CHAPTER: I

A BRIEF SURVEY OF SOCIO-CULTURAL CONDITION OF MODERN IRAN
The terms Iran as the designation for the civilization, and Iranian as the name for the inhabitants occupying the large plateau located between the Caspian sea and the Persian Gulf have been in succeeding gradually use for more than twenty-five hundred years. They are related to the term Aryan and it is supposed that the plateau was occupied in prehistoric times by indo-European peoples from central Asia through many invasions and changes of empire, this essential designation has remained a strong identifying marker for all populations living in this region and the many neighbouring territories that fell under its influence due to conquest and expansion.

Ancient Greek geographers designated the territory as Persia after the territory of Fars where the ancient Archamenian Empire had its seat. Today as a result of Migration and conquest, people of Indo-European, Turkic, Arab, and Caucasian origin have some claim to Iranian culture identity. Many of these peoples reside within the Territory of Modern Iran. Outside of Iran, those identifying with the larger civilization often prefer the distinction Persian to indicate their rapport with the culture rather than with the modern political state. This is also true of some members of modern Iranian emigre populations in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere who do not wish to be identified with the current Islamic Republic of Iran, established in 1979.

Iran and ancient Persia have a long, creative and glorious history. Unlike many other Middle East countries, Iran managed to remain independent throughout much of its history. Today, Iran has a population of about 70 million persons. Principle ethnic groups are Persian 51%, Azeri 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7% and Arab 3%. Iran is a Muslim country, with 89% Shi’a and 10% Sunni Muslims. The remaining 1% belongs to Jewish, Bahai and Zoroastrian faiths. The Bahai and Zoroastrian faiths originated in Iran. Major Languages of Iran are Persian (Fars) and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Baluchi 1%, Arabic 1%, and Turkish 1%. Since 1979, Iran is an Islamic Republic.

Iran is situated east of Iraq, beyond the Tigris River, Shatt Al-Arab waterway and east of the Persian Gulf, across from Saudi Arabia. To the north, it borders on former Soviet Central Asian countries including
Armenia Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea. It also borders on Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east and Turkey to the west.

**Historical background of Iran**

Iran's history as a nation of people speaking an Indo-European language did not begin until the middle of the second millennium B.C. Before then, Iran was occupied by peoples with a variety of cultures. There are numerous artifacts attesting to settled agriculture, permanent sun-dried-brick dwellings, and pottery-making from the sixth millennium B.C. The most advanced area technologically was ancient Susiana, present-day Khuzestan Province. By the fourth millennium, the inhabitants of Susiana, the Elamites, were using semi pictographic writing, probably learned from the highly advanced civilization of Sumer in Mesopotamia (ancient name for much of the area now known as Iraq), to the west. Sumerian influence in art, literature, and religion also became particularly strong when the Elamites were occupied by, or at least came under the domination of, two Mesopotamian cultures, those of Akkad and Ur, during the middle of the third millennium. By 2000 B.C. the Elamites had become sufficiently unified to destroy the city of Ur. Elamite civilization developed rapidly from that point, and, by the fourteenth century B.C., its art was at its most impressive.

Small groups of nomadic, horse-riding peoples speaking Indo-European languages began moving into the Iranian cultural area from Central Asia near the end of the second millennium B.C. Population pressures, overgrazing in their home area, and hostile neighbors may have prompted these migrations. Some of the groups settled in eastern Iran, but others, those who were to leave significant historical records, pushed farther west toward the Zagros Mountains.

Three major groups are identifiable--the Scythians, the Medes (the Amadai or Mada), and the Persians (also known as the Parsua or Parsa). The Scythians established themselves in the northern Zagros Mountains and clung to a semi nomadic existence in which raiding was the chief form of economic enterprise. The Medes settled over a huge area, reaching as far as modern Tabriz in the north and Esfahan in the south. They had their
capital at Ecbatana (present-day Hamadan) and annually paid tribute to the Assyrians. The Persians were established in three areas: to the south of Lake Urmia (the traditional name, also cited as Lake Orumiyeh, to which it has reverted after being called Lake Rezaiyeh under the Pahlavis), on the northern border of the kingdom of the Elamites; and in the environs of modern Shiraz, which would be their eventual settling place and to which they would give the name Parsa (what is roughly present-day Fars Province).

During the seventh century B.C., the Persians were led by Hakamanish (Achaemenes, in Greek), ancestor of the Achaemenid dynasty. A descendant, Cyrus II (also known as Cyrus the Great or Cyrus the Elder), led the combined forces of the Medes and the Persians to establish the most extensive empire known in the ancient world.

The history of Iran, commonly known as Persia in the Western world, is intertwined with the history of a larger region, also known as Greater Iran, comprising the area from Anatolia and Egypt in the west to the borders of Ancient India and Syr Darya in the east, and from the Caucasus and the Eurasian Steppe in the north to the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman in the south. The southwestern part of the Iranian plateau participated in the wider Ancient Near East with Elam, from the Early Bronze Age. The Persian Empire (Persia) proper begins in the Iron Age, following the influx of Iranian peoples. Iranian people gave rise to the Medes, the Achaemenids, the Parthians, and the Sasanians during the classical antiquity.

Once a major empire of superpower proportions, having conquered far and wide, Iran has endured invasions too, by Greeks, Arabs, Turks, and Mongols. Iran has continually reasserted its national identity throughout the centuries and has developed as a distinct political and cultural entity. Iran is home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, with historical and urban settlements dating back to 4000 BC. The Medes unified Iran as a nation and empire in 625 BC. The Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC), founded by Cyrus the Great, was the first of the Persian empires to rule from the Balkans to North Africa and also Central Asia from their capital in Persis (Persepolis).
They were succeeded by the Seleucid Empire, Parthians and Sasanians who governed Iran for almost 1,000 years, and would put Iran once again as the leading powers in the world, only this time amongst their arch rival, the Roman Empire and the successive Byzantine Empire. The Islamic conquest of Persia (633–656) ended the Sasanians and was a turning point in Iranian history. Islamicization in Iran took place during 8th to 10th century and led to the eventual decline of the Zoroastrian religion in Persia. However, the achievements of the previous Persian civilizations were not lost, but were to a great extent absorbed by the new Islamic polity and civilization.

After centuries of foreign occupation and short-lived native dynasties, Iran was once again reunified as an independent state in 1501 by the Safavid dynasty which established Shi’a Islam as the official religion of their empire, marking one of the most important turning points in the history of Islam. Functioning again as a leading power, this time amongst their Ottoman arch rival for centuries, Iran had been a monarchy ruled by a shah, or emperor, almost without interruption from 1501 until the 1979 Iranian revolution, when Iran officially became an Islamic Republic on 1 April 1979.

**Persianate society**

A persianate society is a society that is either based on, or strongly influenced by the Persian language, culture, literature, art and identity. The term Persianate is a neologism credited to Marshall Hodgson. In this 1974 book, the venture of Islam: The expansion of Islam in the middle periods, he defined it in these words.
“The rise of Persian had more than purely literary consequence: It served to carry a new overall cultural orientation within Islam Dom.... Most of the more local languages of high culture that later emerged among Muslims...Depended upon Persian wholly or in part for their prime literary inspiration. We may call all these cultural Traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration, ‘Persianate’ by extension.”[1]

The term, consequently, does not solely designate ethnic Persians, but has been ethnically Persian or Iranian, but whose linguistic, material or artistic cultural activities were influenced by or based on Persianate culture. Example of pre-19th century Persianate societies were the Seljuq, Timurid, Ottoman dynasties, as well as the Qarmations who entertained Persianate notions of cyclical time even though they did not invoke the Iranian genealogies in which these precepts had converged. Persianate is a multiracial cultural category, but it appears at times to be a religious category of a racial origin. [2]

Persianate culture flourished for nearly fourteen centuries. It was a mixture of Persian and Islamic cultures that eventually became the dominant culture of the ruling and elite classes of Greater Iran, Asia Minor, and South Asia. When, in the 7th and 8th centuries, the peoples of Greater Iran were conquered by Islamic forces, they became part of an empire much larger than any previous one under Persian rule. The new Islamic culture was largely based on pre-Islamic Persian traditions of the area, as well as the Islamic rites that were introduced to the region by the Arab conquerors. [3]

Persianate culture, particularly among the elite classes, spread across the territories of western, central, and south Asia, although populations across this vast region had conflicting allegiances (sectarian, local, tribal, and ethnic affiliation) and spoke many different languages. It was spread by poets, artists, architects, artisans, jurists, and scholars, who maintained relations among their peers in the far-flung cities of the Persianate world, from Anatolia to India. [4]

Persianate culture involved modes of consciousness, ethos, and religious practices that have persisted in the Iranian world against
hegemonic Arab Muslim (Sunni) cultural constructs. This formed a calcified Persianate structure of thought and experience of the sacred, entrenched for generations, which later informed history, historical memory, identity among Alid loyalists and heterodox groups labeled by sharia-minded authority as ghulat. In a way, along with investing the notion of heteroglossia, Persianate culture continuities and disjunction with the Iranian past and ways in which this past blended with the Islamic present or became transmuted. The historical change was largely on the basis of a binary model: a dualist struggle between the religious landscapes of late Iranian antiquity and a monotheist paradigm provided by the new religion, Islam.

After the Arab Muslim conquest of Iran, Pahlavi, the language of Pre-Islamic Iran, continued in wide use well into the second Islamic century (8th century) as a medium of administration in the eastern lands of the Caliphate. Despite the Islamisation of public affairs, the Iranians retained much of their pre-Islamic outlook and way of life, adjusted to fit the demands of Islam. Towards the end of the 7th century, the population began presenting the cost of sustaining the Arab Caliphs, the Umayyads, and in the 8th century, a general Iranian uprising—led by the Iranian national hero Abu Muslim Khorrasani—brought another Arab family, the Abbasids, to the Caliph’s throne. Under the Abbasids, the capital transferred from Syria to Iraq, which had once been part of the Sassanid Empire, and was still considered to be part of the Iranian cultural domain. Persian culture, and the customs of the Persian Barmakid viziers, became the style of the ruling elite. Politically, the Abbasids soon started losing their control to Iranians. The governors in Khurasan, the Tahirids, though appointed by the caliph, were effectively independent.

The separateness of the eastern lands from Baghdad was expressed in a distinctive Persianate culture that became dominant in west, central, and south Asia, and was the source of innovations elsewhere in the Islamic world. The Persianate culture was marked by the use of the New Persian language as a medium of administration and intellectual discourse, by the rise of Persianised-Turks to military control, by the new political importance of non-Arab ulama, and by the development of an ethnically composite Islamic society.
Pahlavi was the lingua franca of the Sasanian Empire before the Arab invasion, but towards the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 8th century Arabic became a medium of literary expression. In the 9th century, a New Persian language emerged as the idiom of administration and literature. Persian dynasties of Tahirids and Saffarids continued using Persian as an informal language, although for them Arabic was the Language for recording anything worthwhile, from poetry to science but the Samanids made Persian a language of learning and formal discourse. The language that appeared in the 9th and 10th centuries was a new form of Persian, derivative of on the Middle-Persian of pre-Islamic times, but enriched by ample Arabic vocabulary and written in Arabic script.

The Persian language was, according to Marshall Hodgson in his The Venture of Islam, to form the chief model for the rise of still other languages to the literary level. Like Turkish, most of the more local languages of high culture that later emerged among Muslims depended upon Persian [here Urdu would be a prime example]. One may call these traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration, ‘Persianate’ by extension. This seems to be the origin of the term Persianate.

The Iranian dynasty of the Samanids began recording its court affairs in Arabic as well as Persian, and the earliest great poetry in "New Persian" was written for the Samanid court. Samanids encouraged translation of religious works from Arabic into Persian. In addition, the learned authorities of Islam, the ulama, began using the Persian lingua franca in public. The crowning literary achievement in the early New Persian language, Shahnameh (The Book of Kings) compiled by greatest of Iranian epic-poet Ferdowsi, presented his Shahnameh to the court of Mahmud of Ghazni (998-1030), was more than a literary achievement; it was a kind of Iranian nationalistic resurrection. Ferdowsi galvanized Persian nationalistic sentiments by invoking pre-Islamic Persian heroic imagery and enshrined in literary form the most treasured stories of popular folk-memory.

The Persianate culture that emerged under the Samanid dynasty rule in Khorasan, in northeast of Persia and borderlands of Turkistan and Turks were exposed to Persianate-Islamic culture; the preparation for the incorporation of the Turks into the main body of the Middle Eastern Islamic
civilization, which was followed by the Ghaznavids, thus began in Khorasan; "not only did the inhabitants of Khurasan not succumb to the language of the nomadic invaders, but they imposed their own tongue on them. The region could even assimilate the Turkic Ghaznavids and Seljuks (11th and 12th centuries), the Timurids (14th and 15th centuries), and the Qajars (19th and 20th centuries)."[6]

Mahmud of Ghazni the rivals and future hirers of the Samanids ruled over southeastern extremities of Samanid territories from the city of Ghazni. It attracted many Persian scholars, artists and became the patrons of Persianate culture, and as they subjugated Western and Southern Asia, they took with themselves the Persianate culture. Under the Ghaznavid patronage, Persian culture flourished further. Apart from Ferdowsi, Rumi, Abu Ali Sina, Al-Biruni, Unsuri Balkhi, Farrukhi Sistani, Sanayi Ghaznawi and Abu Sahl Testari were among the great Iranian polymaths and poets of the period, supported by the Ghaznavids.

The Persianate culture was carried by succeeding dynasties into Western and Southern Asia, in particular, by the Persianized-Seljuqs (1040–1118), and their successor states, who presided over Iran, Syria, and Anatolia until the 13th century, and by the Ghaznavids, who in the same period dominated Greater Khorasan and India. These two dynasties together drew the centres of the Islamic world eastward. The institutions stabilized Islamic society into a form that would persist, at least in Western Asia, until the 20th century.

The Ghaznavids moved their capital from Ghazni to Lahore in modern Pakistan, which they turned into another centre of Islamic culture. Under Ghaznavids, poets and scholars from Kashgar, Bukhara, Samarkand, Baghdad, Nishapur, Amol and Ghazni congregated in Lahore. Thus, the Persian language and Persianate culture was brought deep into India and carried further in the 13th century. Seljuqs won a decisive battle with the Ghaznavids then swept into Khurasan; they brought Persianate culture westward into western Persia, Iraq, Anatolia, and Syria. Iran proper along with Central Asia became a heartland of Persian language and culture.
As the Seljuqs came to dominate Persia (including Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia), they carried this Persianate culture beyond, and made it the culture of their courts as far west as the Mediterranean Sea. Under Seljuq rule, many pre-Islamic Iranian traditional arts including the Sasanian traditional architecture resurrected, and indulged many of the great Iranian scholars. At the same time, the Islamic religious institutions became more organized and Sunni orthodoxy became more codified.

The Persian jurist and theologian Al-Ghazali was amongst the scholars at Seljuq court who proposed a synthesis of Sufism and sharia, which became a basis of a richer Islamic theology. Formulating the Sunni concept of division between temporal and religious authorities, he provided a theological basis for the existence of Sultanate, a temporal office alongside the Caliphate, which by that time was merely a religious office. The main institutional means of establishing a consensus of the ulama on these dogmatic issues was the Nezamiyeh, better known as the madrasas, named after its founder Khwajeh Nezam ul-Mulk, the Persian Vizier of Seljuqs. These schools became means of uniting Sunni ulama, which legitimized the rule of the Sultans. The bureaucracies were staffed by graduates of the madrasas, so both the ulama and the bureaucracies were under the influence of esteemed professors at the madrasas.

Modernization of Iranian society

Following the interregnum and anarchy of the eighteenth century, Iran was politically re-united under the Qajar dynasty (1794-1925). The Qajar period marked Iran's long and at times bloody transition from a traditional kingdom - where the existence of semi-independent magnates limited political unity - to a socially and politically integrated nation-state. The centralization of power during the Qajar period was the major impetus for the modernization of the military, the administration, education, and medicine.

