



## A Reflection on the Narrative of Travelogues on Women's Leisure and its Connection with the Gender Order in Iran During the Qajar Era

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### Abstract

During the Qajar period, Iranian society was widely exposed to foreign observers. This was a continuation of the tradition that started in the Safavid period, but the changes in Iran after the fall of the Safavids temporarily halted the visits of Western ambassadors and tourists. After the Qajars came to power and established their government in Iran, these visits resumed. During this period, in accordance with changes in the international situation and Iran's position in these relations, political delegations and larger groups of industrialists, soldiers, doctors, and engineers came to Iran. This situation continuously exposed Iranian society and culture to the eyes and judgment of Europeans more than before. The increasing tendency of Europeans to describe and write about their observations of Iranian society led to the production of a significant amount of travel literature during the Qajar period. The content of these travelogues covered significant topics such as the economy, culture, ethics, norms, religion, and customs, among others. Women's status in society also found much reflection in these travelogues. Through the European travelogues of the Qajar period, the lifestyle of women in Iran and the various cultural and social norms and values that influenced their lives were also narrated. As a result, the social dignity of women was somewhat reflected in this period. As narrated, although Iranian women were limited in terms of the extent of their societal activism, they nonetheless had aesthetic concerns and sought enjoyment and entertainment in their own way. This was consistent with the limited world in which women existed during this period. It can be said that the entertainments of Iranian women in the Qajar period, as described in these reports, were closely tied to their restricted and enclosed world. These limitations were reflected both in the spaces where women's entertainment took place and in the types of entertainment available to them, depending on their social status.

In theoretical terms, it can be said that the narrative of the travelogues and their descriptions and reports of women's conditions make us more aware of a gender order and the dominant cultural discourse surrounding women. The importance of these narratives lies in the fact that they were written by foreign observers. Therefore, the lifestyle of women, their presence in society, and their day-to-day actions in public and private spaces were seriously considered by these travel writers. This issue is revealed



in the many details that travel writers have narrated about the daily life of women in Iran. These details are full of hints and descriptions that, more than anything else, confirm the attractiveness of Iranian women as a social subject with a special type of social activism for tourists. What is important is that in this gender order, women were forced to behave in a certain way. Women's tendency to have fun was directly affected by this gender order. Therefore, in order for women to have fun, they had to engage in limited actions within society because cultural and social norms and values did not give them more freedom to act. What the travelogues reflected about women's recreation and entertainment were, in fact, limited and not very diverse actions that took a special form in the absence of public spaces for women. The presence of many restrictions, constant monitoring by men, gender sensitivities, and other factors shaped the nature of women's entertainment in the Qajar period. For example, women could not visit the market, stay outside at night, or talk to anyone, and they had to wear their hijab. From this point of view, the travelogues are narrators of the lifestyle of women and the factors affecting their recreation and entertainment. This research aims to investigate the impact of cultural and social contexts on women's entertainment and show how women's activism within this gender order influenced their desire for fun and entertainment, according to the content of travelogues from the Qajar period.

The travelogues of the Qajar period present a narrative about the position of women and their tendency to have fun. From the narration of these travelogues, one can better understand the factors affecting the gender order and the formation of specific patterns of female entertainment. What is highlighted in these narratives is the position of women within a specific gender discourse. In this gender discourse, important components such as patriarchy, religion, and tradition have directly influenced women's tendency to have fun. This research aims to investigate the effect of gender order on the pattern of female recreation by relying on historical analysis and using descriptive-analytical techniques. The goal is to answer the question of how the narrative of the travelogues can illustrate the influence of the dominant gender order on the nature of women's entertainment. The result of this research is that by relying on the details provided in the travelogues about the lifestyle of women during this period, it is possible to analyze the issue of female entertainment within the context of social and ideological relations.

**Keywords:** Qajar, recreation and entertainment, women, travelogues, narration.

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