naturalist style.” She gives examples from widely known Iranian writers like Simin Daneshvar and Mahshid Amirshahy, who depict an oppressive atmosphere in Iran during the last two decades of the Revolution.²⁵⁴ Therefore, the Iranian culture, which is highly patriarchal, is one important point to ponder on when dealing with the women writers.

Another important point to note about the emerging writers is the discussion about the veil. The use of veil has even entered the fictional works of women writers in different aspects. The veil has been used as a symbol for women’s closure to the public sphere in their works. In poetry and fiction, it is used as an obstacle for women to appear as they are. The appearance of writers in the public scene is also linked by critics to their use of the veil. Most critics state that no veiled woman has a published work that gives the details of the writer’s life. Although, this belief is challenged by the writers who depict veil as a symbol of women’s freedom and a way to enter in the public sphere, the proportion of the veiled women and published works are still really disputable.²⁵⁵ Moreover, as Milani underlines in her article; “Women’s textual

²⁵³ Vanzan, “From the Royal Harem to a Post-Modern Islamic Society,” 91-93.

²⁵⁴ Basmenji, *Short Stories by Iranian Women*, 11.

²⁵⁵ Vanzan, “From the Royal Harem to a Post-Modern Islamic Society,” 93.

self- representation cannot be divorced from her cultural representation.”²⁵⁶ Therefore, in Iranian culture, which glorifies keeping the self secret and closing the self to the public, and where there are boundaries, walls and veils everywhere to separate the public and the private; it is not surprising to see that the autobiography genre have not flourished. Women have always been considered as the personal, the private and the secret according to the historical cultural understanding that has been coming through the ages.

Moreover, it is also striking to see that most of the women who acted against the expectations of the society experienced a bitter end as a result. As an example, Fotuhi, who wrote the first novel by a woman in Iran, *Savushun*, in 1968, lost her sanity as a result of unveiling herself and being put into prison. In the prison, she went on her writings and in the end put them in a locked box, which was taken care of by her brother. There is a rumour that there must be lots of personal narratives that have been buried and “left to oblivion in silence and isolation.”²⁵⁷

As another example for the above discussed issues, women’s movement to unveil is also associated with women’s efforts to become writers. As the pioneering women writers “unveiled both their bodies and their voices...they lifted the veil of secrecy to show the many faces underneath.”²⁵⁸ We can see examples of these women, who have devoted themselves to writing, despite the cultural oppressions and restraints put on the women.

An example of this is Tahereh (1814-1852) who can be evaluated as a case of opening the self to the public. She chooses to unveil herself in 1848. In her public preaching she showed the first examples of “first public autobiographical act in contemporary Iran...Hers was an assertion of a woman’s individuality and distinctiveness in an age that demanded nothing less than conformity and anonymity from its women.”²⁵⁹ In the end, she is executed by

²⁵⁶ Milani, “Veiled Voices: Women’s Autobiographies in Iran,” 6.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 7.

²⁵⁸ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 7.

²⁵⁹ Milani, “Veiled Voices: Women’s Autobiographies in Iran,” 8.

the government as she declared her new religious faith – Babism²⁶⁰ – openly.

This element of closing of the self to the public, however, has been hidden within the culture since the old times. Ellmann states, starting from art to most of other the literary works published before, talking or revealing about self is regarded as vulgar and immoral in Persian Culture. She states, “[t]raditionally, Persian art has been impersonal.”²⁶¹ Again according to Milani, in a community “where not only art has been mainly impersonal, an individual’s identity is closely tied to the community and where use of the first- person-singular pronoun is still hard for people and is often diffused a bit by *we*, writing an *I* book is not an easy task.”²⁶² In the memoirs which were written before the revolutionary period they generally described the author in terms of external events. They were more of a “personal account of history.”²⁶³ When a habit enters into the traditionally obtained characteristics of a culture, it is hard to change or get over it. The closing of the private and personal to the public as a cultural behaviour is widely reflected in the five memoirs studied as well; from Shah who hides his serious sickness even from his wife, to Afschineh Latifi who does not want to kiss her fiancée in front of the relatives, examples to this tradition are multiple. Latifi states: “When it came to displays of affection, I was very cautious in front of Mom . . . There were *no* displays of affection.”²⁶⁴ Likewise, in Nafisi’s memoir, in the references given to *Lolita*, the writer is focusing on the agreement of the students on the fact that it is “a story of life stolen by someone else.”²⁶⁵

Milani has also given examples from the interviews of women writers in Iran, in which they generally deny speaking about themselves. Forugh

²⁶⁰ “A system of doctrines proclaimed in Persia in 1844 by Ali Muhammad of Shiraz,” *The Colombia Encyclopedia*, sixth edition, 2007. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-Babism.html>

²⁶¹ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 205.

²⁶² *Ibid*, 206.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, 207.

²⁶⁴ Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Leaving Iran*, 289.

²⁶⁵ Levinson, “Literature as Survival,” 24.

Farrokhzad, as an example states, “[b]y God, discussing this seems to me a rather boring and useless task. Well anyone born has a birthday, ... and a handful of conventional and typical events have occurred in her life.”²⁶⁶ According to Milani, these are actually ways to avoid the general public interest in their lives and especially their relationship with men. It must be true when we are also reminded of Ellmann’s view concerning the women writers. She states; “books by women are treated as if they themselves were women, and criticism embarks, at its happiest, upon an intellectual measuring of bursts and hips.”²⁶⁷ Therefore, it can be argued that by writing their memoirs women are opening a new route in the traditional proprieties. From the given examples; the relationship between the revealing of self and veiling and the connection of these concepts to the traditions is explained. It is now time to have an overall look at the way the women reveal themselves within their memoirs.

4.1.3. The Revelation of Self

As explained above the traditional way of thinking within the culture expects women to be closed to the public arena and as argued above this is seen in different ways within the culture and kept women writers away from writing about themselves. Therefore, as Milani emphasizes these women memoir writers “created a sense of self divorced from the conventional definition of womanhood – a naked self, as it were – that is all the more vulnerable in a closed-in society where highly censored communication is the order of the day”²⁶⁸ In this context, it is important to recount the feelings of a student of Nafisi in her memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, her student who is still living in Iran sends a letter to Nafisi for the memoirs epilogue, she states;

[e]ach morning with the rising of the routine sun as I wake up and put on my veil before the mirror to go out and become a part of what is called reality, I also know another “I” that has become naked on the

²⁶⁶ Milani, “Veiled Voices: Women’s Autobiographies in Iran,” 10.

²⁶⁷ Mary Ellman, *Thinking about Women* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 29.

²⁶⁸ Milani, “Veiled Voices: Women’s Autobiographies in Iran,” 9.

pages of a book, in a fictional world, I have become fixed like a Rodin statue. So I will remain as long as you keep me in your eyes, dear readers.²⁶⁹

Therefore, as the writer points out what they are experiencing as reality is in fact a fictional world built by the Islamic regime and it is imposed on them; women cannot portray themselves as they really are in the real life. Women are acting in the public space, according to the image the leaders of the country want them to be represented. However, as the reader can deduce for herself, the real woman is revealing herself –her true feelings and reactions towards the events- with the help of these memoirs.

When looked from a different point of view, the revelation of the self in the five memoirs discussed is different from most of their western counterparts. In the memoirs discussed, the writers reveal their lives, thoughts, feelings and the circumstances they go through, and the society they live in; however, none of these memoirs give a self analysis like in Virginia Woolf's *A Sketch of the Past*. In these memoirs we are not constantly given the writers' inner struggle towards the constraints, rules, and the environment they are in; or a "construction of a self",²⁷⁰ in short we cannot put these autobiographies under the title of psychological autobiographies. In the memoirs examined, besides the revelation of the thoughts and feelings of the writer, the reader is given information about the society and the time period that the memoir is covering, and the feelings of the people. The reason behind this can also be counted as another factor to why and when these memoirs are written. As Benstock also pointed; "it is the question of place -of space- that absorbs the autobiographical writers' attention as well as the proverbial issue of time."²⁷¹ Then, all of these writers are actually dealing with a time and place. It is obvious that the revolutionary period and their life in Iran are at the core of the memoirs.

Likewise, Mason and Green argue, in women's memoirs "the self

²⁶⁹ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 343.

²⁷⁰ Benstock, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, 12.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, 26.

portrait often includes the real presence and recognition of another consciousness”²⁷², which can be called “the other.” We are shown in the memoirs that this “other” is suppressed by the society. The writers in question here devote themselves to writing their memoirs after getting out of that society. Moreover, Benstock states “female autobiographers are more aware of their ‘otherness’.”²⁷³ This is also apparent in the memoirs under discussion; especially, in Nafisi’s memoir, the part where we are given an account of how they form a private reading group is a good example. They start to discuss and disclose themselves to each other, within their private group. As Benstock points,

women can move beyond alienation through a collective solidarity with other women – that is recognition as women as a *group* can develop an alternative way of seeing themselves by constructing a group identity based on their historical experience.²⁷⁴

Likewise many critics, like Barbre, Webster and Farrel, state that, “in the contemporary western feminist movement, consciousness- raising groups allowed women to tell each other about their experiences, doubts and anger – without fear of judgement or punishment.”²⁷⁵ Therefore, the same discourse is examined in Iran in the example of Nafisi’s private reading group; it allowed the participants to disclose their experiences to their friends. Therefore, it can be deduced that the memoirs under discussion are not only individual works discussing the feelings and thoughts of the writer, but also more of a depiction of the period and a realization and questioning of the struggles of the nation as a whole from the writers point of view.

The reason behind that urge to reveal their history and identity might actually be hidden under what Virginia Woolf has also underlined: these women might have decided that they suffered a lot, and after travelling and

²⁷² Mason and Green, *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women*, xiii.

²⁷³ Benstock, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings*, 16.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 40.

²⁷⁵ Barbre, Webster and Farrel, *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, 261-262.

experiencing different cultures, and seeing other cultures' views towards Iran, they might have decided that the facts had to be revealed. Moreover, these writers who were living in exile find a freer space to express their feelings away from the restrictions and censorship of the government.²⁷⁶ Their being in exile is another important factor. As they were forced to leave their countries at some point in their lives, it can be argued that they wanted to remember their country with their memoirs. Examples of this is seen all around the world; like in the Palestinian people, who were inspired by uprootedness and living in Diaspora to write their memoirs.²⁷⁷ Moreover, as Hart states as an example from France, "implicitly masculine in the post-Rousseau romantic tradition the autobiography consigned women to the realm of silence and domesticity. But the revolution furthered the emergence of theories that permitted the women of this study to challenge the traditional conceptions of their social role and the autobiographical enterprise."²⁷⁸ It can also be stated that the atmosphere of enthusiasm of the revolution also pushed women to disclose their experiences in the end.

All in all, in Chapter 4, the women memoir writers in Iran and why they embarked on writing have been discussed through a detailed analysis looking at the issue from various facets. First of all, the development of women writers in Iran and the reasons that make them a minority in the literary arena has been handled. The traditional idea of closure of the self and private to the public which aroused as a primary factor has been discussed in detail. Later on, the early women writers who somehow opened themselves to the public and content of their works and the public attitudes towards them have been debated. Afterwards, another issue important concerning women memoir writers, the revelation of themselves and experiences and the way the Iranian women open themselves to the public, is examined. After various ways and factors the

²⁷⁶ The issue of censorship will be discussed in the Chapter VI in detail.

²⁷⁷ Faqir, *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*, 6.

²⁷⁸ Hart, *Revolution and Women's Autobiography in Nineteenth-Century France*, 11-12.

women write their memoirs have been revealed, in the next chapter, the common issues and characteristics within the memoirs will be sorted out.

CHAPTER 5

THE COMMON THEMES IN THE MEMOIRS

In the previous chapters, the peripheral factors about the memoirs, like what the prominent elements that should be kept in mind are when studying with memoirs, the historical evaluation of the memoirs and women writers of Iran; and why the women embarked on revealing their lives after the Revolution have been analyzed. In this part of the study, the focus will be on the content of the Iranian women's memoirs under discussion: common themes, ideas and characteristics in the memoirs and their positioning within history. While tracing the common experiences of the writers and making connections with the historical significance of these points, this part will try to give a wider perspective of the revolutionary process and its meaning and influence on the witnesses of the period. Although these memoirs were written by authors who are of different ethnic and class backgrounds, this part will reveal they have many issues in common and have varying opinions towards the regime and the Iranian revolution.

When the memoirs are analyzed in detail the common issues stressed can be classified within six categories. First in Part 1 which will be divided into seven subtitles, the comparison of the pre and post-revolutionary periods and the common issues about these periods will be examined. Then in Part 2 the depiction of the Mohammad Reza Shah Period within the memoirs will be examined with its equivalent examples from historical sources. In Part 2, the Iranian Revolution and its meaning for each writer will be discussed. Part 4 will be on the overall experiences, and especially the immediate changes about the transformation period which is given in detail within the memoirs. And the last

two parts will be mainly about the writers and Iranian women in general; again two recurring themes seen in the memoirs; the feeling of exile and women's becoming more and more active after the revolution will be analyzed by also giving examples to the memoir writers who decided to reveal their experiences after years of silence.

5.1. The Comparison Between Pre and Post Revolution Periods in the Memoirs:

As stated before, the Islamic Revolution seems to be the biggest catalyst that directed the writers to narrate their life stories and it can be pointed as the common turning point in each memoir. The memoirs give a detailed depiction of the pre and post revolutionary period which allows the reader to draw a relation between the two time periods. Here, the comparison will not be covering the legal and official changes because firstly, these are not easy to acquire from the memoirs, and secondly, they have already been covered in many studies and will totally be another field of discussion.²⁷⁹ Instead, this section will try to trace the comparison points for the pre and post revolutionary period that are spotted in all of the memoirs and try to locate them within the context of scholarly arguments. In the memoirs the reader is given accounts of the Revolutionary process, the family life, the characteristics, and ideas of the Iranian people. The environmental factors constitute another element which also affects the inner lives and thoughts of the people. At some points we observe the same struggles or problems are experienced without any change.

