

How Korsi shaped family life in traditional Iranian homes

In today's modern world, where advanced technologies and heating systems have become embedded in everyday life, some cultural and traditional heritages have gradually faded from view. One such heritage is the Korsi — a household fixture that not only provided warmth during cold winter days but also played a significant social, cultural, and even therapeutic role in Iranian family life.

Beyond its practical function, the Korsi played an essential role in transmitting Iranian culture and customs from one generation to the next. Beneath the Korsi, elders would share stories, proverbs, and life wisdom, passing down knowledge and cultural values to younger family members. This process of intergenerational transmission not only helped preserve cultural identity but also strengthened feelings of belonging and social cohesion, according to ISNA.

However, in today's fast-paced world and with the rise of modern technologies, the Korsi has gradually receded from daily life and now remains largely as a nostalgic memory. This is despite the fact that the values embedded in the use of the Korsi can still help address the challenges of modern living and reinforce human connections.

A folklore researcher, offering a multifaceted analysis of the Korsi, highlighted its appeal and significance as a functional civilizational masterpiece, saying that the Korsi goes far beyond a heating device and serves as a symbol of emotional cohesion



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and cultural transmission between generations. Mohammad Dehqan, in an interview with ISNA, described the Korsi not merely as a source of warmth for cold days, but as a practical masterpiece of civilization that functioned above all as a sophisticated social, cultural, and even therapeutic institution.

He explained that this traditional heritage managed all aspects of Iranian family life in an integrated manner — from physical health and energy conservation to emotional cohesion and the transmission of cultural heritage — under a system that reached its fullest expression through the central role of grandparents.

Comparing the Korsi with modern heating systems, Dehqan pointed to a fundamental dif-

ference in how energy is transferred. "Central heating systems merely warm the air," he said. "This warmth is superficial and often leads to dry environments and damage to the respiratory tract. The Korsi, however, was an intelligent architecture designed to warm the body from within." He described the Korsi as a model of sustainable household-level energy economics, adding that there was no need to heat the entire volume of air in a house up to the ceiling. "Only a small space was kept warm with exceptionally low energy consumption. This approach represents an outstanding example of optimal resource management — one we should learn from today."

The greatest achievement of the Korsi lay in its social and cultural function, something that

would not have been possible without the strong presence of grandparents. "The Korsi was where the unparalleled cohesion of the Iranian family took shape," he said.

He added that the Korsi was a physical meeting point for all generations, yet this gathering was far more than a simple family get-together. Grandparents occupied a central role beneath the Korsi, and their physical position reflected their moral authority and respected status within the family. Their constant and tangible presence provided psychological security, allowing grandchildren — protected by both the physical warmth of the Korsi and the emotional support of elders — to experience a deep sense of safety.

The folklore researcher continued by describing the Korsi as a

living archive. Long hours spent together created a rare opportunity to strengthen verbal communication. In this setting, grandparents transmitted stories, wisdom, and the family's oral history. These narratives conveyed moral lessons, proverbs, and literary texts indirectly to younger generations, turning the Korsi into a space for nurturing literary taste within the household.

He emphasized that the Korsi also functioned as a space for learning vital social skills. Elders often acted as mediators in family disputes, with discussions and misunderstandings raised in the intimate atmosphere beneath the Korsi and resolved through experience and wisdom. This process taught children the importance of tolerance, respect, and justice in conflict resolution,

effectively making the Korsi a school of ethics and social order within the family.

Dehqan pointed to the social expression of the Korsi in winter rituals, noting that it formed the central setting for long winter gatherings, especially on Yalda Night. On this occasion, the eldest family member — usually the grandfather — was responsible for conducting the rituals, from distributing refreshments to performing the Fal-e Hafez ceremony. He explained that the recitation of Hafez by the grandfather was not merely a literary act, but a ritual practice imbued with deeper meaning through his presence. This ceremony ensured that traditions were passed on to the next generation with the same depth and authenticity experienced by earlier generations.

Ancient cisterns in Hormozgan continue to support water storage



Iranica Desk

The historic water cisterns of Hormozgan Province — known locally as Berkeh — stand as a striking example of the close link between vernacular architecture, traditional engineering knowledge, and the social culture of the region. During periods of rainfall, these structures once again demonstrate their original function and enduring relevance.

