

The Persian Prowess: Architecture and Literature

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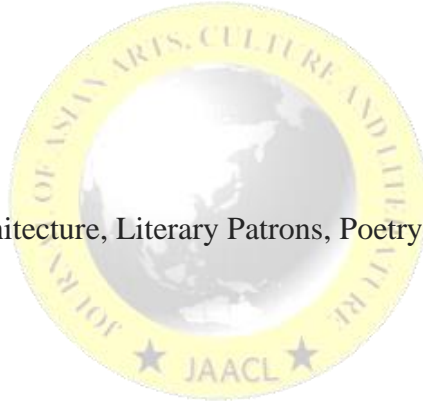
Abstract

Ars sine scientia nihil (without knowledge skill is nothing). The architecture of Persia reflects the profound knowledge of the builders behind the constructions. Iranian architectural design elements and aesthetics have left a mark on constructions throughout the world.

And so is the Persian world of erudites, one among the oldest, spanning thousands of years, with a notable impression on the literary works of many other cultures.

Keywords

Constructions, Persian Architecture, Literary Patrons, Poetry, Storytelling



Introduction

Persian architecture and literature belong to Iran and parts of the rest of West Asia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The beautifully illustrated manuscripts give a glimpse not only of the importance of literature, poetry, and bookmaking in the Persian world but also showcase the architectural finesse. Marked by their cosmic symbolism, inventiveness, and geometric balance, Persian designs date back to 3000 years. Most of the earlier works of ancient Persian literature were lost except for certain inscriptions and administrative records. So, the richness of Persian literature can only be traced back to medieval Persia. Poetry was the dominant form of literary expression. The Zoroastrian canon indicates that the Persian elite was familiar with Greek rhetoric and literary criticism too.

Constructions

Persian construction varies from subterranean aqueducts, cisterns, wells, conduits, sewers, and siphons to irrigation systems, canals, bridges, dikes, dams, water tanks, road networks; and from small huts and gardens to some of the most beautiful and majestic buildings that the world has ever seen, manifesting a long-lasting tradition.

Features of Persian Architecture

Extensive Arches



Image 1: Arches

These are built for aesthetic reasons, as well as to place windows and to lessen the extent of sunlight pouring into the building.

Gardens, Fountains, and Pools

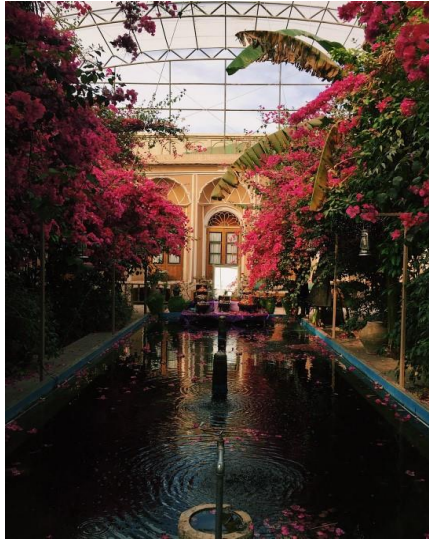


Image 2: Garden with fountain and pool

Spacious gardens and pools with fountains have always been prime features.

Persian agricultural experts created the qanat (subterranean aqueduct) based on hydraulic laws much before the invention of the water pump and so water plays a primary role in Persian designs.

Domes



Image 3: Dome

Domes are a feature traced back to Mesopotamia. Domes are characterized by a distinctive bulbous profile and spectacular tile works and mosaics, and their circular shape represented perfection, eternity, and the heavens. The aerodynamic shapes and the double or triple shells make them splendid scientific structures.

Minarets



Image 4: Minarets

Stable and strong minarets are generally made up of a basement, body, and cowl or crown.

The shape of its body can be cylindrical, conical, or polygonal.

Muqarnas



Image 5: Muqarnas

Muqarnas are applied to the undersides of domes, arches, and vaults. Earlier chiefly structural in form, they can be entirely ornamental, or serve as load-bearing structures.

