

# Indo-Iranian Socio-Cultural Relations at Past, Present and Future (with Special Reference to Architecture of Mughals' or Gurkanids' Period)

M.Reza Pourjafar,\* Ali A. Taghvaei\*

## Abstract

*Nel presente articolo gli autori, dopo aver delineato le caratteristiche e l'intensità dei rapporti tra Iran ed India, prima e dopo l'avvento dell'Islam, evidenziano le analogie presenti nelle culture e nell'architettura dei periodi Mughal (in India) e Safavid (in Iran). Analogie dovute ai rapporti amichevoli tra i sovrani e le popolazioni dei due paesi ed alle migrazioni di artisti ed architetti iraniani in India.*

## 1. Introduction

Iranian culture has had a significant effect on the culture of the Sub-Continent India in various aspects since long ago. Indian architecture both before and after Islam is a good example to prove this claim.

Before Islam due to the migration of Arians from Iran to India particularly at Akamanids and Ashkandis Dynasties, Iranian Cultural features were; to a great extent transmitted to India through close socio-political and economic relations between the two countries. The similarities between the shape, size and design of the pillars of Ashouka and those of Akamanids buildings and palaces, architecture of Bamyan Valley Temple, and the discovered artistic features at Ajnata Cave which represent Ashkanids and Sassanid art are all obvious reasons for the spreading of Iranian art throughout the Subcontinent of India.

After Islam, especially by settling Arab Muslims at Send Valley in 711 AD and then in the tenth and eleventh centuries during Ghaznavids Era, Iran and India had mutual relations in many socio – cultural and economic fields.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when Ghourian were ruling in India, Iranian architecture was the favorite feature. Qovvat – ol – Islam Mosque and Qotb Minaret are examples in this regard. Pourjafar writes that from 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries kings and emperors such as Loudi, Gogarat, Sour, Malova, and Shir Shah used to build their palaces and buildings in Iranian architectural style. Jaame Mosque in Bijapour which was designed and built by one of the famous architect from Qazvin, Iran is a good example of this kind.<sup>1</sup> In Moghul Dynasty in India that began from Baber Shah's and then Homayoon, Akbar, Gahangir Eras were concomitant to the Safavid Dynasty in Iran<sup>2</sup>.

Bilateral relations between Iran and India were reached to the highest level in all aspects of life; such that we can call that era as the "Golden Era" of development of socio-cultural and political ties and close relations between the two countries. For

---

\* "Tarbiat Modares University".

<sup>1</sup> Pourjafar 1997, pp. 31-33.

<sup>2</sup> Pourjafar 1997, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Halyd 1997, p. 72.

instance Shah Jahan's wife and also his first minister were both Iranian. It was at this time that Taj Mahal, one of the most glorious and famous architectural features of the world was created by the Iranian architects and artists in India.<sup>3</sup>

This article is going to talk about the effective factors that had important role in developing and spreading Iranian architecture through out the Sub-continent India. Then a number of famous historical buildings, such as Taj Mahal, Jaame Mosque of Delhi, etc, their design and architectural aspects will be analytically discussed.

## 2. The Effects of Iranian Culture on Indian Culture in Gourkanids Era

Koch<sup>4</sup> contends that Baber the founder of Mughals in India was from Iranian Mughals. He as a person who knows Iranian culture very well, tried to develop it all over the Indian societies when he came to the power. After him, Homayoon continued his efforts as the king of India. Particularly when Homayoon Shah once defeated in a battle against his enemies, he came to Iran and asked for help from Shah Tahmasb, one of the Safavid Emperors, and could overcome the obstacles and returned back to India and continued his ruling there. In his way back to his country, he took a great number of Iranian artists with him to India and wanted them to design and make buildings similar to those in Iran. Soltanzadeh<sup>5</sup> believes that the design of Chahar Bagh and Hasht Behesht (Four-Gardens and Eight-Heavens) are of those Iranian architectural patterns in India. These architectural features in India had become so familiar that people used to say that Homayoon Shah has changed and substituted Indian architecture with the Iranian one.<sup>6</sup> At the time of Homayoon's Son, Akbar Shah, Mirza Ghias-al- din came from Iran to India and was assigned as the Minister for Interior Affairs. He was Asef Khan – e – Etemad – ol – Dowleh's father. Etemad – ol – Dowleh had a prestigious position at Jahangir Shah's period and got the position of prime minister at the time of Shah Jahan.

