

The Garden That Became A Street

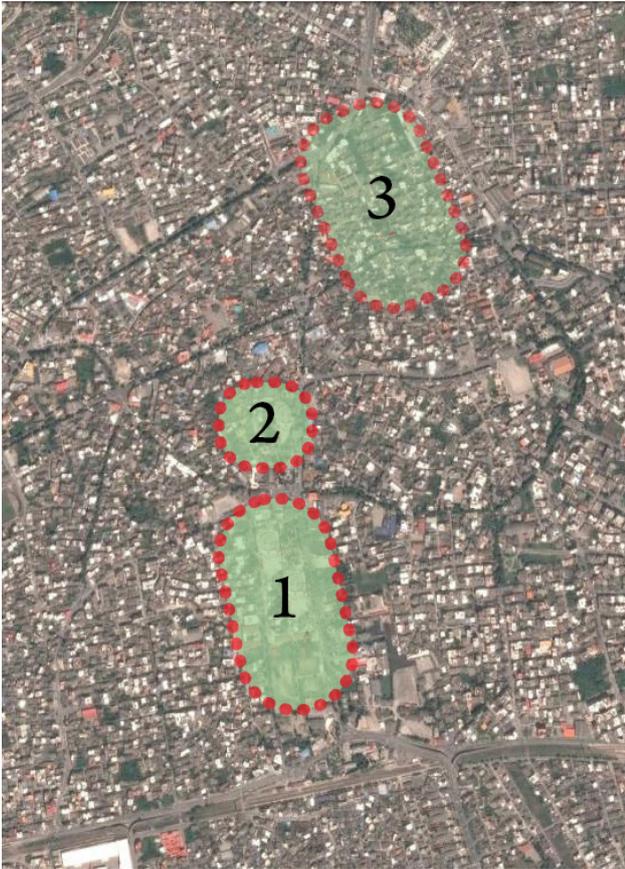
The Evolution of the Old Shah Garden of Sari

Abstract | Being able to benefit from natural resources, Māzandarān has been historically known as an appropriate place for making gardens in the past centuries. This region became a significant place for hunting for spending the winter time during the period of Shah Abbas Safavi, when numerous gardens were built in these areas. Therefore, multiple gardens were built in Sari, the political center of that period, which are currently abandoned for not being acknowledged and consequently due to ignorance, erosion, urbanization and integration of gardens and cities and their functional changes. Few traces of Māzandarān gardens are found today and no extensive researches on these gardens are studied. Deep understanding of demolished Māzandarān gardens and recognition of their prevailing pattern can intensively help us understand the manmade landscape and lead into a major step forward in recognition of Iranian garden. This study aims at recognition and finding of the structural pattern of Shah (king) garden in Sari based on historical documents and field investigations. In this regard, historical documents, texts and statements of travelers about the garden were put into scrutiny and the garden structures was discussed in the next step based on historical photographs. Having analyzed and drawn the probable outlining plan of the garden on the basis of historical documents and principles of Iranian gardens, it can be indicated that the Shah garden had a regular geometric structure with two main interfacial building across the main axe of the garden. Following the made interventions during the first Pahlavi period, the current Khayyam Street was created in line with the main axe of the garden and turned into a major urban street. This was completed by different constructions along the double sides of the garden axis by people and finally formation of residential neighborhoods of old Shah garden in this part of the city.

Keywords | Iranian garden, Māzandarān gardens, Sari, Old Shah garden, New Shah garden.

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Pic. 1: The location of Sari historical gardens: 1. Malek Ara garden 2. Dolatkhaneh 3. Shah Abbas garden. Source: authors.

Introduction | The custom of Iranian kings who were used to hunt during their “Yaylāk and gishlāg”, meaning their summer and winter encampment, required a system of created gardens along the encampment path. As mentioned by Eskandar Beg Munishi, the secretary of Shah Abbas, “Shah Abbas spent most of his time on hunting for winter in Māzandarān” (Petruccioli, 2013: 237). During Shah Abbas reign, southern part of Caspian Sea which was the birthplace of his mother was chosen to be as his recreational capital and achieved quite a renowned reputation along with his political capital, Isfahan. As a result, many gardens and hunting grounds were built in cities of Māzandarān province for recreational purposes during suitable times of the year. According to historical documents and relics, it is suggested that there were many prominent gardens in different cities of Māzandarān including Behshahr (Ashraf Al-Bilad), Farah Abad, Babol, Amol and Sari.