Hormozgan Province has long faced chronic shortages of fresh water. Its hot and arid climate, low and irregular rainfall, high evaporation rates, and limited surface and groundwater resources have historically made daily life challenging. Under such conditions, the collection and storage of rainwater emerged as a vital and intelligent solution among the inhabitants of southern Iran, with Berkeh serving as the most important infrastructure within this water management system. These structures not only met the everyday needs of local communities but also

enabled sustained settlement, the formation of villages, and the flourishing of communication and trade routes across Hormozgan, according to chn.ir.

Rainfall in the province during autumn showed that Berkeh, despite the passage of time and changes in modern water supply methods, continues to function efficiently. In many parts of the province, runoff from the rains was channeled through old waterways and passages into the cisterns, allowing significant volumes of rainwater to be stored in these reservoirs. This demonstrates that the placement of Berkeh was based on a precise understanding of land topography, water flow patterns, and the behavior of seasonal rainfall — evidence of the deep environmental knowledge possessed by past architects and builders.

From an architectural perspective, Hormozgan's cisterns display remarkable diversity, each designed in response to local environmental conditions and community needs. Circular plans



with domed roofs are the most common type in the province, a form that enhances structural stability while reducing water evaporation and maintaining a suitable internal temperature. Alongside these, elongated and rectangular cisterns with barrel vaults, as well as cross-shaped examples, can also be found — each reflecting the creativity and adaptability of southern Iran's indigenous architecture. Tall domes, multiple openings, skylights, and overflow channels not only serve technical purposes but also contribute distinctive visual elements to the cultural landscape of Hormozgan's plains and settlements.

The materials used in constructing cisterns were entirely local and well suited to the region's climate. River stone, coral stone, and Sarooj mortar form the core components of these structures. Sarooj — a mixture of lime, gravel, sand, and organic materials — was used as the primary waterproofing layer due to its high resistance to humidity, pre-

venting leakage and water loss. Coral stone, in addition to being lightweight and readily available, helped improve water hygiene thanks to its insect-repellent properties. The careful selection of materials reflects a sophisticated use of natural resources and accumulated indigenous knowledge.

Estimates suggest that nearly 2,000 cisterns exist across Hormozgan Province, underscoring the scale and importance of this traditional water storage method in southern Iran. Cities such as Bandar Lengeh, Bastak, Qeshm, Bandar Khamir, Parsian, Bandar Abbas, and Kish host the highest concentration of these structures. Many were built alongside historic roads, caravanserais, and settlements, supporting the commercial and maritime routes of the Persian Gulf. From this perspective, cisterns were not merely water facilities but an integral part of Hormozgan's historical economic and infrastructural network.

The social and cultural dimensions of cisterns are equally sig-



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nificant. Their construction and maintenance have long been intertwined with religious beliefs and traditions of endowment (waqf) in southern Iran. Providing drinking water was regarded as a lasting charitable act, and many cisterns were built by benefactors and dedicated to public use. Maintenance activities such as cleaning, dredging, and periodic repairs were traditionally carried out with community participation, strengthening a sense of collective responsibility and social attachment to these structures.

Beyond their immediate role in water storage, the rainfall in autumn 2025 offers an opportunity to reconsider the place of Berkeh within the province's broader water resource management system. As climate change leads to more irregular rainfall patterns and increasing pressure on groundwater reserves, traditional infrastructure can serve as a complementary and sustainable solution. Due to their low construction and maintenance costs, environmental compatibility, and

reliance on natural resources, they can play a meaningful role alongside modern systems in addressing water stress.

From a cultural heritage perspective, these structures represent a valuable part of the province's historical identity and landscape. Their protection, proper restoration, and functional revival not only help preserve Iran's architectural water heritage but also contribute to cultural tourism and introduce younger generations to the indigenous knowledge of their ancestors.

Overall, the historic cisterns of Hormozgan symbolize the wise coexistence between humans and nature in one of the country's harshest climates. Recent rainfall demonstrates that this legacy of the past is not merely a historical relic but a valuable resource for addressing present and future challenges in water management in southern Iran — one that, with proper planning, can enhance community resilience and ensure the sustainability of water resources.