

## Celebrating Simin Behbahani Banooy-e Ghazal Continues to Sing Iran



Love at Eighty?  
Admit it: it's  
Ancient Eve  
offering apples  
red lips and  
Beautiful,  
but not d  
If my face has color  
it's just makeup, a deceit.  
But in my chest a heart  
beats its wings wild with desire,  
every seventy of its heartbeats  
multiplied by two.  
Love and shame and my body  
warm with lust, I burn  
with fever, a fever  
past any physician's cure.  
But at my side is bliss,  
my lover  
kind and faithful  
and as long as he is here  
I dwell in heaven.  
I can't breathe a word;  
my mouth's sealed  
and with your kisses  
burn  
warm with lust  
with fever, a fever  
past any physician's cure.  
You, I, us tonight  
with a wine so delightful  
where's the room for restraint?  
Admire! Come see the spectacle.  
Leave behind your denial and conceits  
and watch as the eighty-year-old  
rivals the twenty-year-old she.  
I dwell in heaven.

zarre.  
is, one  
les:  
golden  
If my face has color  
it's just makeup, a deceit.  
But in my chest a heart  
beats its wings wild with desire,  
every seventy of its heartbeats  
multiplied by two.  
Love and shame and my body  
warm with lust, I burn  
with fever, a fever  
past any physician's cure.  
But at my side is bliss,  
my lover  
kind and faithful  
and as long as  
I dwell in heaven.

I can't breathe a word;  
my mouth's sealed  
shut with your kisses  
their tongues of  
Oh, my thirsty lover  
Look at my happy face  
You, I, us tonight  
with a wine so  
where's the room  
restraint?  
Admire! Come see the spectacle.  
Leave behind your denial and conceits  
and watch as the  
rivals the twenty-year-old she.

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By: Shahri Estakhry



## It Is Our Time

Recently in Early September 1988, I sat on a bench in the playground of All Hallows Academy in La Jolla, California where I was a faculty member, waiting to register a few students for Persian classes. My friend the late Mozzi Bagherzadeh had graciously agreed to help anywhere that she could. I was hoping for a “few” students in order for them to be a challenge to each other in learning. We ended up registering more than 75 students that day, and became aware of the fact that we had a school on our hands.

That was 25 years ago and the start of the Iranian School of San Diego. Within a few months later came the birth of the Persian Cultural Center. 25 years of longevity wasn't exactly what was on our minds. But here we are 25 years later having grown with a community of young and caring professionals determined to preserve their cultural heritage for their children and our future generations. In these 25 years we have become a large family of caring volunteers in San Diego, agreeing and disagreeing on different issues with the ultimate goal of keeping alive our community and our cultural heritage.

The important facts about the past 25 years are foremost the interest of our community in San Diego with their support and the endurance of our volunteer forces year after year. Let me add here that with the exception of the Iranian-American Scholarship Fund that now is a national organization, none of our organizations have taken even one fundraising event that I can remember outside of our own boundaries of San Diego, while we have graciously supported many that have brought their fundraisers here with funds and our volunteer forces.

For those of us that have been involved, the past 25 years have proven that in San Diego there is a need for a Center, and thus we should have a Center that will answer to the needs of our community for future years ahead. Year after year we have had the hope and the dream of making this fantasy come true. Some have given up. Yet, here we are with some of us who never gave up and are more determined than ever to make it happen one way or another.

Now more than ever, in this volatile world with so much negativism towards Iran, we need to do more to bring our rich heritage in view and not let go of our positive hopes and work together for better understanding and for a better future for generations to come.

Looking at it from my perspective, today, after all of these years of volunteer work and stepping into the primary stages of my senior citizenship (yes, it has arrived joyfully), now I look forward for my community to have a Center where I too can participate and enjoy the benefits of some programs and associate with people that can keep alive the fond memories of my homeland, where I was once upon a time so content. As much as one likes to believe that we are infallible, in reality we know better. There is a time and a season for all things in our lives. Change of seasons does not stop or slow down for anyone, the important thing is to leave a positive legacy for those we care about.

This Center can be a great example for our community everywhere to follow our path and build others. I'm hoping that all of those wonderful people who came and did their successful fundraisers on our grounds and turfs, will now, generously support this project and have a brick, a bench or a room in the building with their names in view to honor those who supported them from San Diego. This would mean the true community unity.

I know that once we have such a Center, and I pray it will be in my lifetime, every time that I go there, as soon as I park my car, I will lift my head, look at it with a prideful smile and much happiness in my heart, shake my head joyfully and say to myself “you did it ole girl, you lit the first candle” and then I will walk in and enjoy the best cup of tea in the world with my friends and watch a movie with them or talk about a book, resolve the world situations and be happy and content to be where I am.

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## “Fresh Air” Art Exhibit in Escondido Celebrates Community Artists

Escondido, one of the longest established cities north of San Diego, is well known for its old-world charm and, more recently, its Arts Center, restaurants, and arts galleries, bringing to the City a cultural buzz. It was in this context and environment that the Persian Cultural Center partnered up with “M Gallery” (A.K.A. Mehr International Cultural Center) to present a 10-day exhibition of art on Grand Avenue in Escondido, that highlighted the work of local artists. The exhibit, entitled “Fresh Air” (*Havay-e Taaze*), featured the works of 17 artists, working with watercolors, oils, acrylics, mix media, and semi-precious stones for jewelry. Some of the work clearly reflected the artist’s Iranian background, such as Mansour Khaleghi’s colorful and charming domed interior of a traditional mosque. Other pieces reflected a variety of thought-provoking themes, such as Derissi’s painting of a man in a disheveled business suit, standing in a flower pot in the middle of a pre-storm ocean, holding an umbrella so as to not get wet but deliberately watering his feet which are planted in the pot, with a watering can. Ali Faramarzi’s soft and delicate geometrical forms reflected the dignity and boundless possibilities of abstract art. Peyk’s own Ali Sadr displayed several pieces, such as the sensitively expressive portrait of master musician, Hossein Alizadeh. Over the weekend evenings, the spacious and welcoming interior of M Gallery was infused with the hypnotic and melodic sounds of live classical Persian music, adding an idyllic charm to the overall experience.

PCC would like to thank all the artists who participated from within the community and elsewhere and to say we are so proud of the talent that exists in you and in our community. PCC also extends thanks to Mr. Karim Mirreghabi, owner of M Gallery, for so warmly opening the doors of the gallery to display and support community arts and culture. PCC hopes to make the exhibition an annual event so if you, or anyone you know, did not have an opportunity to display work this time, look out for information on the PCC website or in *Peyk* for the next time.



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All donors' names will be recognized prominently on a plaque posted at the entrance of the Center and entitled, "Founders' Circle." In addition, at certain donation levels special recognition applies as indicated. This Center will not only serve you, your loved ones, and the community, but it will also benefit future generations and those who want to reach out and learn about Iranian Culture and the Persian language. As an established and respected community, we owe it to ourselves, our children, and the survival of our heritage to achieve this goal.

## Solicitation of Material

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We would like to thank all of you who have contributed to the building fund so far; your vision and generosity will serve generations of Iranian-Americans and San Diegans in the future.

## Add yours or a loved one's name to this list.

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 Afshar, Gity and Mashallah  
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# Graduation Hype

By Shaghayegh Hanson



By the time you read this, schools and colleges will be back in session, and the summer vacation will already be a pleasant memory. This summer has flown by! I'm barely over the graduation hype of a few weeks ago and yet, here we go again, about to embark on the next journey. I learned a lot from my daughter's 5<sup>th</sup> grade promotion. Mostly that it was unnecessarily stressful and superficially momentous.

