



Using Clothing to Unify a Country: The History of Reza Shah's Dress Reform in Iran

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The dress reform in Iran was one of the most significant legacies of Reza Shah Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran from 1925 to 1941 (Vogelsang-Eastwood 2012a). Before the modernization of Iran by Reza Shah, Iranians tended to dress diversely in different regions inhabited by distinct group (Chehabi 1993) such as Lurs, Turks, Qashqa'I, and Kurds (Minorsky 1945; Vogelsang-Eastwood 2012b). Reza Shah viewed the distinctive features of tribal clothes as a cause of nationwide disunity. The dress reform he implemented was meant to unify the diverse cultural groups by use of a common dress for everyone. He used a diverse array of techniques, from punitive measures to display of fashion leaders, to prod the public to accept clothing that was not part of their cultural background. Reza Shah's interference in the acceptance or disapproval of dress shows how government regulation can disrupt and change the time frame of what might be considered the natural dress acceptance phenomenon. After this reform, all Iranians including both women and men began to wear western-style garments.

Reza Shah considered the traditional Iranian dress as a disgrace and sign of backwardness; therefore, he decided to introduce a national uniform for the modernization and westernization of the country. Reza Shah viewed the traditional attire as a sign of unsophistication, a disgrace for the whole nation, and one of the main hindrances to the country's advancement and prosperity (Yari & Hakakbashi 2009). Reza Shah believed that apart from science and technology of the west, uniformity was required to modernize the country (Vogelsang-Eastwood 2012a). He believed uniformity in the public's appearance was an indicator of his country's ability to be modern. He started to implement uniformity by changes in men's clothing. Men's dress reform occurred in two stages. The first stage of the reform began with the introduction of Pahlavi Hat in 1927, when it was declared the official headgear for all Iranian men. This was followed by the announcement of the cabinet passing the Uniform Dress Law in 1928, which required all male Persians to dress uniformly in Western style replacing their traditional clothing. Reza Shah's visit with Anaturk in 1934, laid the antecedents for the second round of dress reform. The Pahlavi Hat requirement was abolished and a new Western hat, the Chapeaux Hat, became mandatory in 1935 (Chehabi 1993). Despite some resistance in the beginning, the changes in headgear were accepted as well as Western men's suit. This was sped up by local markets (sources of traditional clothing) being forced by the government to provide only the new type of garments (Vogelsang-Eastwood 2012a). Fines could also be charged to those who did not follow the dress codes as laid out by the laws (Chehabi 1993). Reza Shah hoped that the acceptance of these transformations in men's wear would soften the blow of more socially-charged changes that were to come in women's clothing.

Unveiling of women occurred gradually. In fact, before any law was declared against women's veil, some traditional features of women's clothing had begun to fade away. For instance, the *ruband* (mask or a type of face veil which was worn under *chador*) almost vanished, except in south of Iran where people were considered more traditional and devout, and

even nowadays women continue to wear *ruband* (Vogelsang-Eastwood 2012). However, this was not fast enough for Reza Shah's modernization needs. Even as the Shah of Iran, Reza Shah had to approach the issue of veiling very cautiously because he wanted to avoid infuriating the public and to prepare them for when he would officially forbid veil. He used the status of his wife as Queen and her attendants to try and popularize not being veiled in public. On several official occasions the Queen appeared without veil or with minimum veiling (Heath 2008). The official banning of veil occurred in 1936, which turned out to be the most disfavored reform of all. The state encouraged tailors and hatters to provide the new Western dress for women and even set aside money to aide women who could not afford it. Salaries of women employees could be suspended if they did not obey the law and medical treatment could be withheld (Bahmani 2012).

In a short period of time due to Reza Shah's efforts, Iranian dress was westernized and various ethnic groups gave up their traditional clothing in favor of the national uniform. The government used laws, fines, monetary punishments, withholding of health services, government subsidies, control of the local markets, and the status of fashion leaders in the form of the Queen and other social elites to encourage the acceptance of Western dress in Iran. In 1941, the allied forces removed Reza Shah from power, and his son "Mohammad Reza Shah" came to power as the new king. Under the new regime the mandatory unveiling laws were abolished and women could appear in public both veiled and unveiled (Milani 2008). After the 1979 Iranian revolution the new Islamic regime passed compulsory veiling laws, which effectively undid the "modernization" of Reza Shah, enforcing that all the women be veiled in public places (Ramazani 1993).

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