Arjmand Banoo, Shah Jahan's wife was Etemad – ol – Dowleh's daughter who had a great role in encouraging Iranian artists to migrate to India and develop Iranian Art there. Another Iranian lady who also had such a role was Noor Jahan, the daughter of Ghias – al – din Irani. She married Jahangir Shah and got a lot of influence as the Queen of India, she also was very interested in developing Iranian Art and Architecture in India. Koch,<sup>7</sup> adds that it has been said that the real ruling power was at the

---

<sup>4</sup> Koch 1991, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Soltanzadeh 1999, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Soltanzadeh 1999, p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Koch 1991, p. 11.

hands of this Iranian lady in those days. Generally it can be said that Iranian culture particularly its art and architecture spread all over the Sub-continent of India at Gourkanid Dynasty and specially at the time of Akbar Shah, Jahangir Shah and Shah Jahan. Even at the time of Shah Jahan the new Capital City, the City of Shah Jahanabad (Old Delhi) were designed and made by Iranian architects. Irving,<sup>8</sup> writes that Gourkanid Kings used Isfahan Plan and Architecture of the time of Shah Abbas to develop the new Capital City of India.

### 3. Iranian Garden's Manifestation in India at Gourkanids Era

Many Iranian and other international researchers and writers such as: Mojtaba Ansari, Hosain Soltanzadeh, R. A. Jairabhoi, S. C. Handa, J. C. Harel, Ebba Koch, B. B. Garg, R. G. Irving and Ernest Kuhnelt believe that designing and architecture of gardens in the Sub-Continent India at Gourkanids Dynasty had been originated from Iranian Gardens.

After the restoration of garden making in Taymourid and also in Safavid Periods in Iran. Gourkanids kings who ruled India; particularly Baber, Homayoon, Akbar Shah, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, had the role of founder of tradition of garden making by the help of Iranian architects and artists.<sup>9</sup>

Ansari,<sup>10</sup> argues that designing of Iranian Gardens according to the importance of geometry and application of rectangular plan and its division into four parts as a cross or perpendicular streets has been used in designing of Taj



1. Iran, Esfahan. View of Shikh Lotfollah Mosque.

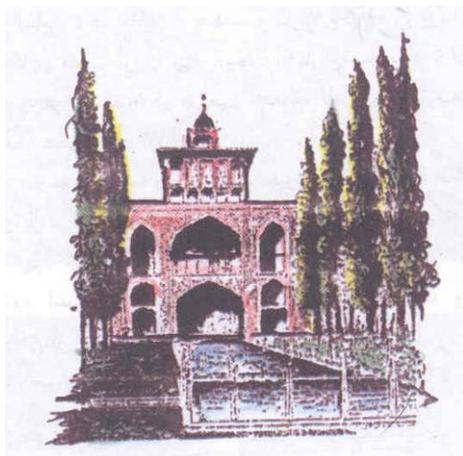


2. Iran, Esfahan. Alighapoo.

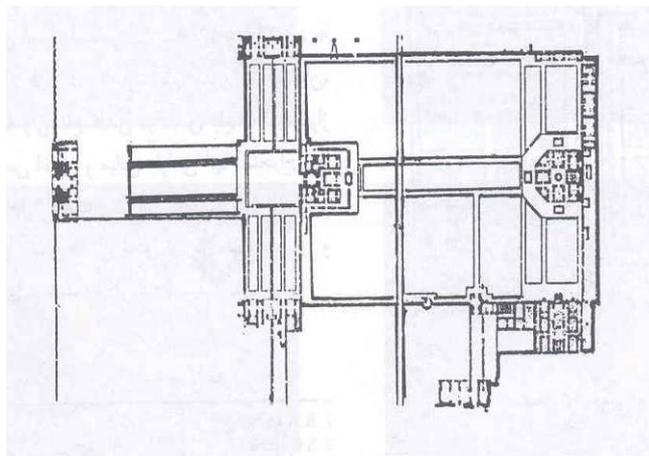
<sup>8</sup> Irving 1984, p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> Irving 1984, pp. 2-14.

<sup>10</sup> Ansari 1999, p. 14.



3. Iran, Kashan. Bagh Fin.



4. Iran, Yazd. Plan of Bagh Dolatabad.

Mahal as well.

The Sets of Tomb of Homayoon in Delhi and Taj Mahal in Agra is a kind of tomb garden used in Iran long time ago. A good example of which is Kouros Tomb at Passargad nearby Shiraz. This model has also been used after the appearances of Islam in Iran.