Here one should distinguish between Modernity and modernization. Modernity is the long and deep process of profound change in culture and values; a "traditional" society’s progress on the path trodden by the Europeans in the five centuries since the Renaissance. Modernity implies a
new world view based on rationalism, secularism, and humanism. By modernization we mean a new way of organizing life and society; the process of bringing the institutions and infrastructures that have been mainly developed in the West, through the process of Modernity, to a traditional and, by definition, backward society.

The role played by Islam in the struggle with Modernity has been the same for all, the Arabs, the Turks, and the Iranians. For Arabic speakers of Middle East, Islam and the history of Arab conquest was the main source of pride and hence an added barrier against Modernity. The Turks, until early 20th century the Otomans, even though converts to Islam, had for centuries made it their own as heirs to the great Arab-Islamic Empire. Their pride in Islam was in no way less than the Arabs themselves. The Turkic tribes that overrun Iran and settled in Asia Minor, had not been conquered and were persuaded to become Moslem-mostly by Iranians. For Iranians, the glory of Islam was tainted by Arab victory and the dark and bloody period of Arab occupation, pillage and systematic destruction. Iranians, unlike others, with the exception of Spaniards --a thousand years later- had successfully fought back, and that has also been part of the national pride. A nation that had always vanquished its many conquerors could also resist and overcome Europe if only it could go back to its roots.

The Iranian modernizers in their search for applicable models looked to Turkey and later Japan. What was happening in the Arab world seemed irrelevant to their conditions. The Arabs were not indigent - as Iran had at least nominally remained even in its darkest hours. Japan would seem a perfect model but for the fact that it was far away and nobody knew much about it. Turkey proved a more practical example.

Under Nasserreddin Shah (1840s to 1890s) a very limited reform program was aborted again and again. During the years of Reza Shah Pahlavi's ascendance (1921 - 41) Iran wholeheartedly, pursued a program of modernization copied from Turkey. The plan did not go as far as Latinizing the script (which many consider as a mistake) or declaring a secular state; and due to extreme backwardness, could not go far enough; but for about half a century remained as a national goal and agenda; one of the few points enjoying consensus among Iranian political class.
While people of almost all political and intellectual leanings agreed on the need for rapid modernization, there was no comprehensive discussion about its strategy and why it really had to be undertaken. The material and quantitative changes that were rapidly transforming Iranian society, were of course assuming a life of their own, creating disequilibrium and sharpening the contrasts in a rapidly evolving situation nobody could fully articulate, let alone control.

From late nineteenth century, when it became clear that a great deal more is at stake than trying to modernize the army and administration, most Iranian intellectuals, who themselves were the product of modernization, started to think about much deeper changes in society. That was a time of a new national awakening mainly due to the spread of western idea of nationalism and democracy, and rediscovering Iran's pre-Islamic past through the work of European scholars and Orientalists. Islam, and the role the Islamic clergy had played in national backwardness, became a main target for critical reappraisal, leading many intellectuals to its denunciation. The more conservative among modernizers, arguing that Iranians are also religious to tolerate a breach with the Islamic clergy, and too traditional to become wholly westernized, soon established their dominance, forcing some of the radicals into repudiating their own views. They also managed to work with an influential fraction of the clergy, at least for a vital period, during the Constitutional Revolution (1906-9). Whatever Iran has achieved in modernity goes back to that revolution, the first democratic popular uprising of the third world which succeeded in imposing a constitution over an absolute monarchy - another first.

The adherents of this school, who in one form or other, have dominated the discourse of Modernity ever since, had a clearer view of the dimensions of western all out preponderance. They argued that this time the nation is not confronted by Arab Beduins or Mongol hordes, and therefore it has to arm itself with science and technology. To them modernization was the only way to defend not only Iran's independence but also its culture and identity. This defensive and limited view of Modernity, logical as it was, has been one of the three main misunderstandings that have distorted Iran's discourse of Modernity-- and
other Middle Eastern nations for that matter. To become modern so as to remain even more like oneself, is a contradiction that has doomed the whole process to failure.

The modernizing drive under Reza Shah was more influenced by the ultra nationalist, anti clerical modernizers who, nevertheless, tried to respect popular sensibility. But when it came to unveiling of women, there broke a short bloody religious uprising. It was an authoritarian, non participatory modernization that concentrated on creating the bare fundamentals of a modern state and society, hoping that quantitative changes would gradually lead to qualitative ones. Iran under the leadership and direct supervision of the Shah became a nation - state, brought back from the verge of certain disintegration, and achieved a degree of progress only dreamed of a generation before. However this preoccupation with material progress neglected a vital aspect of modernization. Unlike the Turkish model, little attempt was made in promoting civil society, especially political parties.

**Background of Iranian society**

During the early 1900s the only way to save country from government corruption and foreign manipulation was to make a written code of laws. This sentiment caused the Constitutional Revolution. There had been a series of ongoing covert and overt activities against Naser o-Din Shah’s despotic rule, for which many had lost their lives. The efforts of freedom fighters finally bore fruit during the reign of Moazaferedin Shah. Mozafaredin shah ascended to throne on June 1896. In the wake of the relentless efforts of freedom fighters, Mozafar o-Din Shah of Qajar dynasty was forced to issue the decree for the constitution and the creation of an elected parliament (the Majlis) in August 5, 1906. The royal power limited and a parliamentary system established.

On August 18, 1906, the first Legislative assembly (called as Supreme National Assembly), was formed in the Military Academy to make the preparations for the opening of the first Term of the National Consultative Assembly and drafting the election law thereof. During this meeting, Prime
Minister Moshirul Doleh delivered a speech as the head of the cabinet. The session concluded with the address made by Malek Al Motokalemin.

“In 1900, the great majority of Iranian population was economically active outside the home, and 90 percent people were either in agriculture or in the nomadic sector. There was almost no industry and the remaining 10 percent people were in handicrafts, trade and service. The socially dominant classes were comprised of the tribal leaders, larger land owners, merchant, aristocrats in the court and civil service. Despite their land ownership, many of agricultural proprietors lived in the towns.”[7]

Capitalizing on the internal struggles, both Russia and Britain entered a pact to settle their own differences; effectively dividing Iran into two areas of influence for their respected countries. This made headlines in early September 1907 and united the various factions in Iran. The Iranian government was officially notified of this pact on September 7, 1907 by Russian and British Ambassadors. The rising tides of dissatisfaction and discontent caused Mohammad Mirza to summon the cabinet members on December 17, 1907 under the false pretense of soliciting advice. He immediately orders their detention. Only Nasserul Molk, who was the prime minister, was let free.

On December 22, 1907 a new cabinet was formed headed by Nezamul Saltaneh Mafi. On the surface the air is cleared and the tensions are eased. But on February 1908, a bomb is thrown at Shah’s Coach, making him highly suspicious. On June 1st, 1908 Shah purges some of the courtiers. Ambassador Zapolski of Russia and Ambassador Marling of Britain warn the Iranian Government to submit to Shah’s intents.

Reza Shah had ambitious plans for modernizing of Iran. These plans included developing large-scale industries, implementing major infrastructure projects, building a cross-country railroad system, establishing a national public education system, reforming the judiciary, and improving health care. He believed a strong, centralized government managed by educated personnel could carry out his plans.
He sent hundreds of Iranians including his son to Europe for training. During 16 years from 1925 and 1941, Reza Shah's numerous development projects transformed Iran into an industrial, urbanized country. Public education progressed rapidly, and new social classes - a professional middle class and an industrial working class - emerged.

“The shift of population from country to town and the expansion in urban employment possibilities has created a massive non-agricultural wage-earning class. In 1977, there were 2.5 million people employed in manufacturing, and 1 million in construction, out of a total economically active population of 10.4 millions.”[8]

These measures provoked religious leaders, who feared losing their traditional authority, to raise their voices against him, which consequently led to some civil unrest. And the increasing arbitrariness of the Shah’s rule caused more provocation among the intellectuals, who seeking democratic reforms. These opponents criticized the Shah for subservience to the United States and for violation of the constitution, which placed limits on royal power and provided for a representative government. The Shah saw himself as heir to the kings of ancient Iran, and in 1971 he held an extravagant celebration of 2,500 years of Persian monarchy. In 1976 he replaced the Islamic calendar with an "imperial" calendar, which began with the foundation of the Persian Empire more than 25 centuries earlier. These actions were viewed as anti-Islamic and resulted in religious opposition.

The shah's regime suppressed and marginalized its opponents with the help of Iran's security and intelligence organization, the SAVAK. Relying on oil revenues, which sharply increased in late 1973, the Shah pursued his goal of developing Iran as a mighty regional power dedicated to social reform and economic development. Yet he continually sidestepped democratic arrangements, remaining unresponsive to public opinion and refused to allow meaningful political liberties.

By the mid-1970s the Shah reigned amidst widespread discontent caused by the continuing repressiveness of his regime, socioeconomic changes that benefited some classes at the expense of others, and the
increasing gap between the ruling elite and the disaffected populace. Islamic leaders, particularly the exiled cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, were able to focus this discontent with a populist ideology tied to Islamic principles and calls for the overthrow of the shah. The Shah's government collapsed following widespread uprisings in 1978 and 1979. The Pahlavi Dynasty was succeeded by an Islamic government under Ayatollah Khomeini.

**Geography**

Iran is the eighteenth largest country in the world, with an area of 1,648,195 km$^2$ (636,372 sq mi). Its area roughly equals that of the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany combined, or somewhat more than the US state of Alaska. Iran lies between latitudes 24° and 40° N, and longitudes 44° and 64° E. Its borders are with Azerbaijan (611 km/380 mi (with Azerbaijan-Naxcivan exclave (179 km/111 mi )) and Armenia (35 km/22 mi) to the north-west; the Caspian Sea to the north; Turkmenistan (992 km/616 mi) to the north-east; Pakistan (909 km/565 mi) and Afghanistan (936 km/582 mi) to the east; Turkey (499 km/310 mi) and Iraq (1,458 km/906 mi) to the west; and finally the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to the south.

Iran consists of the Iranian Plateau with the exception of the coasts of the Caspian Sea and Khuzestan Province. It is one of the world's most mountainous countries, its landscape dominated by rugged mountain ranges that separate various basins or plateaux from one another. The populous western part is the most mountainous, with ranges such as the Caucasus, Zagros and Alborz Mountains; the last contains Iran's highest point, Mount Damavand at 5,610 m (18,406 ft), which is also the highest mountain on the Eurasian landmass west of the Hindu Kush.
The northern part of Iran is covered by dense rain forests called Shomal or the Jungles of Iran. The eastern part consists mostly of desert basins such as the Dasht-e Kavir, Iran’s largest desert, in the north-central portion of the country, and the Dasht-e Lut, in the east, as well as some salt lakes. This is because the mountain ranges are too high for rain clouds to reach these regions. The only large plains are found along the coast of the Caspian Sea and at the northern end of the Persian Gulf, where Iran borders the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab (or the Arvand Rūd) river. Smaller, discontinuous plains are found along the remaining coast of the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman.

**Climate**

Iran has a variable climate. In the northwest, winters are cold with heavy snowfall and subfreezing temperatures during December and January. Spring and fall are relatively mild, while summers are dry and hot. In the south, winters are mild and the summers are very hot, having average daily temperatures in July exceeding 38 °C (100.4 °F). On the Khuzestan Plain, summer heat is accompanied by high humidity.

In general, Iran has an arid climate in which most of the relatively scant annual precipitation falls from October through April. In most of the country, yearly precipitation averages 250 millimeters (9.8 in) or less. The major exceptions are the higher mountain valleys of the Zagros and the Caspian coastal plain, where precipitation averages at least 500 millimeters (19.7 in) annually. In the western part of the Caspian, rainfall exceeds 1,000 millimeters (39.4 in) annually and is distributed relatively evenly throughout the year. This contrasts with some basins of the Central Plateau that receive ten centimeters or less of precipitation annually.

To the west, settlements in the Zagros basin experience lower temperatures, severe winters with below zero average daily temperatures and heavy snowfall. The eastern and central basins are arid, with less than 200 mm (7.9 in) of rain, and have occasional deserts. Average summer temperatures exceed 38 °C (100.4 °F). The coastal plains of the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman in southern Iran have mild winters, and very humid and
hot summers. The annual precipitation ranges from 135 to 355 mm (5.3 to 14.0 in).

Fauna

Iran's wildlife is composed of several animal species including bears, gazelles, wild pigs, wolves, jackals, panthers, Eurasian Lynx, and foxes. Domestic animals include sheep, goats, cattle, horses, water buffalo, donkeys, and camels. The pheasant, partridge, stork, eagles and falcon are also native to Iran.

One of the most famous members of Iranian wildlife is the critically endangered Asiatic cheetah, also known as the Iranian Cheetah, whose numbers were greatly reduced after the Iranian Revolution. Today there are ongoing efforts to increase its population and introduce it back in India. Iran had lost all its Asiatic Lion and the now extinct Caspian Tigers by the earlier part of the 20th century.

Wildlife of Iran includes its flora and fauna and their natural habitats. One of the most famous members of wildlife in Iran are the world's last surviving, critically endangered Asiatic cheetah (Acinonyx jubatus venaticus) also known as the Iranian cheetah, which are today found nowhere else but in Iran. Iran had lost all its Asiatic lion and the now extinct Caspian tigers by the earlier part of the twentieth century. The Syrian elephants used to live in southern parts of the country but has gone extinct as well.

More than one-tenth of the country is forested. The most extensive growths are found on the mountain slopes rising from the Caspian Sea, with stands of oak, ash, elm, cypress, and other valuable trees. On the plateau proper, areas of scrub oak appear on the best-watered mountain slopes, and villagers cultivate orchards and grow the plane tree, poplar, willow, walnut, beech, maple, and mulberry. Wild plants and shrubs spring from the barren land in the spring and afford pasturage, but the summer sun burns them away. According to FAO reports, the major types of forests that exist in Iran and their respective areas are:
1. Caspian forests of the northern districts (33,000 km²)
2. Limestone mountainous forests in the northeastern districts (Juniperus forests, 13,000 km²)
3. Pistachio forests in the eastern, southern and southeastern districts (26,000 km²)
4. Oak forests in the central and western districts (100,000 km²)
5. Shrubs of the Dasht-e Kavir districts in the central and northeastern part of the country (10,000 km²)
6. Sub-tropical forests of the southern coast (5,000 km²) like the Hara forests.

**Culture**

The culture of Iran is a mix of ancient pre-Islamic culture and Islamic culture. Iranian culture has long been a predominant culture of the region, with Persian considered the language of intellectuals during much of the 2nd millennium, and the language of religion and the populace before that.

Iranian culture is Class based, traditional and patriarchal. Tradition for most is rooted in religion and class and patriarchy have been constant features of Iranian society since ancient times. Class in its simplest form is mainly based on income and financial status or family genealogy, though modernity and traditionalism might also be used to distinguish classes. In Iran different classes are bounded together through different processes and have different cultures. For example kinship is a primary source of security and financial support for low-income families. While with the affluent kinship is a source of emotional and psychological support and welfare. Division of labor could be a relatively simple division between the public (men’s work) and domestic (women’s work) for the poor and/or uneducated, or a technical division in sophisticated work environments for highly trained and educated professional males and females. Generally the lower and uneducated classes may regard females as inferior or different who are entitled to a lesser position in the society. On the other hand the
modern classes normally strive to guarantee the equality of sexes and eliminate gender discrimination.

Tradition is mostly based on religion particularly Islam and its’ prescribed codes of behavior, however it contains elements that are much older. For example the prominent position allocated to family as reflected in the Islamic sources and legal codes is a continuation of universal practices adopted by most Eastern societies since ancient times. What makes a difference with respect to Islam is the belief held by many Muslims that Islam is a body of values, ideas and beliefs that should encompass all spheres of life, including personal and social relationships, economics and politics. Consequently for the traditional practicing Muslim the only accepted relationship between the sexes may be through marriage or concubines. The two are the only forms legitimized by Shiite Islam. For such families there may be no question of males and females openly dating or socializing with such intentions before they are legally bounded through the prescribed unions (e.g. arranged marriages). In such cases what is usually classified as group behavior could also be identified with religious behavior. Separating the two might become a daunting task for outsiders not familiar with the intricacies of the traditional and or Muslim culture.