It began with several shopping trips to find the perfect "promotion ceremony dress." Apparently, the rules at school required that the girls wear dresses and shoes with small heels. I decided not to take issue with this for the sake of my blood pressure. But things just kept becoming more ridiculous. My daughter wanted a cell phone as a "promotion present" because, after all, "everybody's getting one!" The assumption was that there would be a generous present of some kind, the devil was in the details. Then arose the issue of where we would go to lunch to celebrate and which friends and family would accompany us. Again there was the assumption that there would be a celebratory post-promotion meal, with details to be identified. I accommodated these expectations as un-begrudgingly as I could, given that such planning had not even gone into my law school graduation! Well, times have changed, and this is Southern California, not reserved England, I told myself.

On the day of the "Big Event" I took the morning off work. I thought everything was in hand and all the planning had gone quite well. But the ridiculousness continued. As I entered the school, I realized that all the parents around me were holding salutary balloons, flowers, and/or soft toys dressed in caps and gowns. I turned on my heels and raced down to the store. With a sense of guilt I purchased as many of the things I had seen other parents holding and ran back to school.

As I hurriedly made my way to the "Big Event" I brushed by tiny children wearing sky blue, silk caps and gowns. They looked awfully cute but...what could this possibly be? Graduation from potty training? Turns out it was graduation from pre-school...*pre-school*. All of a sudden, I felt a slight irritation begin to swell up inside my head. The entire side aisles of the multi-purpose room were covered with paparazzi parents and their fancy cameras on professional-looking tripods, all vying for the best position from which to capture the moment, as if their lives depended on it. I was thinking, "Did I miss something? Is there a guest personality...perhaps the Queen of England, attending this event?" I resentfully pulled out my phone with which to take a picture or two, perhaps record a few moments. Now I would not be able to relax, I would have to create the perfect memory through my phone camera---pictures of speeches, of my daughter going on stage, of her shaking hands with the Principal, of her with all her cute friends.... I began to sweat under my work clothes.

My irritation grew worse as the pomp and ceremony began. The double doors of the hall opened to loud fanfare music. I had visions of the Chariots in Ben-Hur lining up for the race in

the Coliseum. The children ceremoniously entered the hall behind their teachers, all serious, feeling the pride and solemnity of the occasion. I waved at my daughter; she acknowledged me with a controlled, mature smile. Once all were assembled in the front, the music stopped and we were no longer in Caesar's Rome. Then ensued several Hallmark moments that reduced even the toughest of dads to tears. The teachers had compiled a DVD featuring a photo gallery of all the children as they looked in Kindergarten followed by a live shot of them as they now look so many years later, moving up to the next chapter of their lives. There was a soundtrack to this DVD but I cannot recall the name of the song. I do remember it talked about wings and soaring and such things.

After the DVD, two students gave speeches about their time at the school and their feelings about heading to Middle School. I'm not quite sure when it happened but at some point during these speeches, the irritation in my head worked its way down to my stomach and I felt in need of a throw-up bucket. Perhaps it was when one of the girls was saying... "we have experienced joyous times dotted with occasional melancholy..." Oh brother!

After the "diploma" giving and hand-shaking were all over, the children stood up, turned to face the parents, and all sang one last sappy, slow, "We are the World-type" song. I looked at my daughter's face, hoping to find in it a measure of disdain for the overdone sentimentality, but she was in a trance, she sang in earnest about herself and her precious place in this world. The teachers wore satisfied smiles as the tear-fest in the room became climactic---they had accomplished their mission. And I realized that I had been a victim too, for I had a tear-stained shirt, mascara smudged eyes, and a hole in my heart that missed the little girl my daughter used to be. If this was a celebration, why was I feeling so damned depressed all of a sudden!

We had a pleasant lunch following the ceremony, after which I was released. I could not wait to get back to the clinical environment of my office. I had to think about what just happened and why I found it so problematic. I do not have a complete answer. I just know that although I am proud of my daughter for who she is and certain accomplishments, I do not want her to believe that success in life is as cheap as a Hallmark moment or big words strung together to make a 5<sup>th</sup> grader sound like a Harvard grad. Those moments in life when we experience true success or happiness are not always revolved around a personal benefit and are never accompanied by a great deal of fanfare. I hope all the hype does not prevent her from understanding this.

At least I have two years before I need to worry about another promotion. This time I will be better prepared. First order of business---a tripod for my camera...after all, everybody's got one!

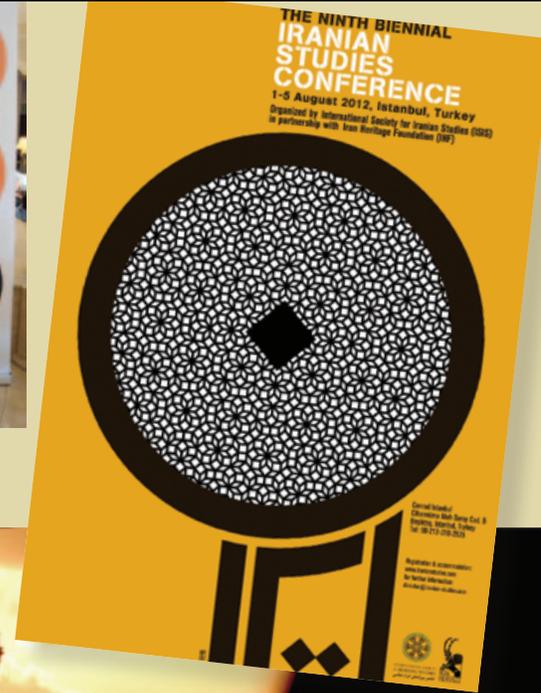
## ISSD Participates in Iranian Studies Conference in Istanbul

In order to address the marginal place of the study of Iranian and Persian culture in American universities in the 1960s, the academic journal, *Iranian Studies*, was established in 1967. It embraced scholars from various disciplines who academically worked on Iran. Registered in the state of New York, the professional association of *Society for Iranian Studies* was also established to facilitate dialogue amongst scholars of Iranian studies. In 1996, SIS held its first biennale conference in the United States. Having attracted scholars from all corners of the world, in 2003 the Society for Iranian Studies became the *International Society for Iranian Studies*; ISIS went on to hold its first conference outside of North America (London, 2006). This year, the conference was held in Istanbul, Turkey (August 1-5) in partnership with the Iran Heritage Foundation (IHF).

An ideal venue, the city of Istanbul shares countless historical ties with Iran, and has been home to many Iranian intellectuals since the eighteenth century. The conference attracted some four hundred scholars from India, Hungary, Costa Rica, Israel, Russia, Japan, England, and other nations. Two young scholars joined the conference by hitchhiking from Lithuania, demonstrating their level of dedication and enthusiasm. Research papers of various disciplines were presented; panels included Translating Persian Poetry, Iranian-Israeli relations, Pre-Islamic and Epic Traditions, Safavid Studies, Iranian Cinema, and more. International publishers of Middle Eastern studies presented their previous and recent publications. The conference was concluded by a dinner on the Bosphorus, graced by the presence of Dr. Ehsan Yarshater, editor-in-chief of *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

On behalf of the Iranian School of San Diego, I had the honor of presenting a paper in Istanbul. Chaired by Professor Pardis Minuchehr, the panel was entitled “Persian Curriculum: Language in Context,” which explored different aspects and challenges of teaching Persian outside of Iran. My paper, which will appear in the next issue of *Peyk*, focused on creating advanced textbooks for the teaching of Persian as a heritage language. I argued that curricula designed in the framework of teaching Persian as a second language are not age appropriate and do not correspond with the linguistic profile of Persian heritage students, while academic curricula do not cater to the particular needs of heritage schools such as ISSD. Particular pedagogical and academic implications should be taken into consideration before creating textbooks for heritage learners of Persian; I offered the advanced textbook I compiled and edited in 2009 as an example for future pedagogical endeavors.

