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## Defining and Understanding The Role Of Women In Marjane Satrapi's "Persepolis"

Marjane Satrapi's first novel "Persepolis" is an autobiographical graphic novel that narrates the experience of a young Iranian girl growing up amid the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Within her novel, many themes are utilized and highlighted to further her story and create a compelling novel. One such theme that is heavily emphasized throughout the novel is the important role and differentiations of gender within a certain time, place, and culture. More specifically, the role of women within that sphere, and how they shape and mold Satrapi's main character in her novel, her younger self.

### How Gender Plays a Role in Marjane Satrapi's "Persepolis"

Gender, specifically the role of women in the novel, significantly impacts Marji, Marjane Satrapi's younger self and main character of the novel's, growth and understanding of the world around her, and more so the immediate cultural sphere she finds herself in during the Islamic Revolution. Being a woman in this setting is both suppressive and empowering. These two contrasting characteristics make for a unique situation in Satrapi's book. Evidence of this is depicted in many different places throughout the graphic novel.

In chapter one of the novel, the first issue depicted is of Marji and other female students wearing obligatory veils enforced by current leaders during the Islamic revolution. From page one, there is already a disparity made between boys and girls. The frustrating part for Marji, is that she, and other girls her age, do not understand the reason behind wearing the veils. This distinction of gender and lack of rationale for the veils, also creates separate castes in gender.

In more subtle panels of the graphic novel, religion also plays a role in how gender affects Marji and Iranian women's lives. For example, on page 6, Marji wants to become a prophet due to her deep religious affiliation. However, in panel 5, pg. 6 the men she speaks to think it absurd to have a women prophet. This again shows a divide in the societal roles of women. However not all distinctions made in gender are based on religion and religious circumstance. Gender roles as whole are not completely separate from societal, religious, cultural, historical and political factors of a given landscape. However, there does tend to be some overlay between the different factors. This panel more so emphasizes the humor men find in associating women with positions of power.

One unique character of the graphic novel is Marji's mother. She perfectly emphasizes the

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contrast between a suppressed and empowered woman. First and foremost she does not wear a veil. This appears to be a subtle disruption from conformity against the Shah and Iranian government. She also actively participates in protests, and sometimes demonstrates, along with her husband, Marji's father. The contradiction, however, becomes apparent when readers are shown her being fearful of her picture in the newspaper, and consequently her identity being revealed to government officials and military. This contrast portrays Marji's mother's passion and bravery for activism coupled with her fear and suppression from the government. Marji's mother also plays an uncommon role in Marji's home life while. She as well as Marji's grandmother, promotes a lifestyle of education and understanding of the world going on around her. They want her to be well read and informed, if not actively participating in the revolution. "The adolescent female protagonists from Middle Eastern cultures desire to empower their own identities through utilizing Western media and its images of independent women, as well as the role models they encounter in their actual lives."

## **Similarly, Marji's Grandmother Plays an Important Role in Persepolis**

Marji's family appears to be more westernized than the average Iranian at the time. This is typically seen as being more liberal in nature in comparison to other Middle Eastern countries. Also, before the Islamic Revolution, Iran was a much more westernized country. Women ran their households, held jobs, and participated openly in society. The society and culture of Iran appeared much more Matriarchal. Women also need not wear veils. After the revolution, however, there became a quiet fear women possessed that disinclined them speaking out against the new regime. Women were made to wear and their traditional roles were pushed into the background instead of remaining at the forefront like those of men. "From Marji's viewpoints women still had power in some households; unfortunately, they just had to hide it."

Even in Marjane Satrapi's art style, gender presents an important role. Because a graphic novel was a unique presentation for Marji's story as opposed to a typical novel of that time period, it is important to reflect on how that medium reflects on gender. When Satrapi set out to visualize Marji's story, special attention was given to illustrative art depicted. Marji's character, even though she is only a child, is not overtly feminine. "It is also a challenge to the very genre that Marji inhabits, suggesting that Satrapi's globalized version of the graphic novel does not subscribe to the cultural or gender-based stereotyping, historical flattening, or caricature-based humor often associated with the cartoon medium. "And while readers can differentiate between genders in the novel, it is more so by comparing female characters to the more masculine features of men. For example, the women are portrayed as having slightly longer hair, but not too many curves, while the men have more distinct facial hair and features like distinct jaw lines."

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As Marji grows and matures, her rebellious nature develops. Marji also comes to understand the role of women under the current Islamic regime, and how heavily dependent it is on the regime's interference in her life. Over the course of the graphic novel, Marji also begins to understand that to be a woman in under this is to be subjugated to a lesser role than the one she perceived herself to have when she was younger. At the age of 10, she imagines herself to be the last prophet, which specifically contradicts with the fact that all the other prophets were men. However, as the novel progresses, she realizes that she "wanted to be an educated, liberate woman". As her comprehension develops, she learns that this "dream went up in smoke" with the Revolution.

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