

From Hamadan to Los Angeles; The Life and scientific legacy of Dr. Hooshang Ebrami from Shaping Iran's Information Infrastructure and Founding Academic Librarianship to Cultural Activism in Immigration

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Abstract

Hooshang Ebrami (1934–2003) was a foundational figure in modern librarianship in Iran, merging economics, social sciences, and library science. This study summarizes his career and assesses his impact on library education and practice in Iran and his later cultural contributions in the United States. Using a descriptive–analytical approach, the paper reviews Ebrami's primary works (publications, theses, translations) and secondary sources (scholarly articles, archival records). Information was organized into education, professional appointments, and major publications. A historical-content analysis traced his evolving influence. Ebrami earned a B.A. in economics from the University of Tehran in 1956 and authored *Sattar Khan: The National Commander* (1973). At the Central Bank of Iran, he created its specialized library and promoted economic research. Supported by the bank, he

completed an M.L.S. at the University of Pittsburgh under Andrew Osborne and a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago under Allen Kent and J.E. Diley. Upon returning, he established library science programs at Tehran and Shiraz Universities. After the 1979 Revolution, he moved to the United States, producing influential works on Jewish culture and history. From 1995 until his death, he led the Habib Levy Cultural Foundation. Hooshang Ebrami's interdisciplinary expertise and international training were instrumental in shaping Iran's library science education and infrastructure. His pioneering programs, specialized libraries, and extensive scholarship continue to guide and inspire librarians and researchers globally. This article based on archival sources, analysis of published texts, and an examination of institutional roles examines Hooshang Ebrami's contribution to the development of modern librarianship in Iran and the identity transformations associated with his migration to the United States. The findings suggest that Ebrami played a substantial role in transferring professional practices to Iran and that, after migration, his cultural activism combined retained professional dimensions with shifts in the configuration of his social identity.

Keywords: Hooshang Ebrami, Jews of Hamadan, Hamadianian Celebrities, Iranian Librarianship, Iranian Diaspora, History of Librarianship in Iran

Introduction

Librarianship, as an inherently interdisciplinary field, plays a strategic role in the organization, preservation, management, and retrieval of information. Within knowledge-based societies, the discipline occupies an important position in facilitating access to information and supporting intellectual development, innovation, and education. The evolution of librarianship in Iran has been closely intertwined with broader social, cultural, and scientific transformations and can be read as reflecting the dynamic relationship between systems of knowledge and social progress.

The tradition of preserving and systematically organizing written knowledge in Iran has a long and notable history reaching back to ancient times and continuing through the Islamic centuries. Across different historical periods, the establishment of libraries often represented a deliberate and strategic effort to preserve and transmit knowledge. Notable historical examples include large centers such as the libraries of *Ctesiphon*, *Jundishapur*, *Beyt al-Hekmah* in Baghdad, and the scholarly institutions of *Nezamiyeh*, *Ray*, *Neyshabur*, and *Herat*. These centers housed valuable manuscripts and rare texts and played important roles in the preservation and dissemination of knowledge. As such, libraries functioned not only as repositories but also as cultural and scholarly centers that contributed significantly to societal development.¹⁻²

¹ Kohan, *Library and Librarianship in Iran During the Samanid Era*, pp.110–12.

² Afshar, “Ketābdāri dar Ketābkhānehā-ye Qadīm-e Irān [Librarianship in the Ancient Libraries of Iran],” *Barrasi-hā-ye Tārikhi* no. 51, pp. 153-170, accessed : <https://ensani.ir/fa/article/8869/ایران-قدیم-های-کتابخانه-در-کتابداری>