Iranian culture is adult oriented with parents being involved in making major decisions for their children such as, whom they should marry and what profession they should have. Nevertheless children are much loved and are the priority with most families. Education is highly praised amongst all Iranians and quite often children are pressured to succeed academically. Mothers and recently fathers spent lots of time with their children and if they can afford it they will financially support them all the way till they have finished all their education and beyond. It is quite expected with the rich to buy property and expensive cars for their children and provide them with a good life style from an early age. Children on the other hand are expected to trust and respect their parents and follow the guidelines designed for them. Family traditionally comes before the individual and family members are brought up and expected to understand and respect such notions.
Iranian culture is patriarchal, legally and culturally males have more rights and privileges than females. Centuries of gender discrimination and segregation of sexes has created distinct roles and codes of behavior for both the sexes and many are still practiced today. Many women particularly the older generation feel more comfortable being with other women rather than in mixed company even though most do not practice segregation of sexes. Parents normally have double standards concerning their children. Usually, there are more restrictions for girls compared to boys with respect to individual freedoms, dress codes and association with the opposite sex. Virgin brides are still in demand by many Iranian males and their families, while there is little stigma attached to males having girl friends and sexual relationships while single.

The Sassanid era was an important and influential historical period in Iran as Iranian culture influenced China, India and Roman civilization considerably, and so influenced as far as Western Europe and Africa. This influence played a prominent role in the formation of both Asiatic and European medieval art. This influence carried forward to the Islamic world. Much of what later became known as Islamic learning, such as philology, literature, jurisprudence, philosophy, medicine, architecture and the sciences were based on some of the practices taken from the Sassanid Persians to the broader Muslim world.

Since the Islamization of Iran, Islamic rituals have penetrated the Iranian culture. The most noticeable of them is the commemoration of Husayn ibn Ali: every year on the Day of Ashura, most Iranians, including Armenians and Zoroastrians, participate in mourning for the martyrs of the battle of Karbala. Daily life in modern Iran is closely interwoven with Shia Islam and the country's art, literature, and architecture are an ever-present reminder of its deep national tradition and of a broader literary culture.

**Language and literature**

Parsi or Persian was the language of the Parsa people who ruled Iran between 550 - 330 BCE. It belongs to what scholars call the Indo-Iranian group of languages. It became the language of the Persian Empire and was widely spoken in the ancient days ranging from the borders of
India in the east, Russian in the north, the southern shores of the Persian Gulf to Egypt and the Mediterranean in the west.

Over the centuries Parsi has changed to its modern form and today Persian is spoken primarily in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and parts of Uzbekistan. It was the language of the court of many of the Indian kings till the British banned its use, after occupying India in the 18 century. The Mogul kings of India had made Persian their court language. Engraved and filled with gold on walls of Delhi's Red Fort is the sentence "Agar Ferdows dar jahan ast hamin ast o hamin ast o hamin ast";-'If there is a paradise on earth it is here it is here it is here.'

Although the name of the language has been maintained as Persian or Parsi or its Arabic form Farsi (because in Arabic they do not have the letter P) the language has undergone great changes and can be categorized into the following groups: Old Persian, Middle Persian, Classical Persian and Modern Persian.

Old Persian is what the original Parsa tribe of the Hakahmaneshinian (Achaemenid) era spoke and they have left for us samples carved on stone in cuneiform script. Middle Persian is the language spoken during the Sasanian era also known as Pahlavi. We have plenty of writings from that era in the form of religious writings of the Zarathushti religion, namely the Bundahish, Arda Viraf nameh, Mainu Khared, Pandnameh Adorbad Mehresfand etc.

Classical Persian the origin of this language is not very clear. Words have their roots in different languages spoken in various parts of the country but the majority of the words have their roots in Old Persian, Pahlavi and Avesta. They are represented in classical writings and poems. Ferdowsi claims to have gone through great pains for a period of thirty years to preserve this language, which was under pressure from the Arab invaders, and was on the verge of being lost.

Modern Persian language or Farsi (Arabic pronunciation of Parsi) as spoken today consists of a lot of words of non-Iranian origin. Some modern technical terms, understandably, have been incorporated from English,
French and German and are recognizable, but Arabic has corrupted a major part of the language by replacing original Parsi words. What Ferdowsi worked so hard to preserve is finally being lost.

The Old Persian of the Achaemenian Empire, preserved in a number of cuneiform inscriptions, was an Indo-European tongue with close affinities with Sanskrit and Avestan (the language of the Zoroastrian sacred texts). After the fall of the Achaemenians the ancient tongue developed, in the province of Pars, into Middle Persian or Pahlavi (a name derived from Parthavi - that is, Parthian). Pahlavi was used throughout the Sassanian period, though little now remains of what must once have been a considerable literature. About a hundred Pahlavi texts survive, mostly on religion and all in prose. Pahlavi collections of romances, however, provided much of the material for Ferdowsi's Shahnameh.

After the Arab conquest a knowledge of Arabic became necessary, for it was not only the language of the new rulers and their state, but of the religion they brought with them and later of the new learning. Though Pahlavi continued to be spoken in private life, Arabic was dominant in official circles for a century and a half. With the weakening of the central power, a modified form of Pahlavi emerged, with its Indo-European grammatical structure intact but simplified, and with a large infusion of Arabic words. This was the Modern Persian in use today.

Article 15 of the Iranian constitution states that the "Official language (of Iran)... is Persian...[and]... the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian." Persian serves as a lingua franca in Iran and most publications and broadcastings are in this language.

Next to Persian, there are many publications and broadcastings in other relatively popular languages of Iran such as Azerbaijani, Kurdish and even in less popular ones such as Arabic and Armenian. Many languages originated in Iran, but Persian is the most used language. Persian belongs to the Iranian branch of the family of Indo-European languages. The oldest records in Old Persian date to the Achaemenid Empire, and examples of Old Persian has been found in present-day Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt.
In the late 8th century, Persian was highly Arabized and written in a modified Arabic script. This caused a movement supporting the revival of Persian. An important event of this revival was the writing of the Shahnameh by Ferdowsi (Persian: Epic of Kings), Iran's national epic, which is said to have been written entirely in native Persian. This gave rise to a strong reassertion of Iranian national identity, and is in part credited for the continued existence of Persian as a separate language.

Persian beside Arabic has been a medium for literary and scientific contributions to the Islamic world especially in Anatolia, central Asia and Indian subcontinent. Poetry is a very important part of Persian culture. Poetry is used in many Persian classical works, whether from literature, science, or metaphysics. Persian literature has been considered by such thinkers as Goethe as one of the four main bodies of world literature.

The Persian language has produced a number of famous poets; however, only a few poets as Rumi and Omar Khayyám have surfaced among western popular readership, even though the likes of Hafiz, Saadi, Nizami Attar, Sanai, Nasir Khusraw, Jami, Taleb Amoli are considered by many Iranians to be just as influential. The books of famous poets have been translated into western languages since 1634. Contemporary Iranian Literature is influenced by classic Persian poetry, but also reflects the particularities of modern day of Iran, though writers such as Housang Moradi Kermani, the most translated modern Iranian author and poet Ahmad Shamlau.

In the nineteenth century Saba, poet laureate to Fath Ali Shah composed a divan and an epic called the Shahanshahnameh; as a poet he was excelled by Neshat, also author of a divan. Qaani (died 1853), the best writer of the nineteenth century and perhaps the most outstanding since Jami, was one of Iran's most brilliant and melodious poets. Well-known prose works of the period include Nasir ud-Din Shah's diaries of his three journeys to Europe and the literary biographies of the poet Reza Quli Khan. This period was marked by the increasing influence of European literature, noticeable in the works of the poet Shaybani and others.

The real revival of Persian letters came in the early twentieth
century, when the growing desire for reform inspired numerous satires. One of the most outstanding figures of this period was Iraj Mirza (died 1926), a poet of great talent and champion of the emancipation of women. Other noted poets were Adib, Bahar, Lahuti, Shahryar, Aref and the poetess Parvin E'tesami. Poets of more recent decades include Nima Yoshij, Ra'di, Khanlari, Islami, Gulchin, Ahmad Shamlou, Mehdi Akhavan Sales, Mas'ud Farzad, Sohrab Sepehri, Fereidoon Moshiri and the poetess Forough Farrokhzad. Some of these poets have introduced verse forms new to Persian literature. Here should not be forgotten the great works of Sadeq Hedayat, Samad Behrang, Sadeq Choubak and many others who enriched the Persian literature.

**Village System**

About half of the people of Iran live in small farm villages. Most of these villages nestle in the mountains, particularly in western and northern Iran. Most of the farmers live in country villages. These villages usually consist of a single wide street and many narrow, twisting, unpaved lanes lined with gray-walled houses. Small mosques usually stand on the village square. Few of them have schools or stores. Dr. Md. Faique says about village system:

“The village groups formed an important element in traditional Persian society. In early times, prior to the Arab invasion, Persian settlements generally consisted of small scattered agricultural hamlets which formed a part of a large feudal estate. With each new conquest of Iran, the rulers paid their military and civilian officials with large grants of land. The new landholders dominated but did not remove the existing landowning class. A hierarchy of landowners emerged and the peasants generally became the losers. One village had so little contact with another that two neighbouring communities frequently spoke different dialects. Strangers aroused suspicion and threatened their security, what little they had. A strong wall around the village afforded some means of protection from outsiders but it also kept out news of the world at large. Muharram, the period of religious mourning, kindled group emotions, the high point came with performance of the Taziyeh, a kind of passion play. The occasion gave the villagers an
opportunity to project their own feelings of sorrow and suppression into the personages of the martyred Saints."

City Life

Most of the cities lie in the western part of the country, near mountains. Fewer than 20 Iranian Cities have more than 100,000 persons. The mud-brick houses and mosques with their tall minarets (Tower) make the cities look much different from those in North America. The gray walls of houses give the cities a drab, dull appearance. But new schools, hospitals, apartment buildings and government buildings stand along wide, tree-lined boulevards in the few modern sections. Most of the cities originally were resting places for Camel Caravans, or served as trading or religious Centres.

Merchants sell their goods in little shops along the narrow streets of the crowded Bazars (Market places). Dorned brick roofs over some of the streets of the bazars protect the merchants and customers from sun and rain. The modern sections have stores similar to those in North America.

In general, Tehran is the heart of the ongoing socio-political tension in Iran, and for many people this is part of life in the capital. Tehran is the main city in which the ban on satellite antennas is taken seriously by the police (not very seriously though) and satellite signals belonging to certain channels are often jammed. Every two or three years there is an election or political crisis that makes the streets of central Tehran the scene of political rallies, which sometimes turn violent. Of course, how much to care about these issues and get involved in them is a personal choice. For many Tehranis these issues barely have any significance.
The streets are relatively safe and life goes on until 11p.m. This and other factors (such as the absence of drunk people wandering about in the middle of the night) make Tehran relatively safe. To quote from WikiTravel, Tehran is relatively one of the safest cities to travel through.

A street in Tehran during the 1930s

Philosophy

Iranian philosophy or Persian philosophy can be traced back as far as to Old Iranian philosophical traditions and thoughts which originated in ancient Indo-Iranian roots and were considerably influenced by Zarathustra's teachings. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy the chronology of the subject and science of philosophy starts with the Indo-Iranians, dating this event to 1500 BC. The Oxford dictionary also states, "Zarathushtra's philosophy entered to influence Western tradition through Judaism, and therefore on Middle Platonism."

Iranian history and due to remarkable political and social changes such as the Arab and Mongol invasions of Persia, a wide spectrum of schools of thoughts showed a variety of views on philosophical questions extending from Old Iranian and mainly Zoroastrianism-related traditions, to school appearing in the late pre-Islamic era such as Manicheism and Mazdakism as well as various post-Islamic schools. Iranian philosophy after Arab invasion of Persia is characterized by different interactions with the
Old Iranian philosophy, the Greek philosophy and with the development of Islamic philosophy.

The Illumination School and the Transcendent Philosophy are regarded as two of the main philosophical traditions of that era in Persia. Philosophy was and still is a popular subject of study in Iran. Previous to Western style universities, philosophy was a major field of study in religious seminaries. Comparing the number of philosophy books currently published in Iran with that in other countries, Iran possibly ranks first in this field but it is definitely on top in terms of publishing philosophy books.

On the diversity and expansion of philosophy in Iran, Khosrow Bagheri has stated "One part of philosophical endeavor in Iran today, and perhaps the main one, is concerned with the local philosophy which is dominated by the school of Mulla Sadra. He has provided a philosophy in line with the old metaphysical inclination but in the feature of a combination of mysticism, philosophy, and the Islamic religious views. On the other hand, a relatively strong translation movement has been shaped in which the Iranian readers are provided by some of the important sources of contemporary philosophy in Persian including both the analytic and continental traditions. In the former, Wittgenstein, Searle, and Kripke, and in the latter, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Foucault can be mentioned. There have also been concentrations on a local polar contrast between Popper and Heidegger, and, due to the religious atmosphere, on philosophy of religion." [10]

Among journals being published in Iran on philosophy there are FALSAFEH-The Iranian Journal of Philosophy published by the department of philosophy of the University of Tehran since 1972 and Hikmat va Falsafeh published by Allamah Tabataba'i University in Tehran, Ma'rifat-e Falsafeh published by the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute in Qom, and many others. Also worthy of mention is the journal, Naqd o Nazar published by Daftar Tablighat in Qom, which often includes articles on philosophical topics and other issues of interest to religious thinkers and intellectuals. It is important to note that Sufism has had a great amount of influence on Iranian/Persian philosophy.
While there are ancient relations between the Indian Vedas and the Iranian Avesta, the two main families of the ancient Indo-Iranian philosophical traditions were characterized by fundamental differences in their implications for the human being's position in society and their view on the role of man in the universe.

Iranian philosophy after the acceptance of Islam in Persia, is characterized by different interactions with the Ancient Iranian Philosophy, the Ancient Greek philosophy and with the development of Islamic philosophy. Illuminationism and transcendent theosophy are regarded as two of the main philosophical traditions of that era in Persia. Among important contributors to philosophy in Iran are Zoroaster, Jamasp, Mardan-Farrux Ohrmazddadan, Adurfarnbag Farroxzadan, Adurbad Emedan, Iranshahri, Farabi, Avicenna, Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari, Suhrawardi, Nasir Khusraw, Biruni, Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi, Abu Yaqub al-Sijistani, Nasir al-Din Tusi, Qutb al-Din Shirazi, Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra, Mir Fendereski and Hadi Sabzevari.

