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## **ARCHITECTURAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT AND IRAN**

### **Abstract:**

Following expansion of Islamic territories toward India, Iranian Islamic architecture also found its way to Indian subcontinent as well as to Far East. Studying the effects of Iranian Islamic architectural arts and the results of its development and maturity in the subcontinent can be considered as a feedback in architectural arts interaction mainstream of the two sides.

Muslims constructed their first buildings as soon as they got into Indian subcontinent. Remnants of a mosque from eighth century AD in Indus valley is a sign of this era. In twelfth century AD, the more Muslims arrived to the subcontinent, the more remnants were left. After ages, in an era known as Mogul Empire (Indian Gurkani), the architecture of the subcontinent flourished mainly under the influence of Iranian arts. Historical monument of Taj Mahal is a famous Islamic architectural monument in the world, which was constructed at this era by Muslim masters and architects some of whom were Iranian. Khorshid Palace (sun house), in Kalat Nader city of Iran, is also among those unique monuments which was built in Afsharid dynasty after subjugating India by Nader Shah, combining mastery of Indian architects with Iranian architecture.

In this article, we first discuss entrance of Islam to Indian subcontinent, and mention periods of Muslims' governance especially during Indian Gurkani. Then the effect of Iranian arts in Indian Gurkani courts on one hand, and footprints of Indian architecture in Khorshid Palace on the other hand, particularly in its decorations, will be discussed.

### **Keywords:**

Taj Mahal, monument, Gurkani, Afsharid, Iranian-Indian, architecture

## Introduction

Shortly after expansion of Islam to eastern territories, Muslim thoughts and ideas got a new manifestation in form of arts and architecture of historical monuments in Indian subcontinent.

Iranian arts and architecture, as a nourishing source of Iranian Islamic arts and architecture, could have impressions on Indian subcontinent monuments, become impressed by it, and benefit from it mutually. Taj Mahal and Khorshid Palace are among those famous and beautiful monuments confirming this claim. Studying viewpoints and thoughts of experts about Taj Mahal design which is considered by them as an adaptation of Iranian architecture, and influence of Indian architects, especially sculptors, on architectural decorations of Khorshid palace, one can conclude that Taj Mahal is a manifestation of Iranian design and architecture in Indian subcontinent, and architectural decorations of Khorshid palace is the emanation of Indian architecture in Iran, and what is called 'Mogul Architecture', is in fact 'Iranian Islamic architecture in India'.

By studying geometric intricacies and decorations applied in these monuments, hidden details of mutual influences could be revealed. Iran, as a bridge between west and east, could have important role in this context. Here we try to elaborate the importance of this subject by studying some features of these buildings.

## Pre-Islamic Era

According to history, from the time of Darius I historic correlation strengthened, because in this era the Indus River constituted eastern border of Iran, and according to Darius friezes, Gandhara (probably today's Kandahar) was also his subordinate (Kholusi, 1990, 152). Pakistanis archeologists performed scientific excavations in Plombet region of Peshawar suburbs that was part of Gandhara territory in Achaemenid era and in Tamar Greh region, and discovered some remnants dated back to Achaemenid era. Through excavations performed in Pataliputra in Mahabharata, enormous monuments are discovered revealing Iranian art and architecture features at the time of Achaemenid. Friezes and epigraphs engraved on rocks upon orders of Ashoka the emperor of Mauryan dynasty, has high similarity to Achaemenid friezes.

In Sasanian era there had been continued connection between the two regions, as the tales about Anushirawan's famous courtiers such as Borzuya the physician and bringing backgammon and The Panchatantra to Iran and taking chess game from Iran to India are sample reasons of such relationship. At the end of Sasanian governance and emergence of Islam, some Zoroastrians migrated to India and became known as Persians of India. It became a means of transmission of Iranian civilization and arts from Iran to India. However, the most affection and cultural and arts exchanges was made through Muslim traders as well as expeditions and migration of craftsmen (Kholusi, 1991, 152)

## Islamic Era

As Islam arrived, the effects of Islamic school of thought on arts and culture of Indian subcontinent was significant (Pourjafar, 1997, 19). In periods of Muslim governance over Indus valley and The Ghaznavids in fourth and fifth Hijri centuries and especially through The Ghurid dynasty in sixth and seventh Hijri centuries (12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> AD), art works arrived to this territory and buildings such as: Qubbat Al-Islam mosque and Qutub Minar was constructed. The relationship between Iran and India was friendly from the old age. Even after Gurkani establishment in India and conquering Delhi by Babur, this friendly relationship continued, especially because Shah Ismail (Ismail I) saved Babur's sister from captivity of Uzbeks and sent her to his brother.