Until the early decades of the twentieth century, libraries in Iran were predominantly managed according to traditional methods, often lacking formal structures or standardized professional practices. The emergence of modern librarianship as an academic discipline and a professional field thus represents a relatively recent development within the broader narrative of Iran's contemporary history. This transformation unfolded alongside twentieth-century advances in science, education, and institutional organization and was substantially influenced by Western academic models and international professional standards. Adoption of Western educational systems and engagement with international library standards were important factors in shaping new approaches to the organization, management, and circulation of knowledge in Iran. These changes responded to the expanding needs of a growing academic and scientific community. A pivotal moment in this process was the formal establishment of librarianship as an academic program at the University of Tehran in 1966 (1345 in the Iranian calendar). That milestone achieved through collaboration between Iranian scholars and several visiting American educators marked a structural turning point in the development of library and information sciences in the country. This period has often been characterized as a formative phase in which the discipline began to take root within the national higher-education system. The return of Iranian professionals educated abroad, who had received formal training at internationally recognized universities, contributed materially to the expansion of library institutions and the founding of new academic programs. The introduction of modern library science curricula at the University of Tehran and Shiraz University signaled significant progress toward professionalization in Iran. These initiatives played a central role in strengthening the country's information infrastructure particularly through the growth of

academic, public, and specialized libraries and helped establish the foundations for a more systematic and scientific approach to librarianship that would shape information services for subsequent generations.³

Among the actors associated with the development of modern librarianship in Iran, Hooshang Ebrami figures as an early and multifaceted contributor. His work is linked to efforts to introduce and consolidate scientific principles and core professional practices within both academic and professional settings. He was actively involved in authoring and compiling instructional materials that facilitated more structured and standardized education in library science. In addition, Ebrami participated in the establishment and development of specialized research centers devoted to library and information studies, thereby helping to secure institutional support for sustained academic inquiry in the field. One enduring aspect of his legacy is the training and mentoring of a generation of practitioners who later served in educational, research, and cultural institutions across the country. The principal aim of the present study is to undertake a critical review and comprehensive reappraisal of Ebrami's scholarly and professional biography, with particular attention to evaluating his role in institutionalizing modern librarianship in Iran and in consolidating it as a recognized academic discipline within the national education system.

This study assesses Hooshang Ebrami's professional and cultural role in shaping modern librarianship in Iran and examines the extent to which his migration experience reconfigured his professional identity and cultural activism.

³ Mohamadyar et al., "The What and Why of the Recorded Knowledge History: Study the Roots and Benefits," pp. 56–57, 110–112.

Research question (main):

How did Hooshang Ebrami's professional and institutional activities in Iran contribute to the establishment and expansion of modern forms of librarianship, and how did his migration to the United States alter or rearticulate his professional identity and cultural activism?

Sub-questions:

1. What was Ebrami's role in the transfer of Western models and practices of librarianship to Iran?
2. How did the relationship between his professional identity and cultural activities manifest during migration (i.e., rupture, continuity, or transformation)?
3. In what ways did institutional contexts and his interactions with contemporaries and organizations shape his contribution to the history of librarianship in Iran?

Materials and Methods

The methodological framework adopted in the present article is qualitative in nature and follows both a descriptive and an analytical approach. This means that, rather than relying on numerical data or statistical measurements, the research focuses on the interpretation and close examination of textual and contextual evidence. The foundation of this approach lies in a detailed analysis of a wide range of historical documents and texts, including archival materials, written records, and other relevant historical sources. In addition, the study carefully reviews various published works related to the life, scholarly contributions, and intellectual legacy of Dr. Hooshang Ebrami, who is regarded as an important

figure in the development of librarianship and historical studies in Iran. The research also undertakes a comprehensive review of existing reports, articles, and academic writings that address the history of librarianship in Iran, tracing how the field has evolved over time and identifying key actors and developments. To enhance the reliability, validity, and overall trustworthiness of the findings, a broad range of credible sources were consulted. These include both print and digital materials published in Persian and English. The study further draws on the research and perspectives of established scholars in the field of cultural history, as well as peer-reviewed articles appearing in recognized academic journals and university publications. To address the first research question, the study reviewed Ebrami's corpus (bibliographies and primary works) together with institutional reports and relevant organizational records. For the second question, a comparative analysis of materials produced before and after his migration was conducted, alongside a focused examination of documented cultural activities. To answer the third question, professional networks, correspondence (where available), and contemporary reference sources were analyzed. Collected data were interpreted within conceptual frameworks drawn from institutional history and the history of professionalization in librarianship. The principal aim of this research is to collect, organize, and perform a content analysis of primary sources relating to Hooshang Ebrami's professional life and cultural activity. This methodological choice rests on two considerations. First, many of the relevant documents are dispersed and lack prior systematic treatment; they therefore require compilation and critical source evaluation before more robust explanatory analyses can be attempted. Second, the scope of the present article is intentionally limited: it is a concise, library-based descriptive study whose objective is to provide documented

