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Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī. Private residence, Yūsufābād, Tehran, 2022.

Biography of Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī

MAHSA SADIQ

THE FARHANGNĀMIH-YI KUDAKĀN VA NŪJAVĀNĀN (ENCYCLOPEDIA FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS)

Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī was born on 21 September 1939 (30 Shahrivar 1318) in Shimla, India, into a distinguished cultural family. Her father, ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Mas‘ūd Anṣārī, was a senior official in the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He had studied political science in Russia and France and, together with his father, participated in the Versailles Peace Conference following the First World War. Her mother, Fāṭimah Mas‘ūd Anṣārī, was a graduate of preschool education in Germany.

Her paternal great-great-grandmother was Princess Shāh Begum Ziyā’ al-Saltānah, the seventh daughter of Fath-‘Alī Shāh Qājār (r. 1212–1250/1797–1834). Ziyā’ al-Saltānah was born to Maryam Khānum Gurjī, the thirty-ninth wife of Fath-‘Alī Shāh. The shah paid particular attention to her education. She served as her father’s private secretary and personally drafted his correspondence. He bestowed upon her the title *Munshī al-Mamālik-i Andarūn*. She supervised the signing and sealing of royal decrees issued within the royal harem, participated in the

management of the harem's finances and the distribution of funds among younger princes, and oversaw the removal of gold and jewels from the royal treasury. She memorized poems sent to the court by contemporary poets in praise of Fath-ʿAlī Shāh and copied a large portion of her father's own poetry. She was skilled in poetry, painting, music, and embroidery and excelled in the arts of *shikastah* and *naskh* calligraphy. Several Qurʾans copied by her survive, including one preserved in the shrine museum of Ḥaḍrat Maʿṣūmah in Qum.

In 1251/1835, Ziyāʾ al-Saltānah married Mīrzā Masʿūd Anṣārī Ashlaqī [Īshlaqī] Garmarūdi (1205–1265 AH), Minister of Foreign Affairs. They had two sons and two daughters. Their sons were Mīrzā Ḥasan Khān Nāʾib al-Wuzarāʾ (1255–1324 AH), the direct ancestor of Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, and Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān Miṣbāḥ al-Saltānah (d. 1259 AH). Their daughters were Shāhanshāh Begum (Āghā Jān) (ca. 1252–1336 AH) and Shāhzādah Begum (1240–1343 AH).

Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī's paternal grandfather was ʿAlī-Qulī Masʿūd Anṣārī Mushāwir al-Mamālik (born 1248 Sh./1869–70), son of Mīrzā Ḥasan Khān Nāʾib al-Wuzarāʾ. During his father's diplomatic missions, he learned French and Russian in Trabzon and Astrakhan. He entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a translator and accompanied the Iranian delegation to the coronation of Nicholas II. In 1329 AH he became Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and later served as Foreign Minister in the cabinet of ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Mīrzā Farmānfarmā in 1334 AH. In 1919 he headed the Iranian delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference and, in 1921, negotiated with the Soviet government and signed the Soviet–Iranian Treaty of 1921 on behalf of Iran.

Her maternal grandfather, Engineer Muḥsin Masʿūd Anṣārī, together with Engineer ʿAbd al-Razzāq Bughāyirī, played an important role in the demarcation of Iran's western frontiers.

Because of her father's diplomatic career, Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī spent her childhood and adolescence in Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, England, Switzerland, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Russia, and in several Iranian cities, including Tehran, Rasht, Isfahan, and Shiraz. During these years she acquired fluency in English, French, and Russian. Encounters with prominent figures such as Jawāharlāl Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Yuri Gagarin, Īraj Afshār, Saʿīd Nafīsī, Ghulām-Riḍā Takhtī, and Sayyid

Muḥammad-‘Alī Jamālzādah contributed significantly to the formation of her social outlook.



Nūshāfarīn Anşārī. Shimla, India, 1941.

In 1959 (1338 Sh.), on the recommendation of Muḥammad-‘Alī Jamālzādah, she enrolled in the School of Librarianship in Geneva, where she earned a diploma in library science. She completed internships in various sections of university and public libraries and worked for a period in the specialized library of a Swiss ophthalmologist.

In 1961 (1340 Sh.), she moved from Geneva to India and volunteered at the Delhi Public Library. There she encountered the concept of “Books for All.” Jawāharlāl Nehru provided her with a note granting her access to work wherever she wished. She chose the old city of Delhi, where she worked in the library’s section for the blind and accompanied a mobile library bus that delivered books to surrounding villages.