In 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> AD, Muslims of Indian subcontinent were highly influenced by Iranian Islamic culture and arts and made many buildings accordingly (Pourjafar, 1997, p31-33). For example, The Grand Mosque of Bijapur was constructed by an architect from Qazvin, and Iranian taste and style is evident in many of these works (Pourjafar, 2003, 17). The era known as Gurkani, which begun by Baber governance, was contemporaneous with Safavid dynasty. Humayun Shah sought asylum to Shah Tahmasp I after he was defeated by his rival, Afghanis Governor of Bihar, and Iranians helped him to reclaim his lost governance. Humayun had great influence on architecture of India by taking many Iranian architects to that territory (The history of India, v. 2, p. 59).

As we know, one of the effects of Iranian arts in India was in architecture context. This begins with the mausoleum of Humayun, which was completely an Iranian architecture. Since then, the Indian Islamic method of architecture reaches to its glory at the time of Akbar Shah in Taj Mahal. A unique building which cannot be seen anywhere around the world was constructed in India. Building such monument was not possible without influence of Iranian architecture. In paintings, Iranian style blended with Indian traditions and created Mogul miniature style, persisting until 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. Iranian affection toward water and flowers was reflected in Mogul's gardens. One of the earliest actions of Baber, as soon as he got to Agra, was creating an Iranian garden. One of latest actions of Mogul dynasty kings was to create an Iranian garden.

After Humayun, Akbar (1526 to 1603 AD) took the power. Among the relics of that era, a very beautiful fort of Fatehpur Sikri and her mausoleum in Sikandra could be mentioned. Many decorations inside Akbar mausoleum is filled with Iranian arts and taste. After Akbar, Jahangir (1605 to 1628 AD) and then his son, prince Khurram succeeded to the throne and became the Emperor of the Mogul, and titled Shah Jahan. In general, Gurkani era and especially the period of Akbar and Shah Jahan can be considered as golden age of Islamic architecture development in Indian subcontinent (Halide, 1997, 72). In this epoch, monuments such as Taj Mahal were created, which is one of the most aesthetic architectural works in the world.

## **The Effect of Iranian Culture in Indian Gurkani Court**

The history of the two countries, Iran and India, shows that from the old age, the people of the two countries had close political, economic, social, and cultural ties, resulting in a deep impression of Iranian culture and civilization on culture and civilization of India (a group of writers, 2009, 417). Through the ages, migration of traders, martials, scientists, litterateurs, poets and other social classes has given credence to name, culture, and civilization of Iran in India. The existence of many historical buildings constructed to Iranian architectural style as well as Persian friezes and countless books written in Persian language and script in India, causes Iranian not to feel lonely, but witness a kind of deep cultural similarity between the two nations (a group of writers, 2009, 418).

The invasion of Sultan Mahmud the empire of Ghaznavid to India and conquering Somnath Temple made many sufferings and displeasure for Indian, but accompanying Iranian artisans and litterateurs with his army, was effective. However, despite these early movements, the most evident and brilliant culture and art transmission should be sought in the time of Baber governance (Indian Mogul), despite the fact that Baber was the founder of Mogul dynasty in India, he was of Iranian Mogul family (his motherhood ties related to Genghis Khan and his fatherhood ties related to Timur) (Kuch Ababa, 1991, 10). He was very familiar with Iranian culture and architecture and was the founder of government in Indian subcontinent. Humayun, his successor, was refugee for few years in Tahmasp court because of his defeat in a war, became fully acquainted with Iranian culture. After he regained his throne and established his governance in India, he took a number of Iranian artisans to India. The design of Humayun mausoleum, which many believe inspired by Taj Mahal design, is affected by Soltanieh Dome layout. This layout is designed based on four gardens and eight heavens layout, which is a common layout for arts and cultures in Iran and India (Soltanzadeh, 1999, 64).

