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Amir Bahador Bridge is the name of a very old neighborhood located in the center of Tehran. Since ancient times, this neighborhood has been part of a larger area called Amirieh, which, along with its surrounding neighborhoods, formed the initial nucleus of the capital city during the late Qajar period. Amirieh was an upscale neighborhood, characterized by gardens and trees that provided a retreat for the aristocracy and courtiers.

The Amirieh is a small area along the southern stretch of today's Valiasr Street, which, in earlier times, was considered the modern part of Tehran. Today, Valiasr Street, stretching 18 kilometers, is the longest street in the Middle East and the most famous and beautiful street in Iran.

The Amir Bahador Bridge neighborhood is located in the central and upper part of the street. The western side led to Qazvin Square — formerly known as Qazvin Gate — used by caravans for trade towards the west and back. To the east, it was adjacent to Vahdat Eslami Square and the Tehran Bazaar, the economic heart of the capital.



⬆️ Mohammad Ashtiani

The name Amir Bahador is associated with Hossein Pasha Khan, known as Amir Bahador, who served as the court minister and the minister of war under Mozaffareddin Shah and Mohammad Ali Shah of the Qajar dynasty. Interestingly, the ancestors of Amir Bahador were khans from the Caucasus who were compelled to migrate to Iran following the signing of the Turkmenchay Treaty. Although he was not well-versed in Persian, he had a deep passion for the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi, to the extent that, under his efforts, a lithographed edition of the Shahnameh was published, which is now famously known as the Amir Bahador Shahnameh. Amir Bahador himself resided in this neighborhood, and coincidentally, his large and historic house still remains. This building, over 120 years old, was originally constructed as a husseinih (a place in which Shia Muslims gather to hold religious ceremonies) for the courtiers. A bit further from Amir Bahador's house is another building used as a husseinih, named Beit al-Zahra, the gravestones and artifacts discovered during excavations date back to 120 to 160 years ago. This structure, built in the architectural style of traditional Tehrani homes, features a fountain and a courtyard with beautiful brickwork, and it belonged to Abolfazl Shirvani, a prominent cleric in Tehran.

Mohammad Ashtiani, a 62-year-old caretaker of the Beit al-Zahra Husseinih, whose family is considered one of the oldest in the Amir Bahador neighborhood, explained the background of the area: "I was born in the Amir Bahador neighborhood. My father, Haj Yadollah, migrated to Tehran from Ashtian for work and education when he was only eight or nine years old, seeking opportunities to learn. He initially worked as an apprentice for a fabric seller in the bazaar, and because the Amir Bahador neighborhood was close to the market, he settled here. After some time, he opened an herbal medicine shop in the neighborhood."

Beit al-Zahra Husseinih; the heart of Amir Bahador neighborhood in Tehran



Tafreshi and Ashtiani families

If you take a little tour around the Amir Bahador neighborhood, you will notice that the family names of Tafreshi and Ashtiani appear above many shops, mosques, husseinihs, and numerous religious centers in the area, indicating that many residents trace their origins back to these places. Tafresh and Ashtian are two cities in the Central Province of Iran. Ashtiani explained, "Our family was among the first to migrate from that region to Tehran, but gradually many families from the surrounding cities and areas came to this neighborhood so that now they make up a large part of the old residents."

Bridge's name

As the name of the neighborhood indicates, it seems that there was once a bridge in this location, which is why the area is referred to as Amir Bahador Bridge. However, no trace of a bridge can be found in the vicinity.

Ashtiani noted that in ancient times, there was a place called *Yakhchal* (icehouse) in front of Amir Bahador's house, where ice was produced. The buildings of the icehouse were connected by a bridge, and based on this, the neighborhood became known as Amir Bahador Bridge.

He continued, "Amir Bahador Bridge neighborhood was located within the Sangelaj, a historical and affluent area of Tehran. Esteemed scholars, prominent figures, commanders, and high-ranking individuals of the Qajar and Pahlavi eras resided in this area and on Farhang Street. In the past, much of the area was made up of trees and gardens, and even today, a few of those large garden houses still remain."

Transforming a historical house into a husseinih

Ashtiani referred to the historical building of the husseinih, noting, "This building was once the home of a cleric named Shirvani, who also hosted religious gatherings here. My father and my second brother, Amir Ashtiani, who were the main founders of the husseinih, had a close and cordial relationship with him. After Shirvani's passing, he entrusted this house to my brother to be used as a husseinih. Following that, the building was reconstructed while preserving its old architecture according to the standards of Iranian and Islamic style, and it has been known as the Beit al-Zahra Husseinih. Each year, it serves the community during mourning ceremonies of Muharram (marking the martyr-

dom anniversary of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions), the holy month of Ramadan, and other religious occasions."

He noted that a library has also been established beside the husseinih, housing at least 3,000 rare and ancient books covering cultural subjects, including historical and religious topics. He said that this husseinih actively engages in charitable activities and collaborates with several welfare centers, a nursery in Tehran, and a charity organization that supports mentally disabled children, providing assistance to them to the best of our abilities.

Moreover, despite being a husseinih, it hosts wedding ceremonies for couples who lack the financial means to hold a celebration at a banquet hall, upholding Islamic dignity.

The husseinih organizes these wedding ceremonies and prepares meals in its kitchen. To date, more than 12 weddings have been held at the husseinih.

150-year-old tombstones

On the wall of the husseinih hangs a tombstone that reads, "The late Torab, son of Muhammad Khan, Ramadan of 1281 AH (1701 CE)". The tombstone is etched with an image of a gun and a powder bag, indicating that the deceased was a soldier or commander from the Qajar period. "When we began the renovation of the husseinih, we planned to convert part of the old water reservoir into a kitchen. During the work, we discovered tombstones over 150 years old at the reservoir's bottom. In total, nine tombstones were uncovered, which are now preserved in our collection, and one of them has been installed on the wall of the building," Ashtiani said.

Additionally, in another corner of the husseinih, several tiles related to the shrine of Hazrat Abolfazl (PBUH), dating back to 1133 AH (1720 CE), have been displayed, capturing the attention of every visitor.

Ashtiani pointed to a black-and-white image on the wall of the husseinih, depicting one of the religious groups from old Tehran, with his father in the center of the photograph. This image, dating back to 1881 CE, relates to a historical religious group in Tehran.

"The Beit Al-Zahra Husseinih was affiliated with a community of craftsmen, merchants, and benefactors from the Qanat Abad neighborhood, approximately in what is now the Molavi neighborhood, and my father was one of the founders of this group," he concluded.

