

Estarkhi village blends waterfalls, history, living traditions

Iranica Desk

Nestled in the mountains of North Khorasan Province, Estarkhi Village offers visitors a blend of pristine nature, rich history, and unique local traditions. Located 28 kilometers south of Shirvan, the picturesque village is surrounded by the villages of Golian, Hesar-e Pahlavanlu, Amiranlu, Barzali, and Bolqan, and is part of the Golian Rural District.

Home to around 223 households and a population of 1,099, Estarkhi is inhabited mainly by Turkish-speaking residents. The village lies in a relatively deep valley stretching from south to northeast, with a river flowing through its center, creating one of the province's most scenic mountain landscapes, according to ISNA.

The river originates from several large and small springs near the village, with a flow measuring approximately 20 inches, before cascading over a cliff more than 20 meters high to form Estarkhi Waterfall, the tallest waterfall in the Shirvan region.

Known locally as Sharshar Waterfall, the cascade plunges through towering poplar, willow, and walnut trees. As the water strikes the rocks below, it creates a cloud of white mist,



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producing a spectacular natural scene.

Beyond Sharshar, Estarkhi is home to numerous other waterfalls scattered throughout the valley. Above the main waterfall stand the remains of an old watermill, while the eastern and western slopes of the valley are covered with dense woodland. The area surrounding the waterfall serves as a popular summer retreat thanks to its cool climate. About 40 meters east of the waterfall lies a small cave containing stalactites and stalagmites. Because the area's geology is predominantly limestone, specialists consider the cave worthy of further scientific study.



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The village is believed to have been settled by Turks from



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Transoxiana, who were relocated to the region during the

reign of Nader Shah. The presence of an old cemetery is regarded as evidence supporting this historical account.

The surrounding mountains are rich in wild and medicinal plants. Local agricultural products include walnuts, raisins, potatoes, wheat, rain-fed barley, and various orchard fruits.

Between the river's source and Sharshar Waterfall stands a remarkable ancient mountain cypress with a trunk circumference of about five meters. Estimated to be around 600 years old, the tree is considered one of the village's natural landmarks.

At the heart of Estarkhi is a shrine that local residents be-

lieve belongs to Shahzadeh Abdolrahman (AS), a son of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (PBUH), the fourth Imam of Shia Muslims. The shrine, which contains a wooden shrine enclosure, remains an important place of devotion and has recently been restored with public donations under the supervision of Shirvan's Endowment Department.

Traditional village life is still visible in Estarkhi. Elderly women continue to wear colorful headscarves, traditional dresses, black trousers, and traditional jewelry attached to their vests, while many older men traditionally wear beards. One of the village's most distinctive attractions is Reconciliation Alley, believed to be the narrowest alley in North Khorasan Province. Measuring only 80 centimeters wide, it was traditionally used for a unique reconciliation ritual.

According to local tradition, two people wishing to settle their differences would first perform ritual washing in a nearby bathhouse. They would then enter the alley from opposite ends, walk toward each other through the narrow passage, and reconcile when they met in the middle. Today, the narrow alley remains one of Estarkhi's most distinctive cultural attractions.

Reading Room

A book revisited through martyred Leader's annotations

The book "Religio-Political Currents and Organizations in Iran" by Rasul Jafarian, a faculty member of the Department of History at the University of Tehran, was first published by Elm Publications.

The martyred Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, wrote a series of marginal notes on this book. Rather than offering a general critique, these annotations constitute a set of historical corrections, supplementary information, and analytical remarks on certain political and religious figures and movements. With close attention to detail, he corrected or completed parts of the text in the margins and, in some cases, commented on the assessment of individuals and groups.

In these notes, he emphasizes the importance of accuracy in reporting historical events, avoiding rushed judgments, and considering the political and temporal context of each period. The late Leader also added information on the activities of certain clerics, religious assemblies, and Islamic organizations, clarifying their role in the struggle against the Pahlavi regime. In addition, he provided explanations regarding some religious figures, offering a more precise picture of their status and activities.

Another part of the annotations is devoted to correcting historical errors and completing names, dates, and relationships among religious movements. These corrections reflect his familiarity with the historical sources and political atmosphere of the 1941-1979 period, as someone who witnessed and participated in those developments.

The author of the book, Rasul Jafarian, has stated that he incorporated many of these notes into later editions, integrating a significant portion of Ayatollah Khamenei's corrections and comments into the main text or footnotes. As such, these annotations have played an important role not only historically but also in improving the scholarly accuracy of the book.