Flowing of water through out gardens like in Shah Nematollah – e – Vali’s Tomb Garden in Mahaan/Kerman has been known as a special important aesthetic feature. This model has afterwards been used vastly in India. Shalmar Gardens, Shahi’s Spring and Neshat Garden have been designed and executed in Sarinegar the Capitat City of Keshmir based on Iranian Chahar Bagh (Figs 1-4).<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. Similar Architectural Culture

The study of words which are used in architectural culture in Gurkanids Era indicates co-relations between the architectural culture of India and Iran. Some of these words have even been used in English literature. Books and articles in English had to use these Persian words in their original forms. Muslims and people who live in places where Moghuls buildings were existed still use these words and phrases. Koch<sup>12</sup> has also referred to these technical words such as; “Aramgah, Bagh, Chaharbagh, Sotoun-e Sarv Andam, Baradari, Berkeh, Abanbar, Chaharsou, Chatri, Jelowkhaneh, Chehel Sotoun, Taqcheh, Daftarkhaneh, Dowlatkhaneh-e Khas va Am, Divan,

<sup>11</sup> Ansari 1999, pp.169-170.

<sup>12</sup> Koch 1991, pp. 137-143.

Divan-e Am, Divan-e Khas, Gaz, Goldasteh, Gonbad, Gombad, Hammam, Hasht Behesht, Pishtaq, Ayvan, Howz, Hodjreh, Eidgah, Ezareh, Masjid-e Jaame, Karvansara, Khalvatgah, Khiaban, Madreseh, Mahal, Maqberah, Marqad, Mihmankhaneh, Mohandes, Monabbatkari, Moqarnas, Naqsheh, Namazgah, Neshiman, Shahneshin, Nowbatkhaneh, Naqarkhaneh, Parchinkari, Qalebkhari, Qanat, Qarineh, Qaisarieh, Qebleh, Rowzeh, Sahn, Saray, Sheshmahal, Takhtgah, Soufi, Talar, Tanbih Khaneh, Taq, Tarh, Vakil, Vazir.

### 5. Similarities in Civil Engineering and Constructional Decision Making

In Gourkanids Era Special attention have been paid into public facilities such as bridges, highways and the likes. A good example to prove this claim is Monem Khan Bridg in Pourawar in 1570.

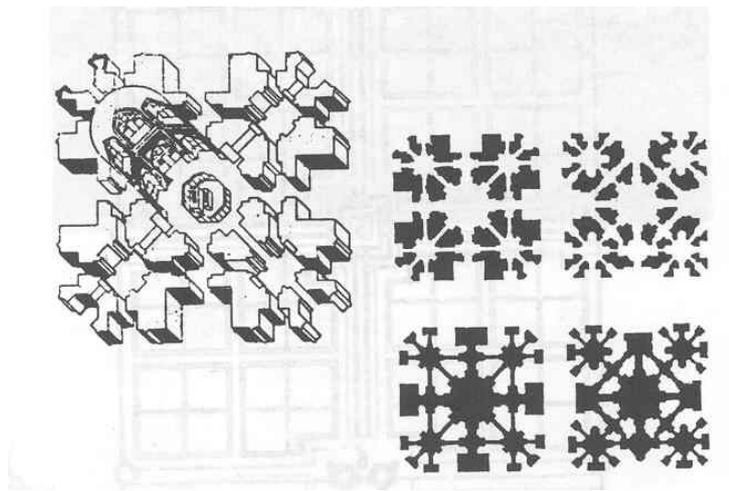
At Safavid Era these sorts of development of public facilities and buildings particularly public water wells, public water reservoirs (Abanbaar) and caravanserai were more common.

Minarets not only as a sign but also as a memory of Royal buildings were built according to Iranian samples such as: Hayran Minar in Fathi Pouri Sikri and Churminar in Delhi.<sup>13</sup>

Planting trees at the sides of the roads that joined cities together (Agra to Bangal Road) is one of Jahangeer's works. Digging water wells beside Agra Road to Lahore and many karvanseraï also have been built at Jahangeer's Reign.

Shah Jahan's Era has generally been named as classical architecture in India. In this period symmetry and harmony in the form of plans and architectural works is very well observed. Making symmetry in designing both small and large buildings around an axes related to the centre had been preferred.