evidence and foundational materials for subsequent analytical research. Accordingly, rather than imposing a broad theoretical framework onto newly gathered and sometimes heterogeneous materials, the study emphasizes critical documentary analysis, purposive sampling of key records, and cross-checking of findings against contemporaneous evidence. It should be noted that while such descriptive work does not itself advance a large-scale theoretical account, it serves as a necessary empirical precondition for future comparative and theoretical investigations; the limitations of this approach and the need for follow-up theoretical studies are explicitly acknowledged in the conclusion.

An Overview of His Life and Scholarly Career in Iran: From the Emergence of Modern Librarianship to Emigration Abroad

Hooshang Ebrami was born on July 14, 1934, in Hamadan. His father, *Mirza Habib Ebrami* (1889 Hamadan–1989 Los Angeles), son of *Haghnazar*, and his mother, *Khatoon Moshfegh Hamadani* (1891 Hamadan –2004 Los Angeles), Daughter of *David Cohen*, were members of a long-established Jewish family in the city.⁴ As a child, he moved to Tehran, where he completed his primary education at *Nezami* Elementary School and his secondary education at *Dar al-Fonoon* High School.⁵ He then entered the University of Tehran and graduated in 1956 with a degree in economics. During his student years, he wrote articles under pseudonyms for various

⁴ “Hooshang Ebrami,” *Geni*, <https://www.geni.com/people/Hooshang-Ebrami/600000000855156341>.

⁵ Ebrami, *Opinions and Opinions; Librarian*, p. 331.

contemporary newspapers and journals, including *Omid-e Iran*, *Sepid o Siab*, *Roshanafeker*, *Kavian*, and *Ferdowsi*.⁶

After graduation, Ebrami turned his attention to studying the Constitutional Revolution. His research culminated in the publication of a book titled *Sattar Khan, the National Hero* in 1973. Ebrami has written this work which blends historical narrative with storytelling—about Sattar Khan, the Iranian constitutionalist and leader of the Tabriz uprising. In this book, he offers a thoughtful analysis of Sattar Khan’s role as one of the most prominent figures in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and explores his influence on the political and social developments of that era. One of the book’s most significant features is its deep character portrayal, through which the author delves into Sattar Khan’s motivations and inner world. Ebrami does not merely recount events but examines the key factors that shaped Sattar Khan’s personality and decisions. He vividly depicts the historical events surrounding Sattar Khan’s life, focusing in particular on the details of his struggles, the challenges he faced, and how he dealt with the crises of his time. The narrative combines documented history with a compelling literary approach that makes the events come alive while preserving factual accuracy. Ebrami’s attention to both the external and internal dimensions of his subject gives the book a unique depth and richness. As a result, this book is considered a valuable and reliable source for gaining a more nuanced understanding of modern Iranian history, especially in relation to the Constitutional Revolution. This publication sparked a deep personal interest in the character of Sattar Khan and shifted his focus from economics to historical studies. In 1958, Ebrami

⁶ “Hooshang Ebrami,” *Center for Research and Studies of Iranian Jews*, <https://www.7dorim.com/شخصیت-ها/ebdami/>.

began working at the Franklin Publishing Institute. At the time, this institution—working in collaboration with prominent writers, scholars, and the Ministry of Education—was pioneering significant reforms in Iranian schoolbook development⁷. Ebrami worked for two years as an editor of history books at Franklin before joining the Central Bank of Iran in 1960, where he contributed to the bank's economic research division and organized its specialized library.⁸