The book examines the formation, growth, and activities of religious movements in modern Iran, particularly from the fall of Reza Shah Pahlavi's government to the victory of the Islamic Revolution. The author shows that after the political opening following August of 1941, religious groups and associations were able to resume their activities and play a more influential role in cultural, social, and political spheres. Despite differences in goals and methods, these movements contributed significantly to preserving the religious identity of society and countering secular and anti-religious currents.

In the early phase of this period, leading religious authorities and the Shiite clerical establishment played a central role. Ayatollah Seyyed Abolhassan Isfahani and other senior clerics not only provided religious guidance but also supported the formation and backing of religious associations. These groups sought to expand Islamic teachings through public funding, religious ceremonies, publications, and educational gatherings, while resisting the spread of non-religious ideas.

The author then discusses the expansion of religious associations across Iranian cities. Many were established in Tehran and provincial centers, each pursuing activities

shaped by local conditions. Some focused on cultural, charitable, and educational work, while others — given the political climate — engaged in social and political activities. These associations also helped build cooperation between clerics, merchants, students, and other religious segments of society.

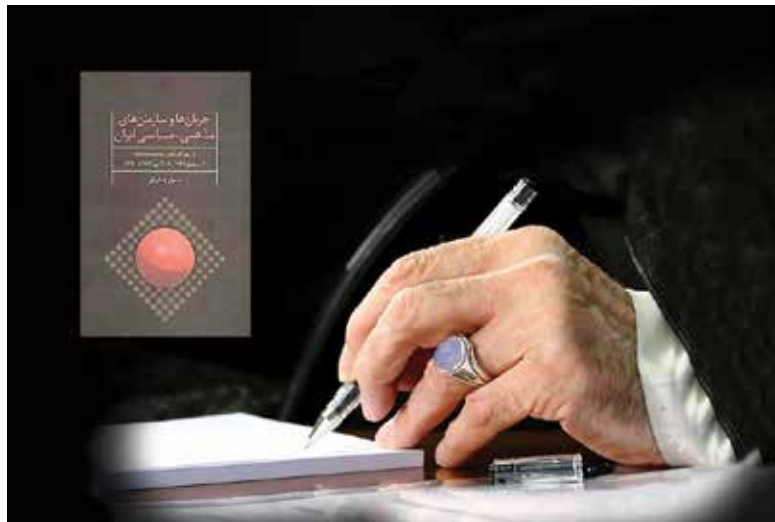
religious organizations and associations. While differing in structure and approach, they shared the common goal of defending Islamic values, strengthening religious belief, and fostering unity among religious forces. Some prioritized cultural and educational work, while others became more politically active. Many

sought to reconcile Islamic teachings with modern social needs. Through writing, public speaking, and university engagement, they presented Islam as a dynamic and rational faith capable of addressing contemporary issues. This group played a key role in attracting educated and university-educated audiences to religious thought.

In the final section, the book discusses the growing political role of religious movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Policies of Pahlavi government, restrictions on religious activities, and rising public dissatisfaction pushed many associations and groups beyond cultural work into political opposition. During this period, mosques, religious assemblies, and Husseiniyas became key centers for public mobilization and awareness.

The author concludes that between 1941 and 1979, religious movements played a decisive role in preserving Iran's religious identity, resisting non-Islamic ideologies, training committed forces, and mobilizing the public. By utilizing the capacities of the clergy, religious associations, cultural centers, and educational institutions, they established a broad social base. This foundation ultimately contributed to the formation of the Islamic movement and the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. According to Rasul Jafarian, understanding these organizations and movements is essential for comprehending modern Iranian political and social developments, as many key transformations of this era were rooted in their sustained and organized activities.

The text was first published on IBNA.



A key theme of the book is the role of religious movements in confronting Marxist, communist, and Western-oriented ideologies. According to the author, the spread of such ideas in universities and cultural centers during the 1950s and 1960s pushed religious forces and clerics to intensify their activities. Through lectures, publications, responses to ideological doubts, and youth education, they sought to preserve religion's place in society and prevent the younger generation from gravitating toward competing ideologies. The book further introduces major

later served as training grounds for revolutionary cadres.

Another section is devoted to seminaries and religious scholars, highlighting their role in both education and socio-political developments. Seminaries not only trained clerics and expanded Islamic scholarship but also contributed to public awareness and social leadership during critical periods. The close relationship between clergy and the public enabled them to assume a guiding role in times of crisis.

The author also examines the activities of religious intellectuals who