Qalebkhari (Moulding) was widely practiced as its original term which basically is known as a measure of standardiza-



5. India. Plan of the Tomb of Homayoon and Tajmahal.

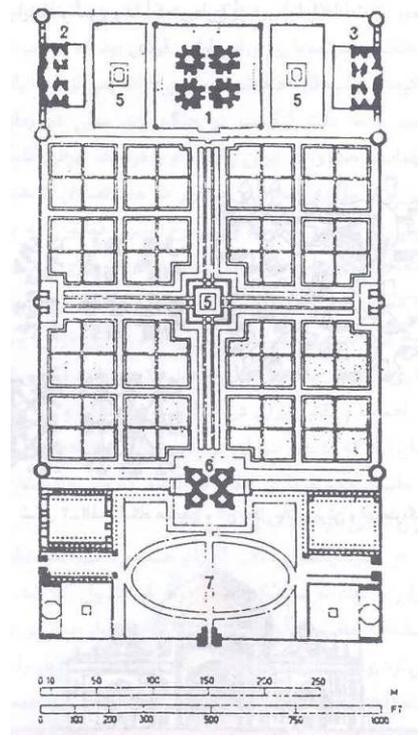
<sup>13</sup> Koch 1991, p. 67.

tion, of architectural aspects in the period under discussion. The great Iranian architects such as Molla Isa Shirazi who had done the design of important projects like Taj Mahal used Qalbkari as an important element in building construction works.

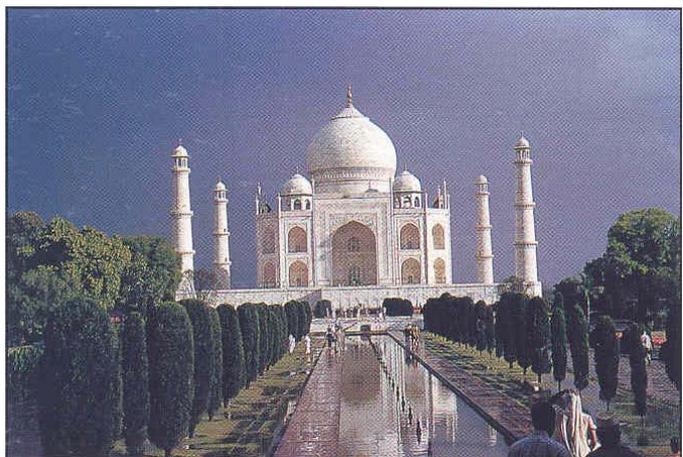
### 5.1. Basic Elements of Design in Iranian and Indian Architecture

The study of Iranian architectural works; specially in Safavid Era, and many of Gourkanids in Sub-continent India shows the reciprocal effects of architecture in those days. In other words it indicates the evolutionary process of Iranian Islamic Architecture in the Sub-Continent. Examples of these works are: Bagh-e-Fin in Kashan, Chehel Sotoun Palace in Isfahan, Shah Nematollah-e -Vali's Tomb in Mahan, Bagh-e- Golshan in Tabas, Bagh-e-Eram in Shiraz, Taj Mahal in Agra, Homayoon Tomb in Delhi, Akbar Tomb in Secandara, a number of other gardens in Keshmir and Jaame Mosques in Delhi and Agra are all have the following common basic elements of design: (Figs 5-10)

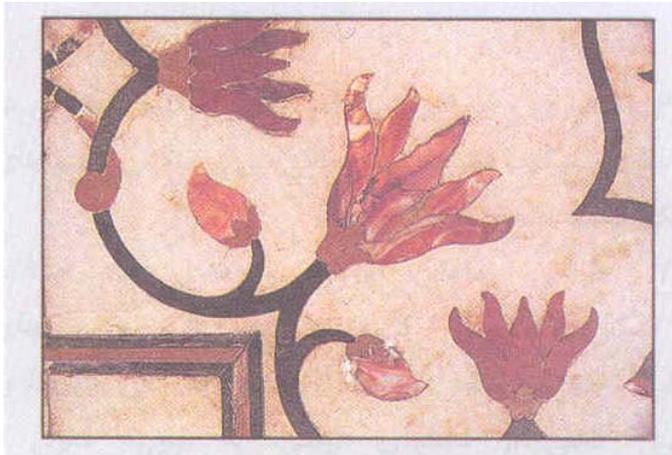
1. Location of the building: the direction of the complex towards greeneries and beautiful environment beside a river or a stream of water.
2. Design of plan: In the design of garden and its inside buildings principles such as symmetry, centrality plotting, geometrical networking, and the idea of horizontal designing (Horizontality) had been under specific consideration.
3. Dimensions of urban design: In the design of the complexes, they used to put a lot of concern on the hierarchies of landscaping which ended to a glorious perspective.