However, this type of Iranian Gardens was abandoned and unrecognized due to natural erosion, urban development, integration of gardens and cities and their functional changes. Recognition of the gardens through historical writings and documents and surviving physical relics can be greatly helpful in understanding the features of gardens in the southern bank of the Caspian Sea and can lead to cognition of Iranian gardens. The main question of the study argues the precise location and structure of Shah (king) garden in Sari.

This paper hypothesizes that the main structure of Shah garden followed the geometric order of perpendicular and long axis with deep vistas. It also considers that the current Khayyam Street was built along the main axe of this garden.

Late writers and researchers focused on studying Iranian gardens in their numerous books and articles. As it was mentioned previously, few studies are conducted on this matter due to few remaining relics of historic gardens in Māzandarān. These researches include the studies by Heidar Nattaj (2010) who has investigated the formation norm of Māzandarān gardens and compared the formation process of these gardens with Iranian gardens in his doctoral thesis, disregarding of Sari gardens; and also studies by Alemi (2011) who has introduced the royal gardens of Safavid era in Sari through analysis of document plan of Sari Dolatkhane (state house) in Mozaffar Al-Din Shah in which no clear reference to Shah Abbas garden in Northern part of Sari city is noticed.

Historical Review of Shah Garden of Sari

There existed three remnants of historical gardens of Safavid period in Sari, two of which near Sabzeh Meydan (square) and another in northern part of the city and on the way to Farah Abad historical city (Pic. 1). From the two gardens that were located in the main square, the first was built by Shah Abbas in the south side of the square and was renovated for the use of local ruler during the reign of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar. Later, the garden was revived by Fath-

Ali Shah Qajar's son, Mohammad Gholi Mirza Malek Ara when Andarouni (the inner space) and Biruni (the outer space) mansions were added to the garden and a pavilion was built in the middle and the garden was renamed as Malek Ara garden. This garden is built in a rectangular 150 × 700 meters long with four main buildings where the local governor spent his luxury life. European travelers of the nineteenth century described the decorated building with paintings depicting Shah Ismail and Nadir Shah's victories and refer to their gradual destruction and negligence and the adjacency of palm and plane trees (Wilber, 2011: 134). The second garden was built opposite Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar's garden and along the main square by a local governor called Mirza Mohammad Gholi. Actually, this garden was Sari Dolatkhaneh (state house) and comprised the governor's house and three other buildings. Reports of restoration actions of the customs office in Sari, in the reign of Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar, refer to Sari Dolatkhaneh. This document contains a plan of Sari Dolatkhaneh which reported to be completely destroyed and unworthy of repairing and rebuilding. It is considered as a significant and the only surveyed document of Sari Dolatkhaneh whose fractional parts were built during the Safavid period (Alemi, 2011). The third garden was located in the northern part of the city, which was called the Shah garden and was built in the time of Shah Abbas. Therefore, two gardens were called the Shah garden; the one that the paper discussed was older and was built by Shah Abbas in the northern part of the city and on the way to Farah Abad based on historical documentation. This garden was not highly considered in later periods and Nader al-Din Shah described it as ruins without walls in his first trip to the Caspian and ordered the construction of the wall and conservation of the garden. However, it was abandoned afterwards with no remained tracks of it.

Shah Garden Description by Travelers

Little has been said about historical gardens of Sari in historical documents and travel books. The first



Pic. 2: Defining pathways by cypress trees; Shah garden of Sari. Source: Naser al-Din Shah album, photo No. 12069.

referring is observed in the book "The History of Aalam Aray Abbasi" in which Eskandar Beg Munshi, the secretary of Shah Abbas, refers to the desirable gardens and buildings of Sari. Other sources that have pointed the gardens date back to the Qajar period. Naser al-Din Shah paid a visit to these gardens in his first trip to the Māzandarān and ordered their restoration. Other explorers, who have traveled to Māzandarān in the beginning of the nineteenth century, have also addressed Sari gardens and provided general information and detailed description of the garden structure and location.

