



Special report by
NCRI Women's Committee



Women prohibited from singing and playing music under the mullahs' rule in Iran

Iranian women prohibited from singing and playing music under the mullahs' rule

Introduction

From day one after seizing power in Iran the mullahs' regime targeted women as its main target of crackdown. The law on compulsory veiling (hijab) accompanied by the chants of "either the veil or a hit on the head" was amongst the first so-called laws of this misogynist regime. Restricting women in social, professional, athletic and of course artistic fields comprise other aspects of this fundamentalist vision.

Women have always been banned from singing and targets of censorship. In the early years of Khomeini's rule, female singers were literally forced to stop their activities and go home, and many had to leave the country. Many others were forgotten and left alone without being able to make ends meet. Only a small number of female singers that chose to tolerate the regime's repressive censorship, were allowed to perform before a female audience.

Over the past two years, women's musical performance has once again become subject of major dispute among the regime's factions. Obviously, in this reactionary regime, the quarrel is not over freedom of female singers but over creating more restrictions and obstacles for female artists. Like all other matters, women's singing is obviously not a religious but a completely political issue and a tool used for restriction of the entire nation. It should be realized that as long as religion is used as a tool by the government to enforce its power, the people of Iran will always be facing various problems aimed at further crackdown on women.

Hamid Rasaii, member of the mullahs' parliament, presented a letter to a Majlis open session in November 2013. In this letter, he claimed with much fanfare that the Ministry of Guidance had issued licenses for singers. By citing leaders of the clerical regime, he attempted to add to his own credibility. The quotations, however, showed that eliminating women from arts is one of the foundations of the misogynist regime's mindset, not limited to one or the other faction. Prominent among the sources cited by Rasaii were the regime's two supreme leaders:

"In response to a question on women singing solo, Khomeini said, 'Considering the specific approach and outlook of the singer while performing, the atmosphere in the gathering, and the lyrics, if the singing causes corruption or pointless joy, it is not permissible.' "

"Khamenei believes: 'If the voice is not enriched (having much ups and downs) and the listener does not listen with impure intentions of joy and the voice does not in any way bring about corruption, it is considered permissible. However, if it entails any form of corruption or provokes lust, it is not permitted.' "

Clearly, these vague definitions condemn any form of singing by women, but Rasaii adds, "Some senior clerics, however, regard it absolutely impermissible; for example, Mullah Behjat believes it is not permissible to listen to the voice of female singers."

Official viewpoints from day one

A state-run news agency published the sentences for female solo singers performing before men on 12 March 2012, quoting some senior clerics.

Question from senior clerics: What is the ruling for women's solo singing before strange men, including the recital of the Quran and singing anthems?

- Mullah Behjat: "It is not permissible if it incites lust because most men are often subject to this, (singing by females) should be avoided."
- Mullah Tabrizi: "Women's recital of the Quran and also singing anthems, are not permissible if they attract attention of strange men or provoke incitement of lust."
- Mullah Safi Golpayegani: "It causes vice and is not permissible."
- Mullah Fazel Lankarani: "In the present circumstances, it usually gives rise to vice and is therefore not permissible. And if the singing constantly changes tone, it is unlawful."
- Mullah Golpaygani: "Women and girls must not recite the Quran in the presence of strange men."
- Mullah Makarem Shirazi: "It is not permissible."
- Mullah Nouri Hamedani: "It is wrong if it leads to vice."

(1,001 religious issues, Volume 2, Page 164, Line 545)

<http://www.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx?pid=197624>

The state-run Fars News Agency once again asked the opinion of the regime's supreme leader in November 2013.

Q: Is it permissible for a man to listen to a stranger woman singing with the intention of enjoying it? Can a woman sing for her husband, and vice-versa?

A: "Listening to singing which brings voice up and out of the larynx, in a manner that incites happiness and suits parties involving pleasure and sin, is absolutely unlawful. Even a woman's singing for her husband's pleasure does not make listening to it permissible. This is considered a perpetual ruling of the jurisprudence and does not change with social conditions. The need to avoid it is absolute."



<http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13920808000901>

The views of other mullahs in this regard sheds more light on the objectives of this misogynist regime. Mullah Ghotbi, general director of Isfahan's Department of Islamic Guidance and Culture, said in September 2014: "Women must learn their own special music. The music must have female applications, such as a nightly lullaby that women sing for children."

<http://iranwire.com/features/6563/>

- In February, Mullah Mohmmad Yazdi, head of the Secretariat of the Assembly of Experts, also condemned all music in general and emphasized: "Music is unlawful in Islam... Women's solo

singing is unlawful without any doubt. Even collective singing (i.e. choir) that includes a female solo singing is also unlawful. In principle, encouraging music is unlawful.”

