

Iranica Desk

Among the historic buildings of Ahvaz, the Mapar House stands out as a surviving example of the city's architectural heritage. Dating to the early Pahlavi period, the mansion features distinctive brickwork, lush courtyards, stained-glass windows, wooden doors and old palm trees, offering a glimpse into the architecture and lifestyle of southern Iran.

Registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 1380 (2001), the house today serves not only as a historical and architectural attraction but also as a venue for cultural, artistic and tourism activities.

The Mapar House stands in the historic zone of Ahvaz, on Khansari Street in the Nadari neighborhood. Its location in the central fabric of the city makes it relatively easy for tourists and residents to reach, and a visit can easily be combined with seeing other historical and urban attractions of Ahvaz, according to IRNA.

The Mapar House is one of the surviving examples of Ahvaz's historic houses, having undergone extensive changes over the past decades, with parts of its old fabric lost. Preserving such buildings therefore does not merely mean maintaining an old structure; it forms part of the effort to safeguard the markers of the city's historical identity.

Sources do not agree on the exact date of construction, but architectural and tourism references attribute the building to the early Pahlavi period. The name of the house has also been linked to Abdolmajid Mapar, a well-known merchant of that era.

More significant is the building's place in the formation of Ahvaz's urban architecture during the late Qajar and ear-

Mapar House preserves Ahvaz's architectural heritage



● IRNA

ly Pahlavi periods. Ahvaz was gradually expanding at the time, and houses were built combining local southern architectural features with the prevailing elements of the era. The Mapar House is one example in whose structure part of this process can still be traced.

After many years, the house suffered from deterioration and was eventually restored under the supervision of the provincial Cultural Heritage Organization. It was registered on Iran's National Heritage List on 26 November 2001.

One of the first things to catch a visitor's eye on entering the Mapar House is the brick facade and entrance portal, where bricks are laid both horizontally and vertically in varied patterns. This type of brickwork provides strength while giving the facade a decorative quality. The building covers about 550 square meters and consists

of two floors and a basement. Basements were particularly important in the hot southern regions, offering residents a cooler environment away from the intense heat outside. Parts of the ceiling are built with wooden beams, and the interior architecture retains traces of traditional southern construction methods.

The courtyard is one of the most important elements of the Mapar House. The design incorporates two courtyards, with the building and rooms arranged around the open space. The pool, flower beds, wooden doors and old trees set the house apart from an ordinary urban building.

Among the natural features, the leaning palm tree is the most famous. Standing in the courtyard, it is a favorite subject for visitors' photographs and, because of its distinctive shape, is known locally and among

tourists as the "Sulking Palm" (Nakhl-e Qahr-Karde). This simple natural element has become one of the visual symbols of the Mapar House.

The stained-glass windows are another striking feature of the mansion. The interplay of light, colored glass, the pool and the courtyard greenery creates an effect found in many traditional Iranian houses. Such details show that the architecture was not limited to providing a residential space; beauty and quality of life were also considered in its design.

What sets the Mapar House apart from many historic buildings is how it has been used since restoration. The building has served cultural purposes in different periods. From the late 1990s, for instance, the basement was used for library and literary activities, hosting programs such as Hafez recitations and poetry nights.

The house later became a space for cultural and artistic activity. Published reports tell of exhibitions, literary programs, handicraft-related activities and other cultural events held there. In this way, the house moved beyond being a mere historical monument to become a space open to the public.

This kind of use is important for historic buildings. An old house can keep its connection with today's society when people are not simply looking at it from behind a fence, but have the chance to enter, explore and experience its space. In this respect, the Mapar House is an example of turning a historic building into a living cultural and tourism space.

For those interested in historic buildings, visiting the Mapar House is more than viewing an old structure. The combination of brick architecture, courtyard, pool, wooden doors, colored

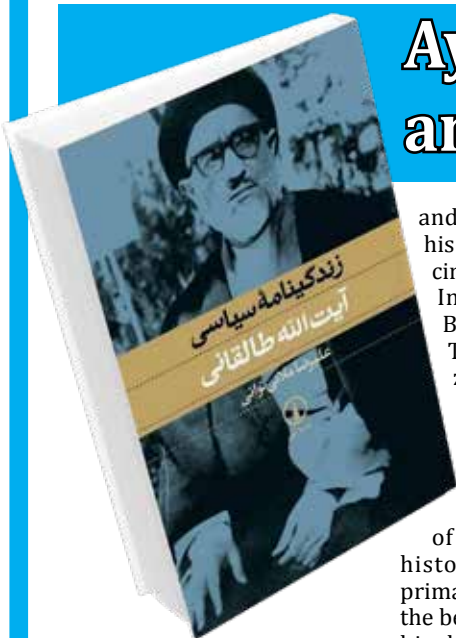
glass and the old palm creates a space that echoes the atmosphere of traditional southern houses.

