

India and Iran: Cultural Bonding

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Abstract: India and Iran are the two oldest countries in Asia with distinct cultures. The cultural relations between Iranians and the Indians have produced exceptional results, especially in the realm of art and culture. Looking at the history of Iran and India we can recognize the strong relations of these two cultures from pre-Aryan and later pre-Islamic Persia and Vedic civilization era to Muslim cultures of Mughals and Safawids. India and Iran enjoy a common civilization background; they share interdependent cultural heritages and face similar problems in preserving them. Among different nations, India and Iran have had deep relations with each other along the history in different fields. Both the nations have outstanding impacts and enjoyed on each other's literary, cultural, religious and architectural codes from far history up until nowadays. In this paper we will discuss about the civilizations of and the cultural relations between India and Iran in the past and also in present. However, as these two cultural civilizations move into the direction of becoming modern nation states, it has brought a different set of problems and challenges of mutual adjustment. The transformation of these two cultural entities from civilization into a nation state was accompanied by fissures, temporary breakdown and at times rupture in the amicable relationship between the two.

Introduction:

Although a dominant power in the Persian Gulf, Iran itself is primarily a land power. India's contacts with Iran have been traditionally over land, not across the Arabian Sea. With the information of Pakistan in 1947, India and Iran or Persia as it was known till 1935, lost the geographical contiguity they had enjoyed for centuries. As a result, Indian policy-makers to some extent failed to appreciate that from a strategic perspective India has to deal with Iran as a neighbouring country. India and the world should not forget that despite its strategic location Iran is one of the few major countries in Asia that managed to maintain its independence and never colonized, unlike many of its neighbours, including India. It is important to recall all this because the outside world needs to handle Iran with respect and be conscious of the sense of national pride and self-achievement in the sophisticated Iranian mind that draws inspiration and strength from its rich and deep rooted heritage of civilization and culture.

Cultural Influence:

India and Iran have always shared deep social, cultural, economic and political connections and relations that have enriched both civilizations. The use of the Persian language at the Mughal courts is just one example of Iranian cultural influence in north India. A growing number of Iranian students are enrolled at universities in India, most notably in Pune and Bengaluru. The clerical government in Tehran sees itself as a leader of Shiites worldwide including India. Indian Shiites enjoy state support such as a recognized national holiday for Muharram. Lucknow

continues to be a major centre of Shiite culture and Persian study in the subcontinent.

India and Iran had deep relations in different field. We both share the same history, the same culture and the literature. The historical heritage found in the archaeological searches in Mohanjodero and Harappa as well as the north west of Punjab and Estasorashtra show that in 2500BC.

Sanskrit and Avesta:

The oldest scripture of Indians are the Vedas which date back to 1500BC. The Vedas are much similar to Avesta of the Iranian, Avesta among the books in Sanskrit the most similar book Vedas. Sanskrit and Avesta the two common languages are very similar in terms of their terminology and phonetics. The rhythm and style of writing poem is so similar that the Avesta language can be converted to Vedas using phonetic rules. The God and Myths of Iran in RigVeda and Avesta are much similar. Worshipping the sun and holiness of fire these things we Indian and Iran both share. The ancient Religion Of Zarthushastra has many similarities with ancient Vedic religion like fire worship and Devas and Asuras in opposite definition to Vedic Hindus point towards some relation between them.

During the Mauryan Dynasty:

During the absolute height of thr Mauryan Dynasty (260BC) parts of Eastern Iran were part of India. However this period was brief about 90 years. The influence of culture, language and religion have really been the main driving forces for both nations. Iran and India share a common origin during the Vedic age. This factor is often overlooked after the Islamic invasion of Iran in 638 AD and India in 712 AD. Both nations shared in the Vedic age, so much so that all the names of higher powers were the same initially. This remarkable similarity was well known to both groups in ancient times. When Iran was invaded by Arab conquistadors who began the forced conversion of Iran, the Sassanian dynasty's remaining members fled to India.