The importance and the role of Iran in formation of culture and arts of Gurkani were so evident that litterateurs said that he transformed India to Iran (Soltanzadeh, 1999, 63). At the time of Akbar monarchy (son of Humayun), Mirza Ghiyas-ud-Din (Mirza Ghiyas Beg) moved from Iran to India and begun to work in his court. He was the father of Asif Khan, known as Etemadd-ud-Doleh, and at the time of Shah Jahan, he was appointed as chancellorship of the court. Etemadd-ud-Doleh was the father of Arjumand Banu (known as Taj Mahal) and husband of Shah Jahan. On the other hand, Nur Jahan, the wife of Jahangir Shah was also Iranian. The real power of the monarchy was in hands of this Iranian woman (Halide, 1997, 11). In Shah Jahan period, the city of Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi) designation and construction was inspired by the design of Isfahan at Shah Abbas era (Irving, 1984, 75).

Therefore, we learn that Iranians were among the first class people in periods of Akbar Shah, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, and Iranian culture was widely popular in this era.

In another city, called Agra, which is near Delhi, and in Delhi itself, beautiful buildings were constructed in Shah Jahan era. In Delhi, he built Friday mosque, forts with building inside them, and a very beautiful palace, with a poem on the wall who reads:

'If there is a paradise on earth, this is it, this is it, and this is it'

Today, one can imagine the glory and beauty of Agra from the vestiges of this city. In this city, among numerous gardens, Murvarid Mosque (Jama Masjid), Gauhar Mosque, private and public levees, Sarir (throne) Palace, imperial bathhouses, mirror halls, Jahangir and Shah Jahan Palaces, Palace of Jasmine and Noor Jahan and Tower of Jasmine, and Etemadd-ud-Doleh Mausoleum the father of Noor Jahan and Mausoleum of Akbar (Sikandra) are valuable examples of Islamic architecture of India which are inspired by Iranian architecture. The building known as Taj Mahal (the mausoleum of Shah Jahan Queen) is one of the most beautiful and perfect historical monuments and is located near Agra city. It is designed by an Iranian architecture named Master Isa, with the help of two Italian and French architectures, and has carbuncled and pictorial decorations as well as beautiful friezes having twelve edges with small minarets in each corner on the roof, and a beautiful dome, which is comparable in many aspects and details with Soltanieh Dome in Zanjan (Kholusi, p. 153).

In Ahmedabad city, some buildings such as Jama Mosque, Monar Jonban, and Rani Sipri's Mosque are among monuments of this era. Artistic exchanges in painting and miniature fields were -just like architecture- a dominant feature of this era. In Baberian era, the school of miniature and single face depiction based on traditional paintings of India and Europe and Iranian miniatures of Herat, as well as school of painting in Iran were developed and many valuable works is left for us from that era (Kholusi, p. 153). Nastaleeq manuscript and illuminated manuscript (Tazhib) are of other artworks, which developed simultaneously with painting, and were inspired and developed by Iranian Islamic arts, and some painters such as Mullah Fakhr Mujallad was calligraphers and illuminator as well.

Arts and cultural relationships had its effects on native and Islamic culture and civilization as well. Regarding lack of enough archeological excavations in east and southeast regions of Iran, the arts and commercial relation in pre-Islam era is not clearly and precisely known. In Islamic era, Khorshid Palace in Kalat Nader and Dolat Abad Garden in Yazd in 12<sup>th</sup> century Hijri (Afsharid and Zand epochs) are among architectural buildings, which were affected by Indian subcontinent arts (Kholusi, 1990, p. 154). Regarding conquering India by Nader Shah in 1152 Hijri, he brought back to Iran three hundred constructors, one hundred sculptors and two hundred carpenters as present (Ghodusi, 1960, 163).

## **Khorshid Palace of Kalat and Impressions from Indian Arts**

The strong fort of Kalat is located at 145 Km northeast of Mashhad, among Hezar Masjid mountains and its natural position is an exceptional phenomenon. Mountain ridges encircled the Kalat valley and made it impenetrable. This caused the fort of Kalat to be a safe place for regnant and governors and sometimes for insurgents and law-breakers (Rezazadeh, 2012, 33). The word Kalat means 'affluent either in highness or in lowness'. Kalat, because of its exceptional position, have always been a place for historical events. In Ferdowsi Shahnameh, Kalat is described as the battlefield for the war between Iranian and Turanian, and had its last glory and magnitude at the time of Nader Shah Afshar. In addition, other historical works from Sasanian, Islamic and Seljuk era (fifth and sixth Hijri century), IL khanate (seventh and eight Hijri centuries), and Timurid dynasty (ninth Hijri century) are found in there, and historic literature shows they had a long presence in Kalat (Labbaf, 1997, 169-170). Of historic relics of this city, two important monuments are left; one is Kabud Gonbad Mosque (from Timurid era in Azeri style) and the other is Khorshid Palace (in Isfahani style) (Rezazadeh, 2012). These building are located on the main axis of the city. Some believe that Khorshid Palace is made to keep the treasures (Astarabadi, 2008, 190). Khorshid Palace is used as a residential in Qajar dynasty (Rezazadeh, 2012, 34)

