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Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī: Books, People, and Institutions

Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī occupies a distinctive place in the cultural history of contemporary Iran. Her career has encompassed librarianship, university education, children's literature, reading promotion, translation, and the work of civil-society institutions. More important than the range of these activities, however, are the connections she created among them. Throughout her career, the university and the public library, professional knowledge and social responsibility, children's literature and cultural rights, and individual initiative and collective action repeatedly came together.

This special issue seeks to understand those connections. Anṣārī's life and achievements have been documented in biographies, oral-history interviews, commemorative volumes, and numerous shorter writings. Less attention has been paid to how her ideas took institutional form: how they entered university teaching, professional practice, collaborative networks, and organizations capable of sustaining work over time. The essays gathered here approach these questions from biographical, bibliographical, theoretical, social, and institutional perspectives.

One idea runs through many areas of Anṣārī's work: "Books for All." The phrase carried practical consequences. Who lacked access to libraries? Which communities remained outside existing services? What did it mean for a library to fulfill its social responsibilities? Her involvement with rural communities, children with disabilities, refugees, blind students, and young people in juvenile rehabilitation centers grew out of these concerns. Access to books, in this sense, was inseparable from the question of whom cultural institutions were meant to serve.

This concern also shaped Anṣārī's understanding of professional librarianship. Cataloguing, classification, and the organization of resources were essential skills that she taught and helped advance. Yet their purpose, in her view, was ultimately to connect resources with readers and to make libraries responsive to the communities around them. Professional expertise and social responsibility were therefore complementary: the value of technical knowledge depended in part on what it enabled libraries to do for people.

The issue opens with a biography of Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī that traces the experiences behind this outlook: her birth in Shimla, childhood in culturally diverse environments, education in Geneva, early encounters with librarianship in India, return to Iran, teaching at the University of

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Tehran, and long association with the Children's Book Council of Iran (CBC). Seen together, these experiences help explain the importance that cultural plurality, participation, and respect for difference later assumed in her professional and institutional work.

The "Bibliography of Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī" documents another dimension of this history. Bringing together her publications, translations, lectures, research projects, supervised theses, and international activities makes it possible to follow the changing emphases of a career extending over several decades. The bibliography also reveals connections that are less apparent when individual works are considered separately: between the circulation of specialized knowledge and the education of librarians, between the history of books and contemporary library practice, and between children's literature, public service, and international cultural exchange.

The first essay, "Libraries of Care: Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī and Feminist Democracy in Iranian Librarianship," reads her work through the concept of "democratic care." Here, care refers to an institutional responsibility to recognize and address exclusion, not simply to personal kindness or charitable action. From this perspective, underserved communities were not peripheral to the library's mission; their access to its resources and services was one measure of whether that mission was being fulfilled. The essay also considers the distinction between the numerical predominance of women in librarianship and changes in the values and structures of the profession that might be understood as feminist.

"Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī and the Cultural Participation of Women Librarians in Iran" turns to the conditions that enabled women librarians to assume more active roles in cultural life. The article highlights professional mentorship, trust, participatory management, delegation of responsibility, and supportive institutional environments. Such settings allowed women to acquire experience, develop professional networks, and move from participation into positions of responsibility and leadership.

A related question is taken up in "Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī and the Development of Social Librarianship in Iran," which places her activities within the broader history of modern Iranian librarianship. Alongside the profession's strong technical orientation, Anṣārī emphasized public

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service, equitable access, and the place of libraries in everyday life. Her teaching, curriculum development, thesis supervision, librarian training, and work with the CBC helped advance a conception of librarianship in which professional competence included responsiveness to social needs. “Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī and the Development of Librarianship and Children’s Literature in Iran” considers her publications and professional activities across the course of her career. The connections among translation, university education, research, cultural institutions, and public engagement are particularly important here. Her translations helped introduce specialized concepts and terminology into Persian; teaching and thesis supervision contributed to the training of researchers; and her involvement in children’s literature brought sustained attention to readers, reading experiences, and cultural participation.

The final article, “Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī and the Children’s Book Council of Iran: Cultural Institution-Building, Organized Voluntarism, and the Logic of Sustainability,” asks how the CBC maintained its activities through political upheaval, financial constraints, generational change, and limited formal support. Its continuity depended on a combination of professional knowledge, participatory management, institutional memory, and ethical commitment. The article also draws attention to the costs of this model. Organized voluntarism required considerable investments of time and human labor and cannot be treated as a substitute for adequate financial resources and structural support.

The essays also make clear that Anṣārī’s career cannot be understood apart from the people and institutions around her. Her work unfolded through relationships with colleagues, students, volunteers, writers, librarians, researchers, academics, and cultural organizations. During her many years in the leadership of the CBC, she drew on wide cultural and academic networks, including connections associated with her own family and that of her husband, and placed them at the service of the Council’s work. Her importance to the institution thus rested partly on an ability to connect people who possessed different forms of knowledge, experience, and institutional access.

Some of her colleagues have described the CBC during these years as “a school for developing people.” The phrase captures an aspect of its history that conventional accounts of institutional achievement can easily miss. Participants learned through the work itself: through collaboration, responsibility, commitment, and the freedom to take initiative. Many

subsequently became active figures in children's literature and related cultural fields, while some carried this experience into other organizations and initiatives. The CBC's contribution can therefore be measured both in its work for books and children's literature and in the people whose professional and cultural capacities were developed through participation in it. Institution-building, in this context, involved sustaining an organization while also preparing people to assume cultural responsibility beyond it.

Books, people, and institutions are closely connected throughout Anṣārī's career. Access to books led to questions about readers and their needs; education and voluntary work created communities of knowledge and practice; and these relationships, in turn, helped sustain cultural institutions. Her work shows how professional knowledge can move beyond the individual, taking shape in networks, shared responsibilities, and institutions that endure across generations. Anṣārī's legacy therefore lies not only in what she accomplished herself, but also in the people she brought together, the opportunities she helped create for others, and the institutions to whose continuity she contributed.

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