In 1963 (1342 Sh.), she returned to Iran. That same year she married Dr. Maḥdī Muḥaqqiq, Professor of Persian Language and Literature at the University of Tehran. They had two children, ‘Abbās and Hastī. At the invitation of Īraj Afshār, she became responsible for establishing the technical services department of the Central Library of the University of Tehran, her first managerial appointment.



From right to left: Standing: Aḥmad Mīrfendereskī, Amīr-Aṣlān Afshār Qāsimlū, H.E. ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Mas‘ūd-Anṣārī, and unidentified person. Seated on chairs: Kāmīliyā Sā‘id

ŞADÎQ: *Biography of Nūshāfarīn Anşārī*

Marāghah'ī, Parvīn Mīrfendereskī, 'Alī-Murād Mas'ūd-Anşārī, Fāṭimah Mas'ūd-Anşārī, and unidentified person. Seated on the floor: Yānā Afshār, Nūshāfarīn Anşārī, and unidentified person. The Hague, Netherlands, 1953.

She also joined both the Iranian Library Association and the Children's Book Council of Iran (CBC), beginning a lifelong collaboration with Tūrān Mīrhādī. She organized a one-month training course in librarianship for a group of the Council's founders at the Rūsh-i Naw School, directed by 'Abbās Yamīnī Sharīf. During the same year, at the invitation of Rukn al-Dīn Humāyūn Farrukh, she established a librarianship training workshop for public librarians at the Central Library of Pār-k-i Shahr in Tehran.



Nūshāfarīn Anşārī. Moscow, 1956.



Jawaharlal Nehru and Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī. New Delhi, 1962.

For a period, she accompanied the mobile library service of the Book Society to the Amīnābād Psychiatric Hospital. When plans for rural library development were initiated, she visited villages around Tehran. In 1964 (1343 Sh.), she wrote *Tashkīl-i Kitābkhānah dar Rūstāhā* (“Establishing Libraries in Villages”) for the training programs of the Literacy Corps, teacher-training colleges, and student teachers.



Mahdī Muḥaqqīq and Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī. Hamadan, 1975. Photo credit: Muṣṭafā Raḥmān-Dūst.

In 1965 (1344 Sh.), she moved with her family to Canada and continued her studies in library science at McGill University. In 1968 (1347 Sh.) she completed her M.L.S. degree with a thesis entitled *A Plan for the Development of Public Libraries in Iran*. Upon returning to Iran that same year, she was appointed Director of the Library of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities at the University of Tehran, joined the Department of Library Science as a lecturer, and in 1971 became head of the department.

In 1976 (1355 Sh.), she returned to Canada to pursue doctoral studies at the University of Toronto. Her dissertation focused on the historical development of public libraries in Iran. In 1978 (1357 Sh.) she came back to Iran to collect research materials, but the events surrounding the Iranian Revolution prevented her return to Canada, leaving the dissertation unfinished.

After remaining in Iran, she resumed teaching in the Department of Library and Information Science and supervised graduate theses. During the Cultural Revolution and the closure of universities, she devoted her time to research. One result was her Persian translation of Jean Sauvaget's *Introduction to the History of the Muslim East* (*Madkhal-i Tarikh-i Sharq-i Islām*), published by the University Publishing Center in 1987. The work became a major reference in Islamic civilization studies and received Iran's Book of the Year Award in 1987.

In 1978 she assumed the position of Secretary of the Children's Book Council of Iran. Until then, founding members—including Lālī Ayman (Āhī), Tūrān Mīrhādī, Tūrān Ishtiyāqī, Ma'şūmah Suhrāb, 'Abbās Yamīnī Sharīf, and Ja'far Şamīmī—had collectively managed the organization through a model of participatory governance. Drawing on her previous managerial experience, Anşārī made participatory management the guiding principle of her own leadership.



Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī with the faculty members of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities, including 'Alī-Naqī 'Ālikhānī, President of the University of Tehran, at her farewell ceremony following her appointment as head of the Department of Librarianship at the Faculty of Education. Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Tehran, 1971.

In 1998 (1377 Sh.), after thirty years of teaching and administration, she retired from the University of Tehran. Nevertheless, through her continuing work with the Council, she remained closely connected with the academic community and successive generations of students.

Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī serves as advisor and policy-maker for the *Farhangnāmah-i Kūdakān va Nūjawanān* (Encyclopedia for Children and Young Adults), of which fifteen volumes have so far been published. Internationally, she is widely recognized for her contributions to children's literature and librarianship.