Persian, categorized as an “immigrant language,” is less commonly taught in the United States than “colonial languages”



such as Spanish, French, and German. Hence, there is a much longer way to go for the development of teaching materials and training professional teachers. Currently, there are about fifty Persian-language programs in American universities. The number of heritage schools and institutes, however, is not clear. The Iranian School of San Diego has recently started a project to gather an extensive database to locate similar part-time, heritage schools of Persian in North America and Europe in order to exchange ideas and collaborate on creating textbooks and curricula. One of the first accredited Iranian schools in the U.S., ISSD has been a pioneer in creating its autonomous curricula and assisting other schools to operate and cater to their community.

International Society for Iranian Studies was itself founded out of a need to bring scholars of Iran together and provide them with an academic forum. This conference once again emphasized the importance of dialogue. Working in collaboration bears fruit much faster than working in isolation. In Istanbul, I was able to network with other language teachers and authors which undoubtedly will play a positive role in our future projects. I would like to commend the Persian Cultural Center of San Diego not only for having the vision to reach out to other like-minded organizations in the world to engage on cultural endeavors, but also to give substance to this vision by generously sponsoring my trip. I look forward to representing the Iranian School of San Diego again in October (13-14) at the 5th Iranian Alliances across Borders International (IAAB) Conference on the Iranian Diaspora at the University of California, Los Angeles.

## “Love at Eighty”

Banooye Ghazal Continues to Sing Iran

Simin Behbahani's poems paint one of the most nuanced narratives of modern Iranian society. Her poems offer apertures into the daily life of the Iranian people, revealing its subtleties and paradoxes. *From the Street*, a series of poems written between 1983 and 1985, is a realistic representation of the economic and moral quandaries that plague Iran; the stories include a pregnant woman giving birth while waiting in line for rationed food (*From the Street 3*) and the stoning of a woman by a cement block (*From the Street 6*). In another poem, *The Child Trailed Behind*, a boy stomps his foot on the floor and cries for pistachios. Embarrassed, the penniless mother leaves the store only to find him smiling with pockets full of pistachios. Momentarily relieved, the mother has a new predicament: has he stolen them?

Spanning over 600 poems, Behbahani's work deals with war, peace, revolution, class disparities, gender discrimination, polygamy, marital life, domestic violence, patriotism, prostitution, aging, poverty, and global violence. For her lifetime accomplishments, in particular her efforts in the struggle for freedom of expression, she was awarded a Human Rights Watch-Hellman/Hammet grant in 1998 and the Carl von Ossietzky Medal in 1999.

Born in 1927 in Tehran into a literary family (Khalili and Arghun), Behbahani is now in her mid-eighties. Nearly blind, her warm and passionate voice still never fails to mesmerize. In her poetry, she likens herself to an “Ancient Eve,” whose mouth is “shut with kisses.” With “wine” in hand and her “companion” by her side, she “rivals the twenty-year-old” Eve. Classical Persian poetry, traditionally coded as masculine, did not foreground issues of gender and sexuality. Behbahani has mobilized her identity and experiences to highlight issues of gender hegemony and egalitarianism. Her story traces and illuminates gender apartheid and oppression as well as ground-breaking transgressions in Iran's cultural and literary history.

Behbahani began to compose poetry at the age of 14. Having experimented with rhyming couplets and free verse, she turned to the *ghazal* as a vehicle for her artistic expression. Formally, she departs from the classical *ghazal* by adding new, original meters; what remains essentially intact is the geometric shape of the classical form.

The Persian *ghazal*, though historically known as a love lyric, has been recast and redefined several times, its elements made to serve new purposes, or sometimes done away with altogether. In her verse, Behbahani circumvents the social and cultural segregation of men and women, particularly by composing *ghazals* outside the aforementioned conventions. She writes in the traditional *ghazal* form but allows her personal perspective on the sociopolitical realities of her time to permeate its fantastical universe and even take precedence over its conventions. Behbahani's predecessors, female poets who challenged gender roles and male-centric conventions in Persian poetry, include Tâhirih Qurratol-Ayn (1814-1852), Parvin E'tesami (1907-1941), Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967), and Tahereh Saffarzadeh (1936-2008).

In her essay *We Await the Golden Dawn*, Behbahani writes, “From early on, my poems have reflected my social milieu and conditions,

though in effect, these reflections have been reflections of my individual and emotional reactions to the society and conditions in which I have lived.” Behbahani employs an autobiographical voice, whereas traditionally poets left their own world to enter the world of the classical *ghazal*. Making the daily lives of Iranians her subject, she explores political and social themes and opinions. There is no trace of unrequited, mystic love; instead, love is often celebrated in its most earthly and physical sense. She manipulates the rigid walls of the *ghazal*'s universe, and appropriates a new space more attuned to the expression of contemporary aspirations and ideals.

Behbahani began to compose poetry at the age of 14. Having experimented with rhyming couplets and free verse, she turned to the *ghazal* as a vehicle for her artistic expression. Formally, she departs from the classical *ghazal* by adding new, original meters—what remains essentially intact is the geometric shape of the classical form.

Behbahani has employed *ghazals* through a period of relative decline for classical poetry in Persian letters and an unprecedented boom in the popularity of free verse. She revives the form by virtue of theatrical subjects, a refreshing combination of highly cultivated and colloquial diction, directness of expression, feminized poetic content, and a remarkable thematic variety, which Kaveh Safa—co-translator of *A Cup of Sin*, the first collection of Behbahani's work to appear in English—says brings “breathlessness to a Persian reader who might come to her poems expecting to find the familiar.” In Behbahani's poetry, the old emerges to claim its newly defined place in the modern.

Uninvolved in partisan politics, her verse is a manifestation of her engaged awareness of the social and political life of Iranians regardless of race, gender, or religion. Her works were banned for many years and continue to be censored in Iran. In 2006, she was harassed by the police, blindfolded, and taken to jail for having celebrated International Women's Day on the streets of Tehran. In 2010, she was banned from leaving the country to commemorate International Women's Day in Paris. In her new book, *Words Not Swords*, Farzaneh Milani, professor of women's studies and Persian literature at the University of Virginia, quotes Behbahani as she recalls her interrupted speech in 1997. The following passage encapsulates the kind of hostility she has faced and consequently the kind of resilience and courage that have become the hallmark of her verse.

Behbahani writes, “The Ministry of Guidance invited me to read poetry in a hall large enough to hold 2,000 people. I pulled out of my purse the written text of a speech, which concerned the harassment, the censorship, the oppression that had been inflicted on Iranian writers for eighteen years.” Barely halfway through the speech, “the



microphone was cut off. I continued at the top of my voice. The lights were shut down. I walked farther upstage in order to use the light streaming through from the auditorium. The curtain was pulled down on me. I stepped in front of the curtain. It was the audience's exuberant show of support that saved me that day."