While working at the Central Bank, he continued his education in the social sciences at the University of Tehran and obtained a master's degree. His impactful contributions to economic research earned the support of bank officials, who provided him with the opportunity to study librarianship abroad. With financial assistance from the Central Bank and a scholarship from the University of Pittsburgh, Ebrami traveled to the United States in 1964 to pursue a master's degree in Library Science. One of his professors at that time was Andrew Osborne.⁹ After completing his studies, he returned to Iran, equipped with a solid foundation in economics, social sciences, and librarianship. He resumed work at the Central Bank's library and actively contributed to the modernization of librarianship in Iran.¹⁰

Since librarianship had not yet become a formal university discipline in Iran, the Iranian Library Association held short-term training courses in the field, and Dr. Ebrami was among the instructors. In 1966, the modern librarianship program was finally established at the University of Tehran, based on professional

⁷ Daliri, "Hooshang Ebrami; Jewish Personality," Adyan Iran, <https://adyan-iran.com/1399/08/27/هوشنگ-ابرامی/>.

⁸ Hayati, Houshang Ebrami and Modern Librarianship in Iran, p. 84.

⁹ Ebrami, *Librarian*, p. 13.

¹⁰ *Center for Research and Studies of Iranian Jews*, Ibid.

principles and supported by American faculty. That year, Professor Alice Rohrer, an American librarian, established the Department of Library Science within the newly created Faculty of Education and invited prominent librarians, including Hooshang Ebrami, to collaborate with the department.¹¹

In 1967, Ebrami married his cousin *Shabla Yafteh*. They had two children a daughter and a son.¹² That same year, Shiraz University (then Pahlavi University), with assistance from the University of Pennsylvania, sought to establish its own Library Science Department. Ebrami was invited to the U.S. by Shiraz University on a research fellowship to pursue a doctorate in Library Science¹³. His doctoral dissertation, titled *Principles of Subject Indexing in Persian Writings*, was supervised by professors at the University of Pittsburgh, including Allen Kent and J.E. Daley. Encouraged by his mentor, Professor Osborne, Ebrami studied the ideas of the renowned Indian librarian and philosopher S.R. Ranganathan. This academic exposure enriched his understanding and elevated his scholarly reputation.¹⁴ Upon returning to Iran, his dissertation received the award for Best Scholarly Work from the Ministry of Science. He joined Shiraz University and established the graduate program in Library Science. Through his efforts, the first cohort of graduate students was admitted in the fall of 1974.¹⁵

In 1975, Ebrami traveled to New York to participate in a conference of Iranian and international experts¹⁶. That same year,

¹¹ Ebrami, *Knowledge of Epistemology (Library Sciences and Epistemology)*, p. back cover.

¹² *Center for Research and Studies of Iranian Jews*, *Ibid*.

¹³ Ebrami, *Authentic Judaism and Captive Judaism*, p. 197.

¹⁴ _____, *Opinions and Opinions; Librarian*, p. 335.

¹⁵ Karami, "Hooshang Ebrami", in *Encyclopedia of Notables and Eminent Figures of Madastan*, forthcoming

¹⁶ Hayati, *Houshang Ebrami and Modern Librarianship in Iran*, *Ibid*.

he was invited by the Imperial Court to help establish the National Library (Pahlavi Library) in Tehran, leading him to resign from Shiraz University.¹⁷ However, his work with the National Library was short-lived. In 1976, he joined the Iranian Planning Institute, a newly established entity under the Plan and Budget Organization. The Institute aimed to expand its library and educational and research activities, and Ebrami played a key role in these efforts. He remained with the institute until after the 1979 Revolution, when the organization—like many other institutions founded during the Pahlavi era was dissolved.¹⁸

Immigration and the Redefinition of Cultural Activism Outside Iran

In 1980, Ebrami and his family emigrated to the United States, still hoping one day to return to Iran. In the United States, he resumed his cultural and scholarly work. Unlike his earlier publications in Iran, which were primarily academic and published by university presses, his post-immigration work focused on Jewish culture and history. He published several books introducing the principles and beliefs of Judaism and also helped fellow Jewish writers publish their own works. Among these, he edited and arranged *Half a Century of Journalism* by His Uncle *Rabi Moshfegh Hamadani*.¹⁹ His interest in Judaism, the Holy Land, and Torah teachings led the newly founded *Habib Levy* Cultural Foundation to invite him to join its efforts. From 1995 until his death, he was actively involved

¹⁷ Ebrami, *Authentic Judaism and Captive Judaism*, Ibid.