**Religion of Iran**

Iran is an Islamic republic. Its constitution mandates that the official religion is Islam, specifically the Twelver Ja'fari school of Islam, with other Islamic schools being accorded full respect. Followers of all Islamic schools are free to act in accordance with their own jurisprudence in performing their religious rites. The constitution recognizes Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians as religious minorities. Zoroastrianism was once the majority religion, though today Zoroastrians number only in the tens of thousands. Iran is home to the second largest Jewish community in the Muslim World. The Bahá'í Faith, Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority, is not officially recognized, and has been persecuted during its existence in Iran. The Iranian government does not officially recognize the existence of non-religious Iranians. This leaves the true representation of the religious split in Iran unknown as all non-religious, spiritual, atheist, agnostic and converts away from Islam are likely to be included within the government statistic of the 99% Muslim majority. Sunnism was the predominant form theology before the devastating Mongol conquest, but subsequently Shi'ism became dominant.
Islam does not have a mechanism for the Separation of church and state and has been the official religion and part of the government’s of Iran since the Islamic conquest of Iran circa 640 AD. It took another few hundred years for Shi'a Islam to gather and become a religious and political power in Iran. In the history of Shi'a Islam the first Shia state was Idrisid dynasty (780-974) in Maghreb, a region of North West Africa. Then the Alavids dynasty (864 – 928AD) became established in Mazandaran (Tabaristan), in northern Iran. The Alavids were of the Zaidiyah Shi'a (sometimes called "Fiver").[11] These dynasties were local. But they were followed by two great and powerful dynasties: Fatimid Caliphate which formed in Ifriqiya in 909 AD and the Buyid dynasty emerged in Daylaman, in north central Iran, about 930 AD and then extended rule over central and western Iran and into Iraq until 1048 AD. The Buyid were also Zaidiyah Shi'a. Later Sunni Islam came to rule from the Ghaznavids dynasty, 975 to 1187AD, through to the Mongol invasion and establishment of the Ilkhanate which kept Shi’a Islam out of power until the Mongol ruler Ghazan converted to Shi’a Islam in 1310 AD and made it the state religion. [12]

Complaints about religious freedom in Iran revolve around the persecution of the Bahá’í Faith, unequal rights of non-Muslim religions, and the forbidding of conversion from Islam to other religions. The Bahá’í Faith is not recognized and is claimed by some to be persecuted. There have been reports of imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, discrimination, and murder based on religious beliefs.[13]

Hudud statutes grant different punishments to Muslims and non-Muslims for the same crime. In the case of adultery, for example, a Muslim man who is convicted of committing adultery with a Muslim woman receives 100 lashes; the sentence for a non-Muslim man convicted of adultery with a Muslim woman is death. In 2004, inequality of "blood money" (diyeh) was eliminated, and the amount paid by a perpetrator for the death or wounding a Christian, Jew, or Zoroastrian man, was made the same as that for a Muslim. However, the International Religious Freedom Report reports that Baha’is were not included in the provision and their blood is considered Mobah, (i.e. it can be spilled with impunity).
Conversion from Islam to another religion (apostasy) is prohibited and may be punishable by death. Article 23 of the constitution states, "the investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief." But another article, 167, gives judges the discretion "to deliver his judgment on the basis of authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatwa (rulings issued by qualified clerical jurists)." The founder of the Islamic Republic, Islamic cleric Ruhollah Khomeini, who was a grand Ayatollah, ruled "that the penalty for conversion from Islam, or apostasy, is death."[14]

Zoroastrianism was the national faith of Iran for more than a millennium before the Arab conquest. It has had an immense influence on Iranian philosophy, culture and art after the people of Iran converted to Islam.[15] Today of the 98% of Muslims living in Iran, around 89% are Shi’a and only around 9% are Sunni. This is quite the opposite trend of the percentage distribution of Shi’a to Sunni Islam followers in the rest of the Muslim population from state to state (primarily in the Middle East) and throughout the rest of the world.

Followers of the Baha’i faith comprise the largest non-Muslim minority in Iran. Followers of the Baha’i faith are scattered throughout small communities in Iran, although there seems to be a large population of people who follow the Baha’i faith in Tehran. Most of the Baha’i are of Persian descent, although there seem to be many among the Azerbaijani and Kurdish people. The Baha’i are severely persecuted.

Followers of the Christian faith comprise around 250,000 Armenians, around 32,000 Assyrians, and a small number of Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant Iranians that have been converted by missionaries in earlier centuries. Thus, Christians that live in Iran are primarily descendants of indigenous Christians that were converted during the 19th and 20th centuries. Judaism is an officially recognized faith in Iran, and in spite of the hostilities between Iran and Israel over the Palestinian issue, the millennia old Jewish community in Iran enjoys the right to practice their religion freely as well as a dedicated seat in parliament to a representative member of their faith. In addition to Christianity and Judaism, Zoroastrianism is another officially recognized religion in Iran,
although followers of this faith do not hold a large population in Iran. In addition, although there have been isolated incidences of prejudice against Zoroastrians, most followers of this faith have not been persecuted for being followers of this faith.[16]

Agriculture

Most of the farms lie in the northern, southern and western parts of the country, where there is enough water to irrigate the crops. Many Iranian farmers own their own land. During the 1950s, the Shah sold much of his land at low cost to the farmers. During the 1960s, as part of a land reform program, the government bought huge blocks of land from wealthy landowners. The government then sold small plots of this land to peasant farmers.

Most Iranian farmers use primitive methods to raise their crops. For example, many cultivate their land with wooden plows pulled by oxen. However, the government has introduced agricultural schools. A water shortage is Iran’s greatest farming problem. Because of this lack of water, only about 15 percent of the country can be used to grow crops. The government has built few irrigation projects, because it lacks money. Most of the farmland is watered by the ancient Kanat system. This system consists of deep wells in the hills or mountain slopes, and long tunnels that carry the well water to the farmland. The wells and tunnels are dug by special workmen who come from families that have specialized in the construction of Kanat system for hundreds of years. These irrigation systems require much work to build and maintain.

Wheat, the chief crop, grows on about half the cultivated land. It is raised mostly for local use. Barley, the second most important crop, is use mainly for feeding live stock. Rice grows on the northern slopes of the Elburz Mountains. Farmers also raise cotton, sugar beets, tea and tobacco. Many farmers grow poppies, the source of the drug opium. Other agricultural products include dates, oranges, lemons; limes, nuts and Tragacanth, a gum obtain from various shrubs of pulse family. Tragacanth is used in making medicinal pills and creams.
Overall, Iran's soil is not well suited for large scale agriculture. About 12 percent of the country's total land area of 1,636,000 km² is cultivated. Still, 63% of the cultivable lands have not been used, and 185,000 km² of the present farms are being used with 50 to 60% capacity.

Both irrigated and rain-fed farming are used in Iran. In 2005, some 13.05 million hectares of land was under cultivation, of which 50.45% was allocated to irrigated farming and the remaining 49.55% to rain-fed system. As of 2013, the amount of cultivated land that is irrigated increased to 8 million hectares, while 10 million hectares remain rain-fed.

Agriculture has a long history and tradition in Iran. As early as 10,000 BCE, the earliest known domestication of the goat had taken place in the Iranian plateau. By 5000BCE, wine was being fermented in Iran, and by as early as 7th century CE, the windmill had been invented in Persia for the first time in history.

Fruits such as the peach first found their way into Europe from Persia, as indicated by their Latin name, persica, from which (by way of the French) we have the English word "peach." As did Tulips, which were also first cultivated in ancient Persia and spinach, the word Spinach itself derived from the Persian word Esfenaj. The Chinese referred to it in 647CE as 'the herb of Persia'. In 400BCE, a form of ice cream was in use in Persia, and the ancestor of the cookie is said to have come from Persia (from the Persian koolucheh) in the 7th century according to many sources.

Modern agriculture in Iran dates back to the 1820s, when Amir Kabir, the Chief Minister to Naser al-Din Shah and a symbol of reform and modernism in Iran, undertook a number of changes to the traditional agricultural system. Such changes included importing modified seeds and signing collaboration contracts with other countries. The first agricultural school was founded about a hundred years ago and the Agriculture Bank was established in 1933. The Ministry of Agriculture is currently overseeing and implementing the government’s policies in the agricultural sector.
The Iranian Educational System

In Traditional Islamic Persia, the ‘Maktab’, Madrasah and religious colleges, played an important role in education. Religious and moral Training were stressed. Even before entering school the child learned to pray and observe the family Tradition of performing the Ramzan fast and the Muharram mourning practices.

Having the world’s youngest population, the Islamic Republic of Iran bears the responsibility of education more that 18 million students at segregated schools. General education is free and parents are obliged to enroll their six years old children at schools. It comprises 5 years of primary, 3 years of lower secondary, 3 years of upper secondary and one year of pre-university of education. The language of instruction in Farsi. The first day of school year is 22 September (1\textsuperscript{st} Mehr), which is annually celebrated joyfully.

“The most prevalent kind of elementary education in Traditional Iran was the system of Maktab-religious schools supported by private contributions and religious foundations and often associated with a mosque. The Maktab system was very limited in many ways. Its syllabus included such subjects as reading, writing and familiarity with the Qyran and classical Persian Texts like Saadi's Gulistan and Bustan and the poems of Hafiz.”\textsuperscript{[17]}

Wedding Ceremonies

Persian wedding traditions, despite their local and regional variations, like many other rituals in Iran go back to the ancient Zoroastrian tradition. Though the concepts and theory of the marriage have been changed drastically by Islamic traditions, the actual ceremonies have remained more or less the same as they were originally in the ancient Zoroastrian culture. The Persian wedding traditions are observed by the majority of ethnic groups in Iran.

There are two stages in a typical wedding ritual in Iran. Usually both phases take place in one day. The first stage is known as "Aghd", which is basically the legal component of marriage in Iran. In this process, the Bride
and Groom as well as their respective guardians sign a marriage contract. This phase usually takes place in the bride's home. After this legal process is over, the second phase, "Jashn-e Aroosi" takes place. In this step, which is basically the wedding reception, where actual feasts and celebrations are held, typically lasts from about 3–7 days. The ceremony takes place in a decorated room with flowers and a beautifully decorated spread on the floor. This spread is typically passed down from mother to daughter and is composed of very nice fabric such as "Termeh" (cashmere), "Atlas" (gold embroidered satin), or "Abrisham" (silk).

Items are placed on this spread: a Mirror (of fate), two Candelabaras (representing the bride and groom and their bright future), a tray of seven multi-colored herbs and spices (including poppy seeds, wild rice, angelica, salt, nigella seeds, black tea, and frankincense). These herbs and spices play specific roles ranging from breaking spells and witchcraft, to blinding the evil eye, to burning evil spirits. In addition to these herbs/spices, a special baked and decorated flatbread, a basket of decorated eggs, decorated almonds, walnuts and hazelnuts (in their shell to represent fertility), a basket of pomegranates/apples (for a joyous future as these fruits are considered divine), a cup of rose water (from special Persian roses)—which helps perfume the air, a bowl made out of sugar (apparently to sweeten life for the newlywed couple), and a brazier holding burning coals and sprinkled with wild rue (as a way to keep the evil eye away and to purify the wedding ritual) are placed on the spread as well. Finally, there are additional items that must be placed on the spread, including a bowl of gold coins (to represent wealth and prosperity), a scarf/shawl made of silk/fine fabric (to be held over the bride and groom’s head at certain points in the ceremony), two sugar cones—which are ground above the bride and groom's head, thus symbolizing sweetness/happiness, a cup of honey (to sweeten life), a needle and seven strands of colored thread (the shawl that is held above the bride and groom’s head is sewn together with the string throughout the ceremony), and a copy of the couple’s Holy Book (other religions require different texts); but all of these books symbolize God's blessing for the couple. An early age in marriage—especially for brides—is a long documented feature of marriage in Iran. While the people of Iran have been trying to legally change this practice by implementing a higher
minimum in marriage, there have been countless blocks to such an attempt. Although the average age of women being married has increased by about five years in the past couple decades, young girls being married is still common feature of marriage in Iran—even though there is an article in the Iranian Civil Code that forbid the marriage of women younger than 15 years of age and males younger than 18 years of age.\textsuperscript{[18]}

Khastegari is the first step of the traditional Persian marriage process. When it is time for a young man to get married, his family will look around to identify a number of potential brides. Some men ask their parents to suggest potential brides, if they have been unable to find one themselves. However, this has become rarer in recent years, with men and women mixing and meeting freely themselves. Once the man, or his family, has decided on a potential bride, the khastegari process takes place. For this ceremony, one or more representatives of the man’s family pay a visit to the woman's family. The first visit is purely for the parties to become acquainted with one another. The first visit does not include a formal proposal and there is no commitment - it is perfectly acceptable for the man and his family to go for more than one khastegari in a short period of time. Following the first visit, both parties can begin to think more seriously about whether they would like to pursue a relationship. Both the woman and the man have their say in whether or not they would like a follow up to this visit.

A marriage proposal is made by the suitor and his family. The woman’s family welcomes the party and invites them to sit in the reception room. At first, members of the bride’s family talk about the virtues of the girl. Traditionally, modesty was among the most highly valued qualities, along with domestic skills like cooking, embroidery, and entertaining at social gatherings (\textit{mehman-navazi}); less emphasis is placed on these characteristics nowadays. In modern times important characteristics are the education level and intelligence of the girl, her ability to make the most of the situation when times get tough, and her future prospects. After hearing about the potential bride, the man's family will discuss his own merits, usually his education and/or career prospects. The woman's parents will normally ask the suitor if he is able to provide her with
accommodation, and if he is able to support their daughter financially. They may also discuss any religious commitments.

The most important part comes when the bride’s father calls for the tea to be served. In the most traditional families, the first time that the man and woman see each other is when she enters to offer tea and pastries to the guests. At the end of the second khastegari, the man and the woman will be given time alone to talk in private. This usually involves a discussion about what they want for the future.

Note that, in most modern families, the first two khastegaris are done in one step, and the man and the woman already know each other and are the instigators of the ceremony. Bāle Boroun is the ceremony which takes place a short period of time after the formal proposal, publicly announcing the couple's intention to form a union. At this stage, both the man and woman are happy with each other and, traditionally, both their families have agreed to the union and any conditions surrounding the marriage. The groom's parents usually give a gift to the bride at this ceremony. According to an ancient Zoroastrian practice, this is done by the groom's family in order to persuade the bride to accept the proposal. The traditional gift is a piece of cloth (to be made into a gown) and a ring. In religious families, the cloth is given to be made into a chador.

The Majless takes place at the woman’s family home. The man and woman, alongside their families, will determine "the gift of love", known as the Mehriye, as well as the date of the wedding. This may be held as early as a year before the wedding itself, in order to allow time for all the wedding arrangements to be made.

The sharing of refreshments that follows the namzadi ceremony is called shirin khordan (eating sweets) including tea and shirini (desserts) such as bamiye (light doughnut balls), nun-e berenji (rice flour cookies), chocolates, ajil (nuts and dried fruit), are served as part of the festivities. Eating sweet food stuffs at celebratory events such as an engagement ceremony carry symbolism such as wishing for sweetness in the couple's life in general.
A few days before the wedding, presents from the groom's family are taken over to the bride’s house. Men from the groom's family dressed up in festive costumes carry the presents on elaborately decorated large flat containers carried on their heads. The containers are called tabag. This ceremony is also called tabag-baran.

A scarf or shawl made out of silk or any other fine fabric is held over the bride and bridegroom's head (who are sitting by the Sofreh) by a few unmarried female relatives (bridesmaids). Two sugar cones made out of hardened sugar are used during the ceremony. These sugar cones are softly ground together above the bride and bridegroom's head by a happily married female relative (and/or maid of honor) throughout the ceremony to shower them in sweetness. The sugar drops in the held fabric, not on their heads.

In spirit of humor, sometimes a few stitches are sewn on the cloth which is held over the bride and the groom's head. The needle will have seven threads of seven colors and will symbolize sewing the mother-in-law's tongue against saying anything rude or unholy to the bride in her future life.

The contract signing for the wedding is usually done before the ceremony of Aghd so that the ceremony can flow naturally. When the groom signs the marriage contract, he legally agrees to provide the bride with a mehriye (Dowry). The amount of mehriye is restated during the wedding ceremony. In religious circles the Aghd usually includes some verses of the Quran (followed by reciting a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad about the importance of marriage (only if one or both of the couple are Muslims). In the more modern ceremonies, the officiant is not of religious background and would recite romantic poems from Saadi, Hafez or Rumi.

Then the ceremony administer (or marriage officiant) asks the mutual consent of the couple. First the groom is asked if he wishes to enter into the marriage. Then the bride is asked the same question. Here the bride makes the groom wait for her hand in marriage by not answering the question right away. This is usually accompanied by a relative yelling out
something (funny) that the bride could have gone to do. The scenario will often be as follows:

*The officiant: Do you wish to accept x as your husband?*
*The bride remains silent, while one of the guests/bridesmaids says "the bride has gone to pick flowers."
*The officiant: For the second time I ask, do you accept x to be your husband?*
*Again the bride remains silent and a female relative/bridesmaid may say "the bride has gone to bring rose-water."
*The officiant: For the third time I ask, will you accept x as your husband?*

This time the bride says "with the permission of my parents and elders, yes" and they are declared man and wife. From that moment, the man and the woman will be considered married (or mahram in religious families).

Once the couple is pronounced husband and wife, the officiant will ask for God to bless the union. The bride and groom exchange wedding rings, where they put the rings on each other's left ring finger. In religious families the kiss exchange is not done publicly. Finally, the bride and groom dip their little finger in honey and put it in each other's mouths, to symbolize starting the marriage with sweetness and love. At this point, the families start clapping and singing, and the closer members of the family will present their gifts to the bride and the groom, mostly cash or jewelry.

