

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Bidari Newspaper and the Reflection of New Medical Developments in Kerman (1304- 1320 SH /1925-1941 AD)

Abstract

Persian Constitutional Revolution, in addition to changing the political and social structures of Iran, challenged the dominant discourse of traditional medicine. In the new approach to medical life, the government, physicians, and the educated class paid special attention to the issue of personal health and the need to diagnose diseases and their complications. Furthermore, they place special emphasis on disease prevention rather than treatment. To accomplish this, each took a particular mission. With the rise of journalism in post-constitutional Iran, they played a crucial role in advancing modern medical goals and educating people. In the present study, through the lens of a modern approach to journalism in medicine, taking an analytical approach, an attempt has been made to examine the mission of the Bidari newspaper to the issue of modern health and medicine in Kerman during the first Pahlavi period (1304-1320 SH/ 1925-1941 AD). Findings show that, to inform the public, the most important missions of the newspaper comprise putting emphasis on healthy living by identifying the types of common diseases in Kerman and the way to deal with them through paying attention to the principles of prevention and introducing governmental regulations in the field of medicine.

Key words: Modern medicine, Traditional medicine, Bidari newspaper, Kerman, Iran, Medicine, Traditional Medicine

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Introduction

Ignorance in recognizing the brilliant history of traditional medicine that began in the late Safavid period, reaching its peak in the Qajar period, and the prevalence of superstitions in the treatment of diseases were among the inappropriate facts about Iranian medical life until the late Qajar period which were also witnessed in Kerman province. This issue was an important cause of the increasing incidence of diseases which, as a result, led to either the death or physical disabilities of numerous people in Iran. The first attempts to get out of the current situation began by government members and the efforts of Amir Kabir with the establishment of the Dar ul-Fonun (polytechnic university). The employment of doctors from European countries to teach at the university and the presence of some European doctors in terms of religious and non-religious missions in Iran, gradually changed the country's medical system.

With the beginning of constitutionalism and the restructuring of the government, launching and making use of the European institutions came to the attention of the Iranian. In the meanwhile, the medical structure of Iran was changed and the need to change the public attitudes toward the existing traditional medicine and to pay attention to modern medicine was formed. The political and economic problems of the governments of the time of Iran from the Constitutional era until 1921 could not widely involve governmental agents in matters related to medicine and treatment. In the meantime, journalists who were often from the educated class of the society reflected these important issues and began to pay attention to modern medicine in their articles. With the rise of the first Pahlavi and the attempt to form a modern government, issues, such as health and the change in the medical structure became more important than before. Local newspapers played an important role in reflecting such atmospheres and making people aware of changes in modern medicine. The status of modern medicine was enhanced by articles written on the current state of medical deficiencies as well as the critiques of the prevalence of the traditional medicine and by the articles physicians published on diagnosing and preventing diseases, along with related laws and governmental regulations. The achievements of such efforts resulted in the promotion of public health, disease prevention and the reduction of mortality and disability in patients.

In this research, the reflection on these issues has been addressed in the Bidari newspaper published in Kerman. Regarding the background of research, it should be noted that, so far, scarce studies have been conducted on the status of medicine and health in the first Pahlavi period. For instance, Mohsen Roustaei, in one section of his book, entitled "History of Medicine in Iran", based on the documents available in the first Pahlavi era, has dealt with the medical situation in Iran. However, due to the limited resources of Kerman medical history, especially from the perspective of journalism, so far, no independent research has been done on this subject. In the book "History of Kerman Medicine, the valuable work of Majid Malek Mohammadi, there is no mention of the Bidari newspaper and its contents in the field of medicine. The main research question deals with the dimensions of the mission of the Bidari newspaper in the context of modern medical discourse. By examining this newspaper, the research-



ers of the study can claim that different strata of people considered the change in the medical structure important. Criticizing the traditional discourse of medicine and the government's inattention to the existing shortcomings in the field of modern medicine in Kerman province and informing people in recognizing, treating, and preventing diseases have been the focus of the Bidari newspaper.