²⁷⁹ For more information or further study; For the changes during the Reza Shah era, see Amin Banani, *The Modernization in Iran: 1921-1941* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1961.) For translation of Family Protection Law of 1967 and its comparison with the current laws see F.R.C Bagley, "The Iranian Family Protection Law of 1967: A Milestone in the Advance of Women's Rights," in *Iran and Islam*. C.E. Bosworth ed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971.) For the comparison of the laws that have changed with regard to women, see Keddie, Nikkie and Lois Beck ed. *Women in the Muslim World* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Uni. Press, 1978.)

5.1.1. Struggle for Rights and Freedom:

When comparing the two time periods with reference to the memoirs a prominent common element which is seen in each side of the revolutionary process is the struggle for rights and freedom. During the revolutionary process, different groups coming from different backgrounds and belonging to different parties merged under the cause of democracy and freedom. The main purpose was to topple the dictatorial rule of the Shah in the name of democracy. In Pahlavi's memoir the reader notices, lots of people rise against the Shah as the liberation process goes really slowly and the people are after a more democratic regime. In terms of women, there were lots of reforms made during the Shah period – as an example, the family laws on polygamy and divorce -; however, they were very limited in content and the women who were in need of meeting their basic needs had no intention of asking for reversal of these rights. However, as Tabari states, with the revolution “many of these women had, in fact, participated in the movement to overthrow the shah's regime with the expectation that new arenas of women's rights and women's participation in social, political, and economic life would be opened. To their horror, from the outset they faced reversals not advances.”²⁸⁰ In Satrapi's memoir, it is clearly shown both before and after the revolution there are protests “for and against the veil”.²⁸¹ In both of these protests the people were looking for a freer atmosphere for their personal choices. Later, after the foundation of the republic in *Persepolis 2*, this time, the struggles of the people that are fighting for more freedom in the public space are recounted.²⁸²

In both periods we are given an account of the dissatisfaction of the people with the status quo and their ongoing struggles for more rights that ended up in vain. Hakakian directly portrays the wishes of ordinary people protesting

²⁸⁰ Azar Tabari, “The Women's Movement in Iran: A Hopeful Prognosis,” *Feminist Studies* 12, no.2 (Summer 1986): 350.

²⁸¹ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 5.

²⁸² Satrapi, *Persepolis 2*, 148.

against the Shah regime. They believe, the new regime will “make poverty history, [they] will be free to say and write anything [they] want because when Agha comes, SAVAK will be history, too.”²⁸³ This is only a snapshot of the wishes of the people for a more democratic life. However, Hakakian also talks about the disappointments of the people with the new regime. The reader is given scenes of protests and struggles for a better life. Hakakian says, after the revolution the principal at the school was changed, and the new principal has changed the rules according to the requirements of the Islamic republic. Then the reader finds out about the protests of the students. She states;

[a]ll our lives we had been taught the virtues of behaving, and now we were discovering the importance of misbehaving . . . We were rebelling for all those who had come before us and had never dared to. This was 1979, the year that showed us we could make our own destinies. We were rebelling because rebelling was all we could do to quell the rage in our teenage veins.²⁸⁴

This is also seen in the mass demonstrations of women “filling the streets of Tehran in opposition to the Regime’s incursion upon their rights.”²⁸⁵ Therefore, it can be concluded in both of the periods the people are in an ongoing struggle for more rights and freedom. Therefore as a result even shortly after the revolution, the disillusionment of the people started to come in sight within the society.

5.1.2. Ideological Suspicion

The ideologies of people took shape within the revolutionary process. As Dabashi mentioned; the Islamic Revolution started with “communal denial” as every other revolution.²⁸⁶ The citizens who were fed up with Shah’s policies

²⁸³ Hakakian, *Journey From the Land of No*, 107

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 169.

²⁸⁵ Hammed Shahidian, “The Iranian Left and the ‘Women Question’ in the Revolution of 1978-79,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no.2 (May 1994): 224.

²⁸⁶ Hamid Dabashi, *Theory of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1993), 3.

raised their voices against the monarchy. Existing discontent of the society overlapped with the constant manoeuvres of the Revolutionaries and the manipulations of the Islamists which made it easier for the Iranian citizens to get confused and blame the Shah Regime. As Farhi states, “the thought of constructing a nation on the basis of ideas, rather than an aggregation of existing cultural plurality”²⁸⁷ are hard to handle for the citizens of a country who are entering a completely new era with a force from the below. Moreover, as Dabashi also states; “the mobilizing power of ideas can generate and accumulate unmanageable difficulties for the state.”²⁸⁸ In Iran, where ethnic differences and traditions matter very much, both the Shah regime and the Revolutionaries have experienced these difficulties.

First of all, the Shah Regime seeing the signs of displeasure from the citizens tried to cope with the counter forces by redefining their policies, making democratization commitments and so forth. Therefore, trapped within the two different and evolving ideologies, the people had lots of questions in mind while entering in the mass protests which are expressed within the memoirs as well.

Within the memoirs, we are also given the private discussions between people and doubts and fears about what their world is turning into.²⁸⁹ The best examples of growing suspicions and doubts about the revolutionary beliefs are seen in Nafisi’s memoir. The people even start thinking how it would feel like to live without the veil and all constraints put on them.²⁹⁰ Living with the veil has created such an effective second personality for the women that they found themselves questioning how it would be without the veil. In Satrapi’s memoir we are provided with the ongoing discussions about the protests and the type of

²⁸⁷ Farhi, “On the Reconfiguration of the Public Sphere and the Changing Political Landscape of Postrevolutionary Iran,” 60.

²⁸⁸ Dabashi, *Theory of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, 3.

²⁸⁹ As stated before, with the importance of the emphasis on the “private” in the memoirs, the studies on this genre provides the advantage of learning what happens in the private sphere along with the public.

²⁹⁰ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 32.

the new regime and the promises given during nightly discussions. The intellectuals question the union of the Islamists and the Marxists and what the outcome will be.²⁹¹

Moreover, as Nafisi also states, during the course of the Revolutionary process, everyone is forced both internally and externally to adapt to the changes in the society. The new regime has changed the definitions of the words and turned them into new symbols as in the case of ‘veil’, which used to be a symbol for the sacred relationship between women and god, and later turned into a political symbol for the regime.²⁹² This challenged beliefs of the people that were using the veil before the revolution as a requirement of their belief. Nafisi refers to the Scott Fitzgerald’s book, *The Great Gatsby*, and defines revolution as a “question of loss and the loss of an illusion” as is the recurring theme of the book *The Great Gatsby*. She states in the revolution we also see a loss of an illusion and the cause that the people were fighting for before.²⁹³

Nafisi also reflects on the disappointments of the people that were fighting for the revolution before. One of her students who was a strong Muslim believer before the revolution reveals in one of the private classes that;

The worst fear you can have is losing your faith. Because then you are not accepted by anyone- not by those who consider themselves secular or by people of your own faith...If one day I lose my faith, it will be like dying and having to start new again in a world without guarantees.²⁹⁴

As another example, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, a filmmaker who was arrested by the Shah regime after attacking a police officer in Tehran in a pro-Khomeini guerrilla protest, states in an interview that “while [he] was in the prison, the religious factions split in two, and I was associated with the second faction, the faction that was less organized and more independent, and closely

²⁹¹ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 62.

²⁹² Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 103.

²⁹³ Ibid, 141.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 327.

identified with popular resistance.”²⁹⁵ This can also be shown as an evidence for the changing political views. Thinking that Mohsen Makhmalbaf was released from the prison in the course of the revolution, the switch in the opinions of the people occurred very quickly in some places.

Therefore, with comparison to the other sources it can be concluded that the Iranian citizens have dropped into an uncertainty and started to question the validity of their previous beliefs. This situation of the citizens deteriorated with the changes within the public arena as well.

5.1.3. Reshaping of the Public Space:

In the Revolutionary process, in which there was a power struggle, and revolutionary state building on the one hand, Iran experienced a “reshaping of the public space” on the other. According to Farhi, this can also be called the closure of the public space and it was based on three pillars; “clerical guardianship, representations of female modesty, and the cult of martyrdom.”²⁹⁶ When these three important elements are taken into account, clerical guardianship was among the most important innovations of the Islamic Republic, which was based on clerics’ claim to direct rule. With this code the guardian council was given the right to veto any code that is against the Islamic codes. Through this element, diversity of opinions and actions is eliminated. Women, under the clerical guardianship, are shown as the bearers of culture, which has to be protected by watchful eyes. They were depicted as the primary element as the leaders were in search of “authenticity and cultural revival.”²⁹⁷ “Behaviour, appearance, and range of activities, as well as public speech about women, came to be defined and regulated by the political and cultural objectives

²⁹⁵ Hamid Dabashi, “Once upon a Filmmaker: Conversation with Mohsen Makhmalbaf,” in *Close up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future*. ed Hamid Dabashi (London: Verso, 2001), 178.

²⁹⁶ Farhi, “On the Reconfiguration of the Public Sphere and the Changing Political Landscape of Post-revolutionary Iran,” 61.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 66.

of various political movements, the state and the leadership.”²⁹⁸ The veil has become a license to enter into the public space. These are also bounded to the fact that the revolution has obscured and changed the lines between the public and private life. As Farhi states,

[p]rivate choices became loaded with public political meaning and each individual’s legitimacy became dependent on his or her private morality. This invasion of “public” or “publicity” into what had formerly been considered “private” ... has been the bearer of much turmoil and anxiety over gender roles, the relationship between men and women, and the relationship among generations in Iran.²⁹⁹

As mentioned above, as an extension of reshaping of the public space, women become invisible in the public space. As Satrapi states in her graphic memoir, even the small children were subject to separation: “In 1979, we were in a religious school/ Where boys and girls were together. / And suddenly in 1980 /.../ We found ourselves veiled and separated from our friends.”³⁰⁰ Moreover, at the very beginning of her memoir Satrapi draws a picture of herself and her classmates indistinguishable from each other within the veil. She even draws herself to the far left in a half invisible way, as if to emphasize the invisibility and the marginality of the women.³⁰¹ Women’s invisibility is crystallized in the fact that they lose their freedom of being truly oneself in the public space. They have to behave as an “embodiment of correct values” which requires them to cover their bodies and behave within the expected patterns and which causes their real selves to become invisible. The public places are separated everywhere, in restaurants, busses, schools. Females and males have to be in separate places and behave according to the Islamic codes. As an example Nafisi states, when she was sitting with an old friend of hers in a

²⁹⁸ Farhi, “On the Reconfiguration of the Public Sphere and the Changing Political Landscape of Postrevolutionary Iran,” 66.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 59.

³⁰⁰ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 4.

³⁰¹ Satrapi, *Persepolis 2*, 3.

restaurant, he was taken to another table with the excuse that the Revolutionary Guards are coming for inspection.³⁰²

Moreover, as mentioned before, in Chelkowski and Dabashi's book, "the massive orchestration of the public myths" and the usage of "collective symbols" in the making of the Islamic Revolution and afterwards are also argued in detail within the memoirs.³⁰³ The use of these symbols, which also added to the discourses of the regime, helped the new republican regime to reshape the public space. In this process the 'cult of martyrdom' is the most prominent element as mentioned within the three pillars of the closure of the public space.

In *Perspolis 2*, while telling Satrapi's application for the graphic arts during the Islamic Republic, she describes the details of the picture she has drawn. She states;

copying a photo of Michelangelo's 'la pieta' about twenty times, on that day, [during examination] I reproduced it by putting a black chador on Mary's head, an army uniform on Jesus, and then I added two tulips, symbols of the martyrs, on either side so there would be no confusion.³⁰⁴

Therefore, penetrated into every mechanism of the state the cult of martyrdom can also be counted among the discourses to consolidate the power of the revolutionaries. Using the martyrdom myth made it easier for the revolutionaries to attract the attention of the masses on their side. As an example, before the revolution in the speech of Imam Khomeini, he shows the Shah as a criminal and declares the murdered people as the first martyrs of the revolution.³⁰⁵

Satrapi also describes a scenery of people carrying a dead body shouting

³⁰² Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 312-313.

³⁰³ Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging A Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 6.

³⁰⁴ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 127.

³⁰⁵ The speech is delivered forty days after the killing of demonstrators in Qom, in January 8, 1978. Iman Khomeini, *Islam and the Revolution* (London, New York and Bahrain: Kegan Paul, 2002), 212.

“here is another martyr” while they are shouting revolutionary slogans.³⁰⁶ Likewise, many people killed by the Shah is counted and advertised as a martyr of the revolution. The revolutionaries continued using the same discourse also after the revolution and during the Iraqi war to secure their followers and to accelerate the implementation of the new rules. Çalışlar and Çalışlar believe that the war and the martyr ideology agitated the usage of veil. According to the writers this ideology made it easier for the regime to put black dressing and use of hejab, which are not actually in the Islamic character. “In order not to behave against the martyrs” the regime could go on with its strict rules easily.³⁰⁷

As stated above in a quotation from Hakakian, the regime used every chance to put the martyrdom as a way of exploitation of the feelings and emotions of the masses.³⁰⁸ This ideology of martyrdom as used for more than thirteen hundred years ago, for Imam Hossein, who is thought as the men “whose virtue and bravery provide a shelter for all”³⁰⁹, is an ideology resurrected again in the process of the Revolution.³¹⁰ Martyrdom emerges as one of the most referred elements also by the memoir writers throughout their memoirs. Therefore, it is an element that should not be omitted while talking about the change within the public space and pre and post revolutionary

³⁰⁶ Later it turns out that actually the person has died of cancer.

