

DRAFT FOR APPROVAL

Women's Literary and Artistic Creativity in Contemporary Iran

A conference at the University of Toronto,
November 6 - 7, 2004

December 2004

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Women's Literary and Artistic Creativity in Contemporary Iran

A conference at the University of Toronto,
November 6-7, 2004

The two-day conference brought participants to Toronto to discuss the role of women in the cultural context of Iran today. Sponsored by the Toronto Initiative for Iranian Studies in conjunction with the Persian Heritage Foundation and the Iranian Association at the University of Toronto, the conference featured lectures, documentary films, a round-table and public discussion, and an Iranian book fair.

The Toronto Initiative for Iranian Studies includes participants from the university's Departments of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, History and Historical Studies at U of T at Mississauga (UTM). The conference was organized by Professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, chair of the Department of Historical Studies at UTM and the author of *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Europology, and Nationalist Historiography* – a recent study of Europe from the Persian point of view – and many papers.

The conference provided an opportunity for Iranian women and others living outside Iran to meet other women who have been recognized for their achievements in the cultural sector, as employers, lawyers, playwright, film-makers, journalists and publishers. They are typical of thousands of self-made Iranian professionals who have been striving to develop their skills and competencies largely in the absence of institutional support.

Today, fully 65 percent of students admitted to Iranian universities are women, a fact that reflects women's recognition of the importance of higher education in the struggle for equality. The remarkable increase in women's university attendance is putting new pressures on the government of Iran to provide employment for women and to admit women as full partners in the management of the country and decisions regarding its future.

Lectures and Lecturers

The conference featured a wide variety of lecturers and topics dealing with contemporary cultural and philosophical issues facing women in Iran. In addition to the lectures listed below, the conference featured two documentary films, a round table discussion of narrative literature in Iran today chaired by Professor Farzaneh Milani of the University of Virginia and featuring three Iranian writers, and a public discussion of Iranian women outside Iran.

Iranian Women Writers and the Public Sphere

Dr. Farzaneh Milani, Professor of Women's Studies and Asian and Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures, University of Virginia

Author of *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, Prof. Milani has written numerous articles on a broad range of topics involving women and literature in the Middle East and lectured widely on literature and feminism in Iran. She is past president of the Association of Middle Eastern Women's Studies in America, past member of board of directors of the Middle East Studies Association of North America and an executive officer of the American Association of Persian Teachers.

Women in Contemporary Iran

Shahla Lahiji, publisher, researcher and writer

A graduate of the Open University of London in sociology, Ms Lahiji is the founder and director of Roshangaran and Women's Studies Publishing. A journalist and writer, she is the co-author with Farideh Assarpour of *Women in Search of Freedom*, a study of the women's movement in Germany, and the author of several other important studies.

Women in Contemporary Iran: Problems and Challenges

Ziba Abdolazadeh Lahiji, educator and publisher

A graduate of Tehran University in Educational Sciences, Ms Lahiji is manager of Roshangaran and Women's Studies Publishing. Ms Lahiji has also worked for the State Welfare Organization. She has studied trends in women's participation in Iranian society and trends in women's health, spousal abuse, addiction and suicide, and other social phenomena.

Iranian Women's Employment Initiatives: Difficulties and Challenges

Firouzeh Saber, employment consultant

A graduate in business administration and management from Alzahra University, Ms Saber has conducted research into job creation for women in Iran for the Ministry of the Interior, developed job creation plans for Iran's Industrial Management Organization and studied the role of women in higher education for the Ministry of Sciences, Research and Technology. She has conducted job creation workshops and is the author of a book describing job creation methods for women

Philosophy as a New Sphere for Iranian Women

Nushin Shahandeh, author and translator

A graduate of Tehran's Allameh Tabatabaei University in philosophy, Ms Shahandeh is the author of a philosophical analysis of Friedrich Nietzsche's view of women and a Farsi translation of Christine de Pisan's *City of Women*, a collection of biographies of women published in 1405.

Women and Drama in Contemporary Iranian Theatre

Chista Yasrebi, playwright

Doctoral candidate and graduate of educational psychology, Ms Yasrebi is a playwright, poet and lecturer. Her first play, “Tomorrow may be the Spring,” was produced in 1989. As a playwright and director she has participated in many drama festivals in Iran and is a member of the board of directors of the Society of Playwrights of Iran’s Theatre House and head of the international committee of the society. She has published some 35 titles, both original works and translations.

Contemporary Iranian Women Journalists

Lili Farhadpour, writer and journalist

A graduate of Tehran’s Alameh Tabatabaei University in journalism, Ms Farhadpour has worked as a journalist for 15 years. She has been editor of the literature and arts sections of newspapers such as Jamea, Toos, Neshat and Asre Azadegan, all closed by the government, and a member of the editorial board of several other publications. Recently she has devoted more time to fiction and is the author of several novels.