This fantastic building is made of bricks, and its outer visage is made of local trimmed stones. More than anything, a cylinder with semi columns which is erected within the building catches the eyes. This view has not been seen anywhere else. The building has a basement and a floor. The floor has the shape of an octagon and semi octagon, and at the center of the floor, the cylindrical shaped tower reaches to the height of 17.40 m. This tower is octagonal from inside view, and ends to a dome at the top. Interesting point is that there is a gap between body of the cylinder and the rest of the building, that works as an expansion joint and on the roof, there are stones that cover these joints like a cap (Rezazadeh, 2012, 34-35). By removing part of the semi columns, the light can shine inside the tower. The tops of the columns have little decorations. All of the facades of the building are trimmed, but in some decorative parts of the view, stone trimming is left unfinished, and this shows that the building construction was left unfinished and had not been used anymore (Rezazadeh, 2012, 35).

In subbasements and corridors of Khorshid Palace, sun could be observed and the beginning of spring, summer, autumn, and winter seasons could be found. Using geometric shape of the building, Nowruz, the first day of spring can be determined (Arian, 2003, p 151). Interior views of the tower shaped part are made with two stages patios and decorated with paintings and are gilded. All around this octagonal space, above the first stage of patios, the Koran's sura (versus) of Al-Aanba is written using dye. Around this space, there are patios with beautiful geometric cover (known as Rasmi-bandi) and the patio faced toward east, is the entrance of the building (Daneshdoust, 1995, 477-479)

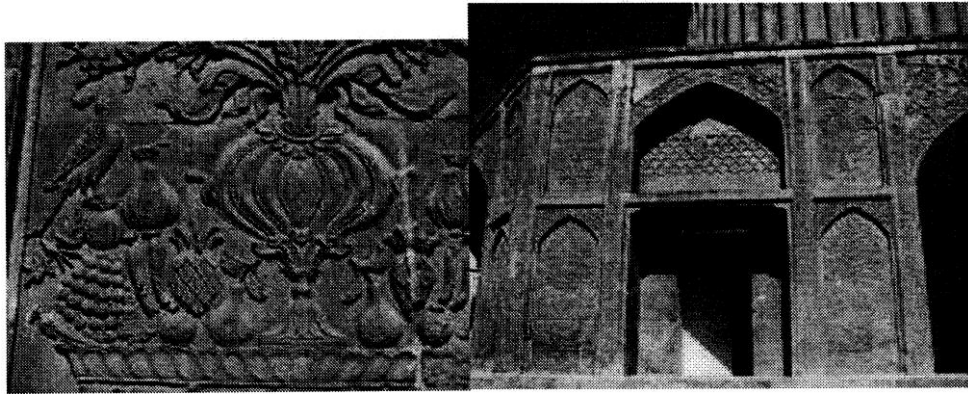
The verses of this sura, by rationalizing the wise orders of the nature, recognizes the establishment of resurrection for accomplishment of reward and penalty system as a necessitation of the god's wisdom, and recognizes the existence of human useless and futile without it. The sura continues by describing a brief excruciation of disobedient and gifts of the paradise residents, and ends with severe warning to unbelievers (Ghera'ati, 2004, p 359). In religious narratives (revayat), Hazrat Ali (as) is referred to as a Naba-e Azim (great logos) (Arousi, 1415, 491). (the picture illustrates part of internal decorations and frieze of the building)

There are different points of view about the reason of constructing Khorshid Palace. Some people recognize it as a palace; some people know it as a mausoleum for Nader burial, and others consider it as place to keep the Indian plunders of Nader Shah. In addition, because of existence of a subbasement, some take it as a prison. However, the existence of some other mausoleums with similar design around the same period, which will be discussed later, supports the mausoleum hypothesis. In addition, the existence of subbasement, and a frieze on which a beautiful gilded manuscript of Naba sura is written, is something that usually could be seen in mausoleums.