³⁰⁷ İpek Çalışlar and Oral Çalışlar, *İran Bir Erkek Diktatörlüğü* (İstanbul: Gendaş Kültür A.Ş., 2004), 49.

³⁰⁸ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 145.

³⁰⁹ Bellaigue, *In the Rose Garden of the Martyrs: A Memoir of Iran*, 1.

³¹⁰ Nabavi gives an interesting side of this point in her essay; she states, it was in 1974 when Khorraw Golestorkhi, a Marxist poet and journalist, was charged with making an attempt on Shah’s family. In defense he made a statement paralleling Islam with Marxism. “Marxist-Leninist had first found social justice in the school of Islam, and then reached socialism”, moreover he makes a similarity between himself and the third martyred Imam, Hoseyn, “fighting the rootless Yazid”. He goes on by saying, “he [Hoseyn] was in a minority, whereas Yazid had the royal court, the armies, authority, and power. [Hoseyn] resisted and was martyred.” Therefore, within the history and the memoirs, we are given that the populist policies, which are generally based on the Islamic history and discourses are used to appeal the masses over and over again in Iran’s political scenery. Negin Nabavi, “The Discourse of ‘Authentic Culture’ in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s,” in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A Critical Survey*. ed. Negin Nabavi (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 91

elements. Thus, under the pillars of ‘clerical guardianship, representations of female modesty, and the cult of martyrdom’ the public space has entered into a radical change within the revolutionary period. As an extension of this element the transformation of the city should not be discarded when making a comparison within the pre and post revolutionary periods.

5.1.4. The Transformation of the City:

Another important factor that is pointed out in the memoirs is that, the city, Tehran, and both the atmosphere and the façade of the city are changing with the revolution. Each writer has given the conversion details after the revolution. First of all, Hakakian has provided a good analysis of this issue in her book. At the beginning of the memoir, she has given a map of Tehran before the revolution and at the end of the book she provides a map of Tehran after the revolution. In the maps, the reader discovers that the entire street names have changed with an Ayatollah’s or martyr’s name after the revolution. She states,

by 1982, most of Tehran’s streets and alleys had been renamed after a lost soldier or an ayatollah. Every address became an intersection of death and a clergyman. At a glance, it seemed that not much had changed, but the new names were the grid of a grim new political reality.³¹¹

Given examples, from the two maps, the ‘Crown Prince Square’ has turned into ‘Messiah Square’, ‘Persepolis Street’ turned into ‘Ayatollah Telegani Avenue’. It is known that the main streets of Tehran were named after President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill and Marshal Stalin in honour of their first visits to Iran in 1943.³¹² It is shown as a gesture for their goodwill and cordiality. Therefore, these minor details that are forced to change are also used by the new regime as a decline for everything belonging to the old regime and

³¹¹ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, map 2. Tehran 1984.

³¹² A.H. Hamzavi, “Iran and the Tehran Conference.” *International Affairs*. (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 20, vol. 2 (April 1944): 200.

symbols for the establishment and consolidation of the Islamic Republic with its full fledged symbols dispersed and circulated all around the country.

In Latifi's memoir we find out that even the airport has totally changed. She describes the airport in her memoir,

When I left it the first time, [during the Shah period] it was hospitable and magical place with a fine restaurant that hosted dances on Friday evening and a coffee shop with big French windows opening onto a balcony . . . I was home but the mood in the airport was not welcoming. It was somber and slightly menacing, like the unsmiling portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini and his anointed successor Ayatollah Montazari, that covered the walls.³¹³

Therefore, it can be argued that the city itself has undergone a process of transformation within the revolutionary process, as well. With the effect of the Iraqi-War added on the revolutionary process, the city is covered with posters and signs of the new regime; which apparently created a gloomier atmosphere. Satrapi says, during the war all the newspapers are covered with the pictures of the martyrs and she states "I tried to think only life. However, it wasn't always easy: at school, they lined us up twice a day to mourn the war dead. They put on funeral marches, and we had to beat our breasts."³¹⁴

Furthermore, as Chelkowski and Dabashi state in their book; Islamic Revolution is a remarkable example of the usage of "power of words and images" successfully to challenge an established state.³¹⁵ In the memoirs, we are also told about the usage of the posters and the discourses in the process and afterwards of the revolution. Hakakian states:

[e]ven those who mourned the fall of the Shah had been touched by the events of the previous several months . . . Now the classy country revered was not the royalty, the celebrity, or even the clergy, but the 'downtrodden'. The imam has unearthed an Arabic Synonym and anointed the poor with it: 'All we have is because of these *mostaz'afeen*. We owe everything to these *mostaz'afeen*...' ³¹⁶

³¹³ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 81-82.

³¹⁴ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 95.

³¹⁵ Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging A Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 6.

³¹⁶ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 145.

She goes on telling; “our world was reinvented. The flag remained green, white, and red, but an Allah insignia replaced its old sword-bearing lion.”³¹⁷

In all of the memoirs we are given examples of the use of the posters and discourses during the revolution. Therefore, the existence of the signs and symbols in the establishment of the new regime is prevalent in the memoirs. And these signs and symbols are frequently used within the city layout. The change in the city is really important as it is a mirror to the changing ideologies and it affects the psychology and the views of everyone living within the city.

5.1.5. Censorship

Another element that is seen as a recurring theme in all of the memoirs when talking about the pre and post revolutionary processes is the censorship issue, and contrary to the common assumption, its presence is seen both before and after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, which were applied in every facet of the people’s lives.

As Milani points out, censorship “has been a constant in most of the 1,100 years of Persian Literature.”³¹⁸ It was experienced by the writers to such an extent that even poets who touch upon non-political matters have mentioned the difficulties of writing under censorship. Most writers said they had written their messages in their books in a method of encoding in order to make their works published. As Milani states, “A manifestation of the strength of totalitarian regimes, religious fanaticism, and chaotic, ultimately repressive historical periods, this tradition of official censorship is important in any study of Persian Literature.”³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 145.

³¹⁸ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 210.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, 210.

The image the reader is given is that from one form of repression, the society has entered into another one. In the memoirs, lots of examples of the repression and the usage of censorship are given in detail. Firstly, starting from the pre-revolutionary period, Farah Pahlavi while she was talking about the publication of the children books and the committees' achievements and works; like opening libraries and publishing graphic novels, has given examples in her memoir in a halfly-disguised manner. She states the book *The Little Black Fish*, has gone through a process thinking that it can be used as a symbol for anti-regime followers. And she states the books that are to be translated were chosen with great care.³²⁰ Therefore, during the shah period the fact that everything was under the control of the central power made it harder for the people to reach the information directly, and provided them only censored information.

In Hakakian's book her brother is sent to America as his drawings, which were thought as bearing anti-regime elements in them, were censored by the Shah regime. Likewise, with the same reasons the magazine *Tofigh*, is closed by SAVAK.³²¹ Later, different form of censorship – ban – is applied by the Islamic republic, which closed the Alborz Mountain, which was a popular excursion spot for the families and youngsters. When Hakakian reaches the mountain with her friends she sees the sign: she states:

THE MOUNTAIN IS CLOSED! read (sic) a cardboard sign one Friday morning. Written in poor script, crookedly hung from the rod-iron gate of a local café, it did not have the look of an official sign. Besides, to shut down the Alborz was like damming Niagara Falls or cordoning off the Pyramids.³²²

Hakakian and her friends who did not believe the prohibition and decided to camp on the mountain are all arrested by the revolutionary guards and interrogated until they learn that these people were all Jews.³²³ Moreover, here the reader is also given another form of censorship, this time in the books,

³²⁰ Pahlavi, *Anılar*, 147.

³²¹ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 34-37.

³²² Ibid, 182.

³²³ Ibid, 182-192.

by the Islamic Republic. The books are printed with missing words in them. The words which are thought to be immoral and improper for the regime are omitted from the books. The writer states it was hard to read a poem with missing words in them. As an example she gives; “one can shout/--- in the fakest tone/in all insincerity: I love you/...”³²⁴

In Nafisi’s book, censorship becomes a recurring theme. She states the books she used to find in the city, started to disappear after the revolution. Moreover, she also mentions the closure of many bookshops as a result of the decreasing number of books that are printed in Iran.³²⁵ She argues the issue of censorship was so excessive that the Revolutionary Guards were controlling everything from their clothes to movements. She points how impossible it has become to teach in those conditions.³²⁶

In Satrapi’s book we are given many examples of this issue, in general she states everything that is reminding the people or everything that is a symbol of the west was forbidden according to the Islamic Republic’s codes. She states she could no longer buy the music albums from foreign singers from the shops, and that if you are caught with any of these items on you, the Islamic Guards had the right to arrest you with the charge of acting in an anti-revolutionary way.³²⁷

Given all these examples of censorship that has entered into many areas within the society it can be argued that it is present and applied in both of the periods. In this context, Basmenji makes another comment while talking about the women writers after 1980s in general; she states the writers were testing “the boundaries of censorship in their quest to express themselves through art and literature.”³²⁸ Therefore, it can be also be deduced that in each period despite the restrictions and censorships put on the citizens, the people were also testing

³²⁴ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 186.

³²⁵ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 166-167.

³²⁶ Ibid, 11.

³²⁷ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 133.

³²⁸ Basmenji, *Short Stories by Iranian Women*, 13.

the ways to transgress the rules, or at least the people are not giving up on trying. This is actually seen within the comparison of the social lives of the citizens with reference to the memoirs.

5.1.6. Social Life

When talking about the comparison of the pre and post revolutionary periods, apart from these elements discussed, the reader is also given various examples from the social life of women and the Iranian people in general, in the memoirs. As Jane Howard also points out in her book; “Social life in Iran has always been centered on family parties- birthdays, weddings, funerals, New Year’s holidays and religious feast days. But there is still an urge to get out and about, to meet new people, to “go out” at night.”³²⁹ In the memoirs, it is observed that, apart from the obvious changes made with the prohibitions in the cultural activities in the public sphere after the revolution, not many changes in the private sphere of the families have occurred.

The great change was in the cultural activities which are either prohibited completely, or going on under the strict observation of the government. As Nafisi states in her memoir, “I should put the word *concert* in quotation marks, because such cultural affairs were parodies of the real thing, performed either in private homes, or more recently, at a cultural center built by the municipality in the South of Tehran.”³³⁰

However, except the obvious changes in the public areas, in all of the memoirs, the reader is also informed about the ongoing meetings and parties. The importance given to the family meetings during the traditional holidays is stressed. As an example for the social life during the Shah period, Hakakian gives us long descriptions of the preparations for the traditional holidays and the dinners made with the whole family members together.³³¹ Moreover, in Latifi’s

³²⁹ Howard, *Inside Iran: Women’s Lives*, 179.

³³⁰ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 299.

book details about how her parents are giving or attending family meetings at home, whenever they find time is also narrated.³³² However, another point which should not be left aside is that we are also given an account of social life outside the homes of the Iranians during the Shah period. The families go to movies concerts and attending games which are arranged regularly.

On the other hand, after the Revolution, despite the many restrictions put on the entertainment arena, it is recounted that most of the people continue their way of living, this time secretly behind the walls. Satrapi's book gives a good account of the life going on regardless of the restrictions. She states;

in spite of all the dangers, the parties went on. 'Without them it wouldn't be psychologically bearable,' some said. 'Without parties we might as well just bury ourselves now.' added the others. My uncle invited us to his house to celebrate the birth of my cousin. Everyone was there. Even grandma was dancing.³³³

In Nafisi's book the reader is also given instances of the social activities going on after the revolution. She also gives lots of examples from these family meetings accompanied with lots of tea and pastry.³³⁴ Apart from that, the usage of the alcoholic drinks and western products that are actually banned from the citizens is also mentioned. There is an underground activity that is obviously smuggling in or copying the products that are prohibited by the regime. Nafisi gives lots of examples for this, like; "... we are at a party sitting outdoors in a fragrant garden . . . Some of us are sitting propped up against the cushions. The wine and the vodka are homemade. But you can't tell by the color."³³⁵

³³¹ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 44-53. The writer also stressed the importance given to the guests in Iran and shows the tradition of hospitality given towards the guests. She states: "in Persian society, to labor over a meal is a sign of respect: It shows that your guests are important to you . . . Guests expect good, complicated meals, with lots of choices. A typical dinner should include three or four main courses and a variety of vegetables and side dishes. That is the price of entertaining." Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 42.

³³² Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Leaving Iran*, 40-43.

³³³ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 106.

³³⁴ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 62-63.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, 307.

Moreover, the wide usage of satellite TVs which are also mentioned in the memoirs can also be used as another example for this argument.

Thus, it can be concluded that in the private sphere the people are trying to continue the social lifestyles they got used to despite the restrictions put by the new regime and trying to find the ways to transgress the boundaries put by the regime.

5.1.7. Literature in Life :

When we look at the cultural interests, an issue that should not be omitted is the importance of poetry in the lives of the Iranian people. In each memoir the writers are giving references to the famous Iranian poems and poets. In Hakakian's book, Farah's suitor Sahan, is complimenting Farah with a poem, in the engagement meeting.³³⁶ Farah Pahlavi, writes about her admiration towards poetry, especially for Ferdowsi and Hafez³³⁷, in every chance in her memoir. Moreover, also seen in the other writers throughout their memoirs, they either discuss the poems or give direct references to the poets. It is suggested that poetry is integrated into Persian daily life, and as Milani emphasizes, poetry "can also be produced and transmitted in the privacy of home without venturing into the social, economic, and political public world barred to women."³³⁸ This characteristic is therefore unchanging in both pre- and post revolutionary period. We are given the revolutionary period is not breaking the Iranian people's love for poems.