6. India. Site Plan of the Tomb of Tajmahal.



7. View of Tajmahal.



8. Detail of wall treatment Tajmahal.

This plus their concern regarding the attractiveness of the buildings both from inside and out side of the complexes as well as making invisible spaces with the help of minarets around the buildings all can be considered as a kind of improvement in Islamic Architecture in the Sub Continent.

4. Landscaping:

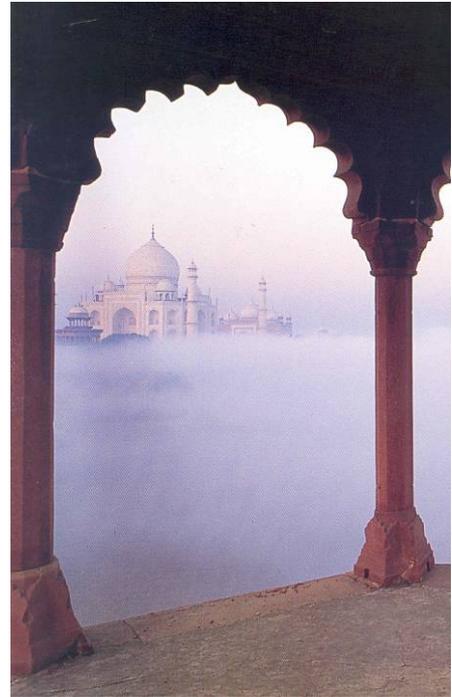
Here, the most important point is acquiring Chahar Bagh Design which was mentioned before. Method of plantation and making green spaces along the main axes to bring about more glorious scenes for the main building are of the other points of concern in this regard.

5. Elements of Design in the Buildings of the Complexes:

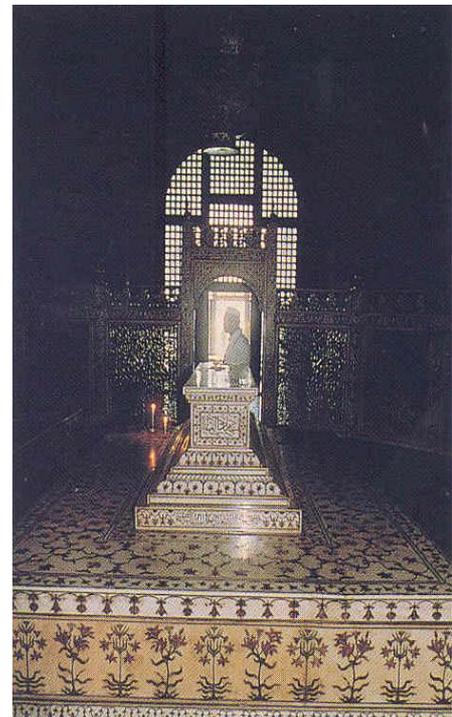
These elements are designed on the basis of hierarchies of open space, semi open space (Aivan), covered spaces and vice-versa so that the complex can be seen from the gate magnificently.

6. Solidarity and vigor ness of Buildings:

This mechanism has been obtained through establishing cone synthesis models in the buildings. The combination of solid and vacant



9. View of Tajmahal from Agra Fort.



10. Interior of Tajmahal.

spaces added to this harmony towards decreasing of the bulk of the buildings.

7. Designing the inside and outside facades of the buildings:

Utilization of bountiful paintings, various forms and shapes of plants, flowers, inscriptions and epitaphs made of precious stones settings on the walls represent steps of improvement in Islamic Art.

8. Technique of structure:

In erecting most of the buildings, the style of making dome, arch and retaining walls have been used.

9. Lighting design:

Lighting is performed through beautiful windows and openings made of marble and glasses networks.

10. Utilization of color:

The dominant color in the Sub-continent is red. However, in details various colors of black, white and precious marbles have been used. In Iran the facades of historical buildings are covered by tile and stone settings.

11. Construction Materials:

In the main buildings sand and marble have been used for the outer layer and rocky stores with soil, sand and lime for solid parts of the skeleton of the construction. To decorate hotels, tombs, monuments and gates precious stones and red sandy clay have usually been used.