Eskandar Beg Munshi has mentioned the construction of gardens and palaces for Shah Abbas in Mazandaran. He refers to Ashraf gardens as "Dar al-saltaneh" and to Farah Abad gardens as "Dar al-sarv". He has also mentioned "the noble buildings and gardens of Sari; in addition to the ones in Amol, Barforoush, Abbas Abad and Astarabad" (Eskandar



Pic. 3: current situation of Khayyam Street in Sari. Photo: Vahid Heidar Nattaj, 2015.

Beg Munshi, 1956: 1111).

Donald Wilber marks in his book: “In the proximity and within the significant city of Sari, there are the remnants of three gardens, two of which date back to Shah Abbas period. Shah garden is located in the northern part of the city that is built during Shah Abbas period. Currently, a pavilion exists near the pool which looks repaired and renovated and covered by red terracotta” (Wilber, 2011: 134).

Rabino, who traveled to Māzandarān in 1908 and 1909, quotes: “Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar built the government palace of Sari in a location where used to be Shah Abbas’ garden. It was partially destroyed by fire and was rebuilt by Malek Ara. Shah garden is located on the other side of the square and opposite the governor’s palace, known as Malek Ara garden. The old garden that was built by Shah Abbas is located in the northern part of Sari” (Rabino, 1928: 25).

Naser al-Din Shah describes Shah garden in his travel

book of Māzandarān as: “the garden is located at the city ends. This garden had two magnificent gateways, one facing the city and another facing Farah Abad Street and considered the street gate indeed. I was overwhelmed by two features of the garden, firstly by the gratitude of space and building consolidation and style and secondly by well planted trees and by the freshness and strangeness of the aligned plane and orange trees...I asked for Mirza Masih and ordered the repairing of garden walls and gate and exaggerated for well repiarements” (Nouri: 2010: 156).

This garden was again mentioned in Naser al-Din Shah’s second trip to Mazandaran, “We entered Shah Abbas garden from the famous Farah Abad Street. Azed al-Malek was our companion; we passed through the bottom door or the city door. A solid wall surrounded the garden and a wooden Malek Ara-shaped pavilion was in the middle. In our first trip, the garden buildings of Shah Abbas were in ruins with no surrounding walls. It was ordered to build a wall around the garden. They built a pavilion from the gates which is now completed and abundant old cypress and orange trees are observed in this garden...there is a building from a long ago in this garden” (Mahjouri, 2001: 190); (Pic. 2).

Mirza Ebrahim who came to Sari in 1861-1862 with Mackenzie quotes: “Mohammad Gholi Mirza Malek Ara has founded a garden outside the city and exactly in the south in which Andarouni (inner) and Birouni (outer) mansions are built. A pavilion is placed in the middle and citrus and cypress trees are planted and flowing water is abundant. It will be in ruins if it is not repaired; just alike Shah Abbas Garden that have plentiful citrus and cypress trees but turned into wreckage without a concierge” (Mirza Ebrahim, 1976: 95).

Captain Charles Francis Mackenzie, the first English Consul in northern Iran, mentioned another Shah Abbas garden in his trip to north. This garden was located near the city gate from which they have entered Sari and it was different from Malek Ara garden where Mackenzie stayed (Mackenzie, 1978: 123).



Pic. 4: Shah garden area in aerial photo of 1956. Source: authors.

Shah Garden in History of Sari Neighborhoods

There exist two neighborhoods called Shah garden in the city of Sari; one as new Shah garden and the other as old Shah garden.

The new Shah garden is located in the south of Sabzeh Meydan and mostly known as a garden rather than a neighborhood. The new Shah garden owes its reputation to the garden that was built by Mohammad Gholi Mirza Malek Ara, the fourth son of Fath Ali Shah Qajar who ruled Māzandarān for thirty-seven years. This garden has been used by military since Pahlavi era (Ahmadi, 2011).