Modern Medicine and the Press

With the expansion of the press from the beginning of the Constitutional era, journalists, who were often educated and were critical of the current situation, while writing on socio-political issues, also paid special attention to the problems in the field of medicine and treatment. Stating their existing shortcomings, the newspaper asked physicians, educated in modern medical schools, to write articles in a simple language to inform people about recognizing various diseases and their treatment as well as raising issues, like disease prevention. These were among the most important missions of newspapers in the formation of modern medical discourses. The inclusion of physicians' speeches in various forums in a simple language for the public about diseases and related issues was another action of the newspapers in raising public awareness and helping the new medical structure in the fight against diseases. The first journal, writing specifically in the field of medicine, was the Journal of Hifzosseha, published in 1285 SH. It was a very popular journal. (Sadr Hashemi, 1983, p. 220) The professional life of this magazine did not exceed one year. The newspaper also aimed at making people familiar with diseases and their treatment methods with an emphasis on traditional and modern medicine. In the ninth issue of this newspaper, readers were asked to read the journal articles to their family members and provide the literate people with newspaper's issues as well. (*Hifzosseha newspaper*, 1945, p. 24) After the newspaper was stopped from being published and before the formation of new medical institutions, including the Ministry of Health and the Faculty of Medicine, in the first Pahlavi period, medical-related news was published in other newspapers. From the beginning of 1302 SH, the Baladieh newspaper was engaged in informing people about medical news. The second specialized medical journal in which several physicians used to write articles was the monthly Journal of Treatment. (Javanmardi et al, 2019, p. 120). Considering this, the claim arises that non-specialized publications, such as the Bidari newspaper, bore the main role in issues like medical developments and public awareness.

The Bidari newspaper, the critique of the discourse of health and medicine and attention paid to the modern medicine

The brilliant history of medicine in Iran during the Qajar period declined for various reasons. The Qajar government's inattention for issues related to medicine and the intensification of cultural problems of people and the society, along with political issues, caused the existing problems to continue up to the first Pahlavi era. At that time, the medical situation was still dominated by the discourse of traditional medicine. One of the missions of the Bidari newspaper was to fight against deviations of



the traditional medicine and to disseminate and support modern medical principles. According to the Bidari newspaper, although Iran used to have a strong medical history and competent doctors, such as Abu Ali Sina and Razi, those days, the Iranian did not act according to the principles of modern medicine, and were deprived of having good doctors available. Hence, people, in case of illness, had to refer to fake or unauthorized doctors, witches, and the like. The most important criticism of the newspaper to such doctors was that after several months, they came to believe that their treatment method was according to medical principles, claiming to treat any diseases (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1931, 5(10), p. 4). According to this newspaper, one of the important reasons for such an approach was the dominated ignorance prevalent among people. (Figure 1) The main goal of their newspaper was to make people not trust such so-called doctors. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1933, 3(10), p. 3).

The following issues of the newspaper continued publishing similar criticisms. The newspaper's authors believed that the traditional medicine in Iran was once glorious. By referring to the travelogues of European tourists in the Safavid period, they considered the people of Iran physically healthy in the past. But they considered their time as the era of forgetting old medicine and neglecting modern medicine, leading to the death of numerous people, especially in winter. The authors of the article considered the severe shortage of physicians, especially in the countries and villages, as the leading cause of mortality. The problems of the people were very serious. Severe poverty among the majority of the people of Kerman was one of the obstacles to people's attention to modern medicine. Most people could not afford paying doctors and buying medicine. Hence, the newspaper often stressed the need to pay attention to the poor and to create and develop health centers to treat the poor (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1934, 4(18), p. 1).