<http://www.nazarnews.com/10358>

Trend of events over the past two years

In addition to the numerous obstacles and the official censorship always enforced by the Ministry of Guidance, female Iranian musicians also face other arbitrary measures by city officials and various government factions. As usual, the objective is none but disappointing women and isolating them in their homes.



- One of the most controversial incidents of censorship was cancellation of the concert of the famous folklore singer, Homayoon Shajarian, which had been arranged for February 26 and 27, 2010. Shajarian wrote in a letter: “In the final days of rehearsals we learned of the disapproval of the concert by the General Department of Culture and Guidance because of the presence of two female musicians in Hessar musical group. They said if the ladies were removed or replaced, the authorization for the concert would be issued immediately.”

The said condition was not accepted by the group and the concert was therefore cancelled despite the sale of tickets.

- In February 2014, a concert by the Black and White musical group playing for singer, Vahid Taj, was cancelled. Mohammad Ali Ghazi Dezfuly, the Friday prayer leader of Dezful, said in this regard, “The concert must not deploy female musicians.”

http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/arts/2014/09/140905_I45_iran_women_musician_ban

- In October 2014, Erfan musical group’s concert at Isfahan’s Khorshid Hall was cancelled for the presence of female musicians in the group. It is said that in this festival, despite the crackdown on Iranian female musicians, Korean singer and musicians performed for the crowd.

<http://melliun.org/iran/49462>

The Bassij forces published an open letter to the Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance on 18 October 2014 in which they protested solo singing of women in the country.

At the end of the parliament's open session on October 28, ten MPs from Tehran – including two women – reminded the Ministry of Guidance of the need to prevent solo singing of women from performing.

However, Pirouz Arjmand, director general of the Music Office of the Ministry of Islamic and Guidance who had received the reminders, stressed, "Following the victory of the (1979) Revolution, no authorization has ever been issued for women to sing solo before male audience. The Ministry of Guidance takes firm action against any violations in this regard. The policies of this ministry are drafted and enforced by taking into consideration the instructions of the Supreme Leader and documents of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution."

<http://iscanews.ir/news/115768/>

In an interview with the state-run Mehr News Agency in November 2014, Hossein Taghavi, MP, said, "Women's performance and solo singing is one of the sanctities violated in this country... If the relevant officials do not listen to the concerns and demands of the MPs in this regard, the parliament will use its authority and legal instruments to resolve the problem."

<http://fararu.com/fa/news/212475>

- Censoring women has practically damaged their male colleagues in the group. On 4 January 2015, Iranian composer Majid Derakhshani was notified at the airport as he was departing Iran that he was banned from leaving the country. He told Etemad daily newspaper (affiliated with Rafsanjani): "Based on the summoning and explanations provided by state agents, I realized that the reason for this measure was the publication and vast distribution of the music clips by Mah-Banoo female musical group which had attracted a lot of attention."

Noting Majid Derakhshani's use of a female vocalist in the production of his clips, Pirouz Arjmand said, "Women's performing and singing in Iran is allowed only for female audience, and distribution of clips with such content is forbidden."

<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/463863/>

- On 13 January 2015, the renowned Azerbaijani singer Alim Ghasemov had a concert along with Tehran's Wind Instruments Orchestra. On the third night, the concert began with one hour delay and without his daughter, who performed as the second vocalist. Forghaneh Ghasemov sat behind the stage during the entire show.

In separate remarks, the father and daughter said, "Nowhere in the world are female musicians treated in this manner."

Just one day before this episode, Harir Shariatzadeh, a musician and wife of Salar Aghili, who was supposed to accompany her husband in his performance was brought down from stage.



Mohammad Reza Kermani, managing director of Salar Aghili's programs, told the state-run Fars News Agency, "There was absolutely no problem with Mrs. Shariatzadeh's covering. She is a renowned pianist and enjoys great artistic prestige. We expected that she would receive a better treatment."

<http://www.dw.de/%D8%AD%D8%B0%D9%81-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%87%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B2%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF/a-18194666>

- In mid-January 2015, Kamkar group's concert in Isfahan was held in the absence of its female members and musicians.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/arts/2015/01/150114_i41_music_women_singing

On the morning of February 5, 2015, the Minister of Culture and Guidance publicly denied that his ministry had issued permits for female vocalists.

The day before, two senior mullahs had threatened to prevent singing of women in concerts.

Speaking in the A'zam Mosque of Qom, Mullah Hassan Nouri Hamedani said, "We will ban all films, books and music against Islam and the Revolution... As for the singing of women, it cannot be made common practice in any way."

Mullah Nasser Makarem Shirazi declared in his class of jurisprudence in Qom that people are "furious" at the Ministry of Guidance for "tramping all the values of the revolution one after the other."