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From right to left: Ma'şūmah Sohrāb, Nasrīn-Dukht 'Imād Khurāsānī, Mahdokht Kashkūlī, Manşūrah Rā'ī, Tūrān Mīrhādī, and Nūshāfarīn Anşārī. Children's Book Council of Iran, Tehran, 1980.



Commemoration of Aḥmad Bīrīshk. Residence of Yahyā Māfī and Ma'şūmah Sohrāb, Tehran, ca. 1999.

From 1986 to 1990 she served on the Executive Committee of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) and chaired its Committee for Developing Countries. She played an important role in promoting Iranian children's literature internationally by introducing Iranian authors and scholars to global forums, serving as a judge for the Hans Christian Andersen Award, and facilitating opportunities for Iranian researchers at the International Youth Library (IYL), in Munich.



From right to left: Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, Barbara Scharioth, and Dušan Roll. International Youth Library (IYL), Munich, 1992.

In 2002 (1381 Sh.), she was one of the principal speakers at IBBY's fiftieth-anniversary congress. In 2009 (1388 Sh.), she was invited by the Republic of Korea to assist in establishing the international section of the annual Nami Island Festival, conceived as an island of peace for artists dedicated to improving children's lives worldwide.

In 2010 (1389 Sh.), during the Thirty-Second International Congress on Children's Literature in Spain, she was elected an Honorary Member of IBBY and received the organization's honorary plaque.



Nūshāfarīn Anşārī receiving her IBBY honorary membership at the 32nd IBBY World Congress, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2010. Photo credits: Nidā Muvahḥidī-Pūr.

Anşārī has published more than eighty scholarly articles and translations, particularly in the fields of books, librarianship, and libraries

for children and adults. She has worked extensively to establish libraries in underserved regions and in refugee camps for Afghan and Iraqi refugees and has helped create communication networks enabling blind students to access non-course-related materials more easily. Initiatives such as inclusive libraries for children and young people with disabilities and the library of the Tehran Juvenile Rehabilitation Center owe much to her efforts and her commitment to the principle of “Books for All.”

Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī is an internationally respected figure in cultural management. Throughout her career she has emphasized the importance of adapting knowledge to local contexts while promoting intercultural understanding. As Director of the Library of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities at the University of Tehran, she modernized library operations, strengthened reference services, recruited professional staff, implemented the Dewey Decimal Classification system, and introduced open-stack access for students. As head of the Education Committee of the Iranian Library Association, she organized short-term training courses in librarianship throughout the country.

Her experience of living within diverse cultures and encountering people from many backgrounds fostered a deep commitment to participation, inclusion, and respect for difference. Whether at the university, in libraries, or within the Children’s Book Council of Iran, she consistently encouraged dialogue, consultation, and collaborative decision-making. Her support for the talents and initiatives of Council members contributed to the emergence of numerous organizations, including the Institute for Research on Children of the World, Mothers Today Institute, Institute for Research on the History of Children’s Literature, Center for the Cultural Development of Children, the Children’s Librarians’ House in Tehran, and the Association of Friends of Children’s Literature in Isfahan.

She has consistently championed all initiatives related to books, children’s librarianship, and children’s literature education. Among her achievements was the introduction of a course on children’s literature into the curriculum of the Department of Library Science at the University of Tehran during the 1970s and the promotion of the Children’s Book Council of Iran as a non-governmental organization within academic and professional circles.

Anṣārī believes equally in the value of experience and research. She encourages non-governmental organizations, which are often practice-

oriented, to engage more deeply with research, while urging universities to make theoretical knowledge more applicable to real-world needs.

She regards public libraries as essential institutions for modern individuals who seek knowledge, ask questions, enjoy their leisure time, pursue their reading interests, and remain connected to the wider world. She argues that the traditional model of the library as merely a repository of books and a lending center is gradually becoming obsolete. Instead, she envisions the public library as a place for gathering, dialogue, and the exchange of ideas—a cultural and intellectual center capable of serving every neighborhood and community.



Nūshāfarīn Anşārī and Şamīnah Bāghchehbān enjoying *Mullah Nasreddin*, illustrated by ‘Alīrīzā Guldūziyān, while looking through the book. Jājrūd, 2025. Photo credit: Sahar Tarḥandih.



Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī and Mahdī Muḥaqqiq. Damāvand, Iran, 2022.