Among the most important barriers in the development of modern medicine were people's cultural and social structure and their belief in superstitions and low-cost treatments. Many classes of the society still did not believe in modern medicine, and sometimes the gaps between the patients and the doctor prevented patients from sharing their physical condition accurately with the physician. This was one of the obstacles physicians faced in accurately diagnosing the disease. On the other hand, even though patients were treated at the Baladieh Hospital free of charge at the time of the outbreak of infectious diseases, still some people were unwilling to go to these medical centers. Then, the government issued a law according to which the burial permit could be issued only by authorized doctors, familiar with modern medicine. This made most patients refer to doctors only when they were in a state of death just for receiving a burial permit. According to Dr. Sohrab Barkhordar, the head of Kerman Health, patients by referring late to the doctor helped the dissemination of infectious diseases. To counter this problem, the authors of the newspaper believed that the violators, at the time of receiving burial permits, should be reprimanded and faced penalties for referring late to the doctor (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1934, 4(18), p. 1).

Lack of medicine and related problems were other issues of concern to the Bidari newspaper. Misinformation about traditional drugs, the scarcity or obsolescence of their medicinal properties and the high price of modern medicines were important





Figure 1. One of the first issues of the Bidari newspaper; on general health and the prevalence of smallpox (The Bidari newspaper, 1929, p. 1)

factors in the failure of treatment and the death of the poor. According to this newspaper, in 1930, many patients died because of the fever widespread in Kerman. In the meantime, criticisms were aimed at the government, asking the members of the government to monitor the drug and its availability more closely (The Bidari newspaper, 1930, 63, p. 2). However, this problem persisted. A year later, the newspaper's writers criticized the government for the shortage of medicine and the problems of the poor, urging the government to assign some pharmacies to provide patients with free-of-charge medicine. They also criticized the fluctuated prices of European medicines



and the ineffectiveness of drugs found in traditional herbal shops (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1931, 89-90, p. 7). Criticism of the status of imported and traditional medicines was reflected in the newspaper two years later (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1934, 4(17 and 18), p. 1).

The newspaper also criticized the drugstores' closing time. They, unlike other cities, closed their pharmacies just after the sunset. Then, the municipality was expected to take measures so that patients would not face problems in obtaining medicine at night (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1931, 2(11-13), p. 2).

Diseases of women and children

The health status of children and women has always been exposed to many harms. Ignorance of health issues and the dominance of traditional medicine based on superstitions and the prevalence of misconceptions among women, especially during pregnancy and the first few years of childbirth, were among the most important factors in maternal and child mortality. On the other hand, the dominant view of fatalism turned people away from paying enough attention to the causes of diseases and their treatment. This made death a normal issue. (Toulabi, 2018, p. 55) Then, because of the above-mentioned issues and unwillingness of people to go to doctors in case of illness, newspapers tried to prevent serious harm to the life of mothers and children by creating the necessary awareness among women.

Maternal neglect of health and medical issues also exposed children's health to serious harm. For instance, women who had contagious diseases, such as syphilis and gonorrhea, were more likely to transmit the disease to their children during and after pregnancy. Accordingly, in the law ratified in 1941, the necessity of paying attention to the improvement of the medical condition was emphasized, and penalties were provided for violators of these principles. (Roustaei, 2003, p. 211) In this newspaper, several articles were published, addressing women suffering from contagious diseases, such as gonorrhea and syphilis, with the aim of protecting women, especially during pregnancy, against such diseases and their adverse effects on children (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1938, p. 1).

Rubella was one of the most common diseases among children, especially in Kerman. An article in the Bidari newspaper was published on the prevalence of Rubella in winter and its symptoms (seizures, nausea, and headache), especially among children, emphasizing the need to pay attention to fever among children (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1934, 4(16), pp. 2-3). The prevalence of diphtheria among children, especially under the age of five, and the description of treatment and recognition of its symptoms were other issues of interest to the authors of this newspaper (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1940, 10(39), p. 1). Furthermore, by publishing the lecture delivered by Dr. Irani, the newspaper tended to increase public awareness on the causes of the spread of this disease and the recognition of its symptoms (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1940, 9(15), p. 1).

