

Iran, A Bridge Between the East and West of the World

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Dear Editor,

Iranian territory has long been a bridge between Eastern and Western parts of the world. Vast oceans located in the southern Iranian Plateau and the northern-southern stretch of the Caspian Sea as well as impracticability of freezing steppes on the north side of this lake have virtually presented Iran as the sole connecting way between the Indian subcontinent, China Plain, Levant, Africa, Arabia and Europe; thus, Iran can be considered as the crossroad of global communications and interactions and this is the very basic concept greatly influencing the fate of the Iranian life throughout the history. Interference between mountain and desert equation, Iranian Plateau dynamism as well as adjacency to the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea have caused a very astonishing climatic diversity; then, by traveling short distances, dramatic differences can be observed. Climatic and living diversity in Iran is to such an extent that each habitat has its own climatic conditions, living resources, and distinct barriers and in short, unique living equations; thus, from this viewpoint, no two habitats are identical.

Inherent capacities of Iran can be singled out as the main cause for the enduring history of habitation in Iran, whether in the set of seasonal migration (Nomadism) between summer (*sardsīr* or *yeylāq*) and winter (*garmsīr* or *qešlāq*) quarters. In fact, geographical location of Iran has facilitated the migration of a vast number of nomads into this area and the habitation potentials offered by it have made the gradual transition between nomadic life to the first forms of settlement presenting the emergence of rural communities. Therefore, the *Aryans* (from which the ancient word of "Iran" is derived) were not the first migrating people arriving here but among the early peoples who gradually and in several stages entered this land.

Oldness of the settlement in Iran resulted in the fact that there exists no habitable place remaining uninhabited in it; rather, all its habitats have the average lifetime of

some thousand years. Main evidence of this claim is that there is almost no city, farm, or even natural and geological marvel such as mountains, mountaintops, springs or winds which remain unidentified and thus not being designated with an ancient name, expression or term, or even not melted in old tales and narratives. To the extent that currently many of these designations are unfamiliar to us due to their oldness.

Even though the chronological study of Iranian history may lead to the assumption that Iranians have intermittently been suffering from discontinuances due to internal and external problems and apparently Iranian cultural works have persistently transformed as the Iranian culture was mixing with other cultures, but a deeper contemplation behind this changing and variegated appearance would present a story of the continuation of a unique nature. As a matter of fact, Iranian culture is a fluid reality which is independent of semblances, and in fact what is constantly been changed during the course of history are its manifestations. This is comparable to a tree that by changes loses its leaves and fruits. However, the same tree can produce fruits of different kinds as a result of grafting its branches with other plants, but on the whole, since it has stable and deep origins (roots) maintains its identity to the extent that even with all its alterations we are ensured that the tree is the same one.

In fact, this might be true that during some periods of time and as a result of either unhealthiness or encounter with other culture's representations, various aspects of Iranian life and history could have been changed, but its identity has never been altered. Therefore even if one may witnesses the existence of differences between art and architecture of Qajar and Safavid or those of Safavid and Timurid, or even Islamic and pre-Islamic period; nevertheless, it is also true that they fundamentally remain reliant on invariable principals, making them easily recognizable as Iranian art and architecture; such as the indivisibly nature of technique and art in Iranian crafts,

also tendency of dematerializing the objects, and bounding by geometrical orders.

Iran is not a distinct ethnic, racial, geographical or even political reality. In other words, one can neither identify the exact political or geographical boundaries of "Iran", nor recognize a particular race of people as Iranians; even Persian-speaking characteristic is not an all-inclusive criterion for being Iranian. In fact, being an Iranian involves a cultural and linguistic diversity including being *Kurdish*, *Azari*, *Lor*, *Baluchi*, *Tājik*, *Arab* or *Fars*. The crossing point of this sum of cultural diversity is the very "being Iranian". From this standpoint, cultural diversity on the scale smaller than the country never harmed cultural unity on the huge scale; All these cultural varieties are members of a body as a whole called Iran each of which finding its particular role towards this body in such a way that their absence would create disturbances in the existence of Iran. Accordingly, the characteristic of being Iranian consolidated during a long history and not confined within the present political boundaries of Iran.

The exclusive location of Iran on the historical junction of the world has been the reason for the Iranians

to play the role of the mediator of global interactions and communications. Consequently, Iranians have always been the facilitators of the meetings between the East and West in different aspects to the extent that almost all of the commercial, scientific, artistic, and even spiritual exchanges were possible by passing through Iran. The story of the inhabitants of Iran is tied with such exchanges. However, Iranians were not merely the neutral facilitators for these interactions rather had their cultural digestive nature. Many of these gifts were entwined with the Iranian culture in such an extensive way that the end result was a new product that whilst novel it included the Iranian spirit. The influences of such association can be observed in designs and drawings of various crafts and professions, for instance tile works, painting, carving, and carpet. Even though the Persian names of such patterns are the name of cultural origin; such as *Eslīmī* (arabesque), *Khatāyī* (from Cathay), *Farangi* (Frankish), and *Rūmī* (Byzantine Roman), may imply external source; but, undoubtedly, they are exclusively Iranian designs.