The old Shah garden neighborhood is located in the northern part of Sari where used to be a garden of approximately 20 hectares, all of which have been in the past. The neighborhood starts from 18 Dey Street and continues to Farah Abad gate or Mola Majd al-Din three-way (Ibid).

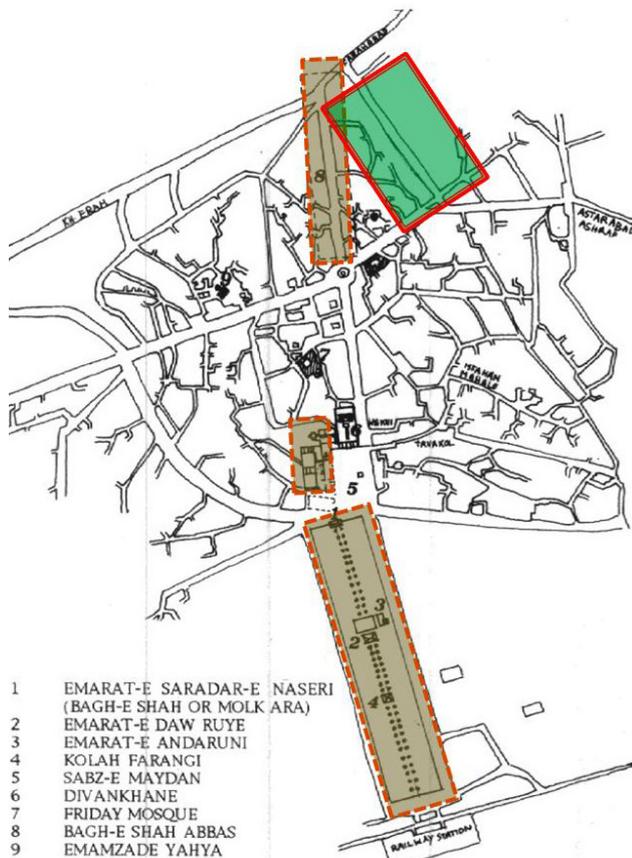
The old Shah garden neighborhood had numerous trees, including citrus and old cypress trees as well as a pavilion and north and south gates and it was considered as a public park and promenade. It is said that the garden was acquired by an influential family

named Fazeli, and Fazeli historical mansion located in Navanbar neighborhood –which is one of the oldest and magnificent mansions of Sari- was made of the cut trees of this garden (ibid). In interviewing elderly people, it was determined that they called the beginning of Khayyam Street in the south which was the entrance of old Shah garden as “front Shah garden” meaning the forefront of Shah garden. Therefore, it can be concluded that new Shah garden or Malek Ara garden is located at Sabzeh Meydan and the Shah garden that this article addresses or the old Shah garden is located between 18 Dey Street and Farah Abad gate or Mola Majd al-Din three-way.

The Role of Shah Garden in City Development

Urban development history of Iran from 1920 to 1941 is considered as the transition period from old to new. Urban changes and evolutions of this period became a model for future urban developments in Iran (Shabani, 2012: 84). In the meantime, during Pahlavi era, like many elements of architecture and urbanism historical gardens could not stand the rapid pace of industrialization and changes resulting

PLAN OF SARI WITH THE ROYAL GARDENS



Pic. 5: Plan of garden locations in Sari and modification of Shah garden location by authors. Source: authors, on the map by Mahvash Alemi (Alemi, 2011).

from the arrival of the transportation vehicles and were eventually forgotten (Golestani, 2011). The governmental documents and records indicate that the urbanism regulations were in favor of obligatory communicational network in the agenda. In that course of time, quantitative development of streets was accentuated to the extent that the first transformation map of Tehran in 1930 is recognized as a “road map. Hence, the streets became a place for traffic, trade and work.