Traditionally, the cost of the wedding ceremony is paid by the groom's family, and in return the bride's family provides the 'jahaz' (the furniture and household appliances for the couple's new life together). However, most modern families share the responsibilities and the costs associated with the wedding ceremonies.

Traditionally, on Patakhti the bride wears a lot of floral ornaments and the decoration of the house with flowers is provided by the groom's family. The relatives of the bride and the groom bring them presents. This is usually more of a party with finger foods, sweets and drink than a sitdown dinner. The majority of the night is spent dancing and socializing. It's almost like a bridal shower, but is held after the wedding.
Persian drama

Persian drama has a unique place not only in the development of Persian literature but also in bringing about a revolutionary change in the socio-cultural history of Iran. Drama was successfully used as a vehicle to highlight socio-cultural and political trends of Iran.

The word ‘drama’ is derived from Greek word which means ‘action’ or ‘thing done’. Drama is a performance of composition in prose or verse presening in dialogue or pantomime a story involving conflict or contrast of character. Drama is written for the Theatre, and the Theatre is a place where people come to see the actions as well as to hear the words. Drama plays an important role in making social and political history of the people. It is no exaggeration to say that ‘nation is known by its Theatre’. As Donatus, a prominent critic expresses that “drama is a copy of life, mirror of custom, a reflection of truth”. [19]

Persian drama, as a matter of fact, developed and flourished since 1906 onwards in Iran. But Nasiruddin Shah Qajar (1846-96) was the first among the kings of Iran who introduced a Theatre in his country. The drama writing was started by the latter half of 19th century. Since earlier plays were translated from French, English and Turkish by different Iranian playwrights, all of them were highly influenced by the European plays. Therefore, the dramatist derived all the forms and techniques mainly from the west. Among earlier dramatists were Mirza Qaraja Daghi, Akhund Zadeh, Ishqi, and Aziz Beg etc, who actually paved the way for drama-writing on the pattern of the west. During this period, people of Iran were not very much familiar with modern dramas. Earlier, they were accustomed to the ‘passion plays’ only.

After 1906, the period of ‘Constitutional Revolution’ was a turning point in the prose writing. Modern Persian drama found a special place in this era. The important and renowned playwrights of 20th century are Behram Baizayee, Yusuf Mirzayee Rafi, Mohsin Yalfam, Ali Naseeryan, Nizam Wafa, Mustafa Rahimi, Gouhar Murad and Abbas Saidipur who, in fact, played a vital role in the field of modern Persian plays.
The drama was introduced Iran in the form of ‘passion plays’ of Moharram. As a matter of fact, Persian drama can be divided into two categories; Traditional and Modern. The passion plays can be summarized further through the following quotation:

“Passion plays on the other hand, by adopting poetic diction and idiom achieved literary status. They differ from Persian narrative poetry only by being written in dialogue form. In diction, imagery and meter they follow the trends and conventions of narrative elegies.”[20]

In appears that Nasiruddin shah Qajar was the first among the kings of Iran to visit European countries and introduced a theatre in his country. This was followed by the ‘Shirkat-e –Farhang’ and the ‘Theatr Melli’, where plays based upon the translation of the European dramas, like those of Molier and other were performed by Armenian and Jew actors. During yje period of fifties, the most famous theatres at the capital were the ‘Teatre-Farhang’, ‘Tamashe khan e-Tehran’ and ‘Tamashe khan e-Hunar.’ About a hundred different plays had been stayed within the course of a few years. But the most famous at the moment were Ishqui’s ‘Rastakiz’, Aziz Beg’s ‘Karbali Kabad; Aqai Zabih Bihruz’s Jilak ali Shah, and the late Zahiruddaulah’s ‘Kabus e- Istabadad’.

Since the beginning of 20th century playwriting has been one of the most productive branches of Persian literature. Reza Shah had planned to establish an Opera, and constructed a building in Tehran’s Firdowsi Avenue for his purpose. Different views of Persian plays are given in the following lines:

“There was no existence of any sort of drama for twelve hundred years after the advent of Islam. It is said that the event of Karbala was not staged in the form of drama up to Safavid period. It is also evident from the answer of one of the learned Iranians given to prof. E.G Browne that ‘Rouzeh Khani’ started during the safavid period but ‘Shabih’ was shown after a long time. Some of the Scholars are of the opinion that ‘Shabih’ came into being at the end of 18th century or in the beginning of 19th century (i.e, at the early phase of Qajarid period).”[21]
This anthology presents five plays that exemplify the most significant trends in Persian literature and represent the first English translations of the works of three of its leading practitioners. Drama is a recent development in Persian literature and is as yet little known outside of Iran. The translations included in this anthology make the genre accessible and bring this new and original art form to the attention of the West.

In Iranian drama there exists a fundamental distinction between traditional, indigenous forms and Western theatrical forms adopted in the nineteenth century. The former most prominently includes ta’ziyeh, the Shi’i ritual drama which was the only written form of drama of Iran until European-influenced plays, in addition to comedic oral forms of indigenous performance arts. Theater in the Western sense appeared in Iran in the late nineteenth century, beginning with direct emulation of Western plays until original Azeri and Persian plays later developed. By the mid-twentieth century, despite the Pahlavi censorship Iranian drama had effloresced with ground-breaking new forms of drama combining modern and post-modern Western innovations with Iranian tradition. Despite the religious restrictions enforced after the Islamic Revolution, drama has continued to develop as an Iranian art form.

Despite its pre-Islamic roots, ta’ziyeh is a Shi’i art form spread from the South Asia, the Middle East and in recent centuries even in the Caribbean as part of the Carnival tradition. As ta’ziyeh centers on the martyrdom of Hoseyn, third Imam of the Shi’a, it is sometimes referred to as the “Passion of Hoseyn” in reference to its comparability to European religious plays, such as the Passion of Christ. Although widely regarded as an indigenous Islamic form of drama, the claim has been made that religious European plays influenced the development of ta’ziyeh. It has been performed since the sixteenth century at the latest, after the conversion of Iran to Shi’i Islam by the Safavid dynasty. Reflecting classical Iranian aesthetics, ta’ziyeh is composed in metered verse.

In the nineteenth century ta’ziyeh flourished under the Qajar dynasty’s patronage. They not only built elaborate performance venues, such as the monumental Takiyeh Dawlat, but also employed professional troops of ta’ziyeh actors. Additionally in that century ta’ziyeh
began to be performed perennially instead of only during ‘Ashura in the Islamic month of Moharram. Via the theatrical device goriz (from Persian gorikhtan, “to flee”) which allows playwrights to include other events into the repertory of ta’ziyeh, the spectrum of ta’ziyeh’s focus expanded. By the end of the nineteenth century, new forms of traditional theater, such as Shabih-e Moz’hak [“comical representation”], emerged (Anvar 61-62).

The first Western-style play to be performed in Iran was a play based on Molière’s Les Misanthrope and performed at the nation’s first theater at the Darolfonun, Iran’s first Western university. The first genuinely original plays published in an Iranian language were those of Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (1812-78), written in Azeri Turkish and later translated into Persian. Living in Russia and well-versed in Western theater, Akhundzadeh influenced Iranian playwright Mirza Aqa Tabrizi. During the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) new playwrights, such as Morteza Qoli Khan Fekri, Ahmad Mahmudi, Abolrahim Khalkhali, Afrasiyab Azad, Ali Mohammad Khan Oveysi, Taqi Rafat, and Abolhasan Forugh, composed dramas and comedies in verse. Eventually small’s numbers of new theaters appeared in Tehran.

Due to Reza Shah’s strict censorship of politically criticism, many plays were prohibited. Nevertheless, writers such as Abolhasan Forughi, Abdolhoseyn Nushin, Zabih Behruz, Ali Nasr, Said Nafisi, Gerigo Yaqikiyan, and Sadeg Hedayat continued to compose plays in Persian (Ghanoonparvar 2001, 92). During the “Spring of Freedom” that lasted in the period after Reza Shah’s abdication in 1941 and before the CIA coup against Prime Minister Mosaddeq in 1953, political plays were revived, with theater becoming a propaganda tool of political parties. More importantly, advancements in Iranian theater in that period, in terms of adopting Western techniques and stagecraft, led to experimental new styles by renowned playwrights of the 1960s and 1970s. Among them are Gholamhoseyn Sa’edi, Bahram Beyza’i, Ali Nasiriyan, Bahman Forsi, Akbar Radi, Bizhan Mofid, Esma’il Khalaj, Parviz Sayyad, Sa’id Soltanpur, Mahmud Dowlatabadi, Mohsen Yalfani, Ebrahim Makki, Mostafa Rahimi, Naser Shahinpar, Arsalan Puriya, Naser Irani, Nader Ebrahimi, and Abbas Na’Ilbandiyan (93).
Despite its dormancy, ta’ziyeh played a role in the development of Westernized Theater in Iran. In 1967, under the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah the state-sponsored Shiraz Arts Festival featured an avant-garde, secularized form of ta’ziyeh and even influenced Western playwright Peter Brook. In 1970 Abbas Na'lbendiyan published Nagahan (Suddenly), a play influenced by ta’ziyeh in terms of plot parallels. For example, the protagonist is martyred on the same day of the Islamic calendar and at the same time as Imam Huseyn according to the Shi’i accounts of the Battle of Karbala (Chelkowski 1984, 55-57). Additionally, the playwriting of Gholamhoseyn Sa’edi contains diverse elements of ta’ziyeh, such as theatrical techniques and topoi.

After the initial onset of the Islamic Revolution, playwrights such as Mahmud Rahbar and Faramarz Talebi were able to directly comment about current events. However, in 1981, the execution of Said Soltanpur led many writers to flee into exile (97-98). Playwrights Gholamhoseyn Sa’edi and Parviz Sayyad continued to write dramas in exile in France and the United States, respectively. Other playwrights of the Iranian diaspora include Mohsen Yalfani (101) in France and, more recently, Maryam Hamidi in Britain (BBC). Bahram Beyza’i, who like Sa’edi is one of Iran’s most prolific playwrights, remained in Iran continuing to produce new plays as well as scholarship on Iranian drama. Akbar Radi is another playwright who continued his career in Iran after the revolution.

Religious institutions

Historically, the single most important religious institution in Iran has been the mosque. In towns, congregational prayers, as well as prayers and rites associated with religious observances and important phases in the lives of Muslims, took place in mosques. Iranian Shias before the Revolution did not generally attach great significance to institutionalization, however, and there was little emphasis on mosque attendance, even for the Friday congregational prayers. Mosques were primarily an urban phenomenon, and in most of the thousands of small villages there were no mosques. Mosques in the larger cities began to assume more important social roles during the 1970s; during the Revolution they played a prominent role in organizing people for the large demonstrations that took place in 1978 and
Since that time their role has continued to expand, so that in 1987 mosques played important political and social roles as well as religious ones.

Another religious institution of major significance was a special building known as a ‘hoseinieh’. Hoseiniehs existed in urban areas and traditionally served as sites for recitals commemorating the martyrdom of Husayn, especially during the month of Moharram. In the 1970s, some hoseiniehs, such as the Hoseinieh Irshad in Tehran, became politicized as prominent clerical and lay preachers used the symbol of the deaths as martyrs of Husayn and the other Imams as thinly veiled criticism of Mohammad Reza Shah's regime, thus helping to lay the groundwork for the Revolution in 1979.

Institutions providing religious education include madrasehs and maktabs. Madrasehs, or seminaries, historically have been important for advanced training in Shia theology and jurisprudence. Madrasehs are generally associated with noted Shia scholars who have attained the rank of ayatollah. There are also some older madrasehs, established initially through endowments, at which several scholars may teach. Students, known as ‘talabehs’, live on the grounds of the madrasehs and are provided stipends for the duration of their studies, usually a minimum of seven years, during which they prepare for the examinations that qualify a seminary student to be a low-level preacher, or mullah. At the time of the Revolution, there were slightly more than 11,000 talabehs in Iran; approximately 60 percent of these were studying at the madrasehs in the city of Qom, another 25 percent were enrolled in the important madrasehs of Mashhad and Esfahan, and the rest were at madrasehs in Tabriz, Yazd, Shiraz, Tehran, Zanjan, and other cities.

Maktabs, primary schools run by the clergy, were the only educational institutions prior to the end of the nineteenth century when the first secular schools were established. Maktabs declined in numbers and importance as the government developed a national public school system beginning in the 1930s. Nevertheless, maktabs continued to exist as private religious schools right up to the Revolution. Since 1979 the public
education system has been desecularized and the maktabs and their essentially religious curricula merged with government schools.

Another major religious institution in Iran is the shrine. There are more than 1,100 shrines that vary from crumbling sites associated with local saints to the imposing shrines of Imam Reza and his sister Fatima in Mashhad and Qom, respectively. These more famous shrines are huge complexes that include the mausoleums of the venerated Eighth Imam and his sister, tombs of former shahs, mosques, madrasehs, and libraries. Imam Reza's shrine is the largest and is considered to be the holiest. In addition to the usual shrine accoutrements, Imam Reza's shrine contains hospitals, dispensaries, a museum, and several mosques located in a series of courtyards surrounding his tomb. Most of the present shrine dates from the early fourteenth century, except for the dome, which was rebuilt after being damaged in an earthquake in 1673. The shrine's endowments and gifts are the largest of all religious institutions in the country. Traditionally, free meals for as many as 1,000 people per day are provided at the shrine. Although there are no special times for visiting this or other shrines, it is customary for pilgrimage traffic to be heaviest during Shia holy periods. It has been estimated that more than 3 million pilgrims visit the shrine annually.

Visitors to Imam Reza's shrine represent all socioeconomic levels. Whereas piety is a motivation for many, others come to seek the spiritual grace or general good fortune that a visit to the shrine is believed to ensure. Commonly a pilgrimage is undertaken to petition Imam Reza to act as an intermediary between the pilgrim and God. Since the nineteenth century, it has been customary among the bazaar class and members of the lower classes to recognize those who have made a pilgrimage to Mashhad by prefixing their names with the title mashti.

The next most important shrine is that of Imam Reza's sister, Fatima, known as Hazarat-e Masumeh (the Pure Saint). The present shrine dates from the early sixteenth century, although some later additions, including the gilded tiles, were affixed in the early nineteenth century. Other important shrines are those of Shah Abdol Azim, a relative of Imam Reza, who is entombed at Rey, near Tehran, and Shah Cheragh, a brother of
Imam Reza, who is buried in Shiraz. A leading shrine honoring a person not belonging to the family of Imams is that of the Sufi master Sayyid Nimatollah Vali near Kerman. Shias make pilgrimages to these shrines and the hundreds of local imamzadehs to petition the saints to grant them special favors or to help them through a period of troubles.

Because Shias believe that the holy Imams can intercede for the dead as well as for the living, cemeteries traditionally have been located adjacent to the most important shrines in both Iran and Iraq. Corpses were transported overland for burial in Karbala in southern Iraq until the practice was prohibited in the 1930s. Corpses are still shipped to Mashhad and Qom for burial in the shrine cemeteries of these cities.

The constant movement of pilgrims from all over Iran to Mashhad and Qom has helped bind together a linguistically heterogeneous population. Pilgrims serve as major sources of information about conditions in different parts of the country and thus help to mitigate the parochialism of the regions.

A traditional source of financial support for all religious institutions has been the vaqf; a religious endowment by which land and other income-producing property is given in perpetuity for the maintenance of a shrine, mosque, madraseh, or charitable institution such as a hospital, library, or orphanage. A mutavalli administers a vaqf in accordance with the stipulations in the donor's bequest. In many vaqfs the position of mutavalli is hereditary. Under the Pahlavis, the government attempted to exercise control over the administration of vaqfs, especially those of the larger shrines. This was a source of conflict with the clergy, who perceived the government's efforts as lessening their influence and authority in traditional religious matters.

