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Problematization of Iranian Discourse of Education and the Beginning of Discursive Conflict over Education in Qajar Era

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Extended Abstract

This research attempts to study how the discourse of education became problematic in Iran. Apart from investigating the conflicts over such a problem, we will face a consequent question: when the educational system came to be a problem and an object of thought? Such a question is the result of a different view toward the history of Iranian education. Up to now, such a history has been impacted by traditional historiography in which the researcher focuses on the role of fundamental structures, development-driven conception, and originality of the role of specific subjects. In this article we move from that traditional approach and rely on Foucaultian historiographical approach to the appearance of the discourse of new education and its related conflicts. Findings of this research show that the break in traditional educational system is neither the result of any specific subject nor it can be explained in any metahistorical framework. The main cause was the coincidence and co-occurrence of some events in history of Iran. Such a Coincidence of events and the inability of the old discourse to explain the new conditions led to the formation a new discourse that went on to be based on new western sciences, technology and rationality instead of following the old discursive order. All these conditions made the education a problematic object in Iran and led to considerable changes and conflicts around the sciences and educational institutes.

Keywords: educational system, event, Genealogy, modern educational institutes, traditional historiography

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INTRODUCTION

In light of two centuries of debates and conflicts on the Iranian educational system a question arises: when the Iranian educational system came to be a problem and an object of thought? This research analyzes the traditional historiography approach in writhing the history of Iran's educational system in order to identify the moment of problematization of the education discourse in Iran. Indeed, we attempt to understand why such a huge complex of discourses was formed on the inefficiency of Iranian traditional education all at once. The mentioned break cannot be accidental, but it has been a purposeful move or the result of the natural sequences of historical changes. Moreover, moving from traditional education system and accepting the new sciences and educational institutes made Iranian education a problematic subject. Hence, the genealogy of many subsequent conflicts must be searched in the mentioned historical moment. If one fails to understand this historical moment, he would hardly understand the breaks, changes and conflicts on the Iranian educational system. The second section of this article focuses on the conflicts arose around the new educational institutes.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this article is Genealogy of the formation of new education discourse in Iran and its related conflicts.

METHODOLOGY

This research is conducted based on Foucaultian approach to historical analysis. This approach moves from the presumptions of historiography to rely on novel principles and methods that Foucault had applied during two phases of his thoughts, i.e. archeology and genealogy. Unlike the traditional historiography, in this historiographical method, the researcher doesn't recognize any specific "cause" or "force" as the agent of occurring a given phenomenon. Besides, he doesn't consider any sort of unity and integrity in studying the phenomena; but he tries to identify all singular and delicate signs of a given event. Such an approach "allows us to identify the diversity of events under the apparent unity of any feature or concept through which... they have been formed" (Foucault, 1389, 150). The genealogical analysis doesn't pay attention to the golden ages, transcendental structures and universal affairs, but it analyzes the events, features and their specific manifestations.

RESULT

Moving from the traditional educational system toward new sciences and educational institutes was a historical event, not a predetermined historical

necessity. The accelerator of this break was the challenges against lives of Iranian society. Coincidence of events such as Iran-Russia wars and the health crises leading to epidemic diseases like cholera and plague not only put a crisis on traditional discourse of education but it paved the way for important changes in Iranians' thought and behavior. Prior to these events, the life of Iranian people was not controlled by knowledge, but since then, the life and its mechanisms gradually entered the arena of explicit manifestations of power/knowledge. Co-occurrence of these events at that moment and the inability of traditional discourse of education led to think of new conditions. All these led to the formation of a new discourse, formed not only based on religious logics, but based on new western sciences, technologies and rationality.

The new discourse forced the Iranian society to accept a specific model of western educational system and made a considerable part of the social body believe in the necessity of changing the traditional educational system. Consequently, the subject of science and knowledge in general and the educational system in particular got an important theoretical, political and educational problem. Foundation of Dar-ul Funun and modern schools were two important measures pushing the break of traditional educational system toward the new era. The foundations of these two institutions (resulted from the problematization of educational structures of old order along with the historical events of the time) were the beginning of new order in Iranian educational system. This new order gradually released the rules and forces from the old order and provided new rules, forces and sciences. Such conditions the advocates of old system concerned. Some considered the foundation of new educational institutes as an invasion to the field of their power and interests. The common ground of all these oppositions was their reliance on religion.

CONCLUSION

The appearance of new sciences and educational institutes in Iran (resulting from coincidence of different events and forces) led to widespread changes in religious order of Iranian traditional society and its discourse of education. Despite popular understandings, these conflicts neither have a single source nor they were the results of the wills of any specific subject, but they are the results of actions and reactions among different power relations at a specific historical moment. Thus these conflicts must be studied as the functions of power. Relating those conflicts to metahistorical ideas (such as those who say Islam was opponent to new sciences, or who suppose that the base of such oppositions was religious) is indeed the result of an unhistorical understanding or a linear view to history, failing to see and analyze



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any phenomenon in its holistic complex. In this article we have attempted to avoid such a linear view. This is why we pay attention to the forces, strategies and different forms of the conflicts.

NOVELTY

In recent two centuries, the history of Iranian educational system has been understood and explained under the impact of traditional historiography. This historiographical tradition supposes the role of fundamental structures and considers a transcendental role to those structures in order to explain the development or underdevelopment of Iranian educational system. Among the characteristics of this innovative historiography is to recognize the originality of specific subjects such as elites, clergies, state, and other individuals and groups in the changes of educational system (such as Abbas Mirza, Amir Kabir, Rashidieh, governmental elites, knowledge-friend ministers, etc.). This article neglects the mentioned approach and adopts a Foucaultian approach to the historical analysis in order to highlight the appearance of new sciences in Iran and their related and consequent debates and conflicts. This historiographical approach allows the researcher to view the phenomena on a historical ground without imposing any historical or metahistorical structure. Hence it presents new findings on the history of Iranian education.



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