During the first Pahlavi period and after 1892 when the City of Sari faced the network development policy, the so-called “street system,” was begun. Thereafter, Shah garden area, which was considered as a public park and an urban promenade, was split into eastern and western parts by turning the main axe of the garden into “Khayyam Street”. Despite adding a street along the garden, this area of the city was

deserted for a long time. Thereafter, a cotton factory was built in the middle of the street and opposite the current Arash Street, which was known as machinery factory. This factory was also abandoned during the second Pahlavi. This area was transformed into a residential area almost from 1971 onwards and it is still considered a low-density residential area in Sari (field interviews); (Pic. 3). Putting the maps into scrutiny and analyzing the evolution of garden into urban zones reveals that the main axe of the garden has turned into a main street and the perpendicular sub-axis of the garden have become residential alleys; offering a grid network in this part of the city. However, addressing this issue is not within the scope of this research and the authors did only intend to regard this issue. The influence of Iranian gardens after their abandonment in the development of cities, as well as feasibility of their impact on the future development of cities can be the investigated in further researches.

Discussion Based on Historical Documents and Field Investigations

According to historical documents, the historical gardens of Sari were located in two areas. One was in Sabzeh Meydan (square) where Dolatkhane and Shah garden or Malek Ara garden were located, and another in north of Sari and at Farah Abas gate where the Shah old garden or Shah Abbas garden was located.

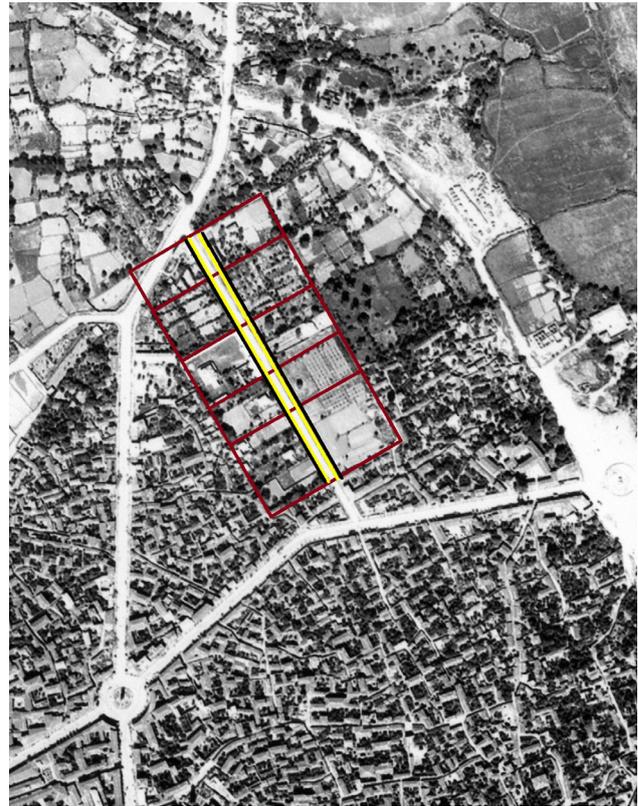
Therefore, these two gardens were called Shah garden, the first one at the south side of Sabzeh Meydan that is also called Malek Ara garden with military function from the first Pahlavi period to the present. In this paper, Shah garden refers the older garden built by Shah Abbas at the northern part of the city, also known as the Shah old garden, whose exact location and geometrical structure was unknown till now. It should be noted that Alemi in her article (Alemi, 2011) specifies the possible area of this garden and does not mention the precise location, structure, geometric proportions, and the approximate area of the garden (Pics 4 & 5).

Shah Garden of Sari has been undergoing many

changes since the construction. The reasons for these changes are as follows:

- Instability of buildings in Māzandarān due to climatic reasons and excessive moisture;
- Being abandoned in a series of different periods (from Safavid to Naser al-Din Shah Qajar period);
- Interventions in the first Pahlavi period, conversion of garden axe to Khayyam Street and construction of cotton factory;
- Advancement and construction of various buildings and residential neighborhoods in the garden area by the public (east and west old Shah garden).

