

## *Characters of sacred landscapes, Case study: Seydan in Fars Province*

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### **Introduction**

Iran with 2500 years of ancient culture has been the witness of many changes during the history. The reason that makes this country a place for studying cultural, social and natural processes is the universal cultures which have first seen in this country. A wide range of habitats with different characteristic has created down the ages because of the cultural and religious processes, and each left its mark all over this country. The natural context of these habitats has been the victim of some changes during years, which have roots in people's beliefs in each period. But the point which we understand by studying the context of different cultures in Iran is, despite the changes in dominions and religions along the history, Iran has a long history in sanctifying natural elements which in some points as a result of this sacredness many special species, watersheds and landscapes has been protected, and it is still valuable to natives. This landscapes are highly valuable in ecological prospects and various in physical features. They still keep their physical elements and original shape. They also have a great role in maintaining landscape mosaic. Some of these landscapes are protected by some organizations. However, there are also some with great ecological and sentimental value, which have not been paid any attention by these organizations. They are protected by natives. One of these landscapes is Seydan, a region of Marvdasht in Fars province which is quite rich in all of the above-mentioned aspects. The most spectacular, natural and physical characteristic of this landscape is the mountains with spatial shape, fluent and influent waters, and dense plant coverage. On the other side, the remainders of ancient Achaemenian culture like fire altar, and some parts of a palace from that period made this area a special landscape with many sentimental and sacred characteristic down the ages. The effort of this article is to find the sacred characteristics of Seydan, as a valuable landscape. The methods of this study is to search the meanings of "sacred" in conjunction with "natural landscape"; regenerate it in historical documents; and chase it in taboos by interviewing the natives. Physical and natural characteristics have been studied at the same time with satellite processed data and aerial photos. The result of these two processes is a holistic view which contributes to find the connections and conjunctions between cultural and natural contexts.

### **Sacredness in natural elements**

Most of the sacred sites which are protected by natives contain native social beliefs. These sacred sites contain natural and man-made sacred elements. In this type of sites, there is a strong synergy between biodiversity and culture. Nature produces light, air, food and water in dynamic recyclable processes for the survival of humans. A symbiotic relationship exists between biological and cultural diversity. This relationship is an important factor for ensuring sustainable human development. Nature provides light, air, food, and water through living processes of creative renewal. This awareness of life in nature as a precondition for human survival led to the worship of light, air, food, and water. Indian culture evolved in forests, first during the Vedic period and later during the times of Buddha and Mahavir. Religious beliefs and rituals (invariable parts of the cultural milieu) are very much inter-linked and intimately related to the management of ecosystems. Religion contributes to the conservation of natural biodiversity in several different ways. The first is by providing ethical and social models for living respectfully with nature. For most cultures, religion is a primary means of judging between right and wrong

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Ancient beliefs play important role in forming the landscape mosaic in ancient world, especially in Iran. Some beliefs have greater role than the others. For instance, the pattern of "Char Bagh" is the most significant method in garden designing which is based on the four pieces of ancient world belief. The design of Char Bagh with emphasis on the concept of infinity in four directions is a symbol of ancient world. Also the holly book of Mazdaism religion as Iran's ancient religion contains lots of points about field planning and usage. This shows the attention of this religion to environment.

There are many sites in Iran which are protected based on the beliefs and culture of local societies. One of the most important landscapes of Iran is the cultural, natural and historical landscape of Fars Province. Sydan is one of the richest landscapes in Fars. It contains many natural elements and historical background. These parameters have made Sydan a sacred landscape.

### Materials and Methods

Seydan city is one of the oldest habitats in Marvdasht region which is broaden in 130 hectares. It is located in the north east of Shiraz, 53' east longitude and 29' north latitude. It is located 1610 m above sea level. The city is surrounded by Mehr mountains in north (part of the Zagros chain) and a flat plain in south. These are two main topographic phenomena in this area that contain special features.

Polvar River is another main natural feature. Most of the secondary rivers of Seydan end up there.

In comparison with surrounded cities, syedan is located in a higher altitude, with dense plant coverage, abundant water resources and steep slope.

From the historical characteristic point of view, Seydan is located between the main roads of Persepolis and Pasargadae. There are many evidences on the existence of achaemenian culture there. These evidences make strong links between these two ancient cities, (Fig. 1)

What makes Seydan the connection link between the Persepolis and Pasargadae? Stronger theory is the existence of significant ancient elements, special nature and historical culture of natives to protect the nature and man-made elements as sacred elements. Because there has not been an exhaustive research about this subject to date, this research makes an effort to understand the relationship between Seydan and its surrounding landscape by studying its different characteristic. On the other hand, extracting the main characteristics for determining the sacred landscape according to evidences is another purpose of the research. Because the main topic of this research has roots in people's beliefs, interviewing the natives was the basic way for the completion of the research approach. In this research, references and historical documents have been used. For better understanding of the connection between landscapes, aerial images have been used. The diagram in Fig.2 shows the research process.



Fig. 1: Satellite data processed image of parse-Pasargadae region (Behbahani, et al.)

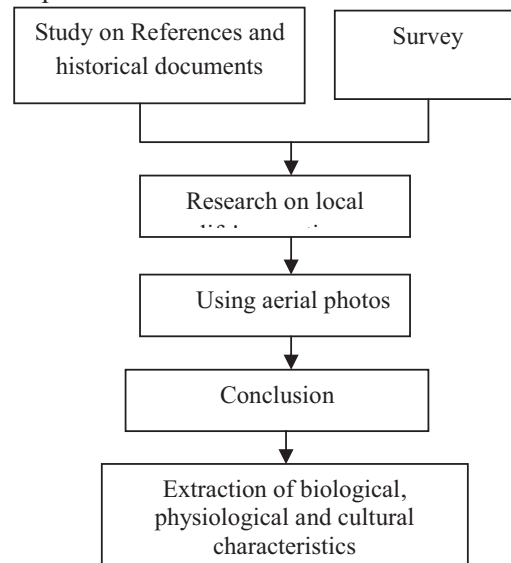


Fig. 2: research process diagram

**Conclusion and discussion**

Seydan as a case study in this research, with historical and natural characteristics, is a complete example of sacred landscape in Iran. It can be used as an original pattern for identifying this type of landscapes. On the other hand, seydan landscape according to the cultural landscapes characteristics, as a part of Persepolis historical complex, can be a great contribution to better understanding and finalizing the conjunctions of its cultural landscape. Results show that Persepolis as a governmental palace, in agricultural fields and fruit gardens context near the buildings, is a complex of human ecosystems, which will be completed if the theory of seydan's sacredness can be proved. This kind of system has many connections and conjunctions and different processes during the history.

Using the gained patterns from these cultural landscapes and finding the connections between different parts of them, plays a great role in making use and protecting these landscapes. The result of using these patterns is the dynamic protection of natural resources.

**Key words**

Seydan, Sacred landscape, Natural elements, Cultural and religious values, Taboo

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