

# Persian Blogs against "The Dual Language"

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Today in Iran many experience a dual life, and speak what I call a "dual language." There is an expansion of ambiguous talk routinely affecting all aspects of a person's daily life. Lying, hypocrisy, fear of punishment and being judged, and an urge to please superiors are all common.

In opposition to dual life in Iran, many young Iranians are increasingly turning to Persian blogs as gateways for speaking out. According to unofficial statistics, there are more than 100,000 active Persian weblogs updated regularly, and figures suggest the larger portion belongs to ones maintained outside Iran. Themes vary tremendously from a regular documentation of how one feels about basic daily incidents, to sports, news, arts, business, religion, science and in its most complicated and probably risky shape, politics.

Ironically, it is again modern technology that is challenging conventional traditions tightly watched for decades, if not centuries. One can hardly avoid being reminded of the long history of modernization obstacles in a society whose infrastructure is traditional and has been severely affected by monarchy in its different forms—the ultimate nutrient of dual language.

## Why Blog in Iran?

Creating and maintaining blogs has become a new movement for a generation curiously connected to the world outside Iran via the Internet. Through blogging an individual is able to feel and express oneself without being judged. As opposed to the West where blogging is one of several ways to express personal opinions, knowing that one can blog anonymously about any desired or culturally taboo subject is critical in a heavily censored Persian society. The opportunity to bypass censorship seems to be the main attractive characteristic of online journalism, easily applicable to blogging. Already Persian blogs

are discussing taboo subjects ranging from Hejaab, or concealing women's hair, to homosexuality (see [www.zananeha.com](http://www.zananeha.com)), the death penalty and the illegal prosecution of journalists.

Another attraction of maintaining a blog is the possibility of rapidly and spontaneously receiving feedback from diverse readers, after simply and immediately publishing your views to a worldwide audience. Although slow Internet connections and the time needed to filter specific websites hinder many Iranian's regular access to the Internet, bloggers in Iran are updating their blogs regularly, whether you are the young girl who updates Zeitoon, or a scholar, who discusses philosophy and sociology daily at Parde-o-Rang.

## Politics and News

Young Persians are keenly discovering and applying ways of communicating directly through blogs. Long Live Iran, a blog dedicated to patriotic Iranians, and Hot News Moment by Moment, for example, break away from the routinely vague and biased narrative forms and terms used in the conventional, government-sponsored Iranian media. Instead these blogs simply narrate events using an everyday vernacular.

Bloggers, often formerly active journalists, have happily accepted the responsibility to cover the Persian news in a very colloquial way. One former Iranian journalist now maintains Rooznegar from outside Iran, where he only recently was released from prison. Although the media in Iran has its own criteria for broadcasting selective news and information, it is impossible to universally apply these criteria to the Internet, even if many blogs are blocked daily by the national servers in Iran. With ongoing pressure from international human rights organizations, freedom of speech is becoming expected of Iranian blogs.

It is hard to miss the subtle signs of protest in the blogs of young Iranians. It is clearly marked in the titles—Hichestan (No Man's Land), Bineshani (Of Nowhere)—and invoked through impressively elaborate phrases and words like Khaake Gharib (Lonely Land), Carpe Diem, Koochi (The Migrant Bird), Afkare khosoosi (Private Thoughts), Prosecution and Man yek zanam (I am a woman). Many others use phrases from Persian poetry.

These protests are not only against representatives of an oppressed culture, but also a confused society, and even family structures harbouring fundamental conflicts. Persian youth, despite the traditional approaches imposed by the ruling system, as well as by a wide range of families, are asking for more and more modern points of view to analyse their lives.

Persian bloggers also create an online network, where participating bloggers share their lives, thoughts and feelings with each other, frequently developing friendships. Bloggers tend to support each other when needed, regardless of the location and the theme, whether it is personal or

political. They sign petitions for arrested bloggers and journalists; they call for help and try to seek the attention of international NGOs. It is through these networks and practices that blogging could bring hope for reuniting the scattered Persian population.

Women's voices are also being heard through weblogs in a unique way. Political issues, women's rights, social restrictions, legal flaws, family issues, relationship struggles and personal feelings are put into words enthusiastically by female bloggers who have hardly had a chance to speak out in such a way. Just look at the Iranian Feminist Tribune and Zananeha, both excellent examples of blogs contributing to women's rights.

## The Vulgarity Debate

Blogs have also become main venues of debates, such as the "vulgarity (Ebtezaal) debate," which focuses on whether some Persian blogs are vulgar. In his paper in the December *American Anthropologist*, Alireza Doostdar clarifies that the issue of vulgarity refers to, first, not complying with the rules of grammar and orthography, especially when writing in a colloquial style, and second, to making deliberate mistakes and engaging questionable linguistic and cultural behaviours. He conceptualizes the vulgarity debate as a clash between two classes of people with unequal access to cultural capital, and mentions that what has been identified as vulgar is an interpretation made by the dominant class in writing and literature. He brings up the intellectual hegemony issue facing cyberspace, which is a much less-restricted environment for publication, easily accessible for non-intellectuals as well as for intellectuals.

Regardless of how we understand the vulgarity debate, and whether or not vulgarity applies to all non-literary forms of writing and all taboo subjects discussed, this so-called "vulgar spirit" in Persian weblogs is a means of confronting dual language, by which some bloggers intend to use somewhat unconventional modes of writing to express what they understand as their "pure" and "real self." This, however, could be contrasted with literary, linguistic and aesthetic standards that are indeed indispensable to a professional and thoughtfully vetted and researched point of view. But blogging can be far beyond professionalism, and is more of a public tribune that can appear in almost every possible form. Although criticized by literary critics and professional writers in Iran, the Persian blogosphere is attending a somehow primitive yet valuable workshop on democracy, which targets respecting and accepting different language genres.

Whether certain trends in blogging can make a difference in the future of Persian society is a tempting question. Although we can't determine where this path of uncensored self-expression is leading to at present, there are clues that they will lead to a promising destination. ■

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### Persian Blogspots

*Zeitoon*: Updated daily by a young girl living in Iran.  
[www.z8un.com](http://www.z8un.com)

*Parde-o-Rang*: Maintained by a scholar who discusses philosophy and sociology.  
[parde-o-rang.blogspot.com](http://parde-o-rang.blogspot.com)

*Long Live Iran*: Dedicated to patriotic Iranians.  
<http://parazit1.persianblog.com>

*Hot News Moment by Moment*: A news source narrating events using an everyday vernacular.  
<http://chekhabar.persianblog.com>

*Iranian Feminist Tribune*: Blog for women's rights.  
[www.iftribune.com](http://www.iftribune.com)

*Zananeha*: Women's rights and taboo subjects, such as Hejaab, the death penalty and homosexuality.  
[www.zananeha.com](http://www.zananeha.com)