**Iranian Festivals**

Nowruz: *now* means new and the word *ruz* means day, so *nowruz* means starting a new day and it is the Celebration of the start of spring ("Rejuvenation"). It starts on the first day of spring (also the first day of the Iranian Calendar year), 21 March, in that 12 days as a sign of the past
12 months, all Iranian families gather around and visit each other. It is also the best time to re-experience the feeling of *mehr* (pure love). In *nowruz* all families talk about their best experiences of the last year and the things they are looking forward in the next year and they all become bonded again in peace.

There are numerous Iran Festivals that are celebrated by different communities in Iran. Due to its multi-cultural influences, Iran boasts of festivals that combine the essence of various cultures and religions including Syrian and Roman influences along with Persian culture and Zoroastrianism. Two of the most revered Iran festivals are: yalda and Jashan-e-Sadeh Festival. The festival of Yalda is also called Shab-e Cheleh. This festival owes its origin to ancient times when Zoroastrianism was spreading through Central Asia.

Celebrated in the month of December, the exact date of the festival is decided by calculating the longest night of the year. The date invariably falls in December (the 21st or the 22nd) in accordance with the traditional, Persian calendar system. Yalda is regarded as the night wherein evil was finally defeated and the holy powers won the struggle for humanity. The festival is also interpreted as the victory of the sacred, Zoroastrian God Mazda over the demon Ahriman.

Like most Iranian festivals, the emphasis is upon cooking delicacies at home. Among the various authentic Iranian recipes cooked during Yalda, the use of melons is emphasized. Eating melon during this time of the year is supposed to ward-off illnesses. Nearly every commercial eatery serves melon-based dishes during Yalda, ranging from pies to breads prepared with melon seeds.

Celebrated in the month of January, the Jashan festival is also referred to as the ‘Zoroastrian Midwinter’ festival. The word ‘Jashan’ means ‘celebration’ and this is one of the most enthusiastically-celebrated orthodox, Iranian festivals. Most families keep alight a pyre of wood on this day. The flame of the pyre is symbolic and is believed to chase-away the demons and mark the onset of the orthodox, Iranian New Year. The heat of
the bonfire represents purity and a good omen that overcomes the evil, represented by the frosty, cold weather that prevails during January.

Visitors are often seen sharing the small bonfires that spring-up across every street, throughout Tehran, during the Jashan festival celebrations. This is perhaps the best way of getting acquainted with the cultural heritage of the Iranian people. The conversations often revolve around the victory of Lord Mihr on the eve of the first-ever Jashan and how this festival was sustained when Christianity prevailed in Central Asia and was celebrated as a delayed New Year.

Sofreye Haft Sin: sofre (tablecloth), haft (seven), sin (the letter س). Al-Biruni said: haftsin came from jamshid because he destroyed the evil that made pars lands weak so in first day of Iranian calendar people called it nowruz (starting of a new day) and they put seven different beans on their table as a sign of thanking nature for giving humans all they need. Since then every year Iranians put haftsin on their tables, but nowadays they put seven things that start with letter س. Some people also believe that sasanian had a very beautiful plate that was given to them from China and they called it chini plate, and after some years the word chini changed into sini (a beautiful plate) so people would put seven things in a sini.

Sizdah Bedar: Persian Festival of ‘Joy and Solidarity’ (The 13th and last day of Nowruz celebration). Because of the end of twelve days (a sample of twelve month) they celebrate the 13th day as a new beginning of the next twelve month and it has no relations with the number 13 (as an unlucky number). It is celebrated outdoors along with the beauty of nature. Al-Biruni also called this day: tir ruz: blissed day.

Mehregan: Festival of Mehr ( A day of thanks giving), It is a day which everyone show the mehr or the love they have for each other and it is one of the most important days in the year.

Jashne Sade: A mid-winter feast to honor fire and to "defeat the forces of darkness, frost and cold" in which people gather around and build a fire so that they can receive good things from the fire and give the fire their incompleteness.
Shabe Chelle: The turning point. End of the longest night (darkness) of the year, and beginning of growing of the days (Lights: A celebration of Good over Evil) Also known as Shab-e Yalda they have special nuts for that night.

Sepandarmazgan: Day of Love, Friendship and Earth in ancient Persian culture.

Chaharshanbe Suri: Festival of Fire, last Tuesday night in the Iranian Calendar year. It marks the importance of the light over the darkness, arrival of spring and revival of nature.

The basis of nearly all of Iranian national festivals is from its Pre-Islamic Zoroastrian era. However, there are some festivals that are celebrated exclusively by Zoroastrians and some with less extent in other communities too. Khordadgan: celebration of the 6th day of Iranian calendar. Khoordad is one of the ezadans name which means completeness. In this day people used to go near the river or a sea to thank God for everything and they gave each other flowers as a sign of happiness. Bahmanagan: Also maintained by Iranian Muslims until the Mongol invasion. The festival was celebrated on the second day of the month of Bahman. Bahmanjana is a later modified form of Bahmanagan. Jasne Sade: Festival of Fire. Lit. the 100th day (before Nowruz). Jasne Mehregan: Festival of Mihr (or Mehr). A day of thanksgiving dedicated to the highest Angel, Mithra. Jasne Tiregan: Festival of Tir. A day dedicated to Tishtrya, Angel of the star Sirius and rain. Also celebrated in some Muslims regions up this day including Mazandaran. Nowruz: New Year's Day. March (first day of Spring). Xordad Sal (Khordad Sal): Birthday of the Prophet Zarathushtra. Zartosht No-Diso: Anniversary commemorating the death of the Prophet Zarathushtra. Ramadan (Ramazan in Iran): Iranian has special recipes as Zoolbia-Bamieh, Shole Zard, Ferni, Halva and Ash Reshteh in Ramezan. Eid ul-Fitr or Eid e Fetr: "The Festival of Fast-Breaking" which comes at the end of Ramadan. People give gifts and money to poor people, patients and the handicapped. Ashurah and Tasoa: Shi'a Muslims observe the day in mourning for Hussein and in remembrance of his martyrdom. In Iran, Iranians perform Ta'zieh, the Old Iranian dramatic parade (post Islamic era). There exists also a rather special recipe for some special drinks in this
festival. Many people cook something and offer it to their neighbors as gifts. Nimeh Saban: celebration for the twelfth and final Shi'a Imam. The festival consists of some fireworks and decorating the cities with lights, bulbs and trees. Ghadr nights: the "Night of Qadr" towards the end of Ramadan, which is when the first verses of the Qur'an, was revealed to Muhammad. Iranian stay awakes the nights and light candles. Ghorban ceremony: "The Festival of Sacrifice". In Iran, Iranian sacrifices sheep and offer the meat to neighbors and also poor people for free. There is also a barbecue in almost every house.

**Livelihood**

Iranian people hospitality is well known throughout the world. This is a characteristic of nomadic lifestyle where people need to communicate and trade with one another on their semiannual migration route.

In the northwest of Iran, tribes and nomads of Kurdish and Azeri have lived their pastoralist way of life for thousands of years. Semiannual migration called Kooch is a way of life with unique characteristics that effected Iranian culture for centuries. Pastoralist nomads in search of pasture follow their herds in beautiful mountains. They live in their self-made black tents. They celebrate their weddings up to seven night and days, like in the legends. They serve their guests in the big beautiful white tent. You can see the liveliest and happiest colors beside the cultural patterns inside tents, on every day living tools or on women dresses.

Iran is the land where various tribes belonging to a diverse geography and ecosystem lived for more than 10000 years. Any borders you choose to enter to Iran you meet a unique culture. In the north, East, West, south and centre of these country different pastoralist nomad tribes have lived together with friendship and kindness.

Most of the men in the cities, and some men in farm areas, wear western-style clothing. Most of rest of the men wears a white cotton shirt, baggy black or blue cotton Trousers, and sometimes a long blue cotton coat.
Most Iranian women in rural areas wear a loose blouse and black Trousers that are gathered at the ankles. Some women, especially in cities, wear western style clothing. Many women throughout the country wear a chuddar, a long, usually black cloth. A woman drapes a chuddar around her body, across her shoulders, and over her head. A chuddar also can be dropped across the lower part of the face to serve as a veil. Traditionally, almost all Iranian women who wore a chuddar used it as veil in public. But many women stopped following this custom during the mid-1900’s. Many of the revolutionaries who took control for the Iranian government in 1979 called for a return to the custom. The use of veils by Iranian women then increased.

Most of the people can afford little furniture. They sit on pillows instead of chairs, and eat their meals from a cloth spread on the floor. They sleep on mattresses unrolled on the floors. When they travel from one grazing area to another, they pack their possessions on the backs of donkeys or Camels. The women are children ride on top of the belongings. The men, on foot or on horse-back, lead the main Iranian foods include rice, bread, cheese and lamb. A favourite dish is Kebab (meat roasted on a skewer). Iranians drink a great deal of sweetened tea. They enjoy the juice of limes, lemons or oranges mixed with water and sugar.

Of the country's livestock, sheep are by far the most numerous, followed by goats, cattle, donkeys, horses, water buffalo, and mules. The raising of poultry for eggs and meat is prevalent. One area where production infrastructure has progressed rapidly is the poultry sector. The face of the industry has now been transformed dramatically so that the entire supply chain process can take place domestically. [24]

**Persian Rugs**

In Iran, Persian rugs have always been a vital part of the Persian culture. Iranians were some of the first people in history to weave carpets. First deriving from the notion of basic need, the Persian rug started out as a simple/pure weave of fabric that helped nomadic people living in ancient Iran stay warm from the cold, damp ground. As time progressed, the
complexity and beauty of rugs increased to a point where rugs are now bought as decorative pieces.\textsuperscript{[25]}

Because of the long history of fine silk and wool rug weaving in Iran, Persian rugs are world-renowned as some of the most beautiful, intricately designed rugs available. Around various places in Iran, rugs seem to be some of the most prized possessions of the local people. Iran currently produces more rugs and carpets than all other countries in the world put together.

Iran exports carpets to more than 100 countries, as hand-woven rugs are one of its main non-oil export items. The country produces about five million square metres of carpets annually—80 percent of which are sold in international markets. In recent times Iranian carpets have come under fierce competition from other countries producing reproductions of the original Iranian designs as well as cheaper substitutes.

The designs of Persian carpets are copied by weavers from other countries as well. Iran is also the world's largest producer and exporter of handmade carpets, producing three quarters of the world's total output. Though in recent times, this ancient tradition has come under stiff competition from machine-made products.

The exceptional Pazyryk carpet was discovered in 1949 in an archaeological excavation in 1949 in the Pazyryk Valley, in the Altai Mountains in Siberia. The carpet was found in the grave of a Scythian prince. Radiocarbon testing indicated that the Pazyryk carpet was woven in the 5th century BC. This carpet is 283 by 200 cm (approximately 9.3 by 6.5 ft) and has 36 symmetrical knots per cm² (232 per inch²). The advanced technique used in the Pazyryk carpet indicates a long history of evolution and experience in weaving. It is considered the oldest known carpet in the world. Its central field is a deep red color and it has two wide borders, one depicting deer and the other horsemen.
Persian Mythology

Persian mythology is traditional tales and stories of ancient origin, all involving extraordinary or supernatural beings. Drawn from the legendary past of Iran, they reflect the attitudes of the society to which they first belonged - attitudes towards the confrontation of good and evil, the actions of the gods, yazats (lesser gods), and the exploits of heroes and fabulous creatures. Myths play a crucial part in Iranian culture and our understanding of them is increased when we consider them within the context of Iranian history.

For this purpose we must ignore modern political boundaries and look at historical developments in the Greater Iran, a vast area covering the Caucasus, and Central Asia, beyond the frontiers of present-day Iran. The geography of this region, with its high mountain ranges, plays a significant role in many of the mythological stories. The second millennium BCE is usually regarded as the age of migration because of the emergence in western Iran of a new form of Iranian pottery, similar to earlier wares of north-eastern Iran, suggesting the arrival of the Ancient Iranian peoples. This pottery, light grey to black in colour, appeared around 1400 BCE. It is called Early Grey Ware or Iron I, the latter name indicating the beginning of the Iron Age in this area.[26]

The characters of Persian mythology almost always fall into one of two camps. They are either good, or they are evil. The resultant discord mirrors the ancient conflict, which in Persian mythology is based on the Zoroastrian concept of the dual emanation of Ahura Mazda (Avestan, or Ormuzd in later Persian). Spenta Mainyu is the source of constructive energy, while Angra Mainyu is the source of darkness, destruction, sterility, and death.

Found in abundance in Persian mythology are the daeva (Avestan, Persian: div), meaning 'celestial' or 'bright'. These divinities were worshipped in pre-Zoroastrian Mazdaism, and as in Vedic religions, the adherents of the pre-Zoroastrian form of Mazdaism considered the daeva holy and sacred beings. It is only after the religious reforms of Zarathustra (Zoroaster) that the term daeva became associated with demons. Even
then the Persians living south of the Caspian Sea continued to worship the daeva and resisted pressure to accept Zoroastrianism, and legends that involve daēva survive to this day. Moreover, Angra Mainyu or Ahriman in Persian, once the Zoroastrian epitome of evil, lost its original Zoroastrian/Mazdaist identity in later Persian literature, and was ultimately depicted as div. Religious depictions of Ahriman made in the era following the Islamic invasion show Ahriman as a giant of a man with spotted body and two horns.

The most famous legendary character in the Persian epics and mythology is Rostam. On the other side of the fence is Zahhak, a symbol of despotism who was, finally, defeated by Kaveh the Blacksmith who led a popular uprising against him. Zahhak (Azi Dahaka) was guarded by two vipers which grew out from both of his shoulders. No matter how many times they were beheaded, new heads grew on them to guard him. The snake, like in many other mythologies, was a symbol of evil, but many other animals and birds appear in Iranian mythology, and, especially, the birds were signs of good omen. Most famous of these is Simorgh, a large beautiful and powerful bird; and Homa, a royal bird of victory whose plume adorned the crowns.

Peri (Avestan: Pairika), considered a beautiful though evil woman in early mythology, gradually became less evil and more beautiful, until the Islamic period she became a symbol of beauty similar to the houris of Paradise. However, another evil woman, Patiareh, now symbolizes whores and prostitutes.

In Persian mythology, the Peri (Persian: pari) are exquisite, winged-like spirits ranking between angels and evil spirits. They sometimes visit the realm of mortals. Many Persian leaders with a Parsi religion have ruled South Asia and a famous was Persian king Kanishka a strong leader of the Avesta dynasty.

The central collection of Persian mythology is the shahnamah of Ferdowsi, written over a thousand years ago. Ferdowshi’s work draws heavily, with attribution, on the stories and characters of Mazdaism and
Zoroastrianism, not only from the Avesta, but from later texts such as the Bundahishn and the Denkard as well as many others.

**Post Modernism**

Postmodernism is a late-20th century movement in the arts, architecture, and criticism that was a departure from modernism includes skeptical interpretations of culture, literature, art, philosophy, history, economics, architecture, fiction and literary criticism. It is often associated with deconstruction and post-structuralism because its usage as a term gained significant popularity at the same time as twentieth-century post-structural thought.

The term postmodernism has been applied to a host of movements, many in art, music, and literature, that reacted against tendencies in modernism, and are typically marked by revival of historical elements and techniques.[27]

The term postmodern was first used around the 1870s. John Watkins Chapman suggested a postmodern style of painting as a way to move beyond French Impressionism. J. M. Thompson, in his 1914 article in The Hibbert Journal (a quarterly philosophical review), used it to describe changes in attitudes and beliefs in the critique of religion: "The raison d'etre of Post-Modernism is to escape from the double-mindedness of Modernism by being thorough in its criticism by extending it to religion as well as theology, to Catholic feeling as well as to Catholic tradition."[28]

In 1921 and 1925, postmodernism had been used to describe new forms of art and music. In 1942 H. R. Hays described it as a new literary form. However, as a general theory for a historical movement it was first used in 1939 by Arnold J. Toynbee: "Our own Post-Modern Age has been inaugurated by the general war of 1914–1918". [29]

In 1949 the term was used to describe a dissatisfaction with modern architecture, and led to the postmodern architecture movement, perhaps also a response to the modernist architectural movement known as the International Style. Postmodernism in architecture is marked by the re-
emergence of surface ornament, reference to surrounding buildings in urban architecture, historical reference in decorative forms, and non-orthogonal angles.

