

RZAN This concept of powerful female energy is given explicit recognition in the Bakhtiari concept of the Shirzan. The term translates as lion woman. It can also translate as heroine, or with negative connotations as virago.

It is necessary to something about relations between the sexes to really understand this term., but for the moment it is perhaps enough to point to a number of cultural factors. Tribal women are never veiled. Their faces are never covered even in the presence of strangers and outsiders unlike so many parts of Islamic culture. Bakhtairi women wear their veils, and their jewelry covering their backs. The back symbolises the vulnerable inside. Bakhtiari women like their men tend to face the world full on. Separation is maintained not by the veil, but by a more invisible barrier where access to the presence of women is controlled by the threat of really punitive violence. Women in their persons symbolise the inner self of the male world, at least in part. ~~To violate the privacy of a man~~ They symbolise man's animal nature, that passionate sensual side of man, which is seen as the antithesis of rational control, understanding and wisdom. Women, as seen from the dance symbolise that physiological energy of the senses which is seen to embody his inferior more natural self. As in so many if not all cultures in the world, women are seen as being closer to nature, to the physiology of the body rather than the cerebrations of the rational mind. They are conceptualised as being more of nature in the raw - wild nature, than man, who is seen as closer to culture, to what man has made out of nature. Man is closer to God, to Divinity because he controls his lower animalistic self more than women. In Islam, he does this by his

extreme control of women. They are secluded, veiled, restricted, controlled in myriad ways. This in effect symbolises man's control over his baser nature his control over animal impulses is essential for survival. In relation to settled life nomads could be seen, as they are by the Iranians as dangerous, mobile, violent, - people of the wind (Ba-badi ?) as opposed to people of the earth - peasants. They are perceived as a threat to stability, rather than what they in fact are, the repositories of energy, and vitality, ESSENTIAL to the nation's personality. The response of the Iranian government, at least partly understandable is to control them, just as males, threatened by the energy inherent in women, in nature itself, in their own human nature, their natural impulses, from sex to rampant aggression, feel they must control it. Women are generally regarded as being incapable themselves of control. Men fear, most often at an unconscious level that their women are inherently uncontrollable. Bakhtiari women are indeed un intimidated by their men folk. They have a ribald sense of humour and often have dominant, powerful personalities. Women play an active part in public life, though not always an obvious one. There are rare examples of female Kalantars, for example, and the wives of powerful men are powerful in their own right. They are called Bibi.

The term Shirzan is reserved for women especially dominant and successful in exercising control over their menfolk, participating in the decisions of their husbands. Such a woman is of considerable prestige and highly respected in the group to which she belongs.

The structure of the term is interesting and revealing of the symbolic

structuring of Male-Female relations. The term does not translate into laioness - shir made in Persian. It is made of Shir - lion and zan-woman.

The lion is a wild animal of considerable symbolic significance. The lion epitomises male virtues. To call a man a lion is to say he maximises the potential of all man. He is a Man amongst men, brave, fierce etc. as a lion. It is the summation of male values. The use of wild animals as metaphors for human attributes and qualities is of course world wide.

If woman is seen as being a metaphor for man's animal nature, then the conjunction of the two - the lion, as the best of wild nature, coupled in a single term with woman - the source of controlled or domesticated ^{human energy} energy or nature, then the power of the term Shirzan becomes readily apparent. The coupling of both wild and domesticated nature - i.e. energy, power, is massively powerful. Such a woman is more than what the lion symbolises - maximum male power, but adds her own energy, her own natural domesticated power. A SHirzan transcends the limitations of the powerful but controlled male. She transcends this division between male and female and symbolises the maximum power image of human nature transcending the boundary between Male and female, between nature and culture. She embodies pan human values.

It is not then surprising that such a creature should inspire considerable respect if not fear. The Shirzan concept, sums up and is the summation, culmination of a hierarchical set of values, which unifies through transcending the discrete conscious cultural categories.