

# Evolution of rural communities in Iran



Filband village, Mazandaran Province

## Iranica Desk

The history of rural communities over the past fifty years, including the significant transformations in the lives of rural inhabitants and the evolving importance of villages, has long been a subject of discussion and research. National Village and Nomad Day (October 6) serves as a timely opportunity to once again highlight the significance of rural society.

According to the 1976 census, approximately 51.6% of Iran's population lived in rural areas, with 34% engaged in agriculture or livestock farming. At that time, government policies contributed to a widening social and economic gap between

urban and rural regions. The struggling rural economy, combined with the growing appeal of urban centers due to their thriving economic and service sectors, accelerated the migration of rural populations to cities during the later years of the Pahlavi era. The concentration of health, economic, and educational facilities in large cities significantly influenced this migration trend, according to chtn.ir.

After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran placed a strong emphasis on the development and prosperity of Iranian villages. Various programs were introduced to enhance village conditions, including retirement plans for villagers over 65 years of age

and agricultural aid such as interest-free bank loans, subsidies for necessary supplies, and low-cost animal feed. The Construction Jihad Organization played a pivotal role in these efforts, focusing on meeting the basic infrastructural needs of villages, including road construction, school and clinic building, and providing drinking water and electricity. The achievements of the Construction Jihad Organization are notable; while only 4,300 villages had access to electricity before the revolution, this number skyrocketed to over 39,000 in villages with populations exceeding 250 within twenty years. Similarly, rural road construction expanded from 8,000 kilometers



Abyaneh village, Isfahan Province

before the revolution to 67,000 kilometers in recent months. These statistics reflect the progress made in rural areas since the victory of the Islamic Revolution. However, despite these efforts, the economy and income of rural inhabitants continue to face significant challenges that require ongoing support and attention. Unfortunately, the average per capita income of the rural community in Iran is one-third that of their urban counterparts. The promotion of rural tourism presents a potential avenue for economic improvement, allowing a portion of urban income to be spent in rural areas and ultimately increasing local income. Currently, one of the major

issues confronting rural inhabitants is the lack of stable employment, exacerbated by persistent droughts and weaknesses in the mechanized agricultural system, which have accelerated rural-to-urban migration.

In addition to agriculture, handicrafts and local industries have historically served as vital foundations for job creation in rural areas. However, with the increasing migration trend, many handicrafts are at risk of extinction. For instance, carpet weaving, once a crucial job-creating industry in villages and small towns, now faces serious threats. If rural tourism is developed, these industries could be revitalized and regain their former significance in the eco-

nomical and cultural landscape of villages.

Tourism-related jobs have the potential to create employment opportunities tailored to local women's circumstances. With rising literacy rates and a new generation of educated women emerging in rural areas, the development of rural tourism can effectively leverage this opportunity.

By implementing such strategies, the active rural population can grow, leading to enhanced financial circulation in the region. The advancement of this industry, starting from villages, has the potential to propel cities — and ultimately the entire country — toward sustainable economic prosperity.

## Notable innovations in Darougheh House of Mashhad

*Darougheh House in Mashhad, the capital city of Khorasan Razavi Province, is one of the Qajar historical houses and a significant tourist attraction in the Khorasan Razavi Province. It was registered on Iran National Heritage List in 2002. This house served as the residence of the last darougheh (darughachi, a Mongol word for governor) of Mashhad, Yusuf Khan Herati, built by his order. Notably, it was designed to be self-sufficient, relying on solar, wind, and water resources.*

### Unique features

One of the key historical values of Darougheh House is its inclusion of the first private bathroom and fireplace in Mashhad. At the time of its construction, no other houses in the city had a private bathroom or fireplace. Residents had to use public bathhouses, making the existence of a private bathroom in this house particularly significant.

### Historical background

Constructed at the end of the Qajar period under Yusuf Khan Herati's orders, he not only served as the last darougheh but was also elected as the first head of nazmiyeh (urban police) after the Constitutional Revolution. He intended the Darougheh House to serve as a venue for official receptions and lived there for several years.

### Ownership changes

Following Yusuf Khan Herati's death, the house was passed down to his heirs. In 1987, a religious congregation from Yazd purchased it, and it was used as a venue for religious gatherings for some time. Eventually, Mashhad Municipality bought



the property and initiated restoration efforts in collaboration with a company, which commenced in 2012 and concluded in 2015.

### Recognition

After its restoration, Darougheh House became one of 13 projects to win UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. It is important to acknowledge that the municipality allocated a significant budget for the restoration.

### Architectural design

Darougheh House is situated in Darougheh Alley, with its entrance on the south side. Upon entering, visitors notice that the house's courtyard is 75cm lower than the surrounding alley. The courtyard features a beautiful fountain and several small gardens.

The two-story structure of the Darougheh House is framed by two diagonal staircases on either side. It employs a design known as "three-sided construction," enclosing the eastern, western, and northern sides of the yard. The house consists of two living quarters and an ambulatory, connected in a style common among Iranian historical homes.

### Architectural influences

The terrace design and two-sided stairs reflect inspiration from Russian architecture, with several decorative features resembling that style.

**Porches:** In the western section, a pillar-supported porch is adorned with octagonal and oval tilework. Names of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the phrase 'Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim' – In the Name of God, the Most Gracious,



the Most Merciful" are intricately engraved on this porch, surrounded by floral designs.

Another porch featuring four pillars is located in the northern section, with beautifully decorated brickwork and diagonally splayed staircases featuring delicate metal railings.

### Seasonal living quarters

Darougheh House contains two distinct sections, the winter and summer dwellings, each designed for comfort during different seasons. The winter dwelling is oriented to face the sun, facilitating warmth during colder months. In contrast, the summer dwelling is designed to remain cooler by being situated away from direct sunlight.

The lower floor of the winter dwelling includes heating equipment to maintain warmth throughout the winter. The kitchen's location in this area also contributes to the house's overall warmth, complemented by heaters and double-glazed windows. A room in the eastern part of the house features a fireplace. The summer dwelling showcases a charming traditional fountain and wind-catcher rooms, which enhance ventilation and keep the house comfortable during warmer months.

### A must-see attraction

A trip to Mashhad to visit the holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), the eighth Imam of Shia Muslims, should also include a stop at various historical houses, with the Darougheh House being particularly noteworthy. Its remarkable architecture makes it one of Iran's most significant tourist attractions, drawing both domestic and international visitors each year.