



IRANIAN IDENTITY

IRANIAN IDENTITY, a collective feeling by Iranian peoples of belonging to the historic lands of Iran. This sense of identity, defined both historically and territorially, evolved from a common historical experience and cultural tradition among the peoples who lived in *Irānzamin*, and shared in Iranian mythologies and legends as well as in its history (see [IRAN iii. TRADITIONAL HISTORY](#)). It was further defined and made distinctive by drawing boundaries between Iranians (the in-group) and the ‘others’ (out-groups), e.g., Iran vs. Anērān (q.v.; Sasanid notion), Iran vs. Turān (mythical and historical notion, later the lands of Turkic people), Iran vs. Rum (mythical and factual notions applied to Greece, Rome, Byzantium, and Ottoman empires), ‘Ajam (primarily Persian) vs. Arab, Tājik/Tāzik (Persian) vs. Turk, Iran vs. Hend (India, particularly during the Safavid period), and Iran vs. Farang (i.e., Europe). This mode of identity was elaborated, transmitted, and continuously reconstructed by Iranian literati.

In Iran, similar to other societies, kinship and tribal bounds, ethnic and linguistic affiliations, religious and cultural affinities, local and provincial ties, and other communal allegiances have often competed with an overarching Iranian identity. Yet, a deep feeling of pride in Iran’s cultural heritage with Persian literature as its core element, and a consciousness of continuity in a long and distinctive history of the country—particularly, a belief in the ability of the Iranian peoples to survive recurrent periods of upheavals—have served as a cohesive force to resist and ultimately overcome divisive currents.



Since the long and eventful history of Iran has seen recurrent constructions, transformations, and resurgences of Iranian identity—interpreted on the basis of a number of contentious notions of ethnic and national identities—a brief conceptual treatment of perspectives on Iranian identity is in order. Iranian identity will, therefore, be treated under the following five separate entries:

- i. *Perspectives on Iranian identity.*
- ii. *Pre-Islamic period.*
- iii. *Medieval Islamic period.*
- iv. *In the 19th and 20th centuries.*
- v. *In the post-revolutionary era..* See Supplement online.