

Architectural reflections of Mazandaran Province's cultural diversity

Iranica Desk

Mazandaran Province, located in northern Iran, boasts a wealth of valuable characteristics, including a cultured populace that resides in the mountains, plains, and forests, each group with its unique customs and distinct way of life. This diversity in clothing, language, traditions, and social practices, alongside the architectural styles of their homes, gives the region an undeniable charm that is reflective of its rich cultural heritage.

The architectural style of rural houses, representing one of many traditional designs, remains highly favored even as urbanization becomes more prevalent. These homes continue to hold a special place in the hearts of people, constructed using materials that are well-suited to the ecological environment of the area. The coastal strip along the Caspian Sea particularly showcases some of the most beautiful examples of rural housing, found in villages nestled among the sloping lands of the mountains and alongside picturesque forests.

However, it is important to recognize that these dreamlike houses, with their enchanting architecture, have increasingly been overshadowed by modern villas, influenced by foreign cultures and a trend towards extravagance. Modern materials such as metal and concrete have largely replaced traditional resources like wood, adobe, and clay. Additionally, vibrant roofs inspired by Swiss architecture have taken the place of traditional thatching and tiles.

Despite the ongoing changes in architectural styles and the growing popularity of modern designs, there remains a quest for a lost identity — one that offers tranquility and intimacy. In this context, eco-tourism has emerged as a means to revitalize traditional houses, although the allure of Swiss chalets has gained significant traction. These luxurious villas are predominantly owned by the affluent residents of western Mazandaran Province.

Despite advancements in architectural science, modern human life faces numerous challenges, particularly in terms of heating and cooling systems. In contrast, the traditional houses of Mazandaran Province have effectively addressed these needs through well-thought-out architectural designs, leading to a resurgence in demand for wooden cabins.

A wood industry expert and historical building restoration specialist explained to ISNA that in the southern shores of the Caspian Sea — particularly in Mazandaran Province — the most critical factor influencing roof architecture is rainfall. Roofs are designed with a specific slope to efficiently manage rainwater runoff, and the materials used in their construction are primarily natural. Commonly, roofs are made from reeds or other locally sourced materials.

Ali Jahaniyan further elaborated that in this region, the humidity and the need for natural ventilation have led to the widespread use of balconies. Adobe, readily available in the area, is another commonly used building material in rural architecture due to its unique thermal properties.

He emphasized the advantages of wooden ma-

terials, particularly those sourced from local trees, which are characterized by their technical properties such as lightness, ease of accessibility, workability, and resistance to tension and bending. Generally, wood and clay have been the traditional materials of choice for constructing wooden houses with earthen walls in Mazandaran Province.

Moreover, Jahaniyan noted that due to the rainfall and snowfall prevalent in mountainous areas, the roofs of Mazandarani houses were traditionally covered with slate tiles, affixed with the help of wooden supports. In the lower regions and plains, such as the forested areas and Firuzjah in Babol, roofs were predominantly made of wood, owing to the abundance of Hyrcanian forests and the easy availability of timber. Most of these traditional houses featured gabled roofs, a common design trait evident across the region.

He added that the roofs of homes for ordinary people in towns were often made of thatch, referred to as *kamle basar*, while those belonging to urban landlords typically featured gabled wooden roofs, which were later built using fired tiles.

Jahaniyan also commented on the design of staircases in the houses of Mazandaran Province. He noted that during the Qajar period, staircases were primarily spiral and circular in design. However, during the Pahlavi era, they shifted to a more direct, European style, and currently, a trend toward spiral staircases is re-emerging in architectural design. He further mentioned that older houses featured large terraces, which normally had expansive windows on the north and south sides, enabling effective circulation of air and wind. In the summer, these architectural features created a corridor effect that intensified the breeze.

Jahaniyan continued by explaining that rooms were often named based on the number of doors in their rooms — for instance, a room with six doors would be referred to as the "six-door room."

He clarified that for winter living, lower-level rooms with fewer windows and doors were utilized.

He pointed out that the kitchen, known as *matbakh*, was typically built a short distance outside the main house, while the restroom and bathroom were usually situated farther away from the primary structure to promote hygiene.

Moreover, he highlighted that balconies or verandas were notable features of Mazandarani houses, serving as gathering places for family and dining during the milder days of the year. He specified that wood, being a warm raw material, contributed significantly to the warmth and closeness of family relationships within these homes. In contrast, the incorporation of metal and stone in modern housing has negatively influenced the character and interpersonal dynamics of contemporary households. In addition, he discussed another distinctive feature of these houses — the excavation of a one-meter-deep pit in the larger room, known as *zoghhal chal*. In affluent homes during the Pahlavi era, this design was often integrated as a wall-mounted stove equipped with a ventilation pipe to the outside, effectively serving the purpose of a fireplace.



Jaame Mosque of Tiss and its historical significance

Jaame Mosque of Tiss, a village in Chabahar Free Zone, Hormozgan Province, is a significant attraction in the area, showcasing a unique façade and design reminiscent of Indian architecture. The mosque's vibrant and colorful forms echo the handwoven crafts found in the nearby regions.

This mosque serves as a reminder of Tiss village's rich history, particularly during the early centuries of the Islamic era when it was a crucial port on Iran's southeast coast. Today, although Chabahar stands as Iran's only oceanic port, the village of Tiss remains an important settlement near the Indian Ocean. Historically, Tiss village was vital for the transfer of goods, facilitating trade routes to the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.

Situated five kilometers northwest of Chabahar, Tiss is nestled at the foothills. Archae-

ological relics found in the area span from the Achaemenid Empire to later periods, highlighting its significance throughout history. The mosque stands as a testament to the village's historical importance, while the remnants of Tiss Castle, overlooking the sea, further emphasize the strategic role of Chabahar.

Prominently visible from the village, the mosque's architecture is strikingly similar to that of mosques in Pakistan and India. Notable features include the minaret and dome adorned in shades of red and green, along with colorful glass windows that add distinct charm.

The mosque's doors, embellished with an array of colorful, regular, and irregular glass pieces, enhance its beauty. The original prayer hall was once inadequate for the local community, leading to expansion efforts on the mosque's eastern side.