Another considerable point regarding this issue is that in the memoirs, it is observed that women have devoted themselves to reading in considerable amounts. Confronted with these restrictions all of a sudden, women try to find comfort in reading. They both search for the history, in order to get more knowledge on the issues that seemed inappropriate and groundless and finding an alternative reality and escape to form a private life that they are looking for

³³⁶ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 69.

³³⁷ Pahlavi, *Anlari*, 40-44.

³³⁸ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 58.

away from constraints and intrusions. The best example of this is Nafisi's wish for forming a private class after her resignation from the school. She always talks about how special that class was for everyone. In her house, with those seven students, they discuss every book they want, away from any kind of intrusion and censorship put on them. Satrapi starts reading books at a very early age to learn more about the history and enlighten herself.³³⁹ Hakakian is also introduced to reading by her brothers who were criticising the Shah regime. After her brother leaves for America, even as a small child confused by the events around her, she also reads a lot about the history of her country.³⁴⁰

In Latifi's memoir, when she is in a cultural shock in America and when the relations within the family are deteriorating, she reads most of the books in the library.³⁴¹ In Nafisi too, apart from the private reading group they formed we are told by the writer that the girls always favour the free-spirited characters most. It seems as if they find an escape in the books they are reading. Moreover, commenting on the private classes they make, Nafisi states, "It allowed us to defy the repressive reality outside the room – not only that but to avenge ourselves on those who controlled our lives. For those few precious hours we felt free to discuss our pains and our joys, our personal hang-ups and our weaknesses; for that suspended time we abdicated our responsibilities to our parents, to relatives and friends and to the Islamic Republic."³⁴² Therefore, the books they read and the group they formed provide them with an escape from the realities and a private space to reveal and share their thoughts with the other women. It can be said that Iranian women are striving to get a private space to act as they wanted.

Therefore, for all reasons literature emerges as an important part of the Iranian people's lives. They are either accepted it as a traditional part of their

³³⁹ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 12.

³⁴⁰ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 43.

³⁴¹ Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Leaving Iran*, 157.

³⁴² Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 57.

life, or using it as a way to escape from the realities however, it is apparently covering a huge place within the lives of the Iranians.

5.2. The Depiction of the Shah Period

After looking at the comparison of the pre and post revolutionary periods, what comes to the mind of the researcher at the first step is the question of how the Shah period is perceived by the writers. The most striking deduction that the reader will reach after reading all the memoirs is that the Shah period is not depicted as a lost paradise in any of the memoirs. Even in the memoir of Farah Pahlavi, which can be counted as the most protective one for the Shah regime, and trying to legitimize the deeds Shah had put into force in general, the reader gets the unrestful and constrained atmosphere around the Shah family. While describing her visits to the other cities and countries, at first she gives the thoughts of the people, who are all showing that they are happy and contented with the regime.³⁴³ However, especially in the 1970s she realizes that the places that she is going for investigation and control are either upgraded and cleaned or are shown as if they have no problems at all.³⁴⁴ She blames these arrangements for hiding the truth.

In another place, she also talks about the harsh responses of the SAVAK security forces, and she states these attitudes took place without their knowledge, and they have actually saved the ones that are arrested by the SAVAK polices when they are informed about the severe punishments of the police.³⁴⁵ Here, Imam Khomeini states in his speech made forty days after the killing of demonstrators in Qum in January 8, 1978 that;

[c]an the police chief of Tehran, the police chief of Qum, the SAVAK chief of Tehran, the SAVAK chief of Qum, or even the Prime minister give orders for such a thing to be done? It is the Shah who determines everything: he is the real criminal.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Pahlavi, *Anılar*, 172.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 182.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 233.

In the same context Pahlavi states that; “Some SAVAK agents no doubt went too far and it is said committed indefensive acts. Were they aware of it? The trouble is that by abusing their power, perhaps unintentionally, they harmed the moral authority of the king and the monarchy.”³⁴⁷ Therefore, under the cognizance of the Shah or not, it is apparent with all the given examples before in this research, that during his reign there were oppressive regulations that were overwhelming the general public.

Likewise, Chehabi points out, after the White Revolution, “Shah’s personal dictatorship became increasingly repressive.”³⁴⁸ Moreover, he states, after the oppressive and opposing policies of the Shah government, young people giving up political activism, resorted to political armed struggle, and as a counter policy, in the 1963-77 period there was a rise in the Islamic fundamentalism rather than modernism. He gives examples from the organizations and groups founded in order to oppose the Shah regime. Mojahedin, whose name is frequently articulated in the memoirs, is among these groups, who thought political struggle is not enough to stagger the regime. Later, there starts a huge conflict between the Shah’s security forces and the opposing groups.

Mohsen Makhmalbaf, a filmmaker, was arrested by the Shah regime after attacking a police officer in Tehran in a pro-Khomeini guerrilla protest, and released after 1978 by the revolutionary wave led by Khomeini. In the interview he states the old regime did not execute anyone under eighteen years old and gave a sentence of five years maximum, which he was given. He asserts the others that are above the age of eighteen were given death sentences. He states, in the prison he was with lots of people from different backgrounds, like doctors, students, engineers, and adds that most of the people that had done a

³⁴⁶ Khomeini, *Islam and the Revolution*, 218.

³⁴⁷ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah A Memoir*, 238.

³⁴⁸ H.E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran Under the Shah and Khomeini* (London: I.B.Tauris and Co. Ltd., 1990), 186.

similar act like his have been given death sentences. He also explains the tortures that were performed by the guardians and the security.³⁴⁹ With these examples, the severe punishments given to the people who were thought to be acting against the regime are also shown directly.

In the same context, Satrapi gives an illustrative account of the tortures and imprisonments during the Shah period. First of all, she has given examples from the liberation of the people, who has a left-leaning political view, a short while before the Islamic Republic is declared.³⁵⁰ Later, she describes examples from the stories of her father's friends who were arrested because of their leftist political view by the Shah Regime. One of them states: "They whipped me with thick electric cables so much that this looks like anything but a foot/ Not to mention putting out their cigarettes on our backs and thighs."³⁵¹

In Pahlavi's book, the reader is also given some accounts of tortures and arrests. On these arrests she totally blames the police and informing the reader that these deeds are done without consulting the Shah. As an example, she states, in an opening of an Art Galery, SAVAK forces did not accept some of the people, accusing them with writings against the Regime.³⁵²

In the mid-1970s, for the Shah, who noticed this situation, it became impossible to continue the rule of his dynasty in the same way, decides to liberalize his regime. Chehabi points out that there starts a huge campaign stating the determination of the Shah regime for this liberalization policy, his officials give speeches on efforts for democratization and improving in the human rights and justice. As a consequence during the periods 1976 and 1977 they released many political prisoners and criminals. In the early 1977, Shah also starts a program for political liberalization. He changed the Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveida with a technocrat Jamshid Amuzegar and in one of his public speeches he declared: "We will have as much political freedom as the

³⁴⁹ Dabahshi, "Once upon a Filmmaker: Conversation with Mohsen Makhmalbaf," 157-172

³⁵⁰ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 47.

³⁵¹ Ibid, 51.

³⁵² Pahlavi, *Anılar*, 233-234.

European democracies.”³⁵³ However, as Chehabi states, the Shah also increased the monopoly of the Rastakhiz party and prevent the opportunity of creating new parties. Therefore, it can be stated that the liberalization movement was not successful in opening up the political system.³⁵⁴ Even it can be argued that it ended up making the shah as the sole ruler of the country and tried to wipe away the diverse and opposing thoughts and groups. Kelly underlines the similar issues,

One of the weapons of the Shah regime abroad is its slick and costly P.R. – produced image. On the other hand, there is total censorship of the media in Iran and brutal suppression of writers and intellectuals. The American chapter of Poets, Essayists, and Novelists (PEN) dedicated its March *Country Report* to repression and censorship in Iran . . .³⁵⁵

The repressive policy of the regime has grown so much that it started to create debates in the international arena.

The position of women, which was apparently more advantageous than the post-revolutionary period, is regarded as not improved enough during the Shah regime as well. As mentioned before in detail the laws that were enacted during the Shah period did not truly open the way to women to improve their situation. These regulations were seen as a way to improve the image of the monarchy in the eyes of the international sphere. Farah Pahlavi also accepts that not many reforms are performed in terms of women; she states,

Indeed, not everything had been reformed. For example, the law still insisted that a women have the signed permission of her husband if she wanted to travel, just like a minor . . .but it was one of the many vexing questions with the clerics, who saw it in a way of legally maintaining women’s dependence on men . . . We wanted to go forward, . . . but we had to pay attention to different mentalities, being careful not to precipitously do away with solidly held customs, not to shock people. .³⁵⁶

³⁵³ Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran Under the Shah and Khomeini*, 226.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 223-225.

³⁵⁵ Joan Kelly, “Comment on the 1980 International Women’s Decade Conference in Iran,” *Signs* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 388.

³⁵⁶ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah A Memoir*, 177.

Therefore, the clerics had a great influence on the society and the administrative branches of the country even during the Shah period. Apart from the elements stated before this was another prominent factor that created a barrier for the improvements in terms of women during the pre- revolutionary period.³⁵⁷

Likewise, in another part of Pahlavi's memoir the reader is given that the educations in some of the schools are given to boys and girls in separate classes before the revolution as well. She explains when she was sent to coeducational Lycée Razi, it was also a sign of open-mindedness in terms of her mother.³⁵⁸ Again in another place, she states her mother was against the arranged marriages which was common in most of the families in those days.³⁵⁹ With these and the historical evidences that are pointed out before, Shah Period is not depicted as lost paradise. The highly autocratic rule that was established by the Shah regime all around the country, and the common customs and traditions which made it harder for the modernization process to move along smoothly make it harder for the people ask and even keep up with the changes.

Understandably, most records are talking about "the horrendous things that have happened to Iranian women since Khomeini's regime came to power"³⁶⁰ However, it would be wrong to view these experiences as something that change in the blink of an eye. As it is pointed throughout the study, one should bear in mind the existence of long-held traditions and customs that people have incorporated and that they cannot be changed easily. As Higgins argued, the Pahlavi monarchs had embraced the western definition of equal sex roles, they supported better education and raised economic opportunities for women and enacted some legal reforms improving the position of women to some extent as already discussed in the previous chapters. While embracing the

³⁵⁷ As an example Pahlavi states there is only one women architect –Nectar Papazian Andrew- in that sector during the 1960s. Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah A Memoir*, 57.

³⁵⁸ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah A Memoir*, 55.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 53.

³⁶⁰ Tabari, "The Women's Movement in Iran: A Hopeful Prognosis," 342.

westernized sexual equality, the people who supported the customs and tried to maintain a traditional “sex-segregated society, were portrayed as ignorant, backward and antiprogress.”³⁶¹ Therefore, expectedly as the revolutionary opposition grew, the growing number people embraced everything against that the Pahlavi regime was supporting. The people “came to see Islam as the alternative to the despotism of the Pahlavi regime and the alienating effects of Westernization.”³⁶² Many people therefore attended the opposition and taken part in the Revolutionary protests with different expectations.

5.3. Meaning and Depiction of Revolution in the Memoirs

As discussed in Chapter 4, Iranian Revolution seems to be one of the core elements that provoked the writers to write their memoirs. It is discussed in detail in each one of the memoirs; however, for each writer it symbolises different expectations, meanings and feelings. First, Pahlavi starts her memoir as

[w]hen I think of that morning in January 1979, I feel that heart-wrenching grief again in all its intensity. Tehran had been under savage attack for months, but now a tense silence had fallen over the city, as if our capital was holding its breath.³⁶³

From the beginning, she is taking a tough stance against the revolutionaries. Considering her background and the conditions she left the country it is not hard to guess that she is against the revolutionary forces. According to her view they are the “attackers” that were trying to violate the order of the government.

When we look at her views towards the citizens’ feelings after Shah left the country, the accounts that she gives are also noteworthy. When they left the

³⁶¹ Patricia J.Higgins, “Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal, Social and Ideological Changes,” *Signs 10*, vol.3 (Spring 1985): 490.

³⁶² Higgins, “Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal, Social and Ideological Changes,” 490.

³⁶³ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah A Memoir*, 1.

country, she was told that there were protests in favour of the Shah regime as well. However, later on she also gives the media reports in Iran and they were about how the majority of the people were celebrating the success of the Revolution.³⁶⁴ The Shah family was the target of the protests and threats of the people. Moreover, she also refers to the resistance groups that were formed in Europe. According to the Shah family these revolutionaries were the occupying forces, which should leave the country soon.

Latifi's stance towards the revolution is somehow similar to Pahlavi's. She starts from the execution of her father by the Revolutionaries and shortly after her family was separated from each other. The revolution also causes the family to have financial straits as one of the money earners of the family is lost. The pre-revolution period is given like a paradise life for a child in which they are living in a mansion-like house, with everything that they wanted right there instantly. However, with the start of the Revolutionary protests they no longer feel safe either at home or at school.³⁶⁵ As Bahrapour states in her review, with the revolution Iran changed from a dream into a nightmare for the Latifi family.³⁶⁶ After the departure of the Shah, the family entered in a state of anxious suspense. Her father was working for the Shah and they knew that without him they would be having a hard time. Latifi counts the threats against them from an attempt to burn their house to search everywhere in the house from top to bottom over and over again.³⁶⁷ In the end with the execution of his father by the regime, everyone in the house is drifted into depression. Taken her special background and the effect of revolution on her family, it is not hard to guess her negative perspective towards the regime. She also refers a lot of people's disappointments and broken lives with the new regime. According to her, the revolution divided the country into two groups; the enemies and the

³⁶⁴ Pahlavi, *Anılar*, 301.