12. Beautiness of the scenes in the different moments of day and night is another aspect which has been considered under the phenomenon of beauty and time. This brings about due to the movement of shadow and light through solid and vacant spaces. This movement causes a kind of dynamism in the environment under discussion.

13. Considering principles of graphics due to the harmony of walls and minarets circumference: this case can be seen in Jaame Mosque of Delhi. particularly the black, white and red lines which have the role of upgrading the altitude of the dome and minarets are very important.

14. Considering the geometric shapes such as rectangle in the plan of buildings in the majority of the building complexes in those days.

## 6. The Program for the Enhancement Of the Future Socio-Cultural Relations

- To select an appropriate place (a town, city or any other defined geographical area) as the site or location for beginning the activities in the ground of art and architecture.
- To find the most important historical places that need to be revitalized, renova-

ted or reconstructed.

- To perform a thorough field research to find those valuable historical buildings; elements or places which have not been registered yet by the related organizations.
- To propose the practical suggestions and to prepare the plans of the work.
- To prepare the flowchart of the implementation phase in regard with the related plans and projects.

### **6.1. Scope of the Work**

The first project in a scope of an urban territory may emphasize on visual arts such as architecture, painting, graphic, calligraphy, tile and ceramic works.

In this ground revitalization, regeneration and rehabilitation of historical monuments and buildings such as mosques, shrines, Imambarahs, and similar historical and religious buildings will be fulfilled.

The history of international relations indicates that of the various elements for strengthening reciprocal relations, between countries and nations socio-cultural relations have been more effective and more sustainable than the economic and political ones. The former has roots in the beliefs, traditions and values of the societies, while the latter may be changed by changing the governments.

Art as one of the strongest elements of cultural relations can play a very effective role in linking nations to each other.

What represents itself as an outstanding component of the friendly relation between India and Iran has been spreading the different branches of arts between the two nations.

At the present time that communication facilities of all types are available and having access to any part of the world is much easier than the past, mutual socio-cultural relations between our countries should be enhanced particularly via the bridges of arts.

### **6.2. Present Situation**

At the present time India and Iran have relations in different fields particularly in socio-cultural aspects. Iran Cultural House in New Delhi and its branches in Bombay and other large cities in India have been able to play the role of guardians or protectors of the efforts of last generations of the two nations for strengthening these kinds of relations. However, this much has not yet reached to a satisfactory level if we compare it with the extent, dimensions and varieties of the relations between the two countries in the past when Indians and Iranians could visit one-another's countries as easily as visiting cities and places in their own countries.

A set of non-necessary diplomatic restrictions (as the general or routine present foreign affairs policies of the modern world) has been responsible in creating obstacles on the way of the people of the two countries not to be able to take simple and easy trips to one-another's places.

### **6.3. Expectations for the Future Situation**

There is a strong beliefs among both authorities and people of the two countries that due to so many similarities in socio-cultural, economic and political aspects, we can easily expand more reciprocal relations in all aspects of our daily life. Areas such as poetry, language and linguistics, painting and other branches of visual arts, theatre, cinema, architecture, tourism are just a small number of samples of the large potentialities in this regard.

When we look a glance to the history of "The Silk Road" we will understand the glory and importance of the multi-dimensional relations between India and Iran. Many may think that the main function of the "Road" has been commerce. Nonetheless, transitions of traditions, values, norms, believes as well as different features and inventions of arts and industry all have been taken place through it.

Tucker<sup>14</sup> writes that The Silk Road was a means of trade goods and commodities; spreading religions, technology and innovations. A number of these commodities from India to Iran which carried by land and sea were pets and arena animals, exotic furs, cashmere wool, raw and finished cotton, sandal wood and other exotic woods, palm oil, sugar cane, perfumes, rubies and diamonds and many types of spices. Those from Iran (Persia) to India were: Pistachios, dates, walnuts, peaches, olive oil, materials for dyeing, and silver vessels (especially the work of Sasanian craftsmen).

Islam and before that, Zoroastrianism (the state religion of Persia until the arrival of Islam in the Seventh Century) are religions which came to India from Iran and attracted millions of devotees.

Tucker also added that architectural styles and devices of Iranian Architects (the Persian invention of the squinch allowed the addition of a dome and led to the construction of many of the world's great buildings.

