

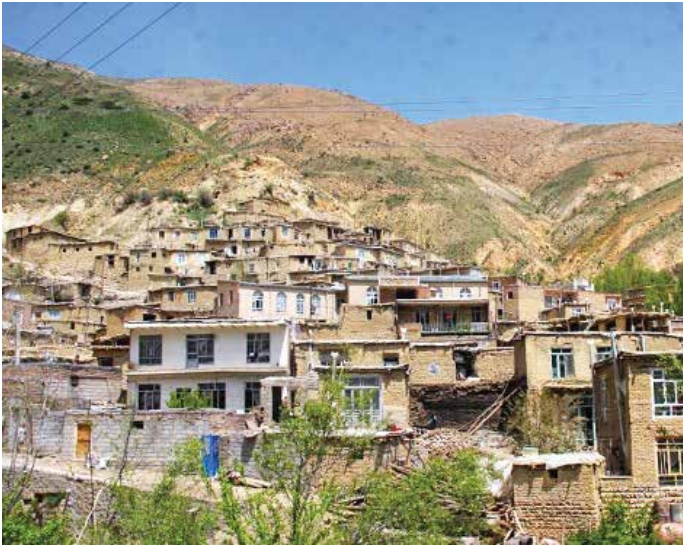
Golakhor village captivates visitors with nature, tradition

Iranica Desk

Nestled in the lush forests of Arasbaran, the village of Golakhor, with its traditional stepped architecture, is considered one of the most beautiful yet lesser-known tourist destinations in East Azarbaijan Province. Located 60 kilometers west of Varzeqan, on the western slopes of Kasabeh Mountain, Golakhor is surrounded by verdant Arasbaran woodlands. The village, with its scenic hot springs, is 160 kilometers from Tabriz and 70 kilometers from Marand. The natural springs in the area are rich in calcium, which creates unique and visually striking formations that captivate visitors, according to chtn.ir.

The village comprises approximately 250 houses built in a stepped arrangement along a valley. Constructed using sun-dried bricks and clay, each home rests on roughly one-meter-high stone foundations. Residents primarily engage in livestock farming and agriculture, with walnuts, cherries, and apricots representing the main agricultural products of the village.

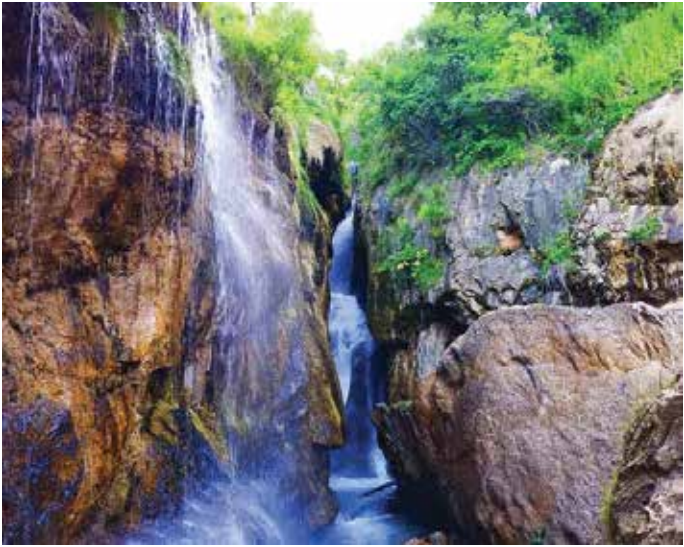
Dairy products such as cheese, Kashk (a dish of dried buttermilk that can be crumbled and turned into a paste with water), yogurt, and milk are also locally produced. Women actively participate alongside men in farming and animal husbandry, and in their spare time, they weave carpets, particularly



in the traditional Heris style. Golakhor also preserves centuries-old culinary traditions. The art of preparing handmade noodles, has been practiced in the village for generations and continues to this day. Women still follow traditional methods to prepare the noodles for local soups and other dishes. Another cultural highlight is the traditional grinding of Kashk in special containers, which is then used in local cuisine. The village celebrates Nowruz (Persian New Year) with a unique ritual. Residents gather in the village mosque to prepare wheat and saffron water, recite Surah Yaseen of the Holy Qur'an collectively, and distribute the blessed mixture among attendees. Afterwards, villagers visit homes where grievances



have occurred over the past year to reconcile and restore harmony.



Other local customs include the observance of Tasua Day (9th day of Muharram, marking the anniversary of the Martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions), when women bake traditional bread, which is then placed at the center of the village in front of the religious banner (Alam). Villagers hold mourning ceremonies around the bread, which is later distributed among participants. The nationally registered Al-Atash Ashura (the tenth day of Muharram) is another long-standing ritual performed in the village with its unique style. For nature enthusiasts, Golakhor offers spectacular outdoor attractions. An ancient cave near the Aq Su Spring and waterfalls provides breathtaking scenery, particularly in spring. Reaching the cave requires about an hour of hiking from the village toward the spring

and waterfalls. The cave entrance sits atop a rocky hill, and inside, visitors find a network of interconnected limestone chambers, making it one of the registered tourist attractions of the county. The climate of Golakhor and its surrounding region further enhances its appeal. The village enjoys a temperate mountainous climate, characterized by mild summers, cool springs, and crisp autumns, while winters can bring occasional snowfall, blanketing the valley in a serene layer of white. This seasonal variation allows visitors to experience the village in different atmospheres, from the vibrant greenery of spring to the golden hues of autumn. The surrounding Arasbaran forests are home to diverse flora and fauna, including oak, hornbeam, and wild cherry trees, as well as native wildlife such as foxes, boars, and various bird species. In addition, the nearby villages and natural sites — such as the Varzeqan forest trails, Kasabeh Mountain peaks, and the rivers and waterfalls of the Arasbaran Protected Area — offer hiking, bird-watching, and eco-tourism opportunities, making Golakhor an ideal base for exploring the rich cultural and natural heritage of the region. Visitors can also enjoy scenic drives and local markets in nearby towns, allowing a deeper connection with the traditions and landscapes of East Azarbaijan Province.