Smallpox in Iran was one of the most common diseases among children and adolescents. This disease and its treatment method were diagnosed by the famous Iranian



physician, Zakaria Razi. With the efforts of Amir Kabir, endeavors were made to fundamentally control this disease, and to this end, in 1305 SH, an office for smallpox vaccination started its activities in different parts of Iran for free. People's inattention to this issue made many parents prevent their children from getting smallpox vaccination. A review of the newspaper's articles showed that most medical-related articles were related to smallpox and measles. This issue manifested the severity of this disease in Kerman province even up to the last years of the first Pahlavi era, despite the efforts made to combat this disease. In 1940, Dr. Irani, the head of the health department of the eighth province (Kerman), gave a detailed speech about this disease, its dangers and the way(s) to prevent its spread at Pahlavi High School, and the Bidari newspaper published the full text of the lecture for public awareness. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1940, 9(91), 9 February 1940, p. 1) In 1940, the outbreak of this disease caused the newspaper to write strict instructions to be applied for smallpox (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1940, 10(39), p. 4). (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Introduction of smallpox and the need for more attention to treat this disease (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1940, 10(39), p. 2).

Through publishing several articles and covering doctors' speeches delivered at various institutions, the awakening newspaper introduced the disease and the consequences of parental neglect and its adverse effects on children's skin and eyes, and recommended them to be vaccinated three times against smallpox. The prevalence of superstition in the treatment of diseases at that time was so strong that even though smallpox vaccination was free of charge, some parents did not let their children be vaccinated. But, because of the legal obligation to vaccinate children against smallpox, parents were just after obtaining the insemination certification without their children being vaccinated. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1940, 9(91), 31 January 1940, p. 2) Dr. Irani, one of the famous physicians of Kerman, in several articles and lectures, pointed out the different dimensions of this disease among children and adolescents and gave some instructions, such as paying attention to health during the illness, including bathing in hot water but placing the patient's eyes and mouth out of water and regularly cleaning them and using effective drugs and the observing the principles of proper nutrition. In this way, he shared useful knowledge in the fight against this disease. According to him, wrapping children in red cloths to prevent skin inflammations, recommended in traditional medicine, has been approved by American physicians today (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1940, 9(92), p. 1).

As a result of the government's great attention paid to the modern medical structure, physicians were required to obtain an official certificate. Moreover, the government put the occupations related to traditional medicine, especially those related to the treatment of children, under strict scrutiny. This banned the activities of counterfeit doctors and those working in various guises in this profession. They, as reported by people in different cities or regions, referred to the Bidari newspaper to ask the government to let them continue their former activities. For instance, a man, named Gholam Hossein Ebrahimi, who did the traditional smallpox inoculation in the cities of Ravar and Kuhbanan, asked the Ministry of Education to allow him to do smallpox vaccination and perform surgery for certain diseases, despite the fact that he lacked an official government permission. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1930, 5(10), p. 3).

The prevalence of this disease in Kerman and the negligence of parents in this regard made the authors of the Bidari newspaper persuade parents to vaccinate their children, blaming them for the deaths of their children. The newspaper also warned them that they would face legal action from the government if they did not vaccinate their children. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1928, p. 2) The authors of the newspaper also encouraged parents to get smallpox vaccine by stimulating their feelings and emotions, as well as addressing their religious belief, making them responsible before God for neglecting to vaccinate their children (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1929, p. 1).

