

In Commemoration of Iranian Women's Emancipation

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Women Day Special = 17 Day 1314 (8 January 1935)

By Sheda Vasseghi

“They have a saying in Teheran that when the women take part in a chuluk (riot) against a Cabinet of the Government, the situation has become serious.”

W. Morgan Shuster, The Strangling of Persia, 1912.

«اصطلاحی در تهران هست که می گوید، هرگاه بانوان در شلوغی (تظاهرات) بر علیه کابینه دولت شرکت کنند به این معنی است که اوضاع بسیار وخیم شده است. دبلیو مورگان شوستر اختناق پرشیا 1912»

In 1911, an American named W. Morgan Shuster was hired as the Treasurer-General by the Iranian Government in order to block further European meddling in its national affairs. Mr. Shuster arrived in Iran in the midst of its newly-formed constitutional monarchy. His accounts of that critical time as the country struggled to emerge from the Dark Ages are tragically similar to Iran's current situation a century later.

According to Shuster, since the Constitution Revolution of 1907, Iranian women had become “the most progressive, not to say radical, in the world.... The women did much to keep the spirit of liberty alive. Having themselves suffered from a double form of oppression, political and social, they were the more eager to foment the great Nationalist movement for the adoption of constitutional forms of government and the inculcation of Western political, social, commercial and ethical codes.”

In January 8, 1936, before the first class of female graduates of Faculty of Medicine and other schools, the father of modern Iran, Reza Shah Pahlavi said:

“My sisters and daughters! Now that you have entered society and moved ahead of your own happiness and the welfare of your homeland, you must bear in mind that it is your duty to work. The future happiness of the country is in your hands. You are to be the educators of the next generation.... I expect you learned women who are now becoming aware of your rights, privileges, and duties to serve your motherland, to be content and economical,....”

During the graduation ceremony, the Queen Mother and two of the princesses in attendance were unveiled. On February 1, 1936, certain restrictions and regulations were put in place to encourage abandonment of hejab.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, one of the first acts of oppression against women by the clerics was to reinstate mandatory hejab. The issue is not hejab itself, but rather its enforcement. To tell a portion of the population that based on their gender they have to dress a certain way is against their “natural” rights.

Since June 2009, following the footsteps of their predecessors, Iranian women are in the forefront of the national uprisings. Thirty years ago, under duress and violence, a generation of young women helplessly watched their hard-earned civil rights vanish. But now, a new generation of women born and raised under an Islamofascist regime, unaware of their country's historical movement in women's emancipation championed by Reza Shah, has stepped forward to regain its natural rights. And tragically as the world witnessed, the first martyr of this Nationalist revolution was a woman -- Neda Agha-Soltan.

Forced conversion to Islam and centuries of falsified history has not changed the core of Iranian life and philosophy. Of course, this is not to deny that a portion believes in Sharia laws which prejudice

women and minorities, but for the most part, Iranian women are unique in the region for their progressive and free-thinking mannerism. This is largely due to Iran's history and philosophy dating back to its prophet Zoroaster.

In short, Iranian philosophy gave men and women equal rights including when choosing a religion. Zoroaster's wedding advice to his daughter Pouruchista was to use her wisdom. Iranians believed the more men and women knew the truth, the better for the society as a whole. Both men and women were encouraged to live with good consciences. In one of his prayers, Zoroaster states "[m]ay a good ruler, man or woman, rule over us...." Interestingly, the concept of daena or "conscience" was feminine.

On the anniversary of Iranian women's emancipation, we salute them and their bravery to free themselves and their country from a fascist regime. And we support Iranian women in their endeavor to bring their beloved land to its rightful place in the 21st century global arena.

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