³⁶⁵ Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Leaving Iran*, 55.

³⁶⁶ Tara Bayrapour, "Orphans of the Revolution," *The Washington Post*. March 20, 2005. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A45476-2005Mar17.html>

³⁶⁷ Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Leaving Iran*, 65-68.

friends. The people who are counted among the enemies are forced to leave the country. She states with this exodus, the people needed most were among the leaving groups. “Doctors, Lawyers and Businessman” were among the people who were forced to leave the country by the repressive codes taken after the Revolution.³⁶⁸

Satrapi depicts the revolution with more confused feelings. Her memoir starts from 1979, and tells also about the past with flashbacks. She also gives the little Satrapi’s questionings and discussions on the revolution. Little Satrapi is depicted as trying to impose a meaning to the fact that they are now studying in different classes with her boyfriends. She is not driving a hard line like Latifi does. In an interview made with her she says;

[t]he world is complex. Even in my book I show a mullah who is good, the one who accepted me at the ideological test. He accepted me. So I can never say ‘All the mullahs are bad.’...But everything is so much more complex. There is so much good in bad, and so much bad in good.³⁶⁹

As understood from her statement, she has confused ideas on the Revolution, in her book. At the beginning of her memoir, she gives examples of the oppressive attitudes of the Shah regime. She has given a large place in her book describing the tortures and the pressures put on the people. Everyone in the country is fighting for a better life and has laid their hopes on the Revolution. However, after the declaration of the Revolution, she shows the ongoing punishments and killings and oppression this time by the Islamic regime. Just before the war period with Iraq, the confused and perplexed people, who are unsure about their future, are depicted around family friends. All in all, the revolution period is given as a period in process, changing its ideologies, using agitations, symbols and moral and religion to stabilize the new regime.

Hakakian first gives us the social uprisings in the country during the Shah period and later, she observes the people uniting for Khomeini, the people

³⁶⁸ Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Leaving Iran*, 76-77.

³⁶⁹ Annie Tully, “An Interview with Marjane Satrapi,” October 2004, http://www.bookslut.com/features/2004_10_003261.php

coming from different groups join under the cause of Revolution. Therefore, after the beginning she is also hopeful about the coming Revolution. However, afterwards with the descriptions she has given, she vocalises the disappointments of the society. She says,

[w]hat did I understand from the revolution? Nothing I could put into words. But I recognized when I saw it. It was in the air. . . Within weeks, Tehran seemed to have matured by years . . . In the day time, marchers flooded the squares. In the evenings, marital law silenced their morning choruses . . . Even the city's thrash changed . . . Canals carried the debris of the city's gallantry: pamphlets, bloody socks, torn sleeves . . . The makeup on the faces women turned pale.³⁷⁰

She goes on by telling the rising number of people leaving the country. Therefore, again the revolution is shown as disappointed all the hopes of the people.

Nafisi gives an overall opinion summarising the feelings of the citizens towards the revolution. She gives the changing atmosphere after the revolution. She talks about the people who were fighting for revolution getting arrested afterwards.³⁷¹ Nafisi as pointed out before defines revolution as a “question of loss and the loss of an illusion” that has eliminated the hopes the people were fighting for before.³⁷² Therefore, in her memoir the revolution is depicted also as a disappointment for most of the citizens. The people are complaining about the misleading of the revolution.

Therefore, within the memoirs the revolution evokes different feelings and has various meanings for all of the writers. However, all in all, it can be concluded that the women writers who were looking at the revolution with some hopes are also presenting their disillusionment afterwards. The Revolution with its promises and expectations turns out to be a false image for all of the writers.³⁷³ Especially women who have drifted into a severe change with the

³⁷⁰ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 121-122.

³⁷¹ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 115.

³⁷² *Ibid*, 141.

³⁷³ This issue will be discussed in detail in part V.

revolution are apparently the ones who are disappointed more with the revolution.

5.4. The Prominent Cases of the Transformation Period

5.4. 1. Depiction of the Transformation Period: A Period of Changes

During the transformation period, which can be claimed to start from 1978 January with the first great demonstrations, until the theocratic constitution is approved by referendum in December 1979, the country has undergone considerable changes and events. In the memoirs, it is given that right after Shah leaves Iran on January 16, 1979, the Iranian citizens entered into a confused and anxious waiting period. On the one hand, it is implied that this period is the most relaxed, and unrestricted period of time when everything was free.³⁷⁴

On the other hand, it is noticeable that it was a period of great changes in Iran, as reflected in the memoirs making the citizens confused and anxious about the changes. Hakakian gives a good account of the transformation period when everything was free and relaxed for a short period of time. However, the reader can observe, on the other hand, small changes start entering into the people's daily lives step by step. She states;

[o]ur world was reinvented . . . Censorship was abolished. Coco was free at last! Newspapers and magazines mushroomed. The calendar changed. On February 12 in 2537 (the year dating from the coronation of King Cyrus) we went to bed. When we woke up the next day, it was February 13 in 1357 (the year of the Prophet Mohammad's migration from Mecca to Medina). Overnight, 1,180 years had fallen away-eons of daylight saved for posterity!³⁷⁵

This quotation is a good example of the great transformation and puzzlement the people experienced at the time. As stated before many people

³⁷⁴ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 42-61.

³⁷⁵ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 145-146.

joined the revolutionaries with different hopes and expectations. As an example, some

women (and men) objected to Pahlavi reforms because they did not do enough to guarantee women the same legal rights and social and economic opportunities as men. They saw the monarchs' reforms as meaningless 'paper' changes or worse, as the source of new, Western forms of women's degradation and exploitation.³⁷⁶

Some others were after a more traditional definition of the sex roles and hoping for a more conservative life. On the other, there were also leftist groups who were looking for a more egalitarian life, women struggling with men on equal grounds and against luxury and expecting "liberation of women along with the liberation of the masses."³⁷⁷ These and many other groups united against the Shah regime, and once the Shah is toppled, new questions and concerns started to occupy the mind of the people.

5.4.2. Change in morals:

One important aspect that has to be pointed out is the change in the concept of morals and modernity. As Najmabadi articulates, after entering into the modernization period under Reza Shah, women found themselves in between the lines of having an "outmoded" look and becoming immoral. Here, it is important to mention the social control over the individuals which will also be discussed in the next section. Şerif Mardin states what "appears as a critique of over- Westernization at its deepest level is simply social control applied against those who transgress the norms of the community."³⁷⁸ This is seen as a change in the transformation period. Previously "normal" behaviours can be counted as immoral within and after the transformation period of the

³⁷⁶ Higgins, "Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal, Social and Ideological Changes," 490-491.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 491.

³⁷⁸ Şerif Mardin, "Super Westernization in Urban Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century," in *Turkey: Geographic and Social Perspectives*. ed. P. Benedict, E. Tumertekin and F.Mansur (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 415.

Revolution. In Satrapi's book, there is a scene in which her family put black curtains to the windows in order to protect themselves from their neighbours. She states one of their neighbours is given seventy-five lashes by the Revolutionary guards as another neighbour informed them that he is going to have a party in his house.³⁷⁹ As stated before, this social control has gone through several changes throughout the formation of the Islamic Republic. During the Shah regime there was still a social control; however, it remained within the cultural restraints then; Pahlavi has mentioned an example of this in her memoir. During her high-school years she is scolded by her mother as she is wearing a lipstick, because only a married woman could wear a lipstick then.³⁸⁰ Therefore, these codes were cultural constraints put on women by the society. However, throughout the revolutionary period, there occurred a transformation in these restrictions. After 1979, the amount of restrictions on the society increased with the attitude of the new regime.

5.4.3. Depiction of Women:

Critics like Barbre, Webster and Farrel also state that women's memoirs are "especially helpful in understanding andocentric hegemony because they document a variety of responses to it."³⁸¹ In Milani's it is stated that in the previous memoirs, the women wrote about the identity of women and the social frictions it experienced. "The very identity of women has been defined in terms of their dependencies and obligations within the institutions of family and marriage as daughter, sister, wife, or mother."³⁸² These memoirs are taken from a sample of people coming from different backgrounds, however; each of their writers belongs to the upper- middle class, and come from educated families.

³⁷⁹ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 105.

³⁸⁰ Pahlavi, *Anılar*, 61.

³⁸¹ Barbre, Webster and Farrel et al *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, 7.

³⁸² Milani, *Veils and Words*, 62.

Keeping this in mind, when we look at the representation of women's position in the family within the memoirs, really interesting deductions are made. First of all, all the mothers of the writers are educated; some even have been in great positions in their career. However; their life as career women is hardly stressed in the memoirs. Nafisi's mother, Nezhat Nafisi, was among the first women who were elected in the Iranian Parliament, shown as a traditional mother, giving priority to her family roles. In her book, Nafisi's mother is seen as a grandmother who likes looking after the kids and preparing coffee for the visitors. She mentions her father as the ex-major of Tehran, however, never emphasizes her mother's important career as a member of the parliament. Likewise, in all the other memoirs, although the rising generation is shown as active women, seeking a career and questioning their rights, the mothers of the writers are represented as housekeepers, child bearers and still bound tightly to the traditions even if they were active. Satrapi, is another example for this heading, although she represents her family as a modern and western-oriented one, her mother still bears the traditional women-mother role within the family. She is still depicted in the private sphere more than the father figure. Therefore, it can be argued that 1960s and 1970s modernization efforts of the Shah did not affect most of the population's lives. With the given records it can be concluded that the traditional role of women which is strictly imposed on them later with the introduction of revolution was actually present in some respect within the culture during the shah regime as well.

However, this element has to be defined clearly; first none of the writers in focus in this study matches with these characteristics. They define themselves as educated, modern individuals, who are working for better conditions. Pahlavi and Nafisi also reflect on their role as mother and wife in the memoirs; however, as the reader notices, these responsibilities do not become an obstacle for their career or way of thinking of themselves as independent individuals. Furthermore, in Nafisi's book we encounter accounts of many women attending universities, reaching high degrees in their career like becoming academicians et cetera. On the other hand, in the memoirs, it is also deducted that there are lots

of women whose identity is only defined by the institutions of family and marriage as mother, wife, sister, and daughter. However, there is still a struggle for better standards and becoming an individual, and fighting for the roles they want to reach in life, instead of accepting the socially defined roles that are put on women. It is more evident in Nafisi's book than any other. When she describes her students, she shows them either lying to the authorities like the SAVAK or the Revolutionary Guards, or their family members, like their brother or father, who act as the honour guard of the family – the honour of the family is very important for the Iranian people as discussed before – to achieve what they desire in life. As already mentioned in the summary of the memoirs, in Nafisi's book she states, “[c]an we call the Revolutionary Guards the truth? We lie to them; we hide our satellite dishes. We tell them we don't have illegal books and alcohol in our houses.”³⁸³ Lying is a recurring theme in all of the memoirs, likewise, Satrapi, uses the same tactic, she lies to the Revolutionary Guardians in order not to be sent to the committee, when she is caught with an inappropriate dress.³⁸⁴ Here, women both display their disobedience for the system and struggle for their freedom in life.

5.4.4. Ambiguity in the Private and Public Sphere:

This struggle is more evident after the Revolution, as women are more confined, segregated and suppressed in the private life after the Revolution. This is also in accordance with the feminist critics' idea that, many women's personal narratives “unfold within the framework of an apparent acceptance of the social norms and expectations but nevertheless describe strategies and activities that challenge those same norms.”³⁸⁵

Milani comes up with a similar topic in her book, she states,

³⁸³ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 17.

³⁸⁴ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 133-134.

³⁸⁵ Barbre and Farrel et al, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, 7.

anyone living in a community needs to keep up appearances and to implement some degree of self-imposed censorship (Freud's superego, William James's social self, Jung's persona). Life in a glass house will probably never be; a complete reconciliation of inner and outer will prove impossible in principle and in fact.³⁸⁶

She implies privacy, being one of the basic human needs, is under threat in the Iranian society. The blurred line between the private and public has given way for the communal rules to enter in the private sphere of the people. Veil, which is thought as a mask by some, becomes another 'self' of the person after being worn all the time. She also mentions the people living in the "concentration camps" and gives a quotation from Milan Kundera saying

[a] concentration camp is a world in which people live crammed together constantly, night and day. Brutality and violence are merely secondary (and not in the least indispensable) characteristics. A concentration camp is the complete obliteration of privacy.³⁸⁷

Based on these, when we examine the memoirs we read, it is easily seen that with the establishment of the Islamic Republic and the Sharia Laws, the intrusion of the government into the private wishes and sphere of the people has increased. Women, that are forced into certain behaviours and wearing certain clothes in public sphere and with the application of the Sharia Law, the government had a direct access to the family life by also limiting the rights of women in the private sphere. These restrictions and constraints are also given in the memoirs in detail. These quick changes within the private sphere as a result of the changing laws in the government grounds, has also effected the progressive and modern families, making them think and question the consequences and ways out from that codes.

As mentioned above "lying" is seen as a way to escape from the system rules for a little. Some of the students of Nafisi were telling their families lies about where they go when they are coming for the private sessions with Nafisi. One of them states, she had "volunteered to help translate Islamic texts into

³⁸⁶ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 213.

³⁸⁷ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 213.

English.”³⁸⁸ Therefore, given this and the examples before, we can also think lying as a mediator used to form a mini private life or escape from the restrictions put on the people in the society.

5.5. The Theme of Separation and Becoming an Exile:

The Revolutionary process caused many people in Iran to leave their country. Most of these memoirs written by the Iranian writers after the revolution are defined as nostalgia memoirs, which are written by the people in exile. The theme of separation and exile is abundant in their memoirs, as the writers themselves have been in exile and separated from their loved ones.

