

# The issue of human rights in "Persepolis"

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



In the current international community, the issue of human rights had been one of the main issues that are faced by the different countries in the world. Topics such as the inhumane treatment towards women and children mostly in the Middle Eastern Countries and Islamic communities around the world are the problems that are still in being debated by my leaders today.

Although many feminist say that there is inequality and inhumanity in the treatment of women in the Middle East, in reality, women are really torn between deciding to obey their culture or practice their right as a woman.

In the past, Persian women are given the equal rights with men. These women have their own properties and are able to retain these even after their marriage. Most of them are given the right to their own freedom and are acknowledged as the most important people in the society given their ability to bear a child and such. In an article written by Massoume Price, he stated that based on historical facts "...the widowed wife inherited from the deceased even if she did not have children. A woman could not act as a witness in the drawing up of contracts, but she could act as a contracting party and have her own seal" (Price, n. . ). Women had the same power as men but as the years progress, female rights in Iran have lessened which led to repression and gender inequality. In the book *Persepolis* discusses such dilemma of a 9 year old child living in Iran during the Iran and Iraq war. The author of the book is Marjane Satrapi who actually is the lead character in the whole story and narrates her experiences as a child until now as an Iranian woman. The book is a graphic novel which looks like a comic strip. The book is filled with black and white drawings (*The Creole Cat*, 1) which I personally think as unique and cool.

It is not like a typical book which is filled with words and serious topics that will turn out to be a boring book in the end. Although the book does not present itself as a serious and a complicated book to read, the issues raised in the book have become one of the most controversial concerns in Iran and in various countries in the world. (Revolution, n. p. ) The graphic novel narrates the life of Marjane Satrapi who was then living in a chaotic world of politics in Iran. Her family is connected to the political branches of the government which makes her more exposed to the lifestyle of politics in Iran.

Her family was communists who generally do not agree with the system of the Islamic Fundamentalists and its actions. Her family usually hosts underground parties which was a form of rebellion in the government. These parties were not allowed by the government because they are believed to be a western practice which opposes the belief of the fundamentalists.

Therefore heavy punishments could be held to them if they are caught participating in these activities. As Marjane lived in a family that was against the Islamic Fundamentalists, she also created measures that imitated the actions of her family.

She got interested in punk and heavy metal music and often bought Nike shoes in the black market. Due to the bold actions of the young Marjane, her family decided that she must live in a different country to prevent her from being arrested by officials, “ It would have been better to just go” (Eberstadt cited in Satrapi n. p. ). During her high school life, she was sent to Vienna Austria however, she felt like she was isolated and typically hated the people

around her. She believes that Westerners do not put any value to the freedom that they have.

After a few months of her stay in Austria she had a relationship with a young man. She became passionately in love with him but after a while, she discovered that he was cheating on her. Due to this, she had clinical depression and almost died of bronchitis. She went home to Iran with a broken heart (Revolution, n. p. ). By the time that she was in college, she went back to Iran. She was hopeful that changes in the society would be present because the war had already ended however; the problem in Iran seemed to have a much bigger issue to solve.

Petty issues such as small differences in religion, and group executions due to political conflicts had been a source of bigger complications in the society which led to a much chaotic Iran. The conflict made the lives of the people much more difficult most especially to the women living in the country. Iran had a much more conservative law which made life for Marjane much more complicated. Freedom of wearing make-up was prohibited. Marjane was almost caught wearing cosmetics but in the end, she got out of the situation for accusing the police for staring wrongly at her body.

In addition she married her boyfriend just to avoid the police scrutiny. In the end, Marjane Satrapi separated with her husband after their three years of marriage. Other events happened and finally her parents decided that she must leave the country in order to prevent her from being arrested by the police. Marjane agreed to the plan of her parents however, after her departure from Iran her grandmother died. In the whole story, the role of

women was one of the strongest and most evident participation. In some articles that critiqued the book has stated that the graphic novel is about feminism and women empowerment in the Middle East.