We know that Khorshid Palace was built in one stage at a six years period, and did not developed later (Astarabadi, 2008, 190). So it can be considered as a relationship between the components and the totality of the whole building. This increases the possibility of its construction upon a predefined design. In addition, this building is a belvedere, and has no proximity with other buildings. Therefore, using strong geometric designs was simpler for the designer. Also assuming it as a mausoleum, one can expect that the designer tried to achieve perfection in his design (Rezazadeh, 2012, 38).

Khorshid palace is highly affected by Indian architecture features at the first glance. Constructive materials for the facade and its lithographs, made the visage of the building similar to Indian architecture. However, this monument has Isfahani style at under layers and is completely an Iranian building inside. One of the hidden characteristics of the building is its geometry. This feature alongside other characteristics makes it as a valuable sample of Iranian architecture (Rezazadeh, 2012, 42). Also, the geometric method used in this work makes it distinguishable from other similar works, giving it an Iranian identity.

Figure 1. Khorshid Palace Lithographs



In Khorshid Palace, besides architectural style of the building and application of massive stones in facade, engraved images also shows the effects of Indian arts. Images of birds such as parrots, and fruits such as banana and pineapple, which was specific to India at the time of Nader, was ordered by him to be applied artistically to this building after his campaign to India.

It should be reminded that the drafts on some stones where no more work are done over them shows that the building is constructed after Nader's campaign to India. Around this space there are patios with beautiful geometric covers (Rasmi-bandi) and the east patio is the entrance of the building (Daneshdoust, 1995, 477-479).

The basement of this building has two sections. One is an octagonal space, with four columns located underneath the octagonal floor space, and the section consists of rooms and corridors around it. Based on studies and conjectures, access paths between the central space of basement and surrounding rooms were once closed, and later they were opened again from other locations. Furthermore, access-paths between underground spaces, floor and outside the building were made later in time and were originally in different forms. Based on some suggestions, Khorshid Palace is constructed on remaining of an older building (probably a tower of an Il Khanate mausoleum) which its basement had been slightly lower than the current basement (Labaf Khaniki, 1997, 178). The stairway from the floor to the roof and from the roof to the top of the tower is also dug out through the walls and this makes climbing difficult (Daneshdoust, 1995, 479). It should be noted that at present time, part of the west half of the garden is buried under the street and neighboring buildings (Daneshdoust, 1995, 480). This part had probably been identical to the west half.

Therefore, the images of south East Asian fruits on the walls of Khorshid Palace shows that artisans benefited from cultural identify of Indian subcontinent, so that the images were sculptured very skillfully on stones of the building by capable hands of artisans. Maybe the origin and style of the relic came from the Safavid era. That is because in that time, most of Iran's relationships was with India and China and trader of these two nations



had more connections through these pathways, as in current time most of Iranian buildings are made similar to European style, in that time, Iranian architectures were imitating Indian and Chinese styles, like Chahar Bagh Street where old passengers through last two or three hundred years ago described its fairness and beauty.

One of the very excellent old buildings that the old passengers wrote nothing about is the School of King's Mother, which in this street and the residents of Isfahan calls it as Chahar Bagh School. A big stream, more like a river, passing through it. The ground of the school is paved with stones and on the two sides of the stream, steps are made by the stones and people sit on them and enjoy their time. It has four gardens (Etemaad os-Saltaneh, 1367 Hijri, 118/9).

By studies performed and comparison of Khorshid Palace, other buildings similar to this building in one way or another are listed as follows:

1. The Mansion of Farah Bagh Mahal, Ahmednagar (India) , 962 Hijri. From facade, structure, shape and construction material is very similar to Khorshid Palace. Farah Bagh Mahal became the model of Taj Mahal after 49 years (George, 1999, 40)

2. The Mansion of Ghadamgah Neyshabur, 1611. It is built to Isfahani style like Khorshid Palace and its location is not far from Khorshid Palace. Mansion of Ghadamgah Neyshabur is similar with Khorshid Palace in plan design ( Gerayeli, 1996, according to rezazadeh, 2012, 36)

3. The Mausoleum of Khajeh Rabi Mashhad, 1622. Is close to Khorshid Palace from plan design, time of construction and location aspects (Pop, 1996).