As Abbas Milani points out in his book, “for the Iranians, living in diaspora was, until two decades ago, a rarity, an oddity commonly experienced only by radical intellectuals, the economically marginalized, or stigmatized religious minorities.”³⁸⁹ However, today as he also articulates at least two million Iranians live in exile. According to Abbas Milani there have been three great waves of exodus in Iranian history, first at the time of the Shah Abbas, a flight of many Iranian intellectuals to India, with the fear of Shiites and the chaos of war unleashed by Afghan invaders. Second wave is in the wake of Iran’s constitutional revolution of 1905-1907, in order to escape from the oriental despotism; and the third one, in the process of the Islamic Revolution 1979.³⁹⁰ The memoir writers under discussion are among the third wave of migration in the Iranian scene.

In the memoirs we are given various forms and cases of exility and the feeling of separation and being alien experienced by the writers and their acquaintances. Firstly, as Milani mentioned in her book, these writers are a product of many cultures, and in their memoirs we can realize that they are

³⁸⁸ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 17.

³⁸⁹ Milani, *Lost Wisdom: Rethinking Modernity in Iran*, 155.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 160- 163.

feeling “outside the circle of both, out of place, dislodged, and dislocated.”³⁹¹ That is because the culture that they are living in is very different from their own and their own culture is forced to change from above. The discontinuities they experience wherever they go makes them feel like living in exile.

In an excerpt from Nafisi’s memoir, while she is talking about the wishes and desires of her students she states, there is a difference between her generation and her students. She continues; “my generation complained of a loss, the void in our lives that was created when our past was stolen from us, making us exiles in our own country... [however], this generation had no past, their memory was of a half articulated desire.”³⁹² Milani’s conclusion in her book is also true for the memoir writers that are examined here, she states, “I write as an exile about exiles.”³⁹³ Therefore, the memoir writers here, are also experiencing the same thing, they are living in exile away from their homeland, and writing about the society they left behind, which is forced to change quickly and left women feeling as exiles within their own country.

As another example, Roya Hakakian mentioned at the beginning of her memoir that, her brother Albert was bound to leave the country as one of his drawings is seen as a threat to the Shah regime by the Savak forces.³⁹⁴ This was her first encounter with the notion of being separated, living in exile and this affects the writer, which can be seen as a factor that forces her to become an adult to understand and see the facts of life. After that, we are given many other separation examples throughout the memoir; her other brother, some of her friends and finally she leaves her homeland. At this point, one thing that attracts attention is although at the beginning of the book everybody was struggling for change and revolution, it turns out Revolution itself, and the strict rules it brought, becomes the element that forces the remaining of the family to leave

³⁹¹ Milani, *Veils and Words*, xi.

³⁹² Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 76.

³⁹³ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 13.

³⁹⁴ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 37.

the country. This theme can be called the most striking common theme in every memoir.

Another version of being in exile shown in the memoirs is feeling in exile when one is at home. “Exile in this sense is more a state of mind and psychology than a fact of geography and politics.”³⁹⁵ Likewise, Najmabadi underlines this important point in her article; she reminds the term “*gharbzadegi*- westoxication or weststructness, popularized by Jalal Al-e Ahmad.”³⁹⁶ According to Dabashi, there are eight prominent figures in the formation and dissemination of the idea and nature of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Mohtahari, Talegani, Tabataba’i and Khomeini are the four prominent ones that gained their degrees in the religious and spiritual areas and deal with the formation of the revolution in the religious Sharia rules and grounds. Al-e Ahmad, Shari’ati, Bazargan and Bani-Sadr are counted as the other four important figures who do not come from a serious or systematic religious scholarly training, however, could later put their ideas of revolution in a non clerical discourse.³⁹⁷ Among these figures, Al-e Ahmad who came up with the idea of “*gharbzadegi*- westoxication” had a great impact on the society. With his idea Al-e Ahmad criticized the awkward imitation of the western “matters and manners.”³⁹⁸

Najmabadi states the word is used for the women by the society during the 1960s and 1970s especially by the Iranian radical youth, as *gharbzadeh* women, for the women who is doing the excessive of some behaviour. For example, for the women who wear too short skirts, laugh too loudly, do excessive make up and so forth. However, the concept was confusing from the start as there was no judge deciding, what is the limit for excessive. Like, while for an Islamic militant every unveiled woman was *gharbzadeh*, for a secular

³⁹⁵ Milani, *Lost Wisdom: Rethinking Modernity in Iran*, 160.

³⁹⁶ Najmabadi, “Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran,” 64.

³⁹⁷ Dabashi, *Theory of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, 6.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 65.

radical they were only “painted dolls of the Pahlavi Regime.”³⁹⁹ Therefore, that concept was an extension of the blurring line between the modern and modest behaviours which are leaving the women in the society in a complicated position. This concept is also important as it is an example of the control of the society upon the individual. It can be said that this social control has put many women, who are confused between the traditions, morals and the modern type of behaviour, in a position of exile within their own community. An example of this is seen in Latifi’s memoir when her mother was trying to find out which prison her husband is sent to. As she tries to speak with the guards, the guards insult her as she does not wear the veil. One of them says “Look at you, you filthy slut! Have you no self-respect? Can’t you dress like a decent woman?”⁴⁰⁰ As mentioned before, the solid lines for decent and indecent, moral and immoral were not drawn by any authority. Therefore, women were bound to live within suspicion and they were not free to behave as they like. And if they were to transgress the norms – the lines that are put by the society, they become an outcast and exile within their own community. Nafisi points out in an interview that she has put excerpts from Nabokov’s book because; “Nabokov is all about exile, all about unexpectedness of the lives and gaps that the life creates for us...feeling exile in your own home.”⁴⁰¹

On further effects of this kind of stance towards women, the emerging Islamic Feminists in Iran are challenged “to maintain a delicate balance between reclaiming a national identity, reaffirming progressive elements of the indigenous culture, and the struggle to create a democratic, just, and coherently developed society.”⁴⁰² Therefore, this created a double challenge for the Iranian women when asking for equal rights and acting as they want, as they have to put

³⁹⁹ Najmabadi, “Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran,” 65.

⁴⁰⁰ Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Leaving Iran*, 2.

⁴⁰¹ Charlie Rose, “A Conversation with Iranian Author Azar Nafisi,” 18 April 2003. TV Show, <http://www.charlierose.com/guests/azar-nafisi>

⁴⁰² Nayereh Tohidi, “Modernity Islamization and Women in Iran,” in *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*. ed. Valentine M. Moghadam (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ.:Zed, 1994), 142.

their claims on legitimate ground on the eyes of the opposing traditionalists. This dilemma caused their alienation, being an exile within the society they are living in.

In this context, Keddie and Matthee talk about a related issue in their book. According to them, in order to make their questions noticeable by the public, the contemporary Muslim new thinkers and the secular feminists in Iran turned to the way of “de-essentialization of notions like ‘the West’ and ‘Western’.”⁴⁰³ This occurred at the same time when the critics and scholars, especially Muslim women, were trying to work against the negative stereotypes and essentialized Islam in the West. Likewise, feminism is defined and viewed as a western concept, as the concept seemed as an irrelevant one and regarded by suspect by the Muslim women. As a further note, according to Keddie and Matthee, 1990 was the earliest time for the Iranian literature when they began to publish translations of the books from the feminist literature of Britain, France and the United States in the books and magazines of the women’s press. It was the magazine *Zanan* (Women) which pioneered the publication of these translations. Called as Islamic Feminism it started to gain ground on the legal opposition as well. It was Ayatollah Khamenei, who was the first Ayatollah to use the word “feminism” and gave speeches against it.

Therefore, breaking the women’s issues away from its associations with the west made it easier for the groups supporting women’s rights to raise their voices and problems in public. It was only later on that the women became to some extent successful in their struggle in gaining grounds for some rights in the Islamic Regime.

The feeling of exile is also evident as the sense of otherness within the society. Like Simone de Beauvoir suggests in her book *Second Sex*, in patriarchal culture women (the other) is defined by its relation to men, (the subject). As Farr and Kerbo also stated, “the Moslem Middle East, including Iran has been called the ‘patriarchal belt’, referring to the strong norms of male

⁴⁰³ Keddie and Matthee, *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, 220.

dominance that exist in the family setting.”⁴⁰⁴ In a country like Iran which has a patriarchal culture and evident gender inequality in the codes of the constitution, the feeling of otherness for the women citizens seems inevitable. Therefore, this is also given in the memoirs either directly or inexplicitly.

In Hakakian’s book, the new principal of the school that was changed after the revolution tells the classroom in one of her speeches to avoid men;

[s]o the drill that I am preparing for you is a ‘man drill.’ . . . So, girls, if I scream, ‘Man! Man! Man!’ what must you do? Run if you can. And if you can’t, hide. And if you can’t hide, surrender, and pull the hem of your uniforms over your heads.⁴⁰⁵

These are from the speech that she gives to a group of secondary school students. Therefore, from the very early ages the children are prepared for the segregation of the sexes. Apparently, women are the ones who are forced outside the public space. The rules enacted are directed to the women in general. Mainly, the new Sharia rule put men in the centre and positioned women as subjects to men. As Hakakian states in another place there were people believing; “[b]y following the Islamic dress code, women helped the nation by preventing men from being sexually stimulated.”⁴⁰⁶ It is in order to protect men, the women are the ones that is suppressed, covered and pushed behind the scenes. At the university, Satrapi comments on the restrictions put on women’s clothing. She points at her male friends at the university and states, they are wearing whatever they want, and then asks; “why is it that I, as a woman, am expected to feel nothing when watching these men with their clothes sculpted on but they, as men can get excited by two inches less of my head- scarf.”⁴⁰⁷ Within the memoirs we are given the inner and outer fears and constrains of women which keep them away from pursuing a freer life. As we are given they are locked within the patterns they should be following. And these patterns are

⁴⁰⁴ Farr, Grant and Kerbo, *Modern Iran: A Volume in the Comparative Societies Series*, 89.

⁴⁰⁵ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 167.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, 17

⁴⁰⁷ Satrapi, *Persepolis 2*, 143.

defined by the patriarchy. It is as if especially women, while struggling to topple the monarchy, have entered into a new form of it which has only changed the codes.

Notkin approaches the same topic in a different way, while making a commentary in Satrapi's memoir she states, the writer also depicts her marginality in her book. She grows up as a "progressive during a fundamentalist takeover, as a woman in a man's world, as a rebellious teen in an environment where rebellion can be literally deathly."⁴⁰⁸ In all of these memoirs, the hindrances of living in a highly patriarchal culture can be examined. However, none of these writers have entered into explicitly feminist causes; they give these examples as another part of their struggles throughout their lives. Therefore, within these memoirs without entering into feminist causes these writers depict their isolation from the public space and feeling of exile in different perspectives.

5.6. Women Citizens Turning into Activists:

Another important point that attracts attention of the reader, while reading the memoirs is that the Revolution process has turned many women who had not been activists into politically aware citizens. In this context, Keddie states that, "Several factors led to a gradual, partial reinstatement of women's rights and an increase in public activities by many women who had not been activists until they were mobilized during the revolution, including popular class and *bazaari* women who dressed in more traditional ways."⁴⁰⁹ In the same way, as Azadeh Kian- Thiébaud mentions in her article, in the process of revolution, women belonging to different backgrounds and groups have also adopted the veil for different reasons:

while secular women used the veil as a symbol of national unity against the Shah regime, the traditionalists' thick black chador symbolized their Shi'ite ideology and culture, and their aspirations to an exclusive

⁴⁰⁸ Notkin, "Persepolis: the Story of a Childhood," 8.

⁴⁰⁹ Keddie, "Iranian Women's Status and Struggles since 1979," 23.

society ruled by Islamic laws. For the Islamist youth who were influenced by the teachings of the radical religious intellectual, 'Ali Shari'ati, veiling symbolized their distinct identity and their struggle for a just and inclusive society.⁴¹⁰

Therefore, as it is also stated in literature many women have been forced to be active for different reasons. These women take part in the public life more than they have ever been before. As Keddie also states women were seen in resistance movements and protests throughout the history of the Middle East and in the contemporary Middle East the main resistance movements are Islamic movements.⁴¹¹ Another important aspect of this issue seen in the memoirs is that, in the memoirs we are given the disappointments of the women after the foundation of the Islamic Republic, who previously became active in the protests and movements against the Shah regime. As an example, the leftist groups throughout the revolutionary process supported feminist movement. However, after the revolution the Iranian left was also criticized for its indifference to the women's struggles and "multifaceted character of women's oppression."⁴¹²

Here, it can be stated that the Iranian women experienced the same fate with similar cases throughout the world. Algerian women have also benefited little after their legendary participation to the struggle against the French colonialism. "Later on, liberation movements from Mozambique and Uganda in Africa to Brazil, Chile, and Nicaragua in Latin America and to Yemen, Palestine, and India in Asia had to tackle the same problem."⁴¹³

The best example of this is seen in Roya Hakakian's memoir, in the example of Bibi. Bibi, who is the eldest sister of the Zaynab, one of Roya's best friends and comes from a Muslim family, is not an activist. However, with the effect of the spirit of the revolution in the country, she starts listening to

⁴¹⁰ Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud, "From Islamization to the Individualization of Women in Post-revolutionary Iran," in *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran*. Ansari, Sarah and Vanessa Martin (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), 128.

⁴¹¹ Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution*, 255.