In 1312 SH, smallpox and measles diseases infected and killed many children, and the Bidari newspaper felt more responsible for fighting against the smallpox disease, and criticized the current situation and informed people in several different ways. First, it cited the example of civilized countries and the role of parents and the government in controlling the disease, informing people and pointing out the duties of each, and asking the government to form a medical working group in the event of an



outbreak of infectious diseases in those areas (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1933, 4(9), p. 3). And then, the newspaper was upset about forgetting the old medicine and neglecting the new medicine and criticized the current traditional medicine and wrote: in the past, smallpox was not considered an important disease. For this reason, they did not prescribe any special medicine and only kept the patient, away from the smell and cold, alone in a room and gave him/her ordinary medicines, such as willow sweat. However, the so-called traditional doctors used to say: “smallpox and rubella are known, so the doctor is not needed.”. Hence, People, believing this wrong saying, did not go to the doctor for treatment. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1934, 4(18), p. 1) Accordingly, to change the current state of mind, the Bidari newspaper severely criticized the traditional attitude of the society as well as the approach of the traditional medicine towards smallpox. In this way, the newspaper provided a ground for the government to improve the current situation by improving the new medical structure. This was because of the fact that the authors of the newspaper knew in advance that they would not be successful in controlling the disease just by informing the public and that the government had to act by reforming the new structure, legal means and introducing innovative measures.

The Bidari newspaper and Infectious Diseases

Tuberculosis: It was one of the common diseases in Iran. Apparently, as this disease was not as severe as other infectious diseases, such as cholera, little effort was made to combat this disease. Therefore, there was no trace of this disease in the country's comprehensive medical plan for the development of public health in 1932. (Javanmardi et al, 2019, p. 128) According to its mission, the Bidari newspaper, in order to inform people, introduced the symptoms of the disease in several articles and mentioned the pain in flank, chest, and cough with the mixing of blood, as the most important symptoms. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1934, 2(48), p. 3) Also, in an article written by Dr. Mirza Ali Khan Yeganeh, the writer paid attention to the principles of prevention of this disease and warned people against spitting and nose-blowing on the streets and alleys. The author simply explained to people that this action would cause the people, suffering from this disease, to make the virus be mixed with the soil and transmitted to other people's lungs with wind. Alcoholics and the people in rooms without sunlight are also prone to tuberculosis. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1932, 5(47), p. 3) In the next issue, the author emphasized that because of being infectious, patients should be kept in centers assigned for the people with tuberculosis and live and exercise in exterior spaces to prevent the disease from getting chronic and see a doctor immediately at its initial stage. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1933, 5(48), p. 3) In 1935, when tuberculosis became prevalent in Kerman, people who worked in carpet weaving factories in Kerman were known as the source of this disease (Figure 3), mainly because of the fact that the interior spaces of most of these factories were shunned from the sunlight (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1935, p. 4).





Figure 3. About tuberculosis and the relationship between carpet weaving and tuberculosis (The Bidari newspaper, 1935, p. 4)

Gonorrhea and syphilis: After smallpox, these two diseases were the subjects of most medical articles published in the Bidari newspaper. According to the health culture of the society, these two diseases were among the infectious diseases whose cause and treatment were attributed to superstitions and superstitious perceptions, making them among the most common diseases in Iran. Dr. Diniar Mazdisna wrote some detailed articles on the recognition, symptoms, and treatment of these two diseases in several issues of the newspaper. The first article provided a detailed description of the symptoms of gonorrhea in the first ten days of infection (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1941, 11(4), p. 2). The next issue referred to the severe complications of this disease if left untreated. In a way, by expressing its symptoms, such as frequent urination, inflammation of the bladder, kidneys, and joints, etc., the writer, somehow, acquainted the readers with the severe symptoms of this disease and emphasized the need for seeing a doctor for treatment (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1941, 11(5), p. 2). The author of the article considered prevention as the best way to treat this serious disease and asked men to follow the moral instructions, and if they are infected, they should see a doctor immediately and stop feeling shame to go to the doctor, because otherwise they will not be treated (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1941, 11(7), 25 March 1941, pp. 2-3). In the next two issues, the author mentioned the causes and descriptions of this disease and the ways to treat it in women (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1941, 11(8), p. 2). In the end, the author described the disease in several articles and advised young people, for taking preventive measures against gonorrhea, to follow the instruction. The articles also emphasized the importance of prevention in this difficult disease (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1941, 11(12), p. 3). (Figure 4)

The outbreak of this disease in the last years of the first Pahlavi period made the government establish a law on prevention of this disease, threatening the violators of this law to face punishment. This law and the reasons for its enactment were reflected in this newspaper (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1941, 11(8), p. 1). The city's health ser-



vices were obliged to treat poor patients for free (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1941, 11(7), 14 July 1941, p. 2).