Reading Room

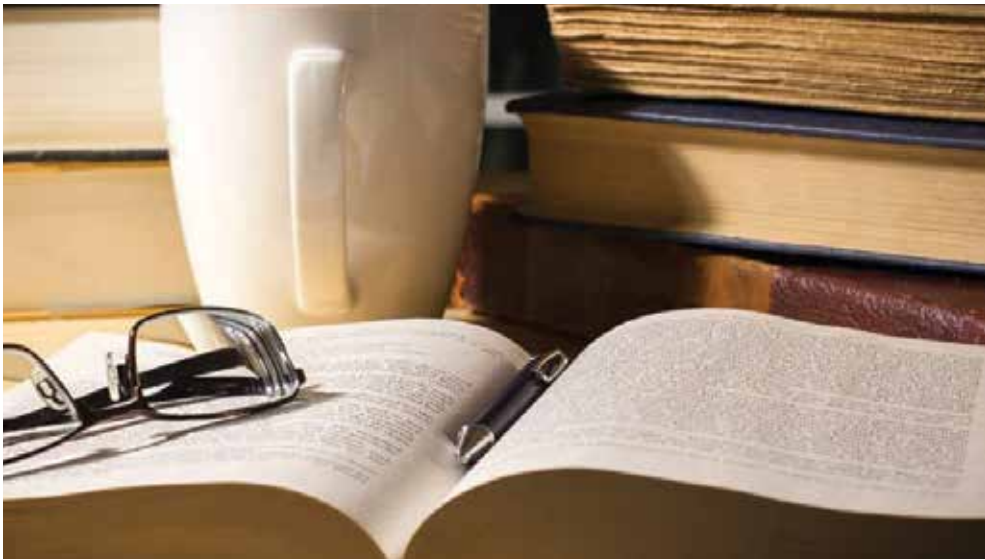
Books as medicine for minds, communities

Iranica Desk

Bibliotherapy, an old yet newly rediscovered concept, now stands at the intersection of literature, mental health, and social action. According to Iran Book News Agency (IBNA), citing LitHub, Jess Décoursey Hines, a librarian and author, explores in a recent essay how reading can serve both as individual relief and as a collective force against anxiety, grief, and the burnout of the contemporary world. “I have often felt like a part-time therapist as a librarian,” she writes. People share their secrets with librarians. We build relationships with regular visitors, listen to their struggles, and deliver something beyond the books themselves. Twenty years ago, during my library studies, I first encountered the term ‘bibliotherapist,’ and I was curious: is bibliotherapy simply a calming reading experience, or does it require a mental health professional?” While arts, music, and drama therapy have long held formal places in academic programs and the mental health system, bibliotherapy remains less widely recognized. Hines

recalls wondering when the “medicine of books” would reach its peak — perhaps that moment is now, with the emergence of figures like Emily Ramble, a clinical social worker and author of Bibliotherapy in the Bronx (2025). Ramble’s book is not a technical academic text limited to professionals but a poetic, accessible guide for book lovers. She reminds readers that bibliotherapy is far from new: in ancient Egypt, one of the earliest libraries welcomed visitors with a sign reading “House of the Healing Soul.” The term bibliotherapy first appeared in 1916 in a humorous article in The Atlantic. During World War I, the Library of Congress and the American Library Association distributed hundreds of books for therapeutic purposes to soldiers. At the time, debates arose over whether patients should avoid books related to their illness or whether reading should serve as an escape from — or reflection on — reality. Hospital librarians even wore medical uniforms and “prescribed” books alongside doctors and nurses. Ramble views bibliotherapy as an accessible tool for

groups with limited access to formal mental health services. She distinguishes between developmental bibliotherapy, which takes place in schools and libraries, and clinical bibliotherapy, which is confined to psychotherapy. According to her, general advice for grief or heartbreak is rarely effective, as every experience is personal. Ramble begins with a “reading interview,” reads the book alongside the participant, and uses the text as a platform for dialogue about family, relationships, anxiety, and trauma. In contrast, other approaches rely on curated reading lists, such as those promoted by the School of Life in London. In these models, readers engage independently with books over time. While this method may not suit acute crises, it can illuminate deeper human questions. Research published in media such as Time and NPR shows that reading fiction can increase a person’s capacity for empathy. But is this empathy guaranteed? Sigrid Nunez wryly notes in her novel The Friend that while reading may enhance empathy, writing might slightly diminish it. This



caution serves as a reminder that books are not miraculous, but they can sharpen the language of experience. Bibliotherapy also holds a special place for children. Family therapists use storybooks to help children find an “authentic language” for their emotions. Non-didactic narratives told from the perspectives of animals or children help youngsters recognize their experiences without clinical terminology. Ramble further emphasizes

the link between bibliotherapy and activism. The history of Black librarianship in the US — from Sadie Delaney to the Schomburg Library — shows that libraries themselves can be radical instruments of change. Today, bookstores highlighting banned or controversial books continue this tradition. In a world where screens have replaced pages, Ramble reminds readers that books need not be “conquered.” Sometimes fragments and

“whispers” are enough. A short poem or the final lines of a novel can provide a survival force during times of censorship, threat, or fear. Ultimately, bibliotherapy does not promise instant salvation, but it offers a defiance of despair. As Ramble notes, in an era fed by fear, polarization, and erasure, reading can move us from isolated individualism to a broader collective horizon — where pain is acknowledged, named, and perhaps made a little lighter.