

IRAN

In Iran there are 103 distinct people groups. Following are two of the groups.

Persian



By definition, Persians (also known as Iranians) are an ethnic group native to Iran. The Persian language, called Farsi, is part of the Indo-Iranian language family, and is the official language of Iran. Dari, the language of the elite in Afghanistan, is a dialect of modern Persian.

Around 1000 B.C., Persian groups began to settle in the territory that is now Iran. Loosely associated Persian tribes became a more cohesive political unit under the Achaemenian dynasty. Their unity soon made them the dominant ethnic group in the region.

For 1,200 years, Persia maintained a culture that became increasingly more complex and rigid. This laid the foundation for a successful Arabian conquest in the seventh century A.D. It was not until the Islamic revolution of 1979 that massive changes came both to Iran and to the Persian people.

Although the vast majority of Persians now live either in Iran or in one of the nearby Middle Eastern countries, small Persian communities can also be found in many other nations around the world.

What are their lives like?

In the Middle East, about half of the Persians are farmers who depend heavily on primitive methods of artificial irrigation. They also make crafts such as hand woven

items, rugs, and pottery. The production of oil has also provided numerous jobs for the Persians. In fact, many of the Persians who live abroad work in this field.

The typical rural Persian home is a single-story dwelling made of clay. It is constructed with a framework of wooden columns, a flat roof, and no windows. Light comes in either through the door or through an opening in the roof. Village populations vary from as small as a few households to more than a thousand people. The size of each village depends primarily on the availability of farmland and water. Homes in cities are usually constructed of burnt bricks. They are built over high foundations and have terraces.

Urban Persians are more or less divided into five well-defined social classes. The lowest class is made up of former villagers who flocked to the towns between the late 1950's and the early 1970's. These unskilled laborers live in densely populated communities located on the outskirts of larger cities. This class forms a majority of the local market craftsmen. At the top of the strata are real estate investors, merchants, and other commercial and industrial businessmen. The priests and other clergymen make up a class known as the ulama.

The basic social and economic unit in Persian culture is the nuclear family; however, some families join together to make larger units. Families are traditionally patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal. This means that their society is strictly male-dominated. The line of descent is traced through the father; property and inheritances are passed down through the males; and family and political rule belong to the men. Persian women are submissive to their husbands in public; however, they often hold a considerable amount of decision making power in private. Men are guardians and defenders of the family honor, and are responsible for protecting the chastity of their daughters and sisters.

Marriages are still arranged, but only after negotiation and approval by both sets of relatives. Marriages between cousins are preferred.

What are their beliefs?

Prior to the Arab invasions, the Persian religion was Zoroastrianism. This religion taught that there was an eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil. Shiite Islam became the national religion of Iran in the sixteenth century, at which time the ulama (clergy) began playing an important role in both the social and political lives of the people.

Today, most Persians are Shia Muslims of the IthnaAshari branch, and are radical in their adherence to Islamic laws and principles.

Islam is a major world religion that is based on the teachings of Mohammed, the prophet. The Koran, or holy book of Islam, was said to have been given to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel.

There are five essential duties in Islam: (1) A Muslim must affirm that "there is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet." (2) Five times a day he must pray while facing Mecca. (3) He must give alms generously. (4) He must fast during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year. (5) He must try to make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca in his lifetime. Muslims are also prohibited to drink alcohol, eat pork, gamble, steal, use deceit, slander, and make idols.

What are their needs?

The Islamic world is extremely difficult to influence with the Gospel. Fundamental Muslims are very outspoken, even militant, against Christianity. Much prayer is needed to break down the barriers separating them from the Truth.

The New Testament and other resources are available in Farsi, yet very little progress has been made among the Persians. The number of conversions to Christianity has been small though in the last few years there has been a slow and steady movement towards Christ, entire extended families coming to the Lord every week.

The difficulties associated with penetrating the barriers of Islam and working in restricted access nations must be broken. Prayer is the key.

Prayer Points

- * Ask the Lord to call people who are willing to reach out and share the love of Christ with them.
- * Pray that God will raise up faithful intercessors who will stand in the gap for the Persians.
- * Ask God to strengthen, encourage, and protect the small number of Muslim Persians who have converted to Christianity.
- * Pray their traditional Muslim culture will soften, creating open doors for the Gospel to be preached among them.
- * Ask the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of the Persian people towards Christians so that they will be receptive to the Gospel.
- * Pray that God will reveal Himself to them through dreams and visions.
- * Ask the Lord to raise up strong local churches among the Persians.



Country: Iran

Continent: Asia

Region: Central Asia

Persecution Rank: 2 (Only top 50 ranked, 1 = highest persecution ranking)

10/40 Window: Yes

Location within Country: Throughout Iran.

