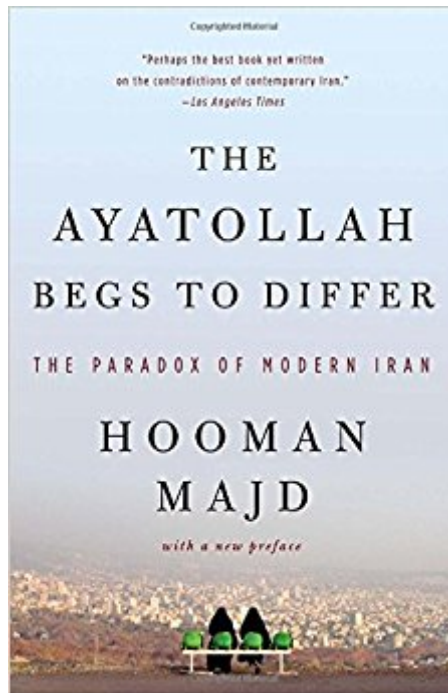




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# **The Ayatollah Begs To Differ: The Paradox Of Modern Iran**



## Synopsis

Including a new preface that discusses the Iranian mood during and after the June 2009 presidential election and subsequent protests, this is an intimate look at a paradoxical country from a uniquely qualified journalist. — The grandson of an eminent ayatollah and the son of an Iranian diplomat, Hooman Majd offers perspective on Iran's complex and misunderstood culture through an insightful tour of Iranian culture, introducing fascinating characters from all walks of life, including zealous government officials, tough female cab drivers, and open-minded, reformist ayatollahs. It's an Iran that will surprise readers and challenge Western stereotypes. — Los Angeles Times and Economist Best Book of the Year With a New Preface

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In this critical but affectionate portrait of Iranian politics and culture, Majd, the Western-educated grandson of an ayatollah, delves into the very core of Iranian society, closely examining social mores and Farsi phrases to identify the Persian sensibility, which, Majd determines, cherishes privacy, praise and poetry. Nothing is too small or too sweeping for Majd to consider, and although he announces his allegiance to the former president Khatami, he remains scrupulously even-handed in assessing his successor Ahmadinejad, shedding light on the Iranian president's obsession with the Holocaust and penchant for windbreakers and why the two are (surprisingly) intertwined. The author's brisk, conversational prose is appealing; his book reads as if he is chatting with a smart friend, while strolling around Tehran, engaged in ta'arouf (an

exaggerated form of self-deprecation key to understanding Persian society). Although Majd seems to gloss too quickly over realities that don't engage his interest—women's voices are only intermittently included—this failing scarcely mars this remarkable ride through what is often uncharted territory. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Perhaps the best book yet written on the contradictions of contemporary Iran.... It captures like no book in recent memory the ethos of the country, in elegant and precise prose.”  
• Los Angeles Times  
“Illuminating.... Captivating.... A discerning guide to a complex country.”  
• Christian Science Monitor  
“Essential reading for anyone wanting to understand the paradox that is Iran (as well as America) in the post-Bush world.”  
• GQ  
“In this delightful book, Hooman Majd, a gifted storyteller, takes us on a tour of his own private Persia, which is also the Iran of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The results are illuminating, humorous, sobering, and ultimately reassuring.”  
• Jon Lee Anderson, author of *The Fall of Baghdad*  
“Hooman Majd is a stylish and engaging guide through the by-ways of Iranian life. Leading us from seminary to opium den to the presidential compound, his wry sense of humor makes this book a pleasure to read.”  
• Gary Sick, Ph.D., senior research scholar at Columbia University and member of the National Security Council staff under presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan  
“A witty, timely perspective on the nation posing the greatest challenge to our next President. Travel writing often makes for easy reading at the expense of relevant information, which gets lost in the details. Not so with *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ*.”  
• Bill White, mayor of Houston and U.S. secretary of energy under President Clinton

This book has interesting information about Iran, but you have to force your way through a horrible writing style to get it. This author has never learned to write a simple declarative sentence. His sentences are long, wandering, disorganized and muddled. I often had to go back and read a sentence several times to figure out what the point was. But once I learned how to work through what he was saying, he had some interesting facts to share. This would have been a much better book if the publisher had assigned an editor to it. Unfortunately there are not many books about modern Iran, so there is not much competition for this one.

Content Summary: This book is primarily a cultural window into modern Iranian society - which is

admittedly a paradox of secularized, even Westernized youth, and ultra-conservative Shia clergy who still govern the State. Majd is very apologetic for the reformists, such as Ayatollah Khatami, who are part of the regime. Even the reformists like Khatami, however, are not going to back off a theocratic Shia-Islamic state. He portrays a battle between more moderate voices like Khatami's, and radicals like Ahmadinejad. In the midst of this, he provides us with a cultural window into what Iran is like, from the perspective of a man who straddles the vast divide between the United States and Iran. Analytical Review: Some may be wary of Majd's relative lack of severe criticism for the Iranian regime. Suffice it to say, my understanding of Majd's intent with this book is that he believes enough of that criticism has been said elsewhere. His purpose is to give a greater humanistic and cultural appreciation of a land that is inaccessible to the thought of most Americans. I believe he has succeeded for the most part, and if you are looking for a critical political overview of Iran's politics (which is certainly warranted) you should look elsewhere and read more. In a small but significant way, Majd shows the warts and promises inherent on a very ancient and paradoxical country.

This book didn't seem to shed too much new light on internal dynamics of Iran. But it did seem but dint of its organization and meandering style of story telling, demonstrate the bourgeoisie attitude of the Iranian middle class. The story told from the first person is replete with anecdotal characters the author encounters throughout Iran who give evidence of the authors assertions and challenge western assumptions. After the long strange trip to Iran is over, you might be wondering why the author told it.

A fantastic look into Iran for Western audiences because Majd is extremely adept at conveying ideas in English that evoke very particular emotions. In this sense, the book manages to tackle the country's complexities with relatable language, which is invaluable in any text that attempts to introduce a new culture or country.

The modern media cycle and political punditry encourage us to see issues as black or white, with us or against us issues. What Majd's book so skillfully reveals is that even within those regimes that are seen as monolithic, there are always opposing viewpoints ebbing and flowing, vying for influence and supremacy. Many in US government and military circles insist on seeing Iran as a unified entity, single-minded in purpose. Yet even going back to the days of the revolution, this was not the case. What Majd illustrates through his interviews and interactions is that Iran has many faces, many times self-contradictory, often mutually opposing, but never as simple as black and

white.

What a wonderful sense of humour Hooman Majd has. Plus he is able to make us understand what is happening in Iran and why. This is a man one would like to have dinner with - meanwhile, I had to make do with the book which is well worth it.

Wonderful explanation of the Shia mind in Iran. I read prior to a trip to Iran, and highly recommend it if one is going there.

Great book! Very interesting topic and I love his first hand experiences and the way he weaves the story.

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