

CURRENT AFFAIRS

The Women of Iran Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

When we talk about Iran (old Persia) we must understand that they are not Arabs and they follow a branch of Islam (Sia) different than the Arabs who belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The Persians don't speak Arabic. Their language is Persian which is a very rich language. Unlike the Arabs, the Iranians don't

women in Iran do not reflect the cultural norms, values, and spiritual beliefs of the majority, especially women.

In ancient Persian society "women could own land and conduct business, receive equal pay, travel freely on their own, and in the case of royal women, hold their

own



belong to tribes. It may come as a surprise to many that 22.2% of Iranians identify themselves as non-religious; 8.8% identify themselves as atheists and 7.1% as spiritual. Not only that, Islamic laws for

council meetings on policy." King Cyrus (r. c. 550-530 BCE) established the Persian paradigm of freedom of religion and expression in his empire, providing a level of autonomy to women of every class. In

ancient Iran, women could travel on their own, the king's mother, wife, and daughters had also their own entourage, and staff to attend to their needs, and were given places of honor at banquets." (Parsa, Fariba, March 3, 2021, In the Face of Islamic Law Iranian Women Are Reappropriating Ancient Persian Culture, The Middle East Institute (MEI)).

Coming to the current perspective, a massive wave of protests has erupted all over Iran after the tragic death of an Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini. Amini was arrested by the Iranian morality police on September 17, 2022, for not wearing a hijab in public properly. While in custody, she died of a head injury. Just a note that this kind of uprising by women is unheard of in the Arab world (with some exceptions in Lebanon).

In Iran, the presence of forces such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has, until now, made similar large-scale protests hard to achieve. Indeed, the regime has clung to power despite growing anti-regime sentiment and demonstrations in the last few years. Nevertheless, the current wave of protests has actually prompted a change in rhetoric on the part of Iran's conservative leaders, including President Ebrahim Raisi who talked about the necessity of changing the way of working and giving people more opportunities for the right to protest and criticize.

This time the Iranian women's protest is different from previous recent protests

inasmuch as the current protests represent a geographically, ethnically, and economically diverse cross-section of Iranian society. Women, estimated to number more than 40 million in Iran, along with Iran's youth population are at the forefront of the protests, which support a vast network of popular groups and political clusters inside and outside Iran. These protests also represent a turning point due to the political, economic, and social nature of the protestors' slogans, including "Woman, Life, Freedom," "We Don't Want the Islamic Republic," "I Will Kill, I Will Kill, Those Who Killed My Sister," "Death to the Dictator," "We are all Mahsa, We Are All in This Fight Together."

The economic crisis, public protests, and internal conflicts within the Iranian ruling class are ominous signs for the present Islamic regime. Of course, it is not yet a given that this new wave of protest, though different, will immediately alter the political system through revolution or radical change. Although it is possible that the government of Iran may purge the protest by using punitive majors, the old spirit of the Persian women has reemerged.