⁴¹² Shahidian, "The Iranian Left and the 'Women Question' in the Revolution of 1978-79," 224.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, 224.

cassettes of Ayatollah Khomeini with her uncle who is religious and actually represented Islam as mentioned before in the Part III. Bibi is not an active member of a political organization or some other group. She is a star student at school and helping her mother at home in her free times and with the effect of the revolutionary resistance that is surrounding the whole country. Her regular visits to the basement to listen to the cassettes of Ayatollah Khomeini starts in the autumn of 1978.⁴¹⁴ Then, on the course of the memoir we are given an account of her becoming more and more conscious and telling the girls about the story of *The Little Black Fish*, which is considered as an inconvenient book by the Shah Regime. Towards the end of the memoir Bibi appears again. The reader learns that she has turned into a politically active personality who joined one of the largest armed opposition organizations, the People's Mujahideen three months after the revolution. In 1982 she has written an essay against the ban and read it in the classroom. She is later arrested and is put into prison for her "anti-revolutionary activities".⁴¹⁵ Therefore, we are not only given her efforts turns out to be in vain but she is also disappointed by the new regime.

Jane Howard also points out the active role of the women in deposing Shah. She states, "They took part in mass demonstrations forcing him to leave. When Khomeini took power, it seemed unthinkable that he would abolish their right to vote."⁴¹⁶ However, for the women who were expecting a more democratic and republican regime, the revolution turned out to be another failure afterwards.

In *Persepolis I*, the examples of previously politically unconscious and disinterested women taking part in the demonstrations against the Shah regime are also given, in the person of Mehri, who comes to Satrapi's house as a maid. Her parents leave her to the Satrapi family as they do not have the conditions to look after her. In the memoir, she is given as a romantic and daydreaming character that has no connection with the politics. However, she is also affected

⁴¹⁴ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 103.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, 218.

⁴¹⁶ Howard, *Inside Iran: Women's Lives*, 23.

by the revolutionary mood and pressures around her and goes to the demonstrations against the Shah regime.⁴¹⁷

In Afschineh Latifi's memoir, after her father is taken into prison we are given an anecdote from the relatives' discussions: "*The streets are no longer safe. There is no established police system anymore. Every day there are more riots, more looting, more demonstrations.*"⁴¹⁸ Even in the normal family meetings people start talking about the revolution and both the educated and non-educated classes are taken into the stream.

In another chapter while talking about the pre- revolution times in 1978, Latifi states the unrest that has grown throughout the years has taken many groups into it.

That was the year the mujahideen begun to riot, followed in short order by the students and the bazaari, who ran the city's markets and bazaars. They were demonstrating in the streets, burning the Shah's pictures, and spreading rumors that the Ayatollah would soon return to Iran.⁴¹⁹

In Azar Nafisi's memoir, this element is abundant in general. At the beginning of her memoir she describes Iran as a country "where all gestures, even the most private, were interpreted in political terms. The colors of my headscarf or my father's tie are symbols of Western Decadence and imperialist tendencies."⁴²⁰ Then after reading the memoir we can say that within those circumstances everyone is forced to be political to some extent. While talking about one of her students she states:

[t]o me, Yassi was the real rebel. She did not join any political group or organization. As a teenager she had defied family traditions and in the face of strong opposition, had taken up music. Listening to any form of nonreligious music, even on the radio, was forbidden in her family, but Yassi forced her will... Her rebellion did not stop there: she did not marry the right suitor at the right time and instead insisted on leaving her hometown of Shiraz to go to collage in Tehran.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷ Satrapi, *Persepolis I*, 39.

⁴¹⁸ Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Leaving Iran*, 12.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, 49.

⁴²⁰ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 25.

⁴²¹ Ibid, 31.

Therefore, even actually here the actions they have done against the traditional sequence of the cases can be seen as rebellious in a person's life. Talking about the divestitures in their lives and what the others would think about them, Nafisi states: "Would they condemn the tortures, the executions and the extreme acts of aggression? I think they would. But what about the acts of transgression on our ordinary lives, like the desire to wear pink socks?"⁴²²

Tabari argues, among the other factors that forced the emergence of women's movement to be more active in Iran,

the most important factor that is keeping it alive is the political character of the state that replaced the shah's regime. For historical, as well as immediate political, reasons, the mass movement for the overthrow of the shah was led to victory by the hegemonic Islamic movement, . . . the programme of this movement for building a new state and a new society in Iran according to Islamic precepts is an extremely repressive one, affecting the situation of women in particular.⁴²³

As the writer later adds, after the establishment of the Islamic republic, the women has entered into more restraints than ever and "resisting a state that is pushing her to the depths of backwardness has become an existential question."⁴²⁴ Therefore, here it is important to mention the women who are mobilized by the revolution resumed their new position also as a consequence of the regime taking over the former one.

Nasrin Alavi is another writer who also emphasizes this issue in her book, *We are Iran*. She states at the beginning of the Revolution the revolutionary guards were razoring the lips of the women who are using lipstick when they are in the public spaces.⁴²⁵ Therefore, it can be deduced that, with the introduction of the new repressive regime, even the most private wishes and thoughts that have become political. Here, it reminds the saying "personal is

⁴²² Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 76.

⁴²³ Tabari, "The Women's Movement in Iran: A Hopeful Prognosis," 358.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid*, 359.

⁴²⁵ Nasrin Alavi, *Biz Iranız*. Çeviri Ali Çakıroğlu (Istanbul: Aykırı Yayıncılık, 2006), 31.

political” which is used abundantly in the 1960s. The fight for political rights is a fight to secure personal selves and to prevent political intrusion into the personal, individual rights. Feminists likewise, interpret the saying ‘personal is political’ stating, “aspects of life considered ‘private’ and therefore apolitical, including emotions, interpersonal relationships, and even women’s lives altogether are actually critical to the smooth functioning of the economic and political system in place.”⁴²⁶ The autobiographers under discussion also affirm a connection between the personal and political in their memoirs. It can also be deduced that they somehow also reverse the term as political is personal as well.

Nafisi raises the same quote in her memoir; and she states the Islamic Republic has blurred “the lines and boundaries between the personal and the political, thereby destroying both.”⁴²⁷

In Satrapi’s book we are given, Marjane, as a young girl, has to enter into illicit ways even to buy the music CD that she wants to listen after the revolution.⁴²⁸ In Nafisi’s book, we are given many examples from the restrictions that are put into practice hastily that forced everyone in the society to be politically active in a way. She states, in every area in life the concerns of the people started revolve around the execution of the new orders and rules of the regime. As mentioned before in the summaries she states:

How well could one teach when the main concern of the university officials was not the quality of one’s work but the color of one’s lips, the subversive potential of a single strand of hair? Could one really concentrate on one’s job when what preoccupied the faculty was how to exercise word *wine* from a Hemingway story, when they decided not to teach Brontë because she appeared to condone adultery.⁴²⁹

This is also seen in the other memoirs. For instance, Satrapi states, a girl can be arrested and whipped for using too much make-up in public; anyone can

⁴²⁶ Hart, *Revolution and Women’s Autobiography in Nineteenth-Century France*, 11.

⁴²⁷ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 273.

⁴²⁸ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 132.

⁴²⁹ Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 11.

be accused of behaving insolent or improper, these rules were the rules forced by the new regime watched by the guardians of the republic in the streets.⁴³⁰ Therefore, mostly women are forced deep into the political arena with the new interpretations of religious laws and traditions put by the Islamic regime.⁴³¹

With the exaggerated lines of rules and restrictions the Islamic Republic created with different excuses, politics entered deeper into the private lives of the people. Nafisi gives striking examples of this intervention of the private sphere by the rules, one of them is where her student saying; “The Islamic Republic has coarsened my taste in colors, Manna said, fingering the discarded leaves of her roses. I want to wear outrageous colors, like shocking pink and tomato red. I feel too greedy for colors . . .”⁴³² In another place, Hakakian is complaining about living with the fact that anyone can be an agent of SAVAMA, the successor agency of SAVAK,

[t]he old women in the floral- print veil limping away. The ogling teenage boy on the stoop. The blind man walking without a cane. Somewhere along the way, no matter where I was going, there was always a check point. Somewhere behind, someone always followed. Nothing was predictable.⁴³³

Therefore, it is argued the restrictions and interference by the government has spread everywhere, making it harder, especially for the women to act as they want.

Esfandiari is another scholar who also stresses the opinion that the Revolution played a crucial role in politicizing women. Before the revolution they urged the women to protest against the regime and throughout these protests many women, even the ones that were neutral or not politically active, entered the demonstrations and campaigns. He also adds that after women became politicized by the process, they started striving for further rights and in

⁴³⁰ Satrapi, *Persepolis I*, 134-136.

⁴³¹ Kian-Thiébaud, “From Islamization to the Individualization of Women in Post-revolutionary Iran,” 128.

⁴³² Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, 14.

⁴³³ Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 223.

the memoirs that is seen clearly. After the revolutionary process, it is believed that women became more aware of the situation and the reader sees women who question more, and struggle for the best.⁴³⁴

The argument Milani states in her article, is also true for the memoirs that are discussed in this thesis, the writers “led the reader beyond the walls and veils, to the domain of the private.”⁴³⁵ Therefore, after a long period of time with these memoirs the outsider has also gained admission to the private sphere and had the privilege to know about the feelings and thoughts of women towards the events happening around them.

In Nafisi’s memoir, the reader is led to think, by most of her class members’ discussions, that these girls are actually raising their consciousness within time and start to ask for a better life. This is seen in their looking for alternative ways out from the unhappy life they have been driven into by the regime.

Moreover, as discussed above in the memoirs the representation of writers and the women around them are also shown in a different way from traditionally accepted and forced roles of women as wife, daughter and sister. Besides these roles all of the writers are portrayed as active citizens who question their lives. First of all, all the writers are highly educated and within the books the reader finds out about their struggles for learning and getting education even in the hard and complicated situation the country was in. In each of the books, it is stated that many women attended the classes both before and after the revolution. Satrapi depicts the pre- and post revolutionary period in school and in both of these periods lots of girls go on their education.⁴³⁶ Nafisi shows all her female students as curious, questioning and eager for learning. Farah Pahlavi stresses on the improving situation of women. In a speech she has taken from Shah she states: “A woman today in Iran is totally different from

⁴³⁴ Esfandiari, “The Politics of the ‘Women’s Question’ in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999,” 75- 76.

⁴³⁵ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 9.

⁴³⁶ Satrapi, *Persepolis 1*, 3 also in 95, 97.

what she was a few centuries ago, or even only a few decades ago. As all walks of life are open to her...⁴³⁷

As many observers argue, whatever the result, in these public demonstrations and the revolutionary process the women, especially the urbanized women have taken a great role. They still had a positive effect on women by increasing the “sense of power and self confidence, the expanded political consciousness, and the perception of greater respect”.⁴³⁸ According to many critics the Revolution had taken many women into the political arena more effectively than the legal emancipation of the Pahlavi era.

Still, as Shahidian argues, the revolutionary movement that stirs many women that are apolitical into the active arena would have been more successful if women were more organized with independent organizations.⁴³⁹ This was, however, impossible due to the previous centralized policy of the Shah regime. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that the Revolution started a hopeful manoeuvre for the future of the women; however, it was insufficient for its time. Moreover, these memoirs reminding the role and the actions of women within the revolutionary process and afterwards, break the general consideration of Iranian women as silent and illiterate, and show them as educated, active and conscious citizens. However, as Tabari argues, with the changing socio-economic structures, more and more women are entering into the working arena. The communication networks that allow women to be in contact with the international women’s activities and their developments within them, and the internal political struggles that emerged with the new regime can all be counted among the factors keeping the women in the active field which, as all of the writers imply, leaves a hopeful future for the women in Iran.

In conclusion, in Chapter 5, it is given that the memoirs that the study is taking into account by authors from different backgrounds and interests are

⁴³⁷ Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah A Memoir*, 149.

⁴³⁸ Higgins, “Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal, Social and Ideological Changes,” 487.

⁴³⁹ Shahidian, “The Iranian Left and the ‘Women Question’ in the Revolution of 1978-79,” 242.

sharing important common characteristics and experiences when it comes to evaluate the experiences of their being Iranian women. The chapter depicts the common experiences narrated in the memoirs which are generally showing sorrows that the women especially experienced both before and after the revolution. The people who put their faith in the revolution while trying to escape from the restraints of the Shah regime has apparently entered into a new era of oppression which mainly put the women of Iran in an only more difficult position. The ideas and feelings of the Iranian people varied and were mostly ambiguous due to the unkept promises of the new regime. The revolution that forced the women into the active arena forced them back into the domestic arena all of a sudden, causing disillusionment and alienation among the women. The women memoir writers, thus, share and reflect a feeling of disillusionment and yearning for a freer and faithful life that they can adhere to.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis studied five Iranian women's memoir's, namely *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, *Journey from the Land of No* by Roya Hakakian, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution and Leaving Iran* by Afschineh Latifi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah* by Farah Pahlavi and *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi, within the frame of the Iranian Revolution. While studying these writers, all depicting the Iranian revolutionary period in their memoirs, the focus of the research has been their stance against the revolution, the changes in the lives of women and the memoir writing tradition which flourished after the revolution.

In order to build up a frame of the time period of the memoirs, the highlighted issues of the period is summarized in the second chapter. While giving the historical data of the period the focus was the emancipation efforts for women and its effects in the pre-revolutionary period. It is argued that these liberalization efforts all stayed rhetorical and used as an image of window dressing by the Shah regime in order to secure their modern image in the eyes of the wide public. In the context of Shah's ineffective policies, Kelly states that the "success of the regime's cynical manipulation of the truth can be gauged by an Amnesty International Report that the 'Shah of Iran retains his benevolent image despite *the highest rate of death penalties in the world, no valid system of civilian courts and a history of torture which is beyond belief.*'"⁴⁴⁰ It is also asserted, with the new regulations, the regime has centralized all the power in its hands leaving no space for the opposition groups and beliefs. Therefore, the

⁴⁴⁰ Kelly, "Comment on the 1980 International Women's Decade Conference in Iran," 389.

people coming from different backgrounds merged under the Islamic opposition as a way to show their opposition to the Shah regime. While summarizing the historical developments, it was pointed that the Iranian women entered from one repressive regime to another one and which happened to be even harsher for women this time.