During the Medieval Period:

During the times of Medieval India in Akbar Shah Kingdom (1542-1605) the Iranian festival (Nawroz-19days) came in vogue again by the king's order due to his interest in solar date. Everything is decorated with expensive colourful and golden clothes and curtains. Jahangir

inherited the throne. He reigned for 22 years. In his kingdom he wrote in Farsi which later known as Tozak-e-Jahangir. He was wrote about 17 years of his kingdom such as First Nawroz, Second Nawroz. Shah Jahan the son of Jahangir sat on Takht-e-tawoos (the throne of peacock) in Nawroz festivals. The Taj Mahal of Agra was constructed by an Iranian architect Named Isa Isfahani. It is a milestone in architecture which Ren Gerossch and French scholar calls “the soul represented in India body”. Takht-e-tawoos was built by Shaer Zargar Bashi of Iran. The sculpture of Ashoka Pillar which includes four lions sitting back to back column it is in fact an imitation of Takht-E-Jamshid which were built in 300 AD and is now in Banaras museum.

Cultural Heritage Issues in Iran and India:

There are many issues that Iran and India share when it comes to the tangible cultural heritage since they have influenced each other along the history in terms of the style, material and technique of applications. Among them we can give examples such as beautiful Safawid and Mughal manuscripts and miniature paintings, elegant Kashmir shawls and Kerman hand embroidery textile works and other master pieces that many of them are in the safeguard of museums around the worlds. Curators and conservators may face the same type of deterioration factors and ultimately more or less the same solutions for their preservation techniques. This is where both countries Iran and India with so many similarities in their tangible cultural heritage have learned from each other’s valuable experiences.

On the other hand Iran and India share a great deal in the domain of intangible cultural heritage. This is perhaps because both countries have common historical as well as spiritual and cultural backgrounds in the areas such as literature, poetry, music, dance, etc. It is clear that preservation of cultural heritage needs to be addressed to both body and spirit; in other words we have to look at the issues of tangible and intangible as a whole.

Cultural and Educational Exchange:

India and Iran maintain regular cultural and educational exchanges. As per an MoU signed in January 2008 between the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), New Delhi and the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organisation (ICHHTO) a weeklong Iranian cultural week was held in New Delhi and Mumbai in April-May 2008. India also held its “Days of Culture” at the Niyavaran Palace in Tehran and Hafezia in Shiraz from May 10-17, 2011 which was attended by over twenty thousand people. The cultural festival was dedicated to the

memory of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.

India over the years has emerged as one of the favourite tourist destinations for Iranian tourists and every year around 40,000 Iranians visit India for various purposes. In February 2011, India successfully outsourced the tourist visa collection in Tehran to facilitate visa services for Iranian tourists visiting India.

Academic Institutions:

To look at the history of education in the field of the preservation of cultural heritage in both countries one can see that Iran during 1979 to 1989 has already established the infra structure in the field of education in comparison to India by offering programs. On the other hand from 1989 to the present Indian government has been more focusing in higher level of education in history of Art, conservation and museology. In Iran the Pardis College of Art in Isfahan was a pioneer of offering degrees in Preservation and conservation of cultural heritage and monuments. A few years later the Iran Cultural Heritage Organisation established its own program of higher education in the related field. This is because Cultural Heritage Organization is an umbrella institution responsible for the preservation of the museum collections and historical monuments nationwide. In India, on the other hand the National Museum Institute was pioneer. The uniqueness of this institute is that it is part of one of the biggest museums in India.

Conclusion:

Even today the largest remaining group of Parsis are in India. Parsi means Persian, they still practice the Zoroastrianism which is what Iranian Vedism became after Zoroaster's reforms. All this shows a relationship between Ancient India which was beyond land grabs and competition. For most of their history conflicts were nonexistent. Even after the Iran's conversion to Islam ties remained with India. The only two conflicts between Iran and India have been limited to two. The first was in the Vedic age, when King Parsha lost the battle of the Indus to another Vedic tribe. The victorious group would settle North India. King Parsha would go west and settle Persia. The second was when Nadir Shah invaded Mughal India in 1738. This invasion was very costly for India in terms of wealth but the scope of the invasion only lasted 6 months. Thus, it can be concluded that over 5000 years of history Iran and India have nearly always had more in common than not.

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