Having consistently and courageously defended freedom of expression, Behbahani occupies an exceptional place in Iranian society. Her poems have been turned into popular songs, extracted for daily aphorisms, rapidly circulated through mass emails, and memorized by Iranians of all walks of life. Her unequivocal voice for economic egalitarianism and her bold violations of culturally accepted gender norms and dynamics are revolutionary. She has fiercely challenged gender roles and criticized laws that discriminate on the basis of sex. In a country ranked 125th out of 135 in last year's Global Gender Gap report, you would be tempted to label her a "feminist." She has versified the suffering and aspirations of her people, and become the voice of Iranians, similar to an ideologue. But both labels fail to encompass her life and works. If neither a feminist nor an ideologue, who is she then?

Beyond all ideological frameworks, Behbahani is a woman and a poet with feminized perspectives and desires. A person in love with beauty, she has witnessed one of the longest wars of the twentieth century, which consumed the lives of nearly one million Iranians and Iraqis (1980-1988). Even the soul-numbing realities and horrors of war are chronicled through the melody and beauty of her verse. The immoral, the bad, the ugly are all communicated through her artistry. Though she is known for her social poems, idiosyncratic themes that celebrate femininity dominate the body of her works. In verse, she discusses issues otherwise unspeakable.

In *Ancient Eve*, one of her more recent poems featured here, she likens herself to Eve, who violated many boundaries and crossed into previously forbidden realms. Unapologetic, prideful, she recites and claims her sexuality. Joyful and content, the octogenarian poet speaks of her desire to love and be loved. Throughout the poem, she challenges the convention that one must be of a certain age or look a certain way to love and to experience and express physical desire and fulfillment. She challenges traditional frameworks of morality and the rigidity of the dichotomies of virtue and sin, divine and godless, acceptable and unacceptable, and perhaps even heaven and hell. She speaks unabashedly of her "body warm with lust," of the "wholesome wine" of the company of her lover, making use of "burn[ing]" imagery and acknowledging implicitly that both are traditionally sinful—and, at her age, "bizarre"—ideas, but asserting in the end that that is all she needs to construct and dwell in her own heaven.

Behbahani may not have yet found the global readership that her works deserve; all the same, her verse resonates profoundly beyond the borders of Iran, perhaps most powerfully in neighboring Afghanistan where the tradition of Persian poetry is the country's cultural hallmark.

Farangiz Sowgand, for instance, is an emerging voice in the literary community of Mazar-e Sharif. Dedicated to the "pure women" of Afghanistan, one of her ghazals challenges the conservative viewpoint towards prostitutes: "Just to herself, she laughs for an hour / the passing breath of a prostitute / for a moment she gazes in the mirror / she isn't there. And then she is / hidden in dust / dust of the world of a prostitute." Sowgand does not mourn her lost "chastity" or "innocence," but rather celebrates her resistance and grieves her lost opportunity to narrate her story fully, recite her song, sound her rebellion. The voice of Behbahani emerges from Sowgand's ghazal; every line echoes her testimonial of humanism, her outcry against the injustices facing women, her nonjudgmental voice, and her vision as a storyteller. The old universe of the ghazal is

there and all its classical elements, but they are presented differently and with a new purpose, challenging the rule of masculine history and presenting different shades of female agency. At 85, Behbahani looks to Sowgand and her generation to commence their own journey and bring forth new changes and innovations.

Whether in Tehran, Mazar-e Sharif, or elsewhere in the world, a new generation of poets is following Behbahani's footsteps, singing over the deafening sound of war, poverty, and despair, firmly insisting on the power of their verse, its artistry, and its beauty. Behbahani has challenged gender monopoly, lending a millennia-old male-centric Persian literary tradition a feminized perspective and content. A revered form evoking male figures the likes of Rumi, Saadi, and Hafez is now associated with a woman, *banooy-e ghazal*, the lady of ghazal. In a political climate where loud, superficial statements demand more and more authority and recognition, a profound sense of hope can be drawn from her vision and verse.

For over six decades, Behbahani has been living and writing in Iran. Professor Milani asserts that her works show evidence of "nightingale's fever," a condition that the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938) described as an "inability to stop singing." With a fever "past any physician's cure," Simin Behbahani continues to sing Iran.

## Ancient Eve

Love at Eighty?  
Admit it: it's bizarre.

Ancient Eve is, once again  
offering apples:  
red lips and golden tresses.  
Beautiful,  
but not divine.

If my face has color  
it's just makeup, a deceit.  
But in my chest a heart  
beats its wings wild with desire,  
every seventy of its heartbeats  
multiplied by two.

Love and shame and my body  
warm with lust. I burn  
with fever, a fever  
past any physician's cure.  
But at my side is bliss,  
my lover  
kind and faithful  
and as long as he is here  
I dwell in heaven.

I can't breathe a word;  
my mouth's sealed  
shut with your kisses,  
their tongues of flame.  
Oh, my thirsty lover!  
Look at my happy fortune:  
You, I, us tonight.  
with a wine so delightful  
where's the room for restraint?

Adam! Come see the spectacle.  
Leave behind your denial and conceits  
and watch as the Eve of eighty  
rivals the twenty-year-old she.



Translation is by authors.

To read the original  
Persian, please see the  
poetry column on the  
Persian side.

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.....  
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questions to [af@ariafani.com](mailto:af@ariafani.com)  
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This stew served with steamed saffron chelow (white rice) is a favorite recipe of Iranians for any occasion. These recipes are from *New Food For Life* by Najmieh Batmanglij.

## Khoresht-e-Karafs - "Celery Stew"

Serves 6, Preparation time 30 minutes, Cooking time 2:25 hrs.

### Ingredients:

2 large onions, peeled and thinly sliced  
 1 pound stew meat (lamb, veal, or beef) cut in 1-inch cubes, or 2 lbs of veal shank or 2 lbs of chicken legs cut up  
 5 stalks of celery, washed and chopped into 1-inch lengths (4 cups chopped)  
 ½ cup chopped fresh parsley; ½ cup chopped fresh mint or tablespoon dried  
 1/3 cup oil; 1 teaspoon salt; ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper; ½ teaspoon turmeric  
 ½ cup fresh squeezed lime juice or 4 whole dried Persian limes pierced or 1 cup unripe plums (gojeh sabz)  
 ½ teaspoon ground saffron dissolved in 2 tablespoon hot water.

### Preparations:

1. In a Dutch oven, brown onions and meat or chicken in 3 tablespoons oil. Add salt, pepper and turmeric. Pour in water (2 cups for meat and 1½ cups for chicken). Cover and simmer over low heat for about 30 minutes or 10 minutes for chicken.
2. In a non-stick frying pan, fry the chopped celery in 3 tablespoons oil for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add chopped herbs and fry for 10 minutes longer.
3. Add the mixture of celery and herbs, the lime juice and the saffron water to the meat. Cover and simmer over low heat for 1½ hours longer, or until the meat and celery are tender
4. Taste the stew and adjust seasoning accordingly. Transfer it to a deep casserole; cover and place in a warm oven until ready to serve.

Note: Unripe plums (gojeh sabz) in season (early spring) are available in Iranian specialty shops.



*Khoresht-e-Karafs - "Celery Stew"*



*Pistachio Soup*

## Pistachio Soup

Serves 4, preparation time 10 minutes, cooking time 55 minutes

### Ingredient:

1 cup pistachios, shelled, 1 teaspoon salt, 2 tablespoons butter or oil, 1/4 teaspoon pepper, 1 shallot (chopped), 1 leek chopped, 1/2 cup Seville orange juice or mixture of 2 tablespoon fresh lime juice & 1/2 cup fresh orange juice, 1 clove garlic, peeled & chopped, 1 tablespoon rice flour, 6 cups homemade chicken broth and 2 tablespoon slivered pistachios for garnish.