At the same time, the hospitality and cultural spaces within the complex make the house appealing to visitors who are not necessarily deeply interested in history and architecture. Many tourists visiting historic buildings look for a place that offers not only historical value but also a chance to rest and make memories. The Mapar House offers exactly that combination. Ahvaz is best known for the Karun River, its bridges and its urban atmosphere, but the city has another face — one seen in the houses and historic buildings left from the past. The Mapar House is among the best-known examples of this heritage, sitting in the heart of the city and offering a chance to discover part of the architecture and life of Ahvaz's past.

Reading Room

Ayatollah Taleqani linked faith, freedom and political activism

Alireza Molai-Tavani



Examining the life and thought of Ayatollah Seyyed Mahmoud Taleqani requires an understanding of the political and social developments that shaped contemporary Iran. From the 1960s onward, his life took on broader dimensions as his political and social activities intensified and became closely intertwined with the changes taking place in Iranian society. His life, therefore, cannot be viewed merely as the personal story of a cleric, but must be examined through the intellectual, political, social

and cultural dimensions of his work and the historical circumstances of his time.

In his book *The Political Biography of Ayatollah Taleqani*, historian Alireza Molai-Tavani, a faculty member at the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, examines Taleqani's life within the broader context of contemporary Iranian history. The study focuses primarily on the period from the beginning of the 1960s to his death on September 10, 1979, when his political and social activities expanded significantly and included trials, imprisonment, exile and close contacts with political activists and opposition groups, according to IBNA.

Taleqani was a distinctive figure among contemporary Iranian clerics. Alongside his religious activities, he paid close attention to political and social issues and maintained contacts and cooperation with figures outside the traditional religious establishment. He supported the movement to nationalize Iran's oil industry and was an admirer of Mo-

hammad Mosaddegh. He also played a role in the formation of the Freedom Movement of Iran, a nationalist-religious political organization.

Despite his strong commitment to Islam and the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, Taleqani maintained an open and conciliatory approach toward different intellectual and political currents. He was willing to engage in dialogue with people holding different views and showed a notable degree of intellectual and religious tolerance.

Some of these characteristics can be traced to the family and cultural environment in which he grew up. Taleqani was raised in a clerical family, but the religious establishment was not regarded as merely a profession. His father, Abolhassan Taleqani, was a religious scholar who was also connected with the intellectual and social issues of his time. The family maintained contacts with reform-minded clerics and figures such as Ayatollah Seyyed Hassan Modarres, while their home provided a setting for religious and intellectual dis-

cussions.

At the time, dialogue among followers of different religions and intellectual traditions was also relatively common in some circles. Muslims, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians engaged in discussions and exchanges of ideas. Taleqani grew up in this environment and witnessed such religious dialogues firsthand. These experiences influenced his understanding of religion and society and helped foster his emphasis on dialogue and tolerance.

This background also made Taleqani more receptive to new ideas in the field of religion. While remaining firmly committed to Islamic principles, he avoided rigid dogmatism and was open to intellectual and religious reforms as long as they did not conflict with his understanding of Islamic foundations. His longstanding intellectual and personal relationship with Mehdi Bazargan, an Iranian scholar, academic, long-time pro-democracy activist, can also be viewed in this context. The two were longtime friends and worked together

on a number of intellectual and political activities. In some respects, Taleqani could even be regarded as more reform-minded and moderate than Bazargan.

One of the most important aspects of Taleqani's political thought was his attention to the Constitutional Revolution and the relationship between religion and political freedom. Following the August 1953 coup, Iran's political environment became increasingly closed and repressive. The Pahlavi government sought to further centralize political power and marginalize opposition groups and political movements. Under these circumstances, many political activists came to believe that earlier approaches to political struggle, particularly constitutionalism and the activities of the National Front, had reached an impasse.

It was in this environment that Taleqani published and edited the important work *Tanbih al-Ummah wa Tan-zih al-Millah* by Ayatollah Mohammad-Hossein Naeini. The work can be viewed as

an effort to revisit constitutionalist thought and demonstrate its compatibility with religious principles. Through this effort, Taleqani sought to reopen discussion of freedom, government and resistance to authoritarianism and to show that constitutionalism could remain a viable means of confronting despotism.

However, this approach did not become the dominant political discourse in Iran. Moderate and nationalist forces did not have sufficient opportunity to develop and promote a coherent theory of freedom, political legitimacy and democracy. As a result, the political struggle gradually moved toward revolutionary currents. With the emergence of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (PBUH) and the growth of reformist and revolutionary Islamist currents, including the ideas associated with Ali Shariati, political Islam increasingly became a central force in opposition to the Pahlavi government. The revolutionary path gradually replaced gradual reform as the principal avenue of political struggle.