¹⁸ Hayati, *Houshang Ebrami and Modern Librarianship in Iran*, Ibid.

¹⁹ Moshfegh Hamadani, *Memories of Half a Century of Journalism*, p. 17.

with the foundation and served as its president. He passed away from a heart attack on November 28, 2003, at the age of 69²⁰.

Although Hooshang Ebrami's migration to the United States constituted a substantial shift in his social, institutional, and cultural environment, the evidence examined in this study indicates that this relocation did not produce a decisive rupture in his intellectual or professional trajectory. Rather, migration appears to have resulted in a form of moderated and reconfigured continuity, in which previously acquired skills, experiences, and professional orientations were adapted to new circumstances. Ebrami's engagement in cultural activities during his years in migration including his involvement with cultural institutions, participation in community-based initiatives, and the production of texts concerned with historical memory and collective identity remained closely connected to his earlier training in librarianship and to his prior experience within Iranian academic and institutional settings.²¹

These activities suggest that Ebrami's cultural work in the United States was not undertaken independently of his professional background but was instead informed by the same organizational, documentary, and scholarly sensibilities that had shaped his earlier career. In this respect, his post-migration trajectory may be interpreted as a form of migrant intellectual activism that sought to preserve, organize, and reinterpret cultural knowledge rather than to abandon or negate previous professional commitments. His continued emphasis on documentation, institutional affiliation, and historical narration points to an effort to sustain forms of professional practice while responding to the altered

²⁰ Sarshar, *Oral History Interview Plan for Iranian Jews*.

²¹ Karami, "Hooshang Ebrami", *Ibid*

social and cultural conditions of the diaspora. From this perspective, migration functioned as a context in which Ebrami's professional identity was neither simply reproduced nor fundamentally displaced, but selectively rearticulated. The transformation involved adjustments in the modes and audiences of his work, as well as in the institutional frameworks through which he operated, while maintaining core elements of his earlier professional orientation. Accordingly, Ebrami's experience of migration can be understood less as a radical break and more as a transformed phase of an established professional identity, reshaped in response to new social, cultural, and institutional environments.

Ebrami's Role in Relation to Institutional Contexts and Contemporary Figures

To arrive at a more precise assessment of Hooshang Ebrami's professional contribution, his activities need to be examined in relation to the institutional structures and contemporary actors involved in the development of modern librarianship in Iran. The available evidence indicates that Ebrami's work did not emerge in isolation; rather, it took shape within the broader context of institutional transformations during the middle decades of the twentieth century, a period marked by the expansion and consolidation of key organizations such as the University of Tehran Library and the National Library of Iran. These institutions provided the organizational settings within which new professional practices, standards, and forms of expertise could be introduced and tested. During this period, the modernization of librarianship was the outcome of a differentiated division of labor among cultural administrators, educational policymakers, and trained

professionals. Within this configuration, figures such as Iraj Afshar and Pouri Soltani and Noosh-afarin Ansari were primarily engaged at the levels of academic policy formation, large-scale organizational planning, formal professional training, and the codification of disciplinary standards. By contrast, Ebrami's contribution appears to have been concentrated more heavily in the domains of practical implementation, hands-on training, and the day-to-day application of emerging librarianship practices within institutional settings. His work thus occupied a complementary position within the broader professional ecosystem rather than constituting an isolated or autonomous initiative.²²⁻²³⁻²⁴

This comparison suggests that Ebrami's significance is best understood not as that of a singular or self-contained actor, but as one defined through his relationship with existing institutional structures and with a network of contemporaneous professionals. His role gains analytical clarity when situated within the interactions among individuals, organizations, and cultural and educational policies that characterized the period. Accordingly, an adequate interpretation of Ebrami's place in the history of Iranian librarianship requires attention to these intersecting institutional and professional dynamics, rather than a narrative centered solely on individual achievement.