The book highlights the role and responsibilities of women in a conservative and Islamic community such that of Tehran, Iran. When the Islamic Fundamentalist party one the most obvious changes that the women had to do was to change the way they dress. Women need to cover their hair in order to not entice the men. In the conservative belief of the Islam religion, women must not show of a body part because it might lead to something sinful for the part of the men. The veil became a mandatory outfit of every woman whether they may be young or old (Creole Cat, 1).

Make-ups are also not allowed by the Islamic Fundamentalists for they believe that it is a Western belief and thus it should not be put on by any woman. In the story Marjane was almost arrested by the police but she was able to make an alibi. In addition, women in many ways had created actions in order to prevent men from being caught by the police while going against the action of the government. A scene in the graphic novel where in the police stopped their car for inspection. The police officer inspected her father and suspected that Marjane's father had drunk wine.

Upon inspection, the mother tried to negotiate with the officers pleading that her father just became surprised with the inspection. In the continuing scene, the grandmother excused herself through justifying that she has diabetes. She was understood by one of the officers and through this, the grandmother and Marjane were able to go up their apartment and sneak in.

They were able to throw away the wines that they have kept in their apartment. Females in Iran were able to somehow cover up for the men because of their characteristic of being compassionate and patient with negotiations with other people.

Marjane's mother is specifically patient and calm during situations like these. She gives support to her husband but is more composed. Although she wanted to have justice and equality amongst everyone in Iran she does not act as violently as others would do. (Satrapi 107-110) The role of the maid in the story was also an important part of the novel. Although it is given small attention, the scene of the story is proclaiming that there is social construct of limiting oneself from interacting with other people due to the social class.

A maid is not a high paying job compared to other jobs available. Maids are also seen as low class citizens and must not go out of their social class. They must not marry higher class people such as the middle class and the elites. It would be immoral and improper because in the Iranian society, any individual must not go out of their social class, like Marjane's father said " In this country you must stay within your own social class" (Eberstadt cited in Satrapi n. p. ). Due to this belief and social construct, the interaction of the society becomes limited which creates inequality.

However, Marjane stated a line in which makes the readers realize that there must not be boundaries with the relations of people " We were not in the same social class but at least we were in the same bed"( Eberstadt cited in Satrapi n. p. ). Her line expressed states that everyone is equal with one another, in terms of loving another person. The situation of the maid,

demonstrated that class difference is one of the main issues faced by Iran. The main character, Marjane illustrates a child that was born in a family that wanted to have a just world.

Just like her parents, she also employs her own belief system which led to many troubles which were narrated in the book. Her boldness and strong belief present a modern Iranian woman that wants to get out of her shell to explore other realities. Marjane advocates the openness to other new experiences such that of the western culture. As a young girl, she immediately had a different sense of desire for freedom and equality. When she was in her younger years, she was already outspoken about her ideas and her dreams.

She wanted to become a prophet which is not really a dream for most the girls of her age. Her teacher even called her parents because she got disturbed by the idea that Marjane wanted to be a prophet. Her dream of becoming a prophet evidently makes her represent the female population that wanted freedom and equality from the Islamic Fundamentalists' belief. Although Marjane was being bold and was acting against the principle of her belief, she still believed in a higher and stronger being which was shown in her graphic novel.

Though, women were repressed and were forced to the will of the fundamentalists, Marjane's role became an important one in the book to show that she was a woman that pursued what she believed is right even though she was held back by the society. She did chase her dream in making the lives of women and other Iranians free from all the difficulties that she had in

her past life. Marjane's life became a symbol of courage and change for many women in the Iranian society. In conclusion, women in the book all have their own roles.

The elderly women in the book such as the mother and the grandmother of Marjane played the role of protecting their families through peaceful means. As much as possible, these elders are fighting for what they believe is right however, they do not do the extremes unlike Marjane. They move with grace and caution to make sure that their family is well protected and at peace. The maid's role in the story is being a woman less powerful than the normal one due to her status in the society. Being a woman and being poor held her back to the lower part of the social system.

The Iranian conservative society does not allow a lower class female to marry or be in a relationship with a male who is in the higher social status or vice versa. On the other hand, Marjane's role in novel changed the perspective of many of the characters. Her rebellion made gave her a little freedom which was needed by most of the women during her time. Marjane showed her strength and courage in battling the norms of her society to prove that women should be given more freedom than their culture allows.