IRANIAN WOMEN RECLAIM THEIR VOICES

Women Ways of Knowing
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Spring 2009
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The Iranian women of the 4th-3rd millennium BCE community maintained a high level of socio-economic status. The distribution of the seals, which as instruments of trade and government represented economic and administrative control, reveals that these women were the more powerful group in their prehistoric society.

During the Sassanian dynasty many of the Iranian soldiers captured by Romans were women who were fighting along with the men.

The Islamic conquest of Persia (633-656) led to the end of Sassanid Persian Empire and the Zoroastrian religion in Persia. However, the achievements of the previous Persian civilization were not lost, but were to a great extent absorbed by the new Islamic Policy.

After Islam spread through Iran, Persian women were forced to cover their body in public, up to neck, the ankles, and below the elbow. The general use of the veil to cover the face did not appear until Abbasid times. Muslim women were to wear Hijab “a Curtain” except in the presence of their husbands, other women, children, their father and brothers.
Reza Shah became monarch in 1926. After several trips abroad and meeting with Turkey’s ruler Ataturk, he imitated Ataturk's modernization movement and wanted to impose westernization on Iranian society and so he forbid religious activities.
A NEW WAVE OF CHANGE

- Reza Shah Pahlavi banned *hijab* in 1936. Many women refused to leave the house for months, and others risked being beaten and having their veil forcibly removed on the streets.
In 1936 Reza Shah, his wife and daughters attended the graduation ceremony at the Women’s Teacher Training in Tehran. All women were advised to come unveiled.

After Reza Shah, his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi became the king of Iran. He followed his father’s footsteps and continued to modernize and westernize the country. In 1962, he gave the women the right to vote and to be elected. Divorce laws were improved and the marriage age for girls was set at 18 years.
A national education system was formed to educate boys and girls equally. Women were required to serve in the education corps and pass military services.
A NEW WAVE OF CHANGE

In 1936 the first females entered Tehran University. By 1978, 33% of university students were female with 2 million in the workforce. 190,000 were professionals with university degrees. There were 333 women in the local council, 22 in congress and 2 in the Senate. Retrieved February 11, 2009, from http://www.iranonline.com/History/women-history/3.html
Discovery of oil in Iran in 1908 attracted great interest from the West. Growing resentment against an uneven distribution of wealth and the westernizing influence of the United States led to a confrontation with Islamic clergy in 1963. The Shah effectively put down the uprising, sending it's leader, an elderly cleric named Ruhollah Khomeini, into exile in Iraq. Though no one knew it at the time, Iran's Islamic revolution had begun. Retrieved February 11, 2009, from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carter/peopleevents/e_hostage.html
The Carter administration suggested that if Iran did not improve its human rights record, aid, including military assistance, might be terminated. In November 1978, White House Iran Task Ball recommended that Washington drop support for the Shah of Iran and support the fundamentalistic Islamic opposition of Ayatollah Khomeini. As a result of Carter’s withdrawal of support from the Shah, the pro-Western nation fell into the hands of the radical Islamist Ayatollah Khomeini.

At the revolution of 1978 millions of men and women participated in mass demonstrations against Shah. Unable to control millions of angry people, Shah fled the country. The Islamic Republic was established in January. The family protection law was abolished in April and by March women were barred from becoming judges.

Women working at government offices were ordered to observe the Islamic dress code. In April the marriage age for girls was reduced to 13 and married women were banned from attending public schools. Retrieved February 11, 2009, from http://www.iranonline.com/History/women-history/3.html
Mandatory Hijab

All female students including university students were forced to wear hijab or face expulsion from school and jail sentences.
Girls or women who did not follow Islamic dress code of the Islamic Republic, were harassed, beaten, and jailed by female special hijab forces.
Women who did not follow Islamic laws were whipped. Married women who had extra marital affairs were stone to death.
Shirin Ebadi is an Iranian lawyer and human rights activist and founder of Children's Rights Support Association in Iran. On October 10, 2003, Ebadi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her significant and pioneering efforts for democracy and human rights, especially women's, children's, and refugee rights. She is the first Iranian to receive the prize. She has been jailed and criticized for defending homosexuals, appearing without the Islamic headscarf abroad, and questioning Islamic punishments. Retrieved February 13, 2009, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shirin_Ebadi
Iranian feminist activists have held many peaceful demonstration for women’s rights demanding an end to legal discrimination against women. Many demonstrators are beaten and jailed by the police.
DEFYING THE AUTHORITIES

Although the Islamic government stresses hijab, determined to fight back, many Iranian girls defy the government by westernizing their dress code.
Unable to meet the opposite sex in public, single Iranians hold private parties in their house, which can be disturbed by police if the authorities are informed of such gatherings.
Unable to openly socialize with opposite sex, many Iranian girls reach out and seek companionship, by blogging and posting their picture on the internet.
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