Iwans



Image 6: Iwans

Iwan or a portico is a vaulted space that opens on one side to a courtyard used in monumental and regal architecture, the gateway is called pishtaq.

Calligraphy

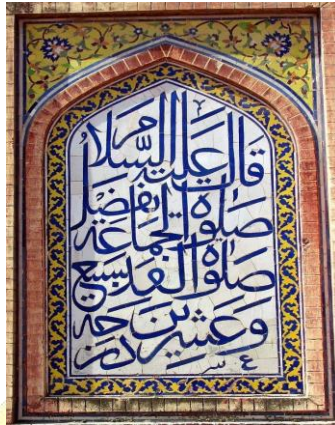


Image 7: Calligraphy

The work of calligraphers and illuminators is used passionately since pre-Islamic times, as an artistic expression.

Mashrabias



Image 8: Mashrabias

The pierced screens are used as windows.

Building Materials

From stone, clay, and mud bricks to steel and concrete, the Persian building has seen a transformation in the material used. Wood is also extensively used.

Modern Styles

Deep courtyards, onion-formed domes and decorated entrance gates, magnificently decorated ceilings and walls with mirror works, and use of new construction materials.

Literary Patrons

The Achaemenids

Alexander the Great is said to have destroyed the library at Persepolis.

The Behistun Inscription of Darius considered the first evidence of 'ancient' Persian literature is usually dated to 522 BCE.

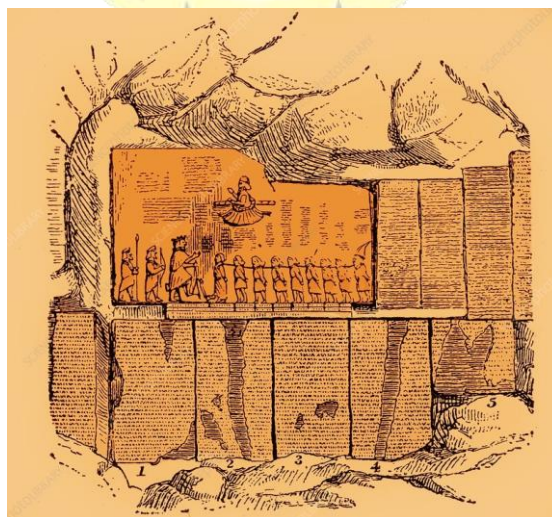


Image 9: The Behistun Inscription of Darius

The Sassanians

The Sassanian emperors started the penning down of these oral traditions into written form.

Commentary on the written texts to clarify various works started developing.

Religious history and custom, mythology, cosmology and ecclesiastical works were composed, all of which relied on poetic imagery and meter to convey their matter.

The Samanids

The Samanids laid the foundations of classical Persian literature. The Persian literature and culture began to flourish and Persian science experienced a period of glory.

The Ghaznavids

Ghaznavids and their successors such as the Ghurids, Timurids, and Mughal Empire, diffused the Persian culture and its literature into the Indian subcontinent. Persian was the language of the nobility, literary circles, and the royal Mughal courts for hundreds of years.

Under the Mughal Empire of India, Persian became the official language of India.

Modern period

After coming into contact with Europeans and Russians, Persian literature evolved to include free verse poetry and genres in prose such as short stories, novels, satire, and humor and new themes related to nationalism and national identity, during the early modern period. The Persian dictionaries and proverbs also hold significance. Lithography was used till the early 20th century to print books. The number of authors greatly increased, and women writers gained much higher visibility.

Poetry

The most noteworthy facet of Persian literature is the exceptional prominence of poetry, the prime outlet of artistic expressions. It was the medium in which almost all intellectual pursuits were expressed, a tradition often supported by royal patronage. An influence of religion, distinctly Sufism inspired mystical poetry.

Even the written works by philosophers, historians, and scientists were often delivered in verse and there was a frequency of Eulogies.