In the third chapter, an introduction to the usage of memoirs is made with reference to the scholars' debates for and against the usage of memoirs in academic research. It has been claimed that the memoirs can be very useful while studying historical events, especially, cultural transformation as they are give personal opinions and accounts that are left out within the historical resource books. The disadvantages of working with the memoirs were fully acknowledged prior to venturing in this research. The research also gets the help of the accessory sources in order to avoid these disadvantages.

First of all, this thesis is on the side of the scholars who believe that even though there might be some personal additions and subjective beliefs within the narratives,

[the memoirs] *are* revealing the truths. These truths don't reveal the past "as it actually was", aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us the truths of our experiences . . . Shared stories provide significant ways of understanding the world . . . Even in our world of printed facts and impersonal mass media, we consciously and unconsciously absorb knowledge of the world and how it works through exchanges of life stories.⁴⁴¹

Therefore, revealing perception and presentation of the truths of the writers and the people around them they are important documents for researchers. As Jerome Bruner gives a reference to the philosopher Nelson Goodman who argues

that physics and painting and history are 'ways of world making'(Goodman, 1978), so autobiography (formal or informal) should be viewed as a set of procedures for 'life making.' And just as it is worthwhile examining in minute detail how physics or history go about their world making might we not be well advised to explore in

⁴⁴¹ Barbre, Webster and Farrel, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, 261.

equal detail what we do when we construct ourselves autobiographically?⁴⁴²

Thus this thesis supports the great contribution of the memoirs within different research areas such as anthropology, history and sociology.

Secondly, the first debate concerning the memoirs considering this research was discussed; whether we can put them under Persian documents although they are written in a foreign language was questioned. It was claimed that these women writing their memoirs in a language they got used to express themselves as they were educated mostly in foreign schools either in Iran or outside, and that they actually wrote their uncensored Iranian experiences as they were away from the restraints of the Islamic regime. Moreover, it is added, that these memoirs are published in a foreign country also added to their revealing of their own experiences in a more direct and free way.

In the same chapter why these five memoirs were chosen was also discussed in another subsection. It was stated that these memoirs are from writers of different backgrounds who supported different beliefs in terms of revolution. It was also pointed a variety of beliefs is important to get an overall idea of the period. In the same context, the stylistic differences and worldwide interest towards the memoirs, which also added to their choice, was also emphasized. It is also emphasized among the thirty memoirs these five are also the ones which give a detailed description of both pre and post revolutionary period. Therefore, in this chapter after the main debates revolving around memoirs in general, the debates concerning the memoirs under discussion is examined. This chapter clarified primary questions concerning the memoirs, forming an introduction to the later discussed topics.

In this chapter also a brief summary of the memoirs providing more examples for the other chapters under discussion was given. This part is necessary as a reminder for the memoirs and it also gave detailed information about the writers as the summaries were provided in a wider ground. It provided an account of how the writers behave under certain circumstances. It depicted

⁴⁴² Bruner, "Life as Narrative," 692.

the change in the behaviours of the writers one by one within the development of the revolutionary process. The disappointments of the people believing in the revolution and freedom expected to come along with it were presented through illustrative examples. The issues that forced the writers to share their experiences and the peculiarities of their experiences were shown in this chapter from the author's point of view. This chapter is important as it enables the reader to understand the power struggles and usage of symbols, images and different discourses and changes within the public and private space during the revolutionary period. Reading the experiences of each writer, with vivid examples from their lives one by one, allows the reader to grasp the alterations in the feelings and behaviours of the people that happened with the revolution. Moreover, this chapter also exemplifies the usage of Islam as an instrumental ideology in the foundation of the Islamic republic. That the Islamist opposition has misled the people and the disappointments of the people after the revolution are understood clearly after reading the fourth chapter.

In the fourth chapter, the possible reasons that led to women's writing were handled as stated within the women's memoirs. In order to emphasize the importance of the boom in the memoir writing by the Iranian women after the revolution, firstly a history of women writers in Iran is given. Prior to the revolutionary period there were only few sporadic women writers in Iran.

Secondly, the peculiarity of the personal narratives for Iranian culture was examined. It was argued that the Iranian culture emphasizes the sacredness of the personal. When looked from the old artworks until now it is seen from literature to painting most of the Persian art emphasizes the personal. Instead in these works of arts the community is glorified in general. Later the reflection of the impersonality issue within the memoirs was pointed out as well. It was also argued that still the memoirs written by the Iranian women are not as self reflective as their western counterparts. Moreover, it should also be kept in mind when talking about the women literature in Iran, as a cultural view the opening of the self, the personal narration of women is associated with women's unveiling, going public, becoming naked. This as a result is not historically

approved by the society which makes it even harder for women to narrate personal or even seemingly personal fictional literary works. On the other hand, it was asserted that, mostly with the impression of the revolution within their lives, the Iranian women silenced for a long period of time within the field of literature entered into the memoir writing with other side effects and various aims of their own. It was claimed the purposes for writing should be treated with reference to the writers' stance in life. The conclusion was that there can be also various factors behind writing. In general it is also true as, what Milani argues as despite many obstacles that are put by the society and the regime, despite the writers

idealized her invisibility, voicelessness, despite the anxieties of exposure and authorship, despite psychological dilemmas and cultural dislocations, despite accusations of shamelessness and charmlessness, toward the middle of the nineteenth century a tradition of women writers came to be established in Iran.⁴⁴³

Moreover, as a recurring common element stated by the writers, the representation of the other Iran that is regarded as an 'axis of evil' by the western media and the sufferings of the people within both of the pre and post revolutionary periods attracts the attention of the researcher. In all of the memoirs the writers depict the other Iran which is not as closed and repressed as it is shown in the foreign media and that the citizens of the country should not be judged by the deeds of the rulers. Moreover, as Virginia Woolf commented women need experiences and to explore the world to devote themselves to writing.⁴⁴⁴ That brings us to back to the the effect of the revolution on the Iranian women writers. Farideh Goldin states;

The shock of displacement, of exile, even if not necessarily the writer's, but for her parents and extended family; the inability to return to one's homeland easily, safely; and awareness of the suffering of family, friends, and those left behind-all such overwhelming life-experiences propel these books of memoirs. Moreover, the nostalgia among the

⁴⁴³ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 71.

⁴⁴⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: HBJ Inc., 1929).

Iranians in exile and the westerners' curiosity about Iran reinforces the momentum.⁴⁴⁵

After examining the external factors about the Iranian women's memoirs, in the fifth chapter the thesis analysed the common characteristics and the issues pointed in the memoirs. It was stated that although the writers come from different backgrounds and seems to be started their memoirs with various intentions, the five memoirs under discussion has many common sides. As all of the memoirs depict the same period of time in the Iranian history, this chapter was mainly divided into subparts, bearing in mind the transformations within the society with reference to different periods. First of all, the depiction of the pre and post revolutionary periods was compared and contrasted. Then, the changes coming with the revolution was debated in detail.

Firstly, it was explained how, in each part of the revolutionary process, the people are fighting for more rights and freedom, however, in the end all experiencing disillusionment. Secondly, the changes and suspicions in the ideologies of the people were examined. It was stated that with the discovery of the empty promises given by the revolutionaries the people started questioning their beliefs and behaviours. With the restrictions and strict behaviour codes put on women many people experienced emptiness within their lives. They start questioning the lives they are trapped into. Moreover, with the reshaping of the public space more and more women have been forced into the domestic side, the private. However, it is also argued that all these restrictions and censorships were also evident within the shah period within different perspectives as well. It is stated the traditional behaviours and expectations of the people cannot be changed with sudden, groundless policies of the Shah regime. Even those regulations made the people angry against the regime and caused them to embrace everything that is against the Shah regime. Therefore, the shah period is also depicted as full of sorrows restrictions and ill-timed cosmetic liberalization efforts that remained only in theory.

⁴⁴⁵ Farideh Goldin, "Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs," *Iran Chamber Society* (Fall 2004)
http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/iranian_women_contemporary_memoirs.php

Afterwards the changes coming with the revolutionary process and their effects on the women are also argued. It is explained all of the country has entered into a revolutionary process. From the city to the morals and behaviours of the people everything started to change within the world of the Iranian people. While accommodating these changes the discourses of the regime relied on mainly three pillars; “clerical guardianship, representations of female modesty, and the cult of martyrdom.”⁴⁴⁶ Once the clerical guardianship is ensured by the new laws and regulations brought with the Islamic republic. The cult of martyrdom is used a lot in order to stabilize the newly brought governance and rules. Women is the third important pillar of the new regime to work on in order to establish the power upon the individuals and the changes brought within the lives of women with the Islamic regime were radical. Besides these great changes in their lives in the memoirs we are given that women are on the one hand tried to be captured within the private sphere, on the other, made politically aware and active with the revolutionary process. Within the memoirs the women after the revolution is depicted as suspicious questioning and working on to improve their status. Therefore these women also experienced a feeling of exile within their own community with the newly adopted changes and roles put on them. It is also argued that this feeling of exile is later realized within many aspects in the Iranian women’s lives. The separation from the family, friends and homeland on one side and the feeling of alienation and exile experienced especially by the immigrants leaving the country in order to escape from the repressive policies of the regime on the other side doubled the feeling of exile for the writers. However, the most important one is the alienation and feeling of exile within their own homeland as a result of the patterns put on women by the traditional codes and new regime rules. The women however, are not depicted as submissive or inactive. The women, becoming more active with the influence of the revolution, are afterwards shown as different from the traditional womanhood- motherhood

⁴⁴⁶ Farhi, “On the Reconfiguration of the Public Sphere and the Changing Political Landscape of Post revolutionary Iran,” 61.

patterns within the memoirs. They go to universities, working in different areas and questioning the roles given upon them.

The memoir writing of the women likewise is seen as a revolutionary attitude on the part of the Iranian women by many critics. Milani argues these autobiographical writers are the people;

who demanded formal and authorized access to public discourse, and who rebelled against the hegemonic figure of female selfhood. Their autobiographical works are the glorious chronicle of a voice regained, while their lives are testimony to much suffering, conflict and sorrow.⁴⁴⁷

Milani also suggests, “a real revolution is, in fact, shaking the foundations of Iranian society, a revolution with women at its very center. Veiled, or unveiled, Iranian women are reappraising traditional spaces, boundaries, and limits.”⁴⁴⁸ With their appearance in the public scene these women are changing the interpretations of veil, and using it as a means to enter in the public scene. The traditional equation of the veil with the private has started to change. In contemporary Iran a woman can be “veiled and also have a public voice and presence.”⁴⁴⁹ Therefore, the future depicted for women within the memoirs is hopeful on the other hand.

Hence, this thesis analysed mainly three debates, first one the use of memoir within the scholarly researches. Depending on the historical sources on memoirs it has verified the importance of the memoirs in the researches. It pointed out the different and important perspective it will contribute to the research. Secondly, the possible various reasons why women have entered into the memoir writing years after silence in Iran were debated. It was argued that revolution has allowed them the necessary experiences and courage to embark on writing, later, when they also gained the freer environment away from the restraints of the Iranian government and cultural patterns, the women’s rote to narrating their personal stories has opened. While analysing these, one realizes

⁴⁴⁷ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 16.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, 9.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, 9.

that it is not easy to get rid of habits and traditions that have penetrated people's lives for so long. Therefore, these Iranian women have also narrated their stories differently from their western counterparts are also argued. It is shown that the revelation of self and self analysis is not that apparent as it is in the western memoirs. The final question examined was what common characteristics and experiences these five memoir writers share within their memoirs. Here, apart from their different ethnicities and background and beliefs, that these women depicting the same period has some similar experiences is pointed. The most important ones were the depiction of the Shah period as full of censorship, restraints, fake improvement policies and disillusionment from the revolution afterwards. The women depicted themselves as leaving one autocracy and entering another one within a different form. Therefore, these materials provide information that is based on the author's experience and gives the reader the chance to see the medallion from different sides.

This study has mainly focused on the changes in the lives of women and the obvious boom of memoir writing tradition after the revolution. While giving these alterations in the lives of women it mainly tied its arguments to the five memoir books under discussion. Many other topics such as the publicity and marketing behind the memoir writing and the depiction of Iran in the Western world left out of discussion. However, as an extension of this study, the researchers hereafter can analyse different topics, such as the various roles that the Iranian women play within the western world, the effects of these boom of memoir writing in Iran, or the effects of Iranian women writers within their own society. On the other hand, Hamid Dabashi has stated these memoirs have also created an anti- Iranian propaganda.⁴⁵⁰ These memoirs also had a huge effect among the Iranians living abroad. As an extension of this, the reactions to these memoirs among the Iranians living in exile can also be investigated.

⁴⁵⁰ Hamid Dabashi, "Native Informers and the Making of the American Empire," *Al Ahram Weekly Online*, 1-7 June 2006. http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/797/_sc.htm. For more information on the topic see: Metafilter Network, Community Weblog, February 27, 2007. <http://www.metafilter.com/58859/Hamid-Dabashi-shows-how-the-cover-of-Reading-Lolita-in-Tehran-symbolises-the-way-antiIranian-propaganda-is-formed-in-the-US-works>. Fatemeh Fakhraie, 12 December, 2007. <http://muslimahmediawatch.blogspot.com/2007/12/persepolis-explaining-iran-in-black-and.html>.

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