Figure 4. Gonorrhoea and its symptoms in men (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1941, 11(12), p. 3)

Diphtheria was one of the most common diseases in this period. In addition to acquainting people with the symptoms of the disease, the Bidari newspaper stated the severe outcome of neglecting this among adults, including the possibility of sudden death because of the heart attack. The author expressed his mission in disease prevention and treatment and asked patients to rest for two weeks; they should take full care for two weeks and protect themselves from other infectious diseases, such as rubella, smallpox, and scarlet fever. Important points in the fight against the disease were sanitizing the patient's room with sulfur fumes, pouring lime water on the floor of the room, emptying the room from decorations, boiling patients' clothes and burning their excrement. Another point of interest in the article was that the author requested the readers to encourage others to take measure for disease prevention and to refer to doctors for its treatment. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1933, 9(95), p. 1).

Typhoid fever: Due to the improvement of the medical condition and the availabil-



ity of vaccines, fewer people became infected with typhoid fever at this time. Efforts to keep waterways clean played an important role in preventing the spread of the disease. Negligence was the main reason for disease transmission among people in the Qutbad district in Rafsanjan. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1932, 8(40), p. 7). Also, in 1934, a limited number of people in Kerman became infected with this disease and quickly underwent treatment through vaccination (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1934, 2(48), p. 3)

Trachoma: Contaminated water and disregarding personal hygiene spread the disease in Iran. In Qajar Iran, the neglect of this disease and its incorrect treatment, namely treating patients based on their temperament, caused the disease to intensify (Brown, 1997, p. 548). In Kerman, this disease was partly common and sometimes was aggravated by the weather conditions and lack of cleanliness (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1931, 9(90), p. 7). According to the Community of Nations, fifty percent of the people were affected by this disease in the states of Khorasan, Fars, Kerman, Kermanshah, Khuzestan, Lorestan, and Bandar Abbas, mainly because of not sticking to health principles. (*The Bidari newspaper*, 1940, 10(37), p. 1).

Conclusion

The establishment of the modern state in the first Pahlavi period changed the medical structure. The implementation of the policy of concentration by the government during this period made the new medical structure be under the control of the government, and by its nature, people had to yield to the new order. Meanwhile, newspapers, as an important element of Constitutionalism, played an important role in people's awareness in various fields, including medicine. Thus, the need for change in the medical system was considered important by educated journalists and physicians who were familiar with the new sciences. These groups of society, who supported modern medicine, tried to change the health and medical structure of the country by criticizing the traditional discourse of medicine and paying attention to modern medicine. Meanwhile, the Bidari newspaper, which was the most important newspaper in Kerman at that time, played a vital role in making people aware, as well as transforming and modernizing the new medical structure. This newspaper, like other newspapers in the country, in addition to publishing the theories and instructions of the government in the field of medicine, encouraged people to follow the related instructions. In the meantime, the restrictive laws also contributed to the promotion of health principles. The authors of the Bidari newspaper pointed to the harmful consequences of traditional approaches and criticized the performance of the traditional medicine system, in which superstitions were employed in the treatment of diseases. The newspaper encouraged people to refer to physicians familiar with modern sciences. The editors of this newspaper played a vital role in preventing, recognizing, and treating diseases of children and people. This was accomplished by publishing the doctor's lectures, delivered in various ceremonies, in the newspaper and asking doctors to write useful articles in the field of medicine.



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