



The Effects of the Introduction of New Technologies to Iran in the Qajar Era (1848-1925)

Hamidreza Aryanfar¹

1. Assistant Professor, Iranology Foundation, Tehran, Iran

* Corresponding Author Email: aryanfar287@gmail.com

Abstract

The introduction of new technologies in Iran brought about profound changes in various social and cultural aspects of the Qajar era. One such technology was photography, which began spreading during the Naseri period with the presence of male photographers. Over time, photography gained popularity among women, leading to the emergence of female photographers and the establishment of women's photography studios. During this period, Iranian society underwent significant cultural and artistic transformations in line with global developments. These changes influenced attitudes toward the role and status of women within the social and cultural structure. As photography evolved in the West, its industry also advanced in Iran. The Qajar court actively supported photography, promoting it first among the nobility and later among the general public. At the forefront of this movement was Naser al-Din Shah, who became the first Iranian to have his image printed on a daguerreotype. This event marked the beginning of his deep fascination with photography and his long-term support for the art throughout his reign. His patronage played a crucial role in the spread of photography and its various applications in Iran. Shah not only photographed court women but also took numerous self-portraits. This article aims to examine the role and status of women in photography, the factors influencing their participation in social activities, and the emergence of female photographers and photography featuring women. The study employs a historical research approach combined with a descriptive-analytical method, utilizing historical sources. It also draws on Matila et al.'s global standard framework for categorizing audiences of new phenomena.

From the very beginning of the photography industry, the photography of women and its limitations attracted the attention of both the court and the Shah personally. Due to the traditional culture and religious prejudices within the Qajar court, restrictions were imposed on it.

The focus of this research is to examine the circumstances surrounding the presence of female photographers in the Qajar period up until the unveiling of the hijab. The central question of this article is: What factors contributed to the emergence of female photographers in Iranian society during the Qajar period? Additionally, the study seeks to address the following questions:



- A. What stages did Iranian society go through in accepting women photographers?
B. What factors influenced these stages in the Qajar community?

Given the ruling structure of Iranian society during the Qajar period, court women and those from the ruling class were the first to take up photography, much like men. Gradually, women from other social classes also became interested in photography. During this time, the most significant factors driving women's interest in photography were the introduction of new elements of civilization and modernism, changes in people's lifestyles, and the presence of foreign female photographers.

In reviewing the thematic background of this article, several recent sources and studies have dedicated significant attention to photography in the 19th century, as well as issues related to photography and photographers of that period. Among the books written on the photography of women during the Qajar era, one notable example is *The Social History of Women in the Qajar Era* by Sumiya Sadat Shafi'i (2021), which explores the role of women in that period. The distinguishing feature of the present research, compared to previous studies, is that it not only introduces female photographers of the Qajar era up until the unveiling of the hijab in 1935 but also examines the factors influencing their presence in society and the stages of their acceptance. This topic is one of the most significant aspects of Iran's social history. The study relies on a global standard framework to investigate and analyze these developments. Additionally, the research evaluates the results and consequences of this phenomenon—the presence of female photographers in society.

The introduction of the camera to Iran during the Qajar era and the emergence of women photographers were direct consequences of Iranians becoming acquainted with European civilization. As societal developments unfolded during this period, the restrictions and stigmas surrounding women photographers and the photography of women gradually diminished. Despite certain challenges and through various stages, Iranian society was ultimately compelled to accept both women photographers and the practice of photographing women. This process of acceptance occurred in three key stages: first within the royal court, then among the nobility and men, and finally among the general public. Unlike the five-stage global standard for adopting new phenomena, this transition in Iran can be condensed into three stages. Several social and cultural factors directly influenced this process, including:

1. Awareness within the court and among women regarding women's social rights, familiarity with modern technologies such as photography, and the presence of female photographers from other countries.
2. The needs of the female community, including the desire to capture family portraits and individual photographs, as well as the upper-class women's aspiration to display status and distinction.
3. Religious beliefs and the issue of hijab.
4. Male prejudices, traditional customs, and prevailing power structures.

These social and cultural dynamics intensified in the late Qajar period and continued into the following era. With the establishment of public photography studios, the



adoption of effective teaching methods, and the use of newspapers, pamphlets, and books to educate the public about photography, efforts were made to promote this art in Iran. Additionally, exposure to various photographic styles and trends further contributed to its development.

As lifestyles evolved, women began establishing their own photography studios, attending public photography studios, and receiving photography education in girls' schools. Consequently, women's involvement in photography became more widespread in Iranian society, and cultural sensitivities regarding the presence of female photographers gradually diminished. This shift was so significant that, after achieving relative freedom in public spaces and with the introduction of civil registration—which required photographs for identity documents—women started visiting photography studios alone or accompanied by their husbands and children.

Keywords: Qajar, new technologies, Nasser al-Din Shah, photography industry, women photographers.

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