Figure 2. Mausoleum of Khajeh Rabi Mashhad

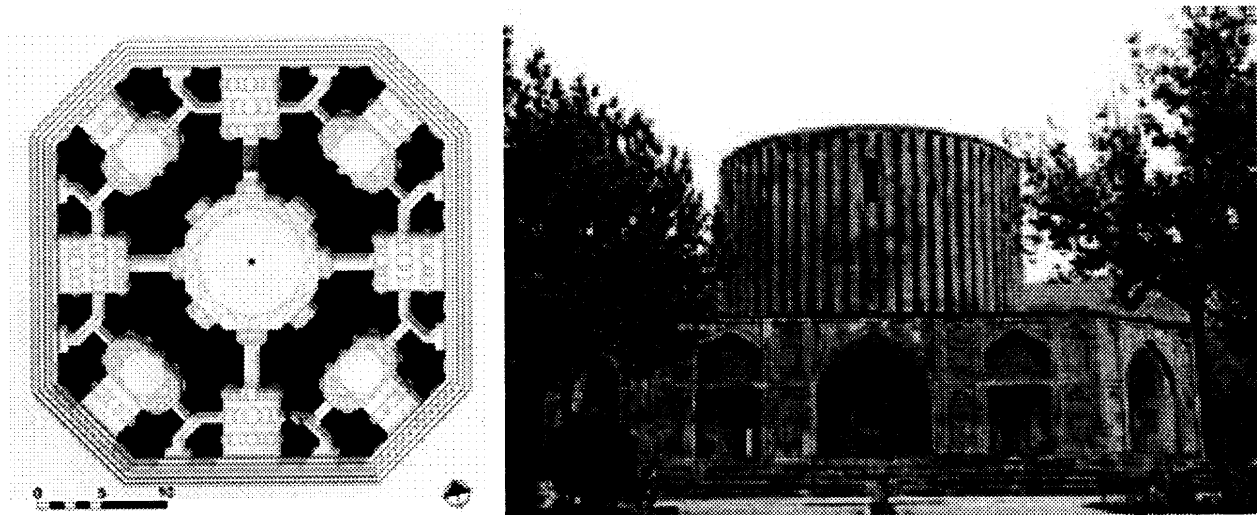


4. The Nil Gonbad Delhi (India), 1625. This was built in Nader Shah colonies and it is located inside the Humayun Gurkani mausoleum enclosure. Its internal view is similar to Khorshid Palace (Rezazadeh, 2011, 36). Considering sculptures of Khorshid Palace who came from India, the relationship between internal views of these two buildings (Nil Gonbad and Khorshid Palace) and the architectures can be understood.

5. The Hasht Behesht (meaning Eight Paradise) Mansion in Isfahan, 1669. This is built at the pinnacle of Isfahani Style era, has a plan design similar to Khorshid Palace, and its time interval with Khorshid Palace is less than a hundred year (Godar, 2009, 265).

6. The Khorshid Palace in Kalat Naderi, 1747. It is built in Isfahani Style and is the basis of comparison.

Figure 3. Khorshid Palace in Kalat Naderi



7. The Pars Museum (Nazar Garden Mansion) in Shiraz, 1771. This building was constructed as the mausoleum of Karim Khan Zand. Its plan is similar to Khorshid Palace and is constructed in less than a hundred years from the time of Khorshid Palace construction (Rezazadeh, 2012, 36).

### Architectural Characteristics of Khorshid Palace

- Simplifying the designs, scaling and using uniform components and sizes as well as central symmetry (Pirnia, 2007, 279). In central symmetric design of the Khorshid Palace, the components of the building are repeating in different edges and sometimes as multiple times in one side. This repetition can be seen in both facades and inner plan. Decreasing projections and concavities is another characteristic (Pirnia, 2007, 86), as facade of the Khorshid Palace has little knots projections (one knot). Applying bezel corners (Pirnia, 2007, 279), separation of base layer construction and the top layer (Pirnia, 2007, 279). The floor plan is square with bezel corners (Rezazadeh, 2012, 37). Building the facade of the Khorshid Palace was begun after finishing brick layering of the base structure. The supporting evidence is that the building is complete but the stones sculptures of the façade are incomplete in some areas.

Although Khorshid Palace has a unique design, other buildings with similar characteristics could be named. As these buildings are chronologically closer to Khorshid Palace, this similarity is more significant. The buildings mentioned here had importance and were chronologically closer to Khorshid Palace than the others were. All these buildings have Isfahani Style. Nader campaigns to India, caused the Khorshid Palace to be affected by its effects, both in design and details.

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