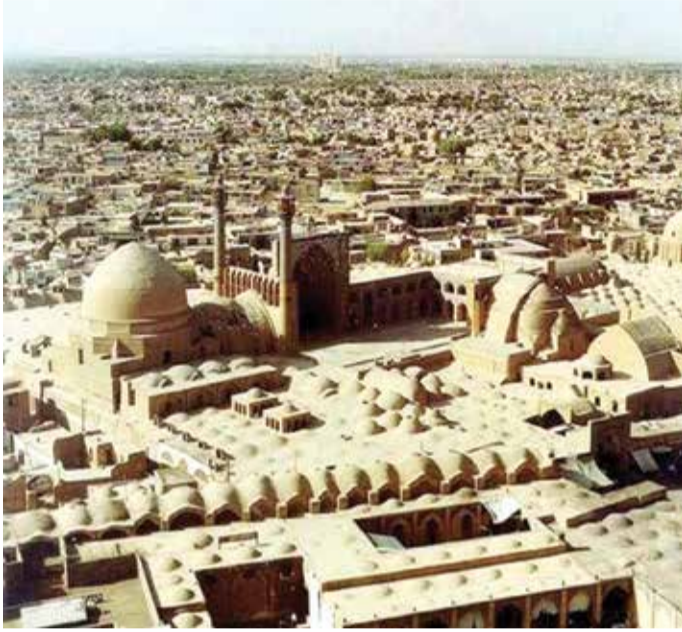


# Reviving Isfahan's historical fabric: A quest for preservation and prosperity



● borna.news



● IRNA



● chtn.ir

## Iranica Desk

The establishment of picturesque neighborhoods encircling the mosque and bazaar, intricately woven together by a labyrinth of alleys, symbolizes the urban development unfolding under the banner of Isfahan. This tale recounts the profound impact of urban planning on the fabric of this remarkable land. The historical fabric of this city has sadly endured damage over time due to tasteless alterations and self-interest-driven changes. Consequently, the city's cohesiveness has been altered by the widening of passages and the modification of its streets. The destruction of Isfahan's historical fabric due to road construction and insufficient services has forced its original residents to leave and created opportunities for the settlement of non-native individuals. As a result, Isfahan has lost its

once-unified historical fabric. Unfortunately, in the detailed plans devised for construction in the historical fabric, only height restrictions have been taken into account. As a result, houses are being built in this area that lack harmony with the fabric and architecture of this renowned region. This is while the houses that adhere to the fabric of this region feature a central courtyard. The Municipality of Isfahan has been working hard in recent years to breathe new life into the city's historical fabric. By preserving the notable structures, they aimed to revive the city's rich heritage and create a lively ambiance. However, the central historic area of the city has yet to reclaim its former glory. Managing Director of Tehran Municipality's Renovation Organization Mohammad Ali Izadkhasti emphasizes that the key

priority for revitalizing Isfahan's historical fabric is to generate both economic and social benefits, focusing on value creation and facilitating investor engagement. "We need to view the whole urban fabric as a unified entity, with the goal of preserving its historical buildings, elevating the cultural vibrancy of the local community, and fostering a sustainable environment," he said. If residents of the historical section face constraints such as height restrictions, compensatory advantages should be defined and established to allow residents to benefit from them. For instance, urban spaces like parking lots should be created around the fabric so that if a house is located in a narrow alley, the owners should at least be able to park their cars in a nearby parking lot. Izadkhasti believes that fostering desirable infrastructure and

urban spaces, alongside cultural development, plays a key role in revitalizing historical areas and motivating investment. Izadkhasti considers the revival of the historical neighborhood of Jolfa in Isfahan as a successful model and experience. He said that with the commencement of restoration activities and urban improvements by the municipality, the economic advantages and the valuable land in this neighborhood have attracted investors. As a result, the historical houses are gradually being restored and transformed into tourist facilities. He noted that the municipality is gearing up to implement an exciting experimental preservation plan in the historical neighborhood of "Baba Qassem" on Ibn Sina Street. The ultimate aim is to create value and allure potential investors to this vibrant area. Alireza Khajavi, an official from

