



## Rotating revolutions: Iran on Maya's wheel



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Revolutions always promise change, and they usually deliver something that merely looks like change. But what is rarely asked is what must change. They speak endlessly about systems, rulers, laws, and institutions, yet remain silent about the one who demands, sustains, and replaces those systems. Regimes collapse, flags are replaced, slogans change, but something remains untouched. The anger finds new targets; the demand itself does not. Iran offers a stark illustration.

In 1979, Iranians overthrew a tyrant in the name of liberation; forty-six years later, their children are dying in the streets to overthrow the liberators. What began as the Islamic Revolution now feels, to large parts of its own population, like Islamic oppression. This is not irony, nor is it history repeating itself.

Photographs of Iranian women from the 1960s show them laughing in universities, driving cars, and walking freely in markets. Then came economic distress, wounded national pride, and the humiliation of a Shah widely seen as a puppet of Western powers. The revolution promised dignity. Within a generation, it delivered the morality police.

In September 2022, Mahsa Amini, a twenty-two-year-old Kurdish woman, was arrested for allegedly violating hijab rules. She died in custody three days later. Her death ignited the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement. Young women tore off headscarves, cut their hair in public squares, and faced bullets. Hundreds were killed, thousands detained. The regime now faces revolt from the very population it once claimed to have saved.

Consider what forty-six years of 'liberation' have produced: inflation above forty per cent, youth unemployment exceeding twenty per cent, widespread food insecurity, and more than half the population now under thirty-five, a generation that remembers only the Ayatollahs, not the Shah. The revolutionaries of 1979 have themselves become the old regime. The wheel has completed its turn. The young are preparing to turn it again, certain that this time will be different.

The question we refuse to ask is simple: when the wheel turns again, what will have changed?

### Maya's Wheel

This is not peculiar to Iran. It is a human pattern, repeated across civilisations and centuries with such regularity that the fault clearly lies not in any particular system, but in the ego that builds and dismantles systems. The Katha Upanishad describes an outward-turned ego that keeps

changing scenes and calls this progress, even as it remains unchanged within. This is Maya's wheel, the illusion that rearranging the external world can deliver inner freedom.

In 1954, the psychologist Hans Eysenck studied committed Leftists and Rightists and argued something uncomfortable: at the extremes, Left and Right resemble each other psychologically. Both display the same dogmatism, the same hunger for certainty, the same need to locate enemies outside themselves. Their beliefs differ in content, but not in structure. The fascist and the communist despise each other's conclusions, yet they share the same ego structure, and, given power, they build prisons that look the same.

Iran's swing between Shah and Ayatollah makes this visible across a nation's history. The secularist and the theocrat wear different costumes and invoke different gods, yet both seek the same shelter for the ego: certainty, belonging, and an enemy to blame. If the Islamic Republic falls tomorrow, what guarantee is there that its successor will not harden into another prison within a generation?

None. The ego has not changed. Only the name of the revolution has.

### The Disillusionment That Never Teaches

Look beyond Iran and the pattern sharpens. After the Second World War, democracy was proclaimed humanity's guarantor of peace. That faith is now eroding across the globe. Extremist movements gain ground not by dismantling democratic institutions, but by being elected through them. The crowd that once demanded the vote now uses it to empower those who promise concentration of power.

The same ego that once declared, 'Democracy will solve our problems,' now announces, 'Democracy is our problem.' First, we depend on a system, then we blame it, then we look for another — like a drunk who blames the bottle, smashes it, and reaches for the next. The search for external saviours continues. The ego remains unexamined.

The Russian Revolution promised power to the workers. What emerged was Stalin. The Chinese Revolution promised liberation from feudal bondage. What emerged was Mao. Wherever the slogan was 'Power to the common man,' dictators arose. Why? Because the common man himself had not changed. He carried within him the same fear, the same greed, the same willingness to submit when weak and dominate when strong. Revolution without self-knowledge is merely the rotation of masters.

The costume changes. The actor remains.

The Upanishadic sages did not begin by asking which system was best. They asked a different question: who is the one demanding systems? What is this ego that attaches itself so desperately to ideologies, nations, revolutions? What does it want? And why does it keep missing what it wants?

This inquiry does not deny that systems matter. A woman in Tehran who risks arrest for showing her hair lives a vastly different life from one who cannot. The difference is real, and worth fighting for. But if the fight remains only external, if it never turns inward to examine the ego that fights, it will produce another version of the same prison. The real revolution examines the ego behind the revolt. It asks: what fear in me seeks ideology as shelter? What emptiness demands an external enemy? The enemy, it turns out, is not the Shah or the Ayatollah, not capitalism or communism. The enemy is the unexamined ego centre that operates identically under every flag.

When this ego centre is finally seen, the compulsion weakens — not because a new belief is adopted, but because the very mechanism of belief is exposed.

### The Only Revolution That Does Not Rotate

Iran may well overthrow its theocratic government. The hijab laws may fall. Women may walk free in the streets of Tehran. These would be real gains. But if the change stops there, if the external victory is not accompanied by an internal reckoning, then, in a generation, the wheel will turn again. The liberators will become oppressors, and the oppressed will rise only to repeat the same

role. This is Maya's relentless cycle, and it includes us all. We say our condition is bad because of the Shah, then the Ayatollah, then democracy, capitalism, tradition,

modernity. We will blame anything and anyone. The one thing we will never say is the only thing that is true: our condition is bad because we do not look within. The only exit from this cycle is the inquiry the cycle is designed to avoid. Not a new ideology, not a better system, but the willingness of human beings to examine the ego with the same ruthlessness they have long reserved for their opponents. This is a revolution with no date, no flag, no anthem. It happens in silence, alone, in the moment when a person stops asking, "What is wrong with the world?" and begins to ask, "What in me is creating this world?"

That question, honestly pursued, is the end of Maya's wheel.

But who wants the wheel to end? The wheel is where the ego lives. To stop the wheel is to lose the rider. That is why revolutions are so popular and self-inquiry so rare. The former lets you keep the ego intact while changing your clothes and slogans. Self-inquiry reveals that the one who keeps changing clothes was the problem from the start. Iran will keep turning, and so will the rest of the world. The wheel will turn until you have the courage to step off.



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