²² Meskoob, "Honoring Pouri Soltani and Celebrating the 200th Issue of *Bukhara*," *Bukhara: Cultural and Artistic Magazine*, November 7, 2015, accessed [Month Day, Year], <https://bukharamag.com/1394.08.8899.html>.

²³ Pouri Soltani, *Saru-ye Sarboland: Memoirs of Pouri Soltani*, interview, compilation, and research by Peymane Salehi (Tehran: National Library and Archives of Iran, 2015).

²⁴ Afshar, *Ibid*

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From Librarianship to Information Science, *Academic Library and Information Research*, Vol. 4, Feb. 1975

The Starting Point: A Gordian Knot in Information Science Education, *Iranian Library Association Letter*, No. 32, Winter 1976

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In Search of Truth, Los Angeles: Habib Levy Cultural Foundation, Spring 2001

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Balboa: Discoverer of the Pacific Ocean, Felix Riesenber, Tehran: Amirkabir and Nil

Gertrude Bell, Ann Tibble, Tehran: Institute for Translation and Publishing, 1963

The Land and People of Australia, Godfrey Blunden, Tehran: Institute for Translation and Publishing, 1967

Introduction to Cataloging and Classification, Margaret Mann, Tehran: Institute for Scientific and Educational Planning, 1972

Parenting in a Troubled Age, Benjamin Spock, Tehran: Safi Alishah Publishing, 1978

An Ancient Commentary on the Quran in Persian, Ruben Levy, Book Guide, Issue 4

Persian Miniatures at Chester Beatty Library, B.W. Robinson, Book Guide, Issue 4

Persian Manuscripts at the British Museum, J.M. Meredith-Owens, Book Guide, Issue 5

Theoretical Aspects of Library Science, Pierce Butler, Tehran: Asian Cultural Documentation Center, 1979

Contributions and Honors

Founder of the Central Bank's specialized library, 1960

Compiled subject index of economic articles at the Central Bank (1961–1967)

Recipient of Royal Prize for Best Book of the Year (1973) for Principles of Subject Indexing

Founder of the Library Science Department at Shiraz University (1974); recruited renowned international faculty

Head of the Library Science Department, Shiraz University (1974–1975)

President of the *Habib Levy* Cultural Foundation, Los Angeles (1995–2003)

Editor-in-Chief of Cheshmandaz magazine, Los Angeles

Conclusion

Hooshang Ebrami is recognized as a key figure in the development of modern librarianship in Iran. Combining practical experience, theoretical knowledge, and cultural insight, he played a significant role in institutionalizing the field within the country. Drawing on formal academic education and extensive experience in cultural and governmental sectors, he contributed to the stabilization and legitimization of librarianship in Iran's higher education system. His scholarly legacy includes a broad range of educational, research, and historical works that remain relevant references for researchers and students. His efforts to link traditional Iranian cultural values with modern scientific approaches created a practical knowledge model that aligns academic expertise with national cultural development. Professionally, his career represents a case of integrating intellectual knowledge with nation-building

activities. Findings indicate that Ebrami's influence operated at three levels:

1. Institution-building and dissemination of professional methods within Iran;
2. Transfer of working models and techniques through training, cataloging, and library management;
3. After migration, a combination of professional continuity and adaptation of cultural activism that redefined his professional identity in a diaspora context.

Analysis of sources shows his impact is notable but requires careful interpretation:

- Evidence points to his significant role in introducing and implementing organizational procedures in libraries and related institutions;
- Some of these methods were transferred from foreign models, though the precise extent and contributions of other actors need further comparative study;
- Migration led to a redefinition of his professional identity and modes of cultural activism, characterized more by a mix of continuity and adjustment than a complete break.

The study's results suggest the simultaneous possibility of internal institution-building and the reproduction of cultural activism within the diaspora. However, these conclusions are constrained by limitations such as dispersed and sometimes incomplete documentation, gaps in key correspondence, and reliance on secondary and online sources.

Finally, the descriptive findings should be viewed as a foundation for future theoretical and comparative research, particularly using

frameworks like professional history, institutional history, knowledge transfer studies, and diaspora studies, to more accurately assess the roles of different actors and mechanisms of institutional change.

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