Gorety Parra

Professor Hamalian

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Women in Revolutions

Throughout history, citizens of the world have pleaded for change in their government and society, but sometimes these changes can come in forms of protesting, rebellions, and wars.  The change that people want can come with a price it may be favorable for some or it can be total chaos for others. In some examples of rebellion, it is more likely to see a woman having more limits on what she can or cannot do. A more specific rebellion is the 1979 Islamic revolution where religion became a major part of the government’s decisions. Iran’s citizens were greatly affected by this sudden change in government especially the ones who believed it was wrong or were not used to living in that way.

         Marjane Satrapi decided to write her experiences of growing up in the middle of the Islamic Revolution in her book “Persepolis”. Marjane was about ten years old when the revolution started, she was young and innocent and the only thing she knew is that she had to be separated from her male classmates and now she was being forced to wear a veil which was clear to her that it was because of the war. She did not understand that the reason why woman had to wear a veil was because “Women’s hair emanates rays that excite men (Satrapi, 74) said a newscaster while Marjane and her family watched the daily news. Women were told to wear the veils because according to the new Iran government, women were making men perverted. According to Adele Ferdows’ “Women and the Islamic revolution” states that women are “enslaved in the name of religion, she becomes a victim of religion” which is true since they have to hide their beauty in order for men not to be tempted. In “Mullahs, Martyrs, and Men Conceptualizing Masculinity in the Islamic Republic of Iran” by Shahin Gerami “Women were expected to look as masculine as possible.” (Gerami, 263)They could not even show an ankle or revealing makeup, “makeup was a taboo” (Gerami, 263)

           Women were also not treated as equals to men. An outspoken, rebellious woman was seen as a threat to society and many of these women.  . Shaul Bakhash’s article “The Islamic Republic of Iran 1979-1989” “Hundreds were executed for ‘making war against God’ and ‘spreading corruption on Earth” (Bakhash, 56). If there was a slight sign that a woman was rebelling they would be stopped and either given a warning if they were lucky or they would be imprisoned that came either with a fine or their lives. “The Government had imprisoned and exectuted so many high-school and college students” (Satrapi, 302). Some people no longer were willing to rebel in public; they would rather hide their rebellion and hope not to get caught.

            When Marjane’s parents saw that her rebellious behavior might come with major consequences, they decided to send her to Vienna. She saw that more woman were free to do whatever they pleased. They could let down their hair or be free to go party whenever they pleased. According to Milton Viorst’s “Limits of the Revolution” that many women during the Islamic Revoltuion ”commonly would expose and ankle or some hair beneath their chador”.  Europe was known for thinking that a woman was “a partner of her husband, a co-producer, educated and free, she is raised equally with men” (Ferdows). For this reason, Iran did not really allow other cultures to be involved. Punk or pop music was known as a disgrace in Iran and if the police caught someone hearing or wearing anything that resembled this, they would most likely be sent to jail. If clothes or makeup were not “appropriate” to the police they would also have a reason to arrest you where you would never know what would happen to you.

           Woman could be said to be the ones who were affected more of the change of government, but men’s life changed as well. For the boys or men in Iran, they were told that they would be sent to a paradise with “plenty of food, women and houses made up of gold and diamonds” (Satrapi, 100) according to Marjane when their maid’s son was told that he might have to go fight for his country. Some people were too focused on the female concerns that males were sometimes overlooked. Going against popular belief, men also had a strict dress code. Men were expected to wear pants and a long un-tuck shirt “man’s long, loose, un-tucked shirt hiding his sexuality” (Gerami 263-264) as well as short hair and thick facial hair. None of the citizen was allowed to look what you would call “attractive” both genders were hiding their good looks from the government. Men were also expected to show full masculinity and not show fear. The Islamic revolution was very tough on men as well but since so many people, including other countries had their primary concern over the gender rights of woman, men were did not really get much sympathy for the dramatic change for them when the revolution started.

            Overall, both men and woman suffered. “In the Islamic Republic, they pray in public and drink in private” (Bakhash, 55-56) when it used to be the opposite where people were free to pray when they desired and now it was mandatory. Regardless of gender, social classes all suffered in one way or another. One example is Marjane’s maid, Mehri, who was considered to be in the lower class. Because of this lower class people were not allowed to study or even learn how to write, they were also not allowed to eat in the same table as others, or they could not marry someone higher than them. Mehri fell in love with a boy from across the street and she would tell Marjane to write him letters. They were in a budding romance until Marjane’s father found out and knew it was against the law and the romance quickly fell apart. Amir Arjomand’s “Iran Islamic Revolution in Comparative Perspective” said that “Middle class wee under supervision by the secret police”. They were being watched over and made sure no social gatherings were going on or any private political meanings. Some high class people were brought down since the government felt that they might eventually take over the government or gain more power.

             Many people were affected by the Islamic revolution no matter what gender or social class. Woman’s lives were changed since the revolution now brought dramatic gender differences. Although women were seen as victims in many societies such as Europe, men were also victims of these gender discrimination “Revolution can be defined as the collapse of the political order and its replacement by a new one” in Iran’s case, the new government was a conservative and religious one. Revolutions affect their citizens’ environment, daily lives, and themselves.

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