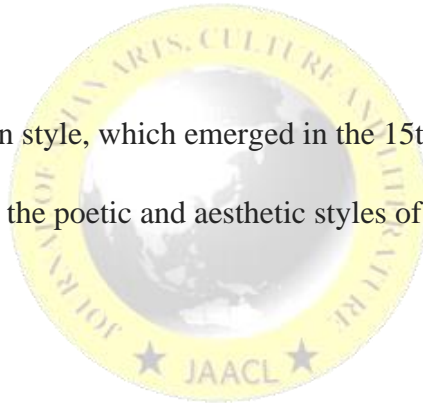
During the 10th to 16th century, three major styles of Persian poetry came to prominence:

The epic panegyric Khorasani style- 10th century in eastern Persia.

The Iraq-i 'Ajami- a lyrical style that uses mystical Sufi concepts developed in 13th century in western Persia.

The Sabk-i Hindi -the Indian style, which emerged in the 15th century.

There remains continuity in the poetic and aesthetic styles of Persian poetry.



Poets

Rudaki

Known as “the father of Persian literature” and “the founder of classical Persian poetry”, the greatest of the Persian poets, he is said to have been able to write in every literary form. He established poetic forms as well as Diwans which later became standard.

Abolqasem Ferdowsi

Shahnameh (the Persian Book of King), composed between 977-1010 CE is considered one of the greatest literary works in the world and remains popular in the present day. It is a poem

of some 50,000 rhymed couplets that tells the story of the mythological history of the Persians from the creation of the world.

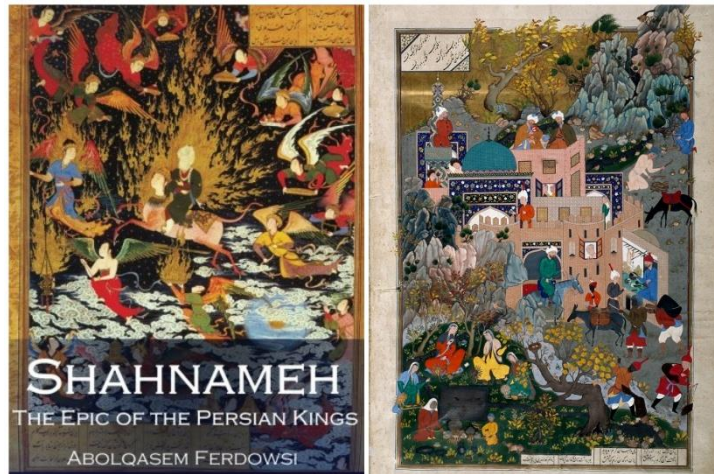


Image 10: Shahnameh

Omar Khayyam

Though Khayyam was esteemed more as a scientist than a poet, he became one of the most quoted poets in English. His Rubaiyat was translated by Edward Fitzgerald in 1859.

Rumi

His lucid expression of the truths of life and themes of eternal love make him popular among the masses in the present day.

Storytelling

"Tell me a story" as they call it, the Persians responded by telling a story that explained the phenomenon in question, which became diachronic traditions of relaying

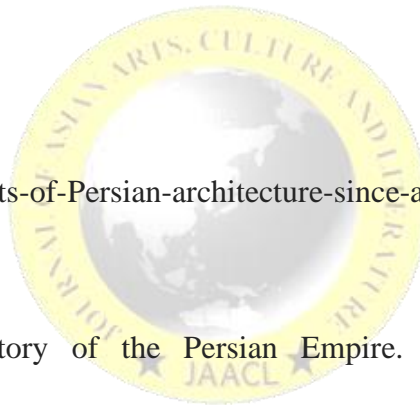
information in the Persian texts. These stories developed and took the form of folklore, legend, and religious revelation by the time of the Sassanian Empire.

Conclusion

Persian architecture and literature have survived their complex cultural past and political turbulences to achieve their own noteworthy form. Some marvels have taken shape with the inclusion of modern styles. Persian writers, some using regional and national variations of the Persian language, continue to create poetry, prose, novels, short stories, essays, and children's stories.

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About the Author

Ms. Ankurita Khajanchi hails from Bikaner, Rajasthan.

She is a content and creative writer alongside preparing for the civil services exams. She has authored a book on civil services' personality test and co-authored an anthology.

She is an artist at heart, inclined towards learning.