Their reference was to an album, called "I love you my ancient homeland", published on January 27 in which Ms. Noushin Taghi had accompanied Mr. Mohsen Keramati in singing the songs. In this album, the voice of the female vocalist can be heard at lower volume and as a second voice.

Hossein Noush Abadi, spokesman for the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance, said on January 31, "The claim about solo singing of women is not accurate. This album is a collective singing and it received authorization after necessary examinations."

<http://persian.iranhumanrights.org/1393/11/ali-jannati/>



A few days later, Secretary of the Guardian Council, Mullah Jannati, told a group of reporters, "The Ministry of Guidance has not issued authorization for any album featuring female singers. Whatever authorized has been collective singing."

<http://alef.ir/vdchxvni623n-zd.tft2.html?260138>

On February 7, 2015, a government-backed group of vicious thugs calling itself the "families of martyrs" published a threatening declaration which read in part: "Even if we have to sacrifice our lives for every drop of blood of the martyrs of this land, we will not allow women to sing solo under any pretext."

The declaration adds, “Have you heard the singing of Pari Maleki, Mahdie Mohammad Khani and Noushin Taghi? The board of the martyrs’ families announces that it will file all the documents on the violations of the Ministry of Guidance with the Public Prosecutor’s Office.”

<http://javanonline.ir/fa/news/702381>

In early March 2015, Hossein Naghavi Hosseini, head of the Assembly of Tehran Province representatives, legitimized this reactionary group and said, “At times, the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance issues authorizations that are viewed as being against the beliefs of the general public. So, they take action on their own and prevent or cancel the event.”

He emphasized, “Any permission for female singing is condemned and any minister in any government that has done so, has violated the law.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/news/2512541>

On April 10, 2015, Guidance Minister Ali Jannati once again publicly emphasized on the ministry’s adherence to the principles of the Velayat-e Faqih regime and said, “There has never been any problem about women’s solo singing, and we do not permit such solo singing.”

<http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/390762>

Victims of censorship speak out

The Iran Wire website published remarks by a number of female musicians on 17 September 2014. One of the female musicians playing in Shahnaz group says, “According to the Friday prayer leader of Mashhad, no music should be performed within the 20-kilometer radius of this city. In Isfahan,



female musicians are openly not permitted to go on stage. Unfortunately, the gender segregation implemented in the universities and government departments has been also applied to music, and led to women’s exclusion and deprivation.”

Leila, another female player of string instruments, said in this regard, “I used to go on stage ever since I was 10 or 11 years old. But now, it has been more than a decade that I have not been able to go on stage in my own city (Isfahan) ... Each time we referred to the Ministry of Guidance we receive irrational answers like this is not customary or usual... And when we ask them to give us a written response so that we can file a protest, again they do nothing. It has been a few years that we have not been able to perform even before a female audience and we have been kept waiting for authorization.” Leila adds, “This has also affected our teachings. My students keep saying, ‘when we go to this and that male master, we are able to see their performances, but we see nothing of your work.’ They think we are professionally weak.”

Sara, a female player of percussions, said, “We have not yet received any clear answer from the officials. The only answer they have given us is to not follow up on any answers.”

<http://iranwire.com/features/6563/>

In spring 2014, Alireza Ghorbani, the vocalist for the national orchestra, protested the exclusion of six female musicians from his group before beginning his performance. He said, "All of them are like our own sisters. These ladies work in all walks of life. They have a hundred percent serious participation in offices, factories and other social fields. The fact that they are excluded from music, in my opinion, is somewhat shocking and needs to be thought over."

www.sharghdaily.ir/News/53004/

Hossein Alizadeh, composer and player string instruments, said on the exclusion of female musicians, "All members of the group live on music and make a living out of it. In these circumstances, we have both an economic issue and a moral issue."

<http://www.isna.ir/fa/news/93061106321>

Majid Derakhshani, supervisor of a music group, says, "Just two months ago, we had a performance in the city of Ilam; two of our musicians were ladies. We had announced the program and sold its tickets. But just a few hours before the program, they said the ladies cannot perform and cancelled our authorization. The tickets had been sold, people were coming to the hall and there was nothing we could do. They created all these problems in the final minutes. We had to put the instruments of female musicians on the stage with no one sitting behind them. Nowadays, female musicians face various issues in many cities and they are being excluded from music in general."

"I believe that in cases where they don't issue authorization, men should not perform either and the entire show should be cancelled... Just this week, we are going to have the Shahnaz music festival and I was supposed to participate. However, I pulled out because ladies cannot participate and perform. In this festival, women can only take part in the fields of writing and composing on paper. Only men can participate in other fields, including group and solo performances, etc."

<http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/article/-a3f2d83193.html>

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