What is expected now at the time of communications is comprehensive socio-cultural, economic and political relations between the two countries. It's time for our universities and other scientific centres and societies to put more time on planning and designing new programs for our scientists, artists and professors of the two countries to do research and to work with each other in the different fields to make more fruitful future for the two nations.

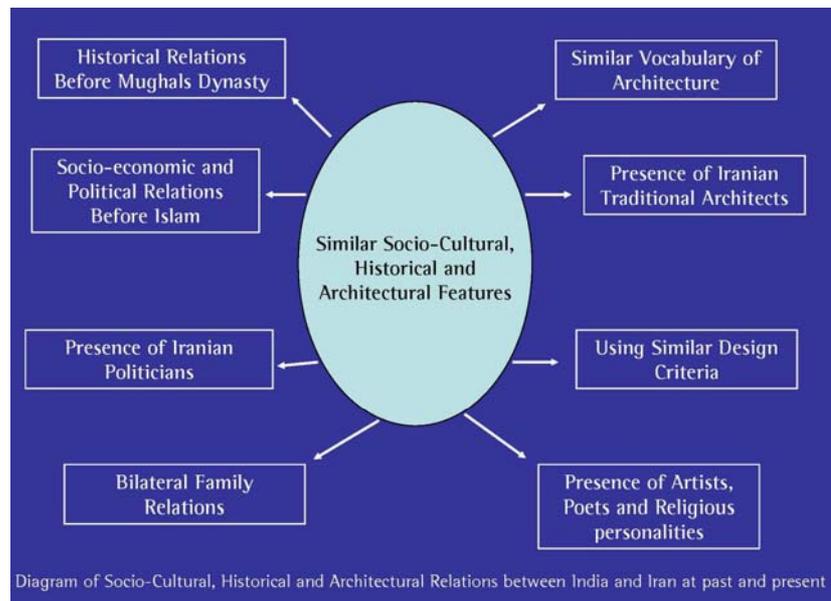
---

<sup>14</sup> Tucker 2003, pp.16-17.

## 7. Conclusion

Architectural works of Gourkanids Era has been known as brilliant features over centuries regarding design and structure. These beauties are generally the result of appropriate combination of the various elements of the buildings. The way of decorating of the buildings, creating invisible spaces via minarets, symmetry, harmony and rhythm in one hand and delicacy of working procedures and processes by using precious construction materials on the other hand have been of important factors of enrichment, beautiness and glory of architectural works in Safavids and Gourkanids Era. As a whole the architectural works of this era look beautiful both from close and far distances. From near the viewer enjoys from paintings of flowers and plants, inscriptions on the tiles and ceramics and engraved of precious stones used in marble and red stones. From far distances the watcher will enjoy to see a combination of attractive elegant features. All of these works are the valuable products of the hard working and very well experienced Muslim artists, experts and specialists of Iran throughout the country as well as other parts of the world particularly in the Sub-Continent of India.

In this regard, it can be claimed that more than 80% of architectural works and designs in India of Gourkanids Era had somehow been practiced firstly in Iran. These works act as good guidances for researchers in art to appreciate the very high degree of artistic and technical preciseness, deep experience, high skill, competent thought, excellent management, and very rich Islamic Culture at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At the end, as the comparative analysis of the architectural works and principles of designing of buildings in India and Iran indicates, all these created art works and master pieces are the products of the "School of Islamic-Iranian-Indian Architecture" which has been called as Mughal architecture in a number of texts (Fig. 11).



11. Figure of the backgrounds of co-relation between Iranians and Indian Goukanids. (Causes of creating of homogeneity of artistic works).

## References

- Ansari 1999 M. Ansari, *Arzesh- hay-e- Bagh-e- Irani* [Values of Iranian Garden], PhD Thesis in Architecture, University of Tehran, 1999.
- Halyd 1997 M. Halyd, *Art of Iran and India*, (Translated by Y. Azhand) Tehran, 1997.
- Irving 1984 R.G. Irving, *Indian Summer*, London, 1984.
- Kock 1991 E. Koch, *Mughal Architecture*, Munich, 1991.
- Pourjafar 1997 M.R. Pourjafar, *Islamic Architecture in the Sub-Continent*, Tehran 1997.
- Soltanzadeh 1999 H. Soltanzadeh, *Continuation of Design of Iranian Garden in Taj Mahal*, The Office of Cultural Research, Tehran, 1999.
- Tucker 2003 J. Tucker, *The Silk Road (Art and History)*, London, 2003.