### Preparations:

1. Grind pistachios in a food processor or grinder.
2. In a heavy pot, heat butter or oil over medium heat. Add shallot, leek, and garlic. Gently stew them. Cover until translucent. Add rice flour, stirring occasionally. Add chicken broth and bring to a boil.
3. Add pistachios, salt and pepper and reduce heat. Simmer over low heat, stirring occasionally, for 20 minutes.
4. Add Seville orange juice, adjust seasoning.
5. Pour the soup into a tureen, garnish with slivered pistachios, and serve hot or cold .

**Variation:** Pistachios can be substituted with either almonds or hazelnuts.

Note: The name Pistachio is from the Persian word *pesteh*.

Seen on video:

# SANTOURI

(2007) A Film by Dariush Mehrjui

Rebecca Romani

Films about musicians are a dime a dozen—musicians singing, musicians performing, musicians versus society, musicians versus the State, etc. So many musicians, so little time...so, so many clichés.

However, director Dariush Mehrjui's 2007 film, *Santouri*, is one of the rare films about musicians worthy of an extra look. At 106 minutes, it's a doable evening's viewing, with a caveat: while the music is magnificent, some of the story line is gut wrenching.

*Santouri* (with the rather poorly chosen English title, *Music Man*) had a very limited screening in Iran as well as limited release in the U.S. According to internet sources, the head of the Ministry of Culture, Hossein Saffar Harandi, was personally against public screenings of the film and it went to DVD, despite winning major prizes at the 2008 Fajr Festival in Tehran.

From the story line, one can see why. *Santouri* follows the life of musician Ali Bolourchi (played by the charismatic Bahram Radan), a santour player with a deeply moving voice and an unusual gift for the santour. Like many of current-day Iran's intellectuals and artists, Ali's gifts are a poisoned fruit. Admired by many, but often limited by the State, Ali's story serves as both a cautionary tale and a deeply disturbing indictment of what a state guided by conservative religious authorities and vicious petty functionaries can do to the creative soul of a country.

The title alone is provocative. *Santouri*, of course, refers to the santour player, but the expression "to play the santour" in Iranian drug culture supposedly refers to injecting heroin by slapping a vein like the hammers slap the santour strings. Harandi's treatment of Ali's life and his descent into hard-core addiction is lyrical and fluid, but seems to suggest that the drug and social problems that haunt much of Iran's current pop artists are directly linked to state suppression of the arts.

*Santouri* joins Ali almost at the end of his journey, after his wife (played by the luminous Golshifteh Farahani) has reluctantly left him. Ali narrates much of the first part of the film through flashbacks. It is a happier, creative time and Ali is married to the charming Hanieh, a talented pianist in her own right. They live the life of happy bohemians – brilliant friends, minor vices, freedom of expression- while Ali produces and gives concerts like a rock star- attended by hundreds moved by his music.

But not everyone finds Ali so charming or his music so moving. His deeply religious mother abhors his music and his father has disowned him for being a musician. A conservative wind is blowing through the government and the authorities clamp down on the writers, the singers, the musicians. Permits are denied, visas are refused, concerts are cancelled, and Ali now

finds himself publically living out his private hell. He is reduced to playing banal events- a small wedding here, a little party there. His frustration grows and his dalliance with heroin becomes a full-fledged affair.

Eventually, Ali's life cracks open. His wife supports them by playing piano in salons and Ali suspects her of having an affair with the self-important violin player of the trio she plays with. When Ali's drugged-fueled paranoia gets the better of him, he strikes his wife, causing her to leave him.

The haunting lovelorn, sufi-like song about loss and loneliness that Ali has sung to appreciative audiences begins to dominate the narrative of his increasingly unstable existence. At a small, low-quality wedding, Ali and his band are included in an attack on the wedding party by a jilted groom and Ali's beloved santour is damaged and he is badly beaten. He slips deeper and deeper into addiction until he crashes his religiously conservative mother's gathering, demanding a portion of his inheritance and begging for help from the scandalized group.

Eventually Ali's ex-wife discovers him living in a park among the homeless and alerts his father. Thanks to an intervention, Ali is sent to a detox center and there cleans up enough to play the new santour the hospital gives him as a gift and to teach the inmates how to play music.

In addition to the theme of musician versus the state, there is an undercurrent of commentary on the role of women in current-day Iran as well, a thread that is sometimes overshadowed by Ali's disintegrating life, but important, nonetheless. Just as Ali and his father mirror each other, so, too do Ali's wife, Hanieh and his mother. Ali's mother is the face of the sanctimonious but hypocritical State while Hanieh, brilliant, talented, and desperate, does the unthinkable: she leaves her husband. Driven to despair by Ali's drug use and physical violence, Hanieh defies her mother's urging to return to Ali and instead,

flees her marriage to tour with a classical music trio outside of Iran where she can breathe both musically and personally. As shocking as Ali's drug use is, Hanieh's decision also bothered the censors, who saw her character as socially abhorrent, an unfit model for modern young Iranian women who are expected to be religiously observant, obedient to their families and husbands, and the keepers of Society's (and the State's) virtue.

Little wonder *Santouri* is listed as banned in Iran.

*Santouri* is a visually and musically stunning film with well-turned out performances. The soundtrack alone is worth the experience, but the story itself, told in a fluid and deft manner, wrings the viewer out. However, as a recent piece from a master director, its commentary on creativity and constraints in current Iranian society bears watching. It joins the documentary, *Who's Afraid of Persian Cats*, as a glimpse into a world where the creative soul trembles on the brink of official extinction.

*Rebecca Romani holds an MA in Television, Film and New Media from San Diego State. She has written on film for various publications, including Cineaste, The Levantine Review, and KPBS. She has also curated film series and currently teaches film at Palomar College.*



# EDUCATION



By Sheiveh N. Jones, Ed.D.



## A New Start

With the school year underway now, this is a great time to think about what you are doing to ensure your child's academic and social success this year. Throughout the many issues of *Peyk*, I have shared various ideas with you ranging from setting up the proper study environment and communicating with the teacher to dealing with bullying. If you could bring all the ideas and suggestions from those articles, your child should theoretically be on track to do well.

It is important to remember a child who feels safe, regardless of whether he/she is a preschooler or a high school senior, will learn more. When fear is present, it affects a part of the brain that would allow a child to process and remember information. Hence, it is very important we work to reduce fear as it relates to anything around school and learning for our children. Keeping this in mind, let's examine effective ways to decrease fear and increase learning.

### 1. Conversations with the school personnel:

**Teacher:** In an earlier issue, teacher communication was addressed. The more your child's teacher understands about your child's background, the better the teacher can plan instruction in a way that takes your child's needs into consideration. There is a tremendous amount of work involved in planning a lesson. Good teaching involves looking at any and all information available about each student in the classroom and then planning activities and strategies that engage every single student in the class. This is why it is important you share information that may affect learning. Examples of useful information would be the following: recent death in the family, recent divorce, primary language spoken in the home, or changes in schedule such as family members visiting for an extended period of time. Ultimately, key information will help prevent your child being misunderstood, which can then lead to consequences that may increase fear.

**Counselor:** High school students have multiple teachers, which makes it more difficult as a parent to have the conversations multiple times. You can contact your child's counselor and share any important information with him/her. Make it clear you would like the information relayed to the teacher OR ask the counselor to coordinate a meeting where you can show up and have all teachers present. My personal philosophy on this is that direct contact with the teacher shows you care about your child and increases the sense of accountability on a teacher's part.