In 1971, in a lecture delivered at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, Mel Bochner described "post-modernism" in art as having started with Jasper Johns, "who first rejected sense-data and the singular point-of-view as the basis for his art, and treated art as a critical investigation."[30]

More recently, Walter Truett Anderson described postmodernism as belonging to one of four typological world views, which he identifies as either (a) Postmodern-ironist, which sees truth as socially constructed, (b) Scientific-rational, in which truth is found through methodical, disciplined inquiry, (c) Social-traditional, in which truth is found in the heritage of American and Western civilization, or (d) Neo-romantic, in which truth is found through attaining harmony with nature and/or spiritual exploration of the inner self.[31]

Postmodernist ideas in philosophy and the analysis of culture, and society expanded the importance of theory and has been the point of departure for works of literature, architecture, and design, as well as being visible in marketing/business and the interpretation of history, law and culture, starting in the late 20th century. These developments re-evaluation of the entire Western value system (love, marriage, popular culture, shift from industrial to service economy) that took place since the 1950s and 1960s, with a peak in the Social Revolution of 1968 are described with the term Postmodernity, as opposed to Postmodernism, a term referring to an opinion or movement. Postmodernism has also been used interchangeably with the term post-structuralism out of which postmodernism grew, a proper understanding of postmodernism or doing justice to the postmodernist thought demands an understanding of the poststructuralist movement and the ideas of its advocates. Post-structuralism resulted similarly to postmodernism by following a time of structuralism. It is characterized by new ways of thinking through structuralism, contrary to the original form. "Postmodernist" describes part of a movement; "Postmodern" places it in the period of time since the 1950s, making it a part of contemporary history.
The idea of Postmodernism in architecture began as a response to the perceived blandness and failed Utopianism of the Modern movement. Modern Architecture, as established and developed by Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier, was focused on the pursuit of a perceived ideal perfection, and attempted harmony of form and function, and dismissal of frivolous ornament. Critics of modernism argued that the attributes of perfection and minimalism themselves were subjective, and pointed out anachronisms in modern thought and questioned the benefits of its philosophy. Definitive postmodern architecture such as the work of Michael Graves and Robert Venturi rejects the notion of a 'pure' form or 'perfect' architectonic detail, instead conspicuously drawing from all methods, materials, forms and colors available to architects.

Modernist Ludwig Mies van der Rohe is associated with the phrase "less is more"; in contrast Venturi famously said, "Less is a bore." Postmodernist architecture was one of the first aesthetic movements to openly challenge Modernism as antiquated and "totalitarian", favoring personal preferences and variety over objective, ultimate truths or principles.

It is this atmosphere of criticism, skepticism, and emphasis on difference over and against unity that distinguishes the postmodernism aesthetic. Among writers defining the terms of this discourse is Charles Jencks, described by Architectural Design Magazine as "the definer of Post-Modernism for thirty years" and the "internationally acclaimed critic..., whose name became synonymous with Post-modernism in the 80s".

Music

The musical culture of Persia, while distinct, is closely related to other musical systems of the West and Central Asia. It has also affinities to the music cultures of the Indian subcontinent, to a certain degree even to those of Africa, and, in the period after 1850 particularly, to that of Europe. Its history can be traced to some extent through these relationships. Like that of most of the world’s cultures, the music of Persia has depended on oral/aural transmission and learning.
In order to examine Persian music, that of the neighboring countries should first be tackled, since the states which have either impressed our music or have been influenced by it have either been part of Iran in ancient times or just adjacent to it. Besides the relation between the neighboring countries, given that Iran was located in-between the east and west, the frequent crossings of various tribes left its impressions on Persian culture. The two issues needs to be examined closely. Though a thorough discussion of the issues in question won't be possible here, but I will do my best to show such a mutual impact as far as possible.

Persian culture is one of the world's most ancient. Given that no remarkable information and documents are available on its ancient era, nonetheless, on the basis of the existing evidences one might realize the existence of an integrated music in the ancient Persia. The oldest document is a cylindrical stamp dating back to the 5th millennium BC, which has been unearthed at Choghamish near Dezful city. It shows the world's most ancient music ensemble, which is consisted of a harpist and a drummer.

On the other hand, Persian music might have been influenced by the Indian music, which might be linked to the music of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan. This is, nonetheless, nothing new and its evident sample is Abu Reyhan Birouni’s book titled ‘Mal ol-Hind’.

The impression left on Persian music by the Indian music since ancient times is quite evident from the common Aryan traditional music, among which the one with the well-known story about the Indian gypsies might be the most famous. It is said that Bahram Gour requested his father-in-law, who was India's monarch, to send 12,000 musicians to Iran in order to entertain the Iranian nation by playing Indian music. The consequent impression left on Persian music has been talked about to some extent. The existence of such Indian musical instruments as "van" and "darai" in Iran marks the traces of Indian music. Besides coming across musical pieces such as Ramkali in Abu-Ata, Denasari in Homayoun, Rak-e-Abdollah, Rak-e-Hindi, Rak-e-Kashmir in Mahour and Rast-Panjgah are samples of such an impression. It should be clarified that Ramkali and Denasari are Indian Ragas (modes). Besides Rak is the Arabic version of Rag, which is somehow related to the Persian word Rang (color). The impression of Iranian music
on the Indian music is still more evident, which is contributed to the presence of Iranian musicians specially Amir Khosro Dehlavi, the Indian Persian-speaking poet and the famous singer and musician at Akbar Shah's court. Indian music of today is based on two styles known as Hindustani and Karnatic Sangeet. Hindustani style commonly played in northern India appeared under the impression of Iranian music. The Indian singing styles including Qavali, Ghazal, and Tarana and so on are all rooted in Persian music. The Indian sitar is taken after the Persian setar, which has undergone some changes to produce the melodies suitable for Indian music. According to the latest research, the Indian "tabla" is rooted in three instruments including the Iranian "naghareh", the Iranian/Indian "doholak" and the Indian "pakhavaj". On the other hand the presence of the Iranian and Arabic words such as "saz" (instrument), "mezrab" (plectrum) denotes such an impression. Unfortunately, further elaboration in this respect would divert our attention from the original issue.

Given that China played a decisive role in the cultural and musical exchange, it should be mentioned as well. Several Iranian instruments, which were taken to China, were influenced by some characteristics of the Chinese music. For instance, the Chinese instrument known as "suona" is rooted in the "sorna" (Persian oboe) and is related to some extent to the "shahnay" (Indian oboe). Another such example is the Iranian "barbat" (Persian lute) that was taken to China and became known as "pipa", which should have later been taken to Japan and the Japanese called it "biwa". Another instrument quite resembling the Persian "tonbak" (goblet-shaped drum) called "shuhai-gata-katamen-taiko" is also commonly played in Japan, while the instrument played in Sistan-Baluchistan province of Iran, known as "binjo" is probably of Japanese origin.

It is interesting to note, however, that the culture of Uyghur Turks has been greatly impressed by the Persian culture and the presence of such Persian instruments as "tar", "khoshtar", "dap", etc. is the best evidence. Uyghuri music is based on modal style and is comprised of 12 modes, which should be rooted in the well-known Iranian 12-modal.

Given that we already surveyed the common music of eastern Iran, let's tackle that of western Iran. According to the surveys conducted
so far by unknown researchers, it has been revealed that the Greek music is originally rooted in the Orient. Likewise, the Turkish music has so much in common with Persian music that they might hardly be considered independent from one another. Therefore, the Persian music should be taken as one of the basics of the Turkish music. For instance, the Greek goblet drum known as "toubeleki" which is from the same family as the Turkish instrument called "dumbelek", should have been rooted in the Persian goblet drum known as "dombak". "Dombalak" is a Pahlavi (middle Persian language) name which is a converted form of "dombak". It should be noted, however, that once the Islamic Civilization prevailed, the use of Greek texts in theoretical music became common, which might be taken as the theoretical impression of the Greek music on the theoretical music of the world of Islam.

But what is more important is to discuss the music of Arabic-speaking countries. Everything that is related to the Islamic civilization has been attributed by some biased historians to the Arabs on the mere ground that they have been written in Arabic, while the share of Persians have either been ignored or rendered quite pale. The Islamic civilization is known to have been quite common in the world of Islam over 9th-11th centuries owing mostly to the committed attempts of the Iranian scholars. It should be mentioned that what is known today as the Arab music is rooted in the music of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia.

**Cinema**

Iranian cinema has thrived in modern Iran, and many Iranian directors have garnered worldwide recognition for their work. Iranian movies have won over three hundred awards in the past twenty-five years including Oscars. One of the best-known directors is Abbas Kiarostami. The media of Iran is a mixture of private and state-owned, but books and movies must be approved by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance before being released to the public. The Internet has become enormously popular among the Iranian youth. Iran is now the world's fourth largest country of bloggers.
Iran throughout its history has been a melting pot for other cultures. Repeated introductions of new cultures through conquerors and traders from Aryan civilization until today have developed a kind of social subconscious filtration system which absorbs only the useful aspects of the frequently imposed, ever newer external cultures. This factor made it easier for Iran to adopt the western-originated cinema, in spite of Moslem religious beliefs that opposed it. Yet, although superficially adaptable, deep down a majority of Iranians remain Persian, i.e. self-reliant individualists.

Before the advent of cinema in Iran, entertainment was a luxury afforded by only a small, well-to-do segment of the population while the great majority of the people had no money to spare. Morteza Ravadi, Iranian historian expresses this point very well:

"Class differences, lack of social and economic security and feudalistic wars (in the country) had the life of the people and particularly that of the great majority of the working classes so chaotic and unsure that people wished only for security and equal justice, to be able to make even a substandard living and continue their unbearable lives. Obviously, under such circumstances entertainment and recreation were of secondary importance...and the rich entertained themselves with drinking, love making with pretty girls and handsome boys, gambling, hunting, horseback riding, polo playing, music and singing, attending ceremonial chess and backgammon parties, watching the performances of clowns and comedians, attending dancing and singing parties, and listening to entertaining stories."

In the West, cinema complemented the existing popular forms of entertainment such as theaters, traveling musical shows and the various kinds of stage productions. But in Iran, cinema virtually replaced most forms of mass entertainment for various political, economical, historical and cultural reasons. When cinema came to Iran it was a diversion for the well-to-do for about ten years or so before it turned into a mass entertainment medium. Since 1905, when the first movie theater opened in Tehran, the Iranian government has made a special point of keeping ticket prices low so that all segments of the population, at any economic level, might have access to this source of recreation. The early history of film
making in Iran is far from clear because of a lack of easily accessible data, death of the early motion pictures pioneers and loss of almost all the early footage.

It is claimed that the first film made in Iran was of the coronation of Muzaffar al-Din Shah in 1896 photographed by Rusi Khan. However there is no evidence to substantiate the claim. But it is certain that Shah during his visit to Paris in 1900 saw moving pictures, liked them, ordered his official photographer to purchase motion picture equipment. Thus cinema became a diversion for royal court and well-to-do section of the society when it came to Iran (1900).

The early film making in Iran was often supported by the royalty of the time who were interested only in the entertainment value of the medium. Therefore, most of films of this period are news reels of activities, such as various royal and religious ceremonies which were mostly screened in the royal palace. One could see these newsreels at the homes of dignitaries during weddings, circumcision celebrations and birth ceremonies.

The first pioneer of this film era is Mirza Ebrahim Khan Akasbashi who was the official photographer in the court of Muzzafar-e Din Shah, the fifth Shah of the Qajar dynasty. The second, Mandy Russi Khan, who originally was from Russia, filmed Moharram mourning ceremonies (processed in Russia and not shown in Iran) and Muzzafared-Din Shah's coronation ceremonies.

By 1900, Ebrahim Khan Sahafbashi a nationalistic antique dealer, on the way back from Europe bought an Edison Kinetoscope film projector and a number of films. He converted the backyard of his antique shop into an open air movie house; the first movie theater in Iran came into being in 1905. The customers were mostly members of upper class families or royalty.

Khan Baba Motazedi, an Iranian electromechanical engineering student, brought home from Paris a 35 mm Gaumont camera, some raw stock, film processing chemicals and projector. At first he experimented
with production of 'entertainment films' for private viewing featuring his family members and friends. Later, by order of the Minister of War, he became involved in filming the various ceremonies at the court of Reza Shah, the father of the last Shah of Iran.

1906 in Iran was the year of constitutional revolution, but the establishment of parliamentary democracy did not take place until 1911. Nonetheless the era of democracy did not last long. In 1921, the British government by supporting Reza Khan (later he called himself Reza Shah and established the Pahlavi dynasty) and staging a coup d'etat, overthrew Ahmad Shah, the last member of Qajar dynasty.

Considering that Reza Shah was one of the more progressive monarchs in the recent history of Iran, and since he was fascinated by the means of modernization, it is odd that he could not conceive the role and the importance of the motion picture industry in society. While he patronized the arts, revived ancient arts and crafts, preserving them from extinction, and even encouraged the modern arts, his efforts toward cinema were very small. Besides a few documentary films which were made to record the royal ceremonies and a few newsreels of the events, the rest of the film which were exhibited in theaters were imported from Europe, the United States, and Russia.

The first feature length movie, Abi and Rabi was not made until 1930, when Ovans Ohanian, a young Iranian-American, immigrated back to Iran from Russia where he had spent most of his life and had studied cinema at The Cinema Academy of Moscow. From the very beginning he realized that making movies without a professional cast and crew is something next to impossible. He established a foundation for a film industry—an acting school to train actors and actresses to be used in films. Since the general attitude of the people was that cinema could not develop into an art form and/or a profession, Parvareshghahe Artistiye Cinema (The Cinema Artist Education center) attracted only sixteen students and two instructors, Ohanian and Sa’id Nafici.

Ohanian, with the help of Motazedi as cinematographer; Sako Elidzeh, producer; two of his students, Zarrabi and Sohrabi as leading
actors, wrote and directed the first Persian silent feature movie. Abi and Rabi, a 35 mm, black and white, comedy is the story of the adventures of two men, one tall and one short, and based on a Danish comedy series. It was shown in 1930 in Cinema Mayak, where it was well received. However, no copy of this film is known to exist.

The success of this film at the box office encouraged Ohanian and his crew to produce another comedy entitled Haji Agha (1932, the story of a religious man's daughter and her fiance who want to act in a film.

If Ohanian's contribution to Iranian cinema has been considered great, the trend he left behind was not harmless. Imitation of foreign films of mostly comedy and melodrama genres and almost total displacement of any realism in later films were the results of his early influence. At the time Iran was in an awakening stage, when the society was in desperate need of social consciousness and a modern understanding of life, and at a time when the formation of its modern economy was taking place. Entertainment in general and entertainment and escapist film in particular was the last thing that Iran needed at that time for progressive social growth. Spending hours in a movie theater and watching nonsense melodrama, Hollywood-Style and accomplishing nothing, was a luxury that Iranians could not afford.

A student of The Cinema Artist Educational Center in Tehran, Ebrahim Moradi, a 'born and bred' Iranian, began the second feature film. But a series of obstacles, including lack of adequate technical equipment and trained motion picture personnel, government restrictions on importation of cinema equipment, and lack of proper production funds prevented the film from reaching completion. The unfinished The Brother's Revenge (1932), a black and white, 35 mm, silent, forty-five minutes in length was written, directed, and photographed by Moradi himself. This unsatisfactory experience motivated Moradi to establish the third Iranian film studio, Iran Film Company, Limited. The first production of this studio was Sensual (1934), a critical comparison between the pitfalls of city dwelling and the simple and unspoiled way of life in the village—a comparison of the change in social values in the cities because of westernization of Iran with the traditional way of life in the villages. From
about 1925, the challenge of modernization of the big city against the simplicity and purity of the traditional way of life in Iranian society became a theme upon which to build stories that were popular with cinema-goers and safe from governmental censorship.