Despite all the changes, the basic structure of the garden can be proposed on the basis of historical documents, the writings of travelers, aerial photographs and field observations of 1956. According to field interviews, Khayyam Street was assumed as the main axe of the garden and remnants of the garden was found on both sides of the axe. Since the most personal land interventions was done after the regulations of 1961, the garden area, main structure and partitions can be observed in aerial photos of 1956 (Pic. 6). The garden structure follows a rectangular geometry, perpendicular axis and long pathways with extensive deep vistas; this geometry is one of the features of



Pic. 6: The structure of Shah garden based on aerial photos of 1956. Source: authors.

Iranian garden. The garden with two main entrance gates along the main axe was in rectangular shape with approximate dimensions of 200x400 meters and an area of about 8 hectares (Pics. 7 & 8).

Table 1: Features of Shah garden in Sari. Source: authors.

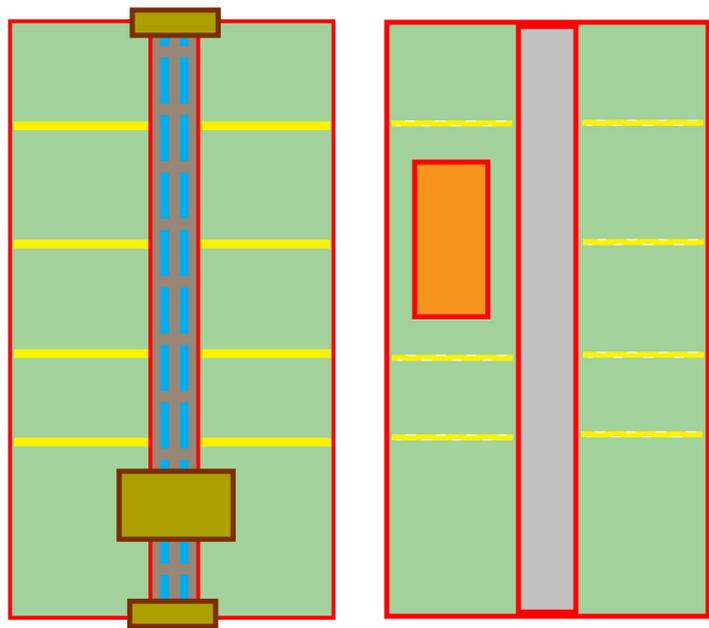
Features of Shah garden in Sari		
Garden structure	General geometry in garden	Rectangular with approximate dimensions of 400 x 200 meters Linear and grid order in the garden plan
	Garden axis	Garden foundation along the main axe with two entrance gates at both sides Perpendicular axis in the garden
	Enclosure	Enclosure by walls
View and Vista	Internal	Extensive deep vistas in garden axis
	External	Extensive view to the surrounding pristine scenery
Vegetation	Order	Arranged and ordered vegetation along the main axe of the garden
	Type	Cypress (heritage of garden ancient trees), orange and citrus trees
Water	Whole	A variety of stagnant and running water systems (ponds, streams, etc.)

Conclusion | The current study tries to recognize an image of Shah (king) garden in Sari in order to determine the structural pattern of the garden based on historical documents and archeological excavations. In this regard, historical documents and statements of

the travelers were discussed and the structure of the garden, and Khayyam Street’s role in the geometric pattern of the garden was analyzed with the help of aerial photographs in 1956 and the few remaining relics. Having analyzed the remnants of the garden



Pic. 7: Geometrical structure, main axe and garden division and partitions in on aerial photos of 1956. Source: authors.



Pic. 8: Evolution process of Shah garden in Sari from Safavid era (left) until today (right). Source: authors.

and complemented it with historical documents and principles of Iranian gardens, it can be concluded that the geometrical structure of Shah garden followed a rectangular order, with approximate dimensions of 400 x 200 meters and an approximate area of 8 hectares. The garden was founded along the main axe with extensive deep vistas supported by two entrance gates at

both sides of the main axe which was crossed by perpendicular sub axis. The main vegetation of the garden comprised planted cypress trees as the main heritage of the garden along the garden axe as well as orange trees and citrus and productive trees in the garden. The current Khayam Street was the main axe of Shah garden which was built in the first Pahlavi period (Table 1).

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