### 2. Home environment:

Create an environment at home where your child can enjoy doing homework, reading, and dedicating time and energy to school related work. Structure can be implemented without

hard discipline. In other words, instead of threatening or punishing your child for not getting his/her work done, draft an after school agenda with your child's input; this agenda should be consistent and predictable on a daily basis so your child knows it is expected he/she will do homework at a specific time every day. The agenda should also include something to look forward to following completion of said homework. An agenda may look like the following: 3-5 pm: snack/play; 6-7 pm: homework; 7-7:30 pm: dinner; 7:45-9 pm basketball practice. The environment should also include a quiet and comfortable space where your child can listen to music if he/she chooses.

### 3. Safe Communication:

Your child should feel comfortable communicating with you regarding school issues including bullying, needing extra help in a class, or having problems with a teacher. A good teacher friend of mine once shared with me that there were times her son, while in high school, told her things that made her want to instinctively react in anger. She quickly realized if she wanted to have a good relationship with her son where he could share his school issues with her, she should take a deep breath and, instead of reacting, ask him how he felt the issue should be handled. That way, their conversation could evolve into a problem-solving discussion that would allow her son to move forward and make better decisions at school.

### 4. Bullying:

Any issues around bullying must be addressed immediately. This includes communicating with the teacher, site administrator, counselor, and, if necessary, district personnel. As mentioned in previous articles, there are no classes or programs in teacher preparation courses in universities that address bullying. Bullying can be an uncomfortable issue for school personnel because there is no clear way to handle it, causing the adults at school to sometimes ignore it rather than address it.

When you send your child to school everyday, you assume he/she is going to learn and eventually be prepared to go to a good university. In the meantime, you play a very important role in your child's daily academic life and will find that following a few simple ideas will maximize learning and achievement.

# Calendar of Events

## Persian Cultural Center

Tel: (858) 653-0336 - Fax & Voice: (619) 374-7335  
www.pccus.org



## Building the Dream Gala Fundraiser & The Iranian School of San Diego 25th Anniversary

with Maz Jobrani

September 9, 2012 6-10pm

Del Mar Marriott Hotel

11966 El Camino Real, San Diego 92130

858-653-0336

## Setar Workshop by Kourosh Taghavi

Registration and info: (858) 243-6008

Tombak workshop, Info: (858) 735-9634

Daf Workshop with Ali Sadr,

Tuesdays 6 to 7:30 PM at PCC office.

## Iranian School of San Diego

(858) 653-0336



## ISSD Registration

### Branch I

Sunday Sept. 9, 2012 at 10am-12pm

Mt. Carmel High School

9550 Carmel Mountain Road

San Diego, CA 92129

### Branch II

Thur. Sept. 6, 2012 at 6-8 pm

Mt. Carmel High School

9550 Carmel Mountain Road

San Diego, CA 92129

## Persian Dance Academy of San Diego

(858) 653-0336

www.pccus.org

## Dollar a Month Fund

Tel: (858) 653-0336 • www.dmfund.org

http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dollar-a-Month-Fund



## Association of Iranian American Professionals (AIAP)

Tel: (858) 207-6232 • www.aiap.org

Last Wednesday of each month at 6:30 PM

at Sufi Mediterranean Cuisine

5915 Balboa Ave, San Diego, CA 92111



## ISTA (Iranian Student Association at UC San Diego)

visit us at www.istaucsd.org



## Dar Shahr Cheh Khabar?

### House of Iran

Tel: (619) 232-Iran Balboa Park,  
Sundays 12:00-4:00pm



### Iranian-American Scholarship Fund

Tel: (858) 653-0336 • www.iasfund.org



### Mehrgan Foundation

www.Mehrganfoundation.org Tel (858) 673-7000

### PAAIA

Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian American  
www.paaia.org



### NIAC

National Iranian American Council  
www.niac.org



### Book Club Meeting

Last Sat. of each month

Sufi Mediterranean Cuisine

5915 Balboa Ave, San Diego, CA 92111

## Events:

### ISTA:

#### Setar Ensemble Concert - Kourosh Taghavi

Subject: A Night of Persian Classical music by Setar Ensemble

Directed by Kourosh Taghavi

Time: Saturday September 29 2012, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Location: UCSD Price Center East

Address: 9500 Gilman Dr, La Jolla, CA 92093.

Parking: Free at Gilman Parking Structure

Tickets: http://istaucsd.org

UCSD students: FREE- Non-UCSD students: \$15-

General Admission: \$20

Premium Seating: \$40

Phone: 858-775-1604 (For general information only)

### Mehregan Foundation

Mehregan 10th Yearly Seminar

Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego

One Market Place, San Diego, CA 92101

Friday, Aug 31, Sat. Sept. 1, Sun. Sept. 2 and Mon. Sept.3 2012

Information: 858-342-9991

www.mehrganfoundation.org

### Center for world Music

10/1/12

Zimbabwe: J. Mafuleni & M. Thom 6:00 PM

San Diego State University (Rhapsody Hall/ Music Bldg.)

5500 Campanile Dr.

(619) 594-1017 (to reserve tickets)

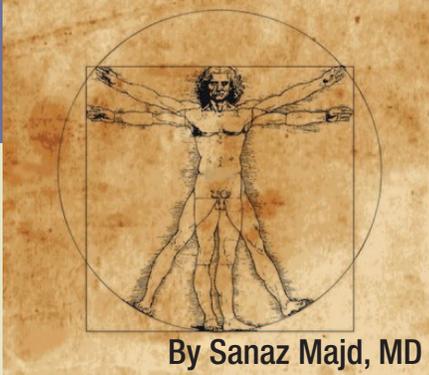
### Julian Apple Harvest

Sep 1 - Nov 30, 2012

Price: Admission is free

Region: East County

Local residents and guests celebrate autumn with music, art shows, cider and delicious apple pies in the charming mountain town of Julian.



## Acid Reflux

Acid reflux is one of the most common complaints at the doctor's office. Most of us have experienced it at one point or another. But some of us suffer from this on a more chronic basis. If not addressed early on, reflux can lead to complications in the future. So let's find out why this is so important to treat, and how we can go about treating and preventing it.

### What is Acid Reflux?

At the location where the stomach meets the esophagus (or bottom of the throat) is a "doorway" that opens up to let food pass through. In some people, this doorway can be rather loose and allows food to reflux upwards from the stomach into the esophagus when it's not supposed to. If the acidic content of your stomach reaches up high enough, you may experience a sour or bitter taste in your mouth.

### What Are the Symptoms of Acid Reflux?

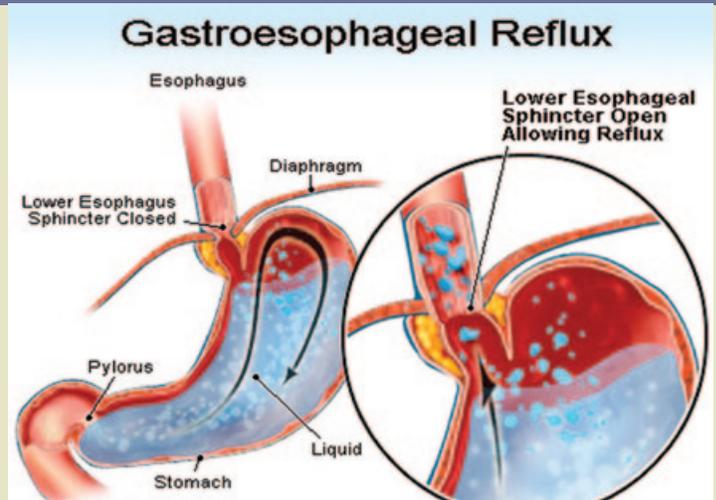
Not everyone experiences this abnormal taste in the mouth. Most patients suffer from one or more of the following symptoms instead:

- Heartburn
- Indigestion
- Nausea or vomiting
- Chronic cough
- Hoarseness
- Burping
- Dental decay
- Sensation of something "stuck" in the throat
- Chest pain

Of course you should never ignore any of the above symptoms and just "assume" that it's acid reflux. If you experience these symptoms, consult your physician to make sure that you don't suffer from other health conditions causing these symptoms.