Isfahan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, said, "We are faced with a city that has a rich history, spanning thousands of years. It encompasses the three periods of the Buyid, Seljuk, and Safavid. This extensive history has bestowed upon us a remarkable cultural and historical heritage. He said that the onset of the industrial era and the advent of machines brought about countless street expansions, unfortunately, at the expense of disregarding and neglecting the precious historical heritage. As a consequence, there was widespread devastation within the historical fabric, disrupting the age-old harmonious balance and resulting in the loss of countless priceless historical artifacts. He believes that the potential capacities of Isfahan's historical fabric are still largely intact. By

implementing new strategies and acknowledging the value of this heritage, it is feasible to rectify past damages to a great extent and establish a conducive environment for life, cultural activities, and tourism. This task requires stopping intrusive and destructive encroachment and irregularities in the historical fabric. "The only option isn't just using the capacities of the historical fabric for creating traditional restaurants and museums. Instead, by organizing neighborhoods, establishing infrastructures and providing appropriate services, it's possible to restore life and vitality in historical neighborhoods. Instead of constructing new buildings for cultural or administrative purposes, historical locations within neighborhoods can be preserved and transformed into cultural or administrative spaces," he noted.

## Evolution of Urdu as a rival to Persian

Beginning around the reign of Shah 'Alam II (1759-1806 CE), Rekhta (slowly coming to call itself 'Urdu') came to be used in the court of the Mughals across the Indian Subcontinent. While Persian remained in place as the official language, the gentry in Delhi became less inclined to utilize it in their writings. Outside of the imperial centre, cultures of newly emergent Mughal successor states began to take shape and, in time, impact patronage opportunities for Persian. Persian, of course, was already well-situated across the Indian Subcontinent. The sprawling networks of Mughal bureaucracy and the significance accorded to the language as a marker of elite intellectual and literary status nurtured an active poetic culture in places like Lucknow, Agra and Lahore as well as other cities and provinces. As Purnima Dhavan, assistant professor of History at the University of Washington, notes, already by the early decades of

the seventeenth century most Persian learners could be found 'not in the rarified inner circle of the imperial court, but in much more eclectic settings all over the province and cities of the emperor'. Nonetheless, as Mughal central authority in the eighteenth century waned, the rise of regional powers witnessed the emergence of 'new cultural and institutional forms', allowing for Urdu, like other regional languages, to be enriched by the 'vocabulary and literary forms of Persian'. In Awadh, for example, rulers beginning with Shuja' al-Dawla (1753-75) - himself a Persianised Mughal and the grandson of a migrant from Iran - offered patronage opportunities for Urdu in addition to supporting the fine arts in general. While the Nawabs of Awadh offered patronage to Persian poets on a lavish scale too, 'Persian poetry did not flourish here to any great extent ... primarily because of the growing vogue for Urdu as a poetic medium'.

Sceptical and wary of the old Mughal elite, rulers such as Shuja' al-Dawla relied on local non-Persianised groups and imported others, like Shaykhzadas, Telingana Rajputs and Gosain mercenaries, who were more inclined to offer patronage to Urdu poets rather than Persian. Alongside the shift in political tides and patronage practices stemming from the break-up of the Mughal Empire, Urdu was simultaneously emerging as a more readily acceptable medium of literary and poetic expression in competition with Persian. Crucial to this shift in perception was the work of 'Vali' Dakhani (1667-1707), who elevated the status of Rekhta by demonstrating that its poetry 'could rival, if not surpass, Indo-Persian poetry in sophistication of imagery, complexity and abstractness of metaphor'. This shift in perception led to the growth of poets choosing to write in Rekhta instead of Persian in the early 1700s. This

would soon be followed by persistent efforts to compose poetry in Urdu. Along with the increased attention to Urdu poetic composition came the need for poets to find instructors to teach them, the rise of poetic assemblies to share verses and hone skills, and the blossoming of master-student relationships. The new world of Urdu poetics and poetic community put a premium on identifying with a master or lineage, association with a readily identified master (*ustad*) being viewed as a major necessity. The new class of Urdu poets emerging in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would be more likely to identify themselves with a local and accessible *ustad* for easier affiliation than with an individual further afield or a historical poet that they could emulate, tightening the social network around Urdu composition. Such an approach can perhaps best be seen in the Mughal court and the shifting terrain upon which the relationship

between the courtier poet and patron-ruler was now founded. Opposed to past practices in which rulers sought poets to offer panegyrics in their praise and celebrate special occasions, rulers such as Shah 'Alam II and Bahadur Shah II (1837-57) sought out poets to serve as their own teachers with greater frequency. The result was a new configuration of poetic community for those composing in Urdu. With the growth of master-student relationships, a whole new literary culture began to emerge, one in which poetic genealogy, status, codes and poetic gatherings for Urdu poets rose in importance. This was accompanied by various feuds, loyalties and competitions over patronage, either among royal patrons or among sought-after instructors in poetry. 'What began as a need', the literary scholar Shamsur Rahman Faruqi writes, 'soon became fashion, and then a minor industry and source of patronage.'