The first Iranian "talkie" entitled The Lor Girl was released (1933) in two Tehran cinemas, Mayak and Sepah. The story of the film was based on a comparison between the state of security in Iran at the end of the Qajar dynasty and during Reza Shah's period. The star and script writer was a poet and a writer, Abdulhossein Sepanta who has been acknowledged as the father of Iranian sound movies.

This was a period of mostly newsreels. Some of the subjects were the arrival of Reza Shah at the National Constituent Assembly (December 15, 1925), horse races, and Army parades. Also, opening ceremonies of the trans-Iranian railway system, the Pahlavi communication center, the Bank Melli Iran (National Bank of Iran), and the opening of the installations of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in Khuzestan were typical topics. All of these newsreels were shot, processed and printed by Khan Baba Motazedi. Some of these newsreels were shown at the Royal Court but most were shown in the army compounds as well as in the theaters.

There were fifteen theaters at this time and all were located in the northern avenues of Tehran, Iran's capital, where most of their customers were upper class people. Later, with financial aid from the government and with the supervision of Motazedi, the first movie theater was built in the southern part of Tehran where the poor lived. It is called Tammadon and is still operating.

Following Reza Shah's coronation in 1926, the most controversial period of the contemporary history in Iran began. Those with a leftist point of view, as well as those with a religious point of view were antagonistic to Reza Shah's regime. Those with a more 'moderate' view criticized lack of freedoms, yet they applaud Reza Shah's modernization of Iran.

Overall social and political conditions at this period militated against the growth of the motion picture industry and audience size. For years, the
Moslem clergy prejudiced the vast majority of people against anything new. There was social pressure against the showing of films and the establishment of movie theaters. Women were not allowed to go to movie theaters (later one theater created by Ali Vakili in the Zoroastrian school hall in Tehran was devoted to showing films to women only).

The shooting of The Lor Girl started in April 1932, took seven months to complete, in a place called Ghamoor on the outskirts of the city of Bombay, India. The financial success of the film encouraged The Imperial Film Company of Bombay and Sepanta to produce other Iranian films, in India, such as, Ferdowsi (1935), the story of life of the most celebrated epic poet of Iran; Shirin and Farhad (1935), an Iranian classic love story which is believed to be partly true, takes place during the reign of the Sassanian king, Khosrow I, known as Anushirvan, "The Just" (531-579); Black Eyes (1935), the story of Nader Shah's invasion of India in 1737, and the effects of the invasion on the relationship of two lovers; and Laili and Majnun (1937), an eastern love story similar to western story of Romeo and Juliet.

Upon the completion of the last film, Sepanta returned to Iran, hoping to continue his film-making activities in his home country. But various obstructions and lack of financial support by the government or the private sector, forced him to part with cinema. He started the Sepanta newspaper in 1943 in Esfahan (a central city of Iran), and by the mid-1950's he became the Iranian assistant of the United States Aid program in Esfahan. Throughout his life (1907 Tehran-1969 Esfahan) he wrote or translated eighteen books and made five Iranian feature films which for many years will be remembered because of their themes, quality, and technique. With Sepanta's departure from cinema, the production of Iranian sound movies in India came to an end and no feature films were made in Iran until 1947, when the new Iranian film industry was founded by Esmail Koushan. Koushan was hardly a sincere artist, but rather seemed more interested in the commercial exploitation of cinema.

**Art and Architecture**

Persian art and architecture, works of art and structures produced in the region of Asia traditionally known as Persia and now called Iran. Bounded by fierce mountains and deserts, the high plateau of Iran has seen
the flow of many migrations and the development of many cultures, all of which have added distinctive features to the many styles of Persian art and architecture. There are excellent collections of Persian art in Tehran; the Metropolitan Museum; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Persian architecture is the architecture of contemporary Iran and the Iranian Cultural Continent. It has a continuous history from at least 5000 BCE to the present, with characteristic examples distributed over a vast area from Turkey and Iraq to Northern India and Tajikistan, and from the Caucasus to Zanzibar. Persian buildings vary from peasant huts to tea houses and garden, pavilions to "some of the most majestic structures the world has ever seen". [33]

Iranian architecture generally displays great variety, both structural and aesthetic, developing gradually and coherently out of earlier traditions and experience. Without sudden innovations, and despite the repeated trauma of invasions and cultural shocks, it has achieved individuality distinct from that of other Muslim countries". [34] Its paramount virtues are several: "a marked feeling for form and scale; structural inventiveness, especially in vault and dome construction; a genius for decoration with a freedom and success not rivaled in any other architecture". [35]

Traditionally, the guiding formative motif of Iranian architecture has been its cosmic symbolism by which man is brought into communication and participation with the powers of heaven. This theme has not only given unity and continuity to the architecture of Persia, but has been a primary source of its emotional character as well. According to Persian historian and archaeologist Arthur Pope, the supreme Iranian art, in the proper meaning of the word, has always been its architecture. The supremacy of architecture applies to both pre-and post-Islamic periods.

Any reservation about attributing to Iran primary status among the countries contributing to the art of the ancient Middle East must be associated with the discontinuity of its early history and the comparatively incomplete state of its archaeological exploration. Nevertheless, it is clear that Iranian art maintained a distinctive identity from prehistoric times onward; thus, characteristics seen in designs on painted pottery of the 4th millennium BC can also be recognized, for instance, in the sculpture of the
Achaemenian Persians. One of these characteristics—manifest in bronze casting and stone carving as well as in painted ornament—is the predominance of decoration over representation. Such purely Iranian predilections seem, surprisingly, to have survived the historical hiatus in the 2nd and 3rd millennia BC, during which the more culturally advanced regions of the country were so profoundly influenced by the ideas and artistic formulas of neighbouring Mesopotamia. During the better-documented years of the 1st millennium, they again survived; side-by-side with the innovations imposed by Greek and other foreign craftsmen, and was later in fact reciprocally transmitted to Europe.

Although earlier civilizations are known, the first archaeological finds of artistic importance are the superb ceramics from Susa and Persepolis (c.3500 BC). On tall goblets and large bowls are symmetrical designs that cover the surfaces with stylized abstractions of animals, particularly water birds and ibex. The choice of subjects from nature, simplified into almost unrecognizable patterns, may be called the formative principle of Persian art. Much of 4th-millennium Iranian art is strongly influenced by that of Mesopotamia. The 3rd-millennium art of Elam, found at Sialk and Susa, also follows Mesopotamian styles, and this trend is continued in the less well-known Elam and Urartu art of the 2nd millennium.

The art that comes from mountainous Luristan has aroused a good deal of controversy. Probably dated 1200–700 BC, the many small bronze objects are thought to be mostly weapons and horse trappings—bits, bridle ornaments, rein rings, and pole tops. The treasure of Ziwiye (Sakiz), a hoard containing gold, silver, and ivory objects, included a few Luristan pieces. These provide a definite link with the art of the Scythians known as the animal style. The Ziwiye Treasure is roughly divided into four styles: Assyrian, Scythian, proto-Achaemenid (with strong Greek influences), and native, or provincial. Dated c.700 BC, this remarkable collection of objects illustrates the heterogeneity of types and sources in early Iranian art.

The Median period is one of the least well defined periods of Iranian Archeology. To speak of Median Art means, first of all, mentioning the huge gaps in our knowledge of Median history. We know that Medes were mentioned in neo Assyrian annals from the year 836 B.C. onwards; as late
as in King Esarhaddon’s vassal treaties (672 B.C.) they are represented by petty princes: central kingship had not yet been established, the foundation of which was later ascribed to the legendary judge, Deīokes (Herodotus 1.96ff.). When the Assyrian empire fell in 615 612 B.C., the Medes played a major role (D. J. Wiseman, Chronicles of the Chaldaean Kings, London, 1956, pp. 13, 15, 57). The end of their dynasty is shrouded by legends around Cyrus the Great (Isaiah; Herodotus; Xenophon).

Iran is home to one of the richest artistic traditions in world history and encompasses many disciplines, including architecture, painting, weaving, pottery, calligraphy, metalworking and stonemasonry. Carpet-weaving is one of the most distinguished manifestations of Persian culture and art, and dates back to ancient Persia. Persians were among the first to use mathematics, geometry, and astronomy in architecture and also have extraordinary skills in making massive domes which can be seen frequently in the structure of bazaars and mosques. The main building types of classical Iranian architecture are the mosque and the palace. Besides being home to a large number of art houses and galleries, Iran also holds one of the largest and most valuable jewel collections in the world.

Iran ranks seventh among countries in the world with the most archeological architectural ruins and attractions from antiquity as recognized by UNESCO. Fifteen of UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites are creations of Iranian architecture.

**Cuisine**

The cuisine of Iran is diverse, with each province featuring dishes, as well as culinary traditions and styles, distinct to their regions. The main Persian cuisines are combinations of rice with meat, chicken or fish and
some onion, vegetables, nuts, and herbs. Herbs are frequently used along with fruits such as plums, pomegranates, quince, prunes, apricots, and raisins. Onions and garlic are normally used in the preparation of the accompanying course, but are also served separately during meals, either in raw or pickled form. Iran is also famous for its caviar. Iranian food is not piquant.

Persian cuisine, although strongly influenced by the culinary traditions of the Arab world and the subcontinent, is largely a product of the geography and domestic food products of Iran. Rice is a dietary staple, and meat—mostly lamb—plays a part in virtually every meal. Vegetables are central to the Iranian diet, with onions an ingredient of virtually every dish. Herding has long been a traditional part of the economy, and dairy products—milk, cheese, and particularly yogurt—are common ingredients in Persian dishes. Traditional Persian cuisine tends to favour subtle flavours and relatively simple preparations such as khūresh (stew) and kabobs. Saffron is the most distinctive spice used, but much other flavouring—including lime, mint, turmeric, and rosewater—are common, as are pomegranates and walnuts.

Persian cuisine is the traditional and modern style of cooking of Iran. Situated in the Middle East and West Asia, the Iranian culinary style is unique to Iran, though has historically both influenced and has been influenced by Iran's neighbouring and conquered regions at various stages throughout its history. Specifically, these have been mutual culinary influences to and from Anatolian cuisine, Caucasian cuisine, Mesopotamian Cuisine, Levantine cuisine, Greek cuisine, Central Asian Cuisine, and minor aspects from Russian cuisine. The cuisines of the Caucasus and Turkey are heavily influenced by that of Iran, due to geographical proximity, ethnic relations, shared empires, and conquerings by such as the Achaemenids, Sassanians, Seljuks, Safavids, Afsharids, Ottomans and Qajars. Fresh green herbs are frequently used along with fruits such as plums, pomegranates, quince, prunes, apricots, and raisins. Typical Persian main dishes are combination of rice with meat, lamb, chicken, or fish and some onion, vegetables, nuts, and herbs. To achieve a balanced taste, characteristic Persian flavorings such as saffron, dried limes, cinnamon, and parsley are mixed delicately and used in some special dishes.
Persian cuisine is not widely recognized and is sometimes confused with Middle Eastern cuisine, a much broader and more general term. Many Persian super-markets and restaurants are labelled as Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, or "International" in order to broaden their appeal to the Western consumer. Persian cuisine has similarity to Turkish and Greek cuisines in its kebabs and other dishes due to cultural contacts with Greeks and Turks. Persian cuisine is gaining popularity in multicultural cities like London, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Washington, D.C., and Toronto, which have significant Persian populations. Los Angeles and its environs, in particular, are well known for the number and quality of Persian restaurants which are usually centered on kebab, but almost always also serve various stews as well.

Sports

Many sports are practiced in Iran, both traditional and modern. Tehran, for example, was the first city in West Asia to host the Asian Games in 1974, and continues to host and participate in major international sporting events to this day. Freestyle wrestling has been traditionally regarded as Iran's national sport, however today; football is the most popular sport in Iran.

With two thirds of Iran's population under the age of 25, many sports are practised in Iran, both traditional and modern. Iran is the birthplace of polo, and Varzesh-e Pahlavani. Freestyle wrestling has been traditionally regarded as Iran's national sport, however today, the most popular sport in
Iran is soccer with the country having won the Asian Cup on three occasions. Basketball is also very popular in Iran where the national team won two of the last three Asian Championships. In 1974, Iran became the first country in West Asia to host the Asian Games. Iran is home to several unique skiing resorts, with the Tochal resort being the world's fifth-highest ski resort (3,730 m/12,238 ft at its highest station), and located only fifteen minutes away from Tehran. Being a mountainous country, Iran is a venue for hiking, rock climbing, and mountain climbing. The origin of chess is a disputed issue, but evidence exists to give credence to the theory that chess originated in Persia, and later found its way into the Indian subcontinent. For example, the earliest recorded history of chess is to be found in Persian writing, and the earliest chess pieces found also being from Persia. All of this evidence lends weight to the theory that chess in Persia (Shatranj) pre-dated chess in India (Chatrang). Chess later spread from Persia into other nations in the Islamic world.

Sports and athletic exercises were among the most fundamental daily pursuits of the people in Ancient Iran. The society attached special status to sportsmen who thanks to their physical strength and courage, defended their family and homeland when the need arose. They were welcomed everywhere with much enthusiasm, the people took much pride in their sportsmen and praised and admired them for their courageous deeds. According to their religious teaching, the Iranian Zoroastrians in their prayers sought first the beauties of heaven and then physical strength and mental power. They believed in a healthy and powerful body.

The ancient Iranians attached spiritual meaning to their spoils activities which they modeled on their weapons. Even the Mages (religious sages) while engaging in prayers in their temples held a mace in their hands, not unlike the British bishops who hung swords on their belts. *Avesta*, the sacred book of the ancient religions of Iran glorifies the champions and sportsmen as much, if not more than saints and men of God. The older generation made arrangements for the ancient narratives and epics to be read to the young either from books or from those who had learned them from their elders.
This tradition has survived until today and outlived the rest of ages. Thus, even today, it can be observed that among the tribes and in the tea houses storytelling is practiced with the same enthusiasm as it was in bygone ages. The extent to which the Iranians were interested in their heroes and champions is revealed, among other things, by the fact that in the Persian language there are over 30 words to label the concept of a hero or champion.

Science and Technology

Ancient Iranians built Qanats and Yakhchal to provide and keep water. The first windmill appeared in Iran in the 9th century. Iranians contributed significantly to the current understanding of astronomy, natural science, medicine, mathematics, and philosophy. Khwarizmi is widely hailed as the father of algebra. Ethanol (alcohol) was first identified by Persian alchemists such as Muhammad ibn Zakariya Razi. Throughout the middle Ages, the philosophy and mathematics of the Ancient Greeks and Persians were furthered and preserved within Persia. The Academy of Gundishapur was a renowned centre of learning in the city of Gundeshapur during late antiquity and was the most important medical centre of the ancient world during the 6th and 7th centuries. During this period, Persia became a centre for the manufacture of scientific instruments, retaining its reputation for quality well into the 19th century.

The Iranian nuclear program was launched in the 1950s. Iran is the 7th country in production of uranium hexafluoride and controls the entire cycle for producing nuclear fuel. Iran's current facilities includes several research reactors, a uranium mine, an almost complete commercial nuclear reactor, and uranium processing facilities that include a uranium enrichment plant. Recently head of the British spy agency MI6 forecast that Iran will achieve nuclear weapon capability in two years.

Iranian scientists outside Iran have also made some major contributions to science. In 1960, Ali Javan co-invented the first gas laser and fuzzy set theory was introduced by Lotfi Zadeh. Iranian cardiologist, Tofy Mussivand invented and developed the first artificial cardiac pump, the precursor of the artificial heart. Furthering research and treatment of
diabetes, HbA1c was discovered by Samuel Rahbar. Iranian physics is especially strong in string theory, with many papers being published in Iran. Iranian-American string theorist Kamran Vafa proposed the Vafa-Witten theorem together with Edward Witten.
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1. Hodgson 1974, pp. 293–294: Quote: "It could even be said that Islamicate civilization, historically, is divisible in the more central areas into an earlier 'caliphal' and a later 'Persianate' phase; with variants in the outlying regions—Maghrib, Sudanic lands, Southern Seas, India,(p. 294)"


7. Mohammad Faique; A complete study of Persian Drama (1906-1995), p.28-29

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10. Interviews: Islam philosophy and education


16. “Iran Index of Religion”

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