### What Are the Consequences of Acid Reflux?

If not addressed, chronic acid reflux can cause some major health consequences. First of all, it can erode the stomach lining to the point where an ulcer develops, termed "peptic



ulcer disease." If the ulcer is progressed enough, it can even bleed and cause either blood in your stool or black stools. If ignored, a hole can actually pierce through the stomach lining where the ulcer is, and at this point it can be fatal if not corrected surgically emergently.

In addition, chronic acid reflux left untreated (typically years) can erode the lining of the esophagus and can eventually turn those areas into precancerous or cancerous lesions. This is termed "Barrett's Esophagus."

### How Can You Treat Acid Reflux?

If you experience heartburn or acid reflux more than twice a week, or suffer from any of the symptoms mentioned above, make sure to seek your doctor for treatment.

Here are some tips to help combat acid reflux in addition to medications:

1. Stop smoking: Smoking helps to "relax" the doorway that allows stomach contents to reflux upward.
2. Eat smaller, frequent meals: Instead of three large meals, eat five smaller ones. The less you fill up the tank, the less likely it will expel its contents upward.
3. Raise the head of the bed: Place some bricks or heavy books underneath the head of your bed. The more upright you sleep, the less likely that gravity can influence acid reflux.
4. Lose the extra pounds: Excess weight can place more pressure on the stomach and push its contents upward.
5. Avoid food triggers: Certain foods can trigger and/or exacerbate acid reflux. ~~Cut down or stop altogether:~~ caffeine, citrus, tomatoes, spicy food, heavy/greasy food, mints, chocolate, blueberries, sodas, and alcohol.

## ON ABSTRACT ART: WHERE IS THE SKILL? Part I

Among the various movements of the twentieth century, it is agreed that most of them, in one way or the other, are abstract. Whether the art work is a dove painting by Picasso, an apple tree by Mondrian, or bands of color by Rothko, the word “abstraction” comes to mind. And while in the eyes of many experts abstract art is praised, to non-expert viewers abstraction is not worthy for they see no skill in it. We may see some creativity in the simplification of form in Picasso’s dove, but to appreciate a work by Rothko or Pollock, both Abstract Expressionists, where the skill of drawing recognizable forms is missed, we need justifications. These justifications, usually given by experts, seem like a bunch of intellectual excuses; after all, a child can pour paint on a surface! Where is the difference between this type of painting and the work done by a child? And finally, where is the skill in this?

The term abstraction, which can be used to link many of the works of the twentieth century and many other periods of art, is a much debated word in the terminology of modern art. The word has many synonyms such as concept, idea, notion, and generalization. Abstraction in visual arts is a word that describes the formal appearance of a work. A work that depicts or portrays natural objects in recognizable form can be called “representational.” The less a work of art resembles real things in the real world, the more “abstract” it is and when the work does not refer to the natural, or objective world at all, it is said to be “nonrepresentational” or “nonobjective.” It is also important to note that abstraction is a very relative term. For example, Picasso’s *Woman with a Book* is more abstract than Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*, and any of Monet’s landscapes are more abstract than John Constable’s landscapes. And today, if abstraction has not gone to its extreme nonrepresentational form and has remained within the frame of cubism or fauvism, the styles that give the viewer identifiable and relatable forms, the viewers would have an easier time to appreciate it.

What are we looking to get from a work of art? What is

it that makes us not appreciate drops of paint or huge canvasses of multicolor bands? The many centuries of image-making in representational styles has given us the habit of expecting a recognizable form in a painting. The way we have observed, understood, and analyzed the world around us, which is reflected in our philosophical quest, has gave us a constant reason to compare the painted world with the real one—Art and Nature!

It took some time for viewers to appreciate an impressionistic landscape. Before this acceptance, a Monet’s landscape was nothing but a blurry mixture of colors. We have learned to appreciate color more than form, and then to give value to the idea more than the hand that creates. We get puzzled to stand in front of an Untitled work by a contemporary artist—for the simple fact that work titles gives us a narration and narrations connects things easier. There is less ambiguity and why should we like ambiguity?

Very connected to the social context of the creation, the many styles of abstraction have changed to more extreme ones, what we can call pure abstraction. We will continue to massage and tackle these reactions in the next column.



Pollock painting, photographed by Hans Namuth.



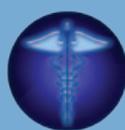
Picasso, *Woman with Book*.



Rothko, *No. 3/No. 13 (Magenta, Black, Green on Orange)* (1949).



Constable, *Wivenhoe Park* (1816).



# Dear Readers:

As a part of our community services, we have approached some of the Iranian medical specialist in various fields to send us their information to share with the community. We appreciate the work of Dr. Reza Shirazi who spearheaded this effort. The following list is not complete by any means. If you are a Medical Doctor and would like to be added to this list, please send your information to Dr. Shirazi or directly to *Peyk*.

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# PERSPECTIVE:

Mithaq Kazimi

## The Most Visited Building of the World

In Conversation with its architect, Fariborz Sahba

People of Persian heritage deserve to know that while they can claim to be heirs to historical architectural sites, such as the pre-Islamic Persepolis and myriad beautiful mosques visible in every street corner of the country, they can also be proud of an iconic structure, recognized as today's *most visited building in the world*, the Lotus Temple of India. It is designed by no other than the Iranian architect, Fariborz Sahba.

In the past 25 years, Sahba has worked mainly on two major projects. One, the Lotus Temple in India, and the other, the hanging gardens of Haifa in Israel, recently named a World Heritage site by UNESCO and therefore joining the ranks of Esfahan's Meidan-e Naqsh-e Jahan, Bamiyan's Buddhas, and New York's Statue of Liberty. In this interview, we'll suffice with learning about his first project.

The Lotus Temple of India is one of the seven Baha'i Houses of Worship located in every continent of the world. It is a unique place of worship open to people of any race, status, religion or no-religion, to come in and commune with their higher selves. In design, the nine doors leading to the dome symbolize the diversity and oneness of the human race. The building attracted some 4.8 million visitors just last year, making it *the most visited building of the world* – an achievement that the Guinness World Records noted back in 2001.

In 2012, the Lotus Temple celebrated its 25th anniversary with several thousand participants who had come from across the world. The main event was focused on the aspect of service to the community and how the Lotus Temple has created and can continue to create unity and harmony among the diverse people of India. On this occasion, some distinguished Indians such as the former President of India, the Minister of Culture, Minister for Tourism, and Chief Minister of Delhi sent statements praising the Temple for its unique role in building unity and communal harmony in the country. Furthermore, the Ministry of Tourism included the Temple as a tourist attraction in their *Incredible India!* campaign, which includes ads running all over Europe and North America.

Sahba, who is now in his mid-sixties, has grayish-white hair, a black jacket and a pair of glasses which he constantly adjusts as he eagerly waits for me to stop my *tarofs* and start asking him questions.