Population in this Country: 27,827,000

Affinity Bloc: Iranian-Median

People Cluster: Persian

Primary Language:

Farsi, Western (27,827,000 Speakers)

Primary Religion: Islam

Religion Sub-division: Shia

% Christian Adherents: 0.33 %

% Evangelical: 0.19 %

Mazanderani, Tabri



The Mazanderani live in northern Iran's Mazandaran province, bordering the Caspian Sea. It is there that early Iranian civilization flourished. Historically, this province had been invaded by outsiders, beginning with the Mongols in the 1200's and 1300's. In 1723, the region was conquered by the Russian Empire. The coast of the province is dominated by marshy plains. Farther inland, it merges into the highlands. Although the province is strategically located on the Caspian Sea, the coast lacks good natural harbors. This has forced them to build an artificial harbor.

The estimated population of the Mazanderani is about 2.8 million and is an ethnic mix of Turkic tribes, Armenians, and Russian immigrants. Other smaller groups include the Qadikolahi and the Palavi. The language of the majority, also called Mazanderani (or Palari), remains unwritten. This language is closely tied to Farsi, the official language of Iran.

What are their lives like?

Agriculture dominates the economy of the entire Mazandaran region. Most of the Mazanderani are settled farmers who grow crops such as rice, wheat, barley, tea, fruits, and cotton. They also raise some cattle. In addition to farming, the Mazanderani are famous for breeding Arabian horses.

The mid-1970's saw a number of agricultural reforms in the Mazandaran province. Farming became a large-scale business operation that included the production, processing, and distribution of agricultural products, as well as the manufacturing of farm machinery, equipment, and supplies. At the same time, major agricultural

movements were encouraged by the influx of large investments that were made as a result of the oil boom. Many new businesses were introduced, including cement, textile, and cotton industries. Fisheries also sprang up all along the coastal areas. Today, the coastal fisheries of this region harvest some of the finest caviar in the world.

Although many of the Mazanderani farmers are settled, some maintain the nomadic lifestyle of their ancestors. These nomads use the higher, cultivated regions for grazing their animals. Their herds include a certain breed of humped cattle, as well as buffalo, which are used as beasts of burden.

Since most of the people in the Mazandaran province are Muslim, their society is organized according to the guidelines of traditional Islamic communities. The family is the major social unit and is led by the father. Although the Koran gives women equal status in Islamic society, in reality, they are usually second class citizens with little or no political freedom.

What are their beliefs?

Although Mazandaran was the last province in Iran to be converted to Islam, the Mazanderani are now virtually all Muslim. They belong to the Ithna-Ashari sect of Islam and their independent character makes them unique in Iran.

As Muslims, the Mazanderani believe in only one omnipotent god, Allah. They are taught that the ultimate purpose of humanity is to worship him and to build a social order that is not corrupt. Their religious practices include praying, fasting, giving to the poor, and making a pilgrimage to Mecca. They hold the imams (religious rulers claiming descent from Mohammed) in very high esteem, since they believe that only the imams can interpret the true meaning of the Koran.

What are their needs?

Many of the Mazanderani are uneducated. The fact that their language is not yet in written form presents a roadblock to their cultural and spiritual progress. Perhaps Christian teachers will have the greatest opportunity to work among this people group. There is a university in the town of Babol that may provide open doors for linguists who are willing to create a written script for the Mazanderani language.

Prayer is the key to seeing these precious people reached with the Good News.

Prayer Points

- * Ask the Lord to call people who are willing to go to Iran and share Christ with the Mazanderani.

- * Pray for the salvation of key Mazanderani leaders who will boldly proclaim the Gospel.

- * Ask the Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of the Mazanderani towards Christians so that they will be receptive to the Gospel.
- * Pray that God will open the hearts of Iran's governmental leaders to the Gospel.
- * Ask the Lord to raise up intercessors who will faithfully stand in the gap for the Mazanderani.
- * Ask the Lord to raise up strong local churches among the Mazanderani.
- * Pray for translation of the Bible to begin in this people group's primary language.
- * Pray for the availability of the Jesus Film in the primary language of this people.



Country: Iran

Continent: Asia

Region: Central Asia

Persecution Rank: 2 (Only top 50 ranked, 1 = highest persecution ranking)

10/40 Window: Yes

Population in this Country: 4,063,000

Largest Provinces: Gilan, Golestan, Mazandaran, Qazvin, Semnan

People Name in Country: Mazanderani, Tabri

People Name General: Mazanderani

Affinity Bloc: Iranian-Median

People Cluster: Persian

People Name General: Mazanderani

Primary Language: Mazanderani (4,063,000 Speakers)

Primary Religion: Islam

Religion Sub-division: Shia

% Christian Adherents: Data not available

% Evangelical: 0.00 %