**Mithaq Kazimi:** Let's start from the beginning. Where did you spend the early years of your life?

**Fariborz Sahba:** I was born in city of Mashhad and completed my high school education there, and then moved to Tehran for my higher education. However, I have traveled all over Iran intensively and have vivid memories.

**What inspired you to become an architect?**

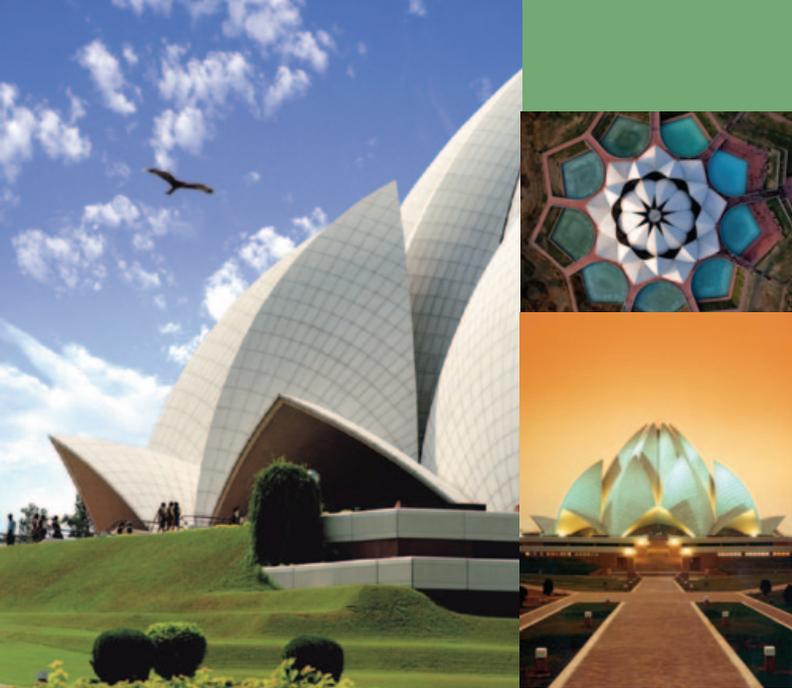
My main inspirer was my mother and the stories she would tell me as a child. When we lived in the town of Gonabad, it was in a desert area with barely any architecture. My mother, who wanted to give us a vision of civilization and architecture, often told us of 'Ishqabad, the town she had grown up in. In particular, stories of a building which she remembered dearly and stood in her mind as a great example of architecture – that structure was the first Baha'i House of Worship ever built. She would tell us how it was a place of tranquility and peacefulness. She was very saddened when that building was destroyed by an earthquake and whole-heartedly wished that when I grew up, I would build one like it. That was when I was five—and from then on, I wanted to be an architect.

**What do you think was the most exciting and perhaps challenging stage of the process?**

I think the design period was the most challenging and exciting part of the project. To design a temple, which would reflect the rich cultural heritage of India and at the same time be compatible with the principles of the Baha'i Faith – that humanity is one—provided me with an unusual and remarkable task. This was the most exciting part of the project for me, the rest of the challenges were technical matters, which I would have dealt with somehow.

**What were the initial concepts that you based your design on?**

I was looking for a concept that would be acceptable to the people of all different backgrounds that abound with such rich diversity in India. I wanted to design something new and unique; at the same time not strange but rather familiar, something which any human being would find spiritual and intuitively find some sort of relationship with it in their hearts.



and the degree of humidity varies, the installation and maintenance of air-conditioning was not an environmentally friendly or cheap solution. Therefore, we implemented a more sophisticated technique.

This, in a way, can be called "natural ventilation." It is based on the principal of the Wind Towers in the deserts of Iran and was developed by "smoke tests" which were performed in the Imperial College of London on a model of the Temple. The results demonstrated that with openings in the basement and at the top, the building would act like a chimney, drawing up warm air from within the hall and expelling it through the top of the dome. Thus, constant draughts of cool air passing over the pools and through the basement flow into the hall and out through the opening at the top.

**How long did the construction take?**

We had estimated the construction to take six years. We started the work on 21 April 1980 and completed it on 21 December 1986. So construction took six years and eight months.

**The words love and India remind me of the Taj Mahal. I know that similar to the architects of the past, such as the Taj Mahal, you didn't just design it, but you also built it as well.**

Yes, I was also the project manager. In other words, I represented the client and the consultants at site. I had to build up a very good spirit and relationship between the contractors, consultants, and the client.

**The structure is obviously not conventional in any way. I would say it's more like a piece of art, what do you think?**

I am an old-fashioned architect who has always considered architecture to be an art, and no matter how practical or technical it becomes, in essence it is a work of art that communicates with its audience. This, in my opinion, is the most satisfying aspect of the architect profession. All other things are only tools. In the Lotus Temple a great many technical challenges had to be addressed, but I take satisfaction from the fact that my project communicates with the people, and is alive.

**The building has been praised for its technical qualities over the years, please mention some important ones.**

Awards and recognitions have been received from the American Institute of Architect, the Institution of Structural Engineers of the United Kingdom, the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America, the American Concrete Institute, and the GlobArt Academy award in 2000. But more importantly, some 100 million people have visited it in the past 25 years and I think that is the biggest award one can receive.

**In conclusion, give us a simple phrase that would summarize your overall experience with this project?**

Hard work.

.....  
*While New Delhi may be many miles away, a panoramic virtual tour of the temple is available at: [www.p4panorama.com/panos/lotustemple](http://www.p4panorama.com/panos/lotustemple)*

**About the Columnist:** Mithaq Kazimi is an Afghan-American filmmaker residing in San Diego, California. He holds a degree in the field and is the current program director of Dawn Breakers International Film Festival. He has recently started interviewing a number of unique and prolific individuals on his personal blog, *Perspactive* : [kdkfactory.com/perspactive](http://kdkfactory.com/perspactive)

I began without preconceptions, ready for ideas. I visited almost a hundred temples all over India to discover a concept that would integrate the spiritual heritage of this sub-continent. As I delved deeper and deeper into the cultural and architectural heritage of the country, I became profoundly fascinated by the task before me.

**So finally, you chose the lotus flower to be the inspiration for this structure. What is the significance of this particular flower?**

There is a deep and universal reverence for the lotus in India. It is regarded as a sacred flower associated with worship throughout many centuries and therefore its significance is deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of the Indians. In the epic poem *Mahabharata*, the Creator Brahma is described as having sprung from the lotus. In Buddhist folklore the Buddha is represented as being born from a lotus, and is usually depicted standing or sitting on a lotus. It is also deeply rooted in Zoroastrian and Islamic architecture; for example, the dome of the Taj Mahal is the bud of a lotus.

**How did you bring your initial concept to life? Tell me a bit about the architectural aspect of the structure.**

The whole superstructure is designed to function as a skylight. The interior dome is composed from the intersection of nine spheres and patterned after the innermost portion of the lotus flower. The interior dome, therefore, is like a bud consisting of 27 petals, and light filters through these inner folds and is diffused throughout the hall. Nine open petals, each of which functions as a skylight, surround the central hall and nine entrance petals complete the design.

**How about the exterior, specifically the pools that surround the structure?**

Nine pools around the building form the principal landscape of the building. They also represent the green leaves of the lotus afloat on water. Moreover, the pools and fountains help to cool the air that passes over them into the hall. The superstructure, the podium, and the pools are designed as an integrated whole.

**It seems that you had thoroughly thought of the environment in your design. What exact methods and techniques have been used?**

Since the climate in Delhi is very hot for several months of the year