

Original Research Article

Potentials and Strategies for Utilizing the Shrine of Shah Nematollah Vali in Developing Literary Tourism and Strengthening the Cultural Identity of Kerman Province*

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Abstract | Shah Nematollah Vali (731–834 AH), a renowned Iranian mystic and poet, is a pivotal figure in the history of Sufism. His shrine in Mahan, Kerman, serves as a significant center linking mystical, literary, and ritual heritage. It exemplifies the intersection of literary-mystical texts, sacred spaces, and tourist attractions. This study, adopting a descriptive-analytical method and an interdisciplinary approach, explores the literary tourism functions of the shrine at three levels: representation of mystical heritage, patterns of visitor engagement, and local socio-economic impacts. Data were collected through fieldwork, including observation and interviews with cultural activists and visitors. The integration of architectural elements, pilgrimage rituals, and literary-mystical references has transformed Astana from a purely historical site into a profound literary-cultural experience. Notably, the Chelekhaneh, a lesser-known section, plays a crucial role in deepening mystical tourism and enhancing the durability of visitor experiences. Furthermore, the shrine fosters unique social interactions between pilgrims and tourists, linking rituals with cultural activities and supporting local handicrafts such as pateh-embroidery. Tourism centered on this complex not only generates direct employment in the service sector but also indirectly stimulates local businesses, consolidating Mahan's position in literary tourism. These impacts can be amplified through literary and cultural programs, including conferences dedicated to Shah Nematollah Vali. The findings highlight the need to revise models of cultural content presentation and management at Astana, positioning it as a prime example of literary tourism's potential to connect intangible heritage with sustainable local development.

Keywords | *Shah Nematollah Vali, Literary Tourism, Cultural Identity, Mahan, Kerman.*

Introduction | Kerman Province, with its historical richness and profound mystical heritage, is regarded as one of the strategic regions for the development of cultural and literary tourism in Iran. Among these capacities, the tomb complex of Shah Nematollah Vali in Mahan holds particular importance as the center of the Kerman mystical school. This complex

is not only a historical and religious monument but also a platform for the continuation of the literary and spiritual traditions of Shah Nematollah Vali and his followers. Historical sources indicate that Mahan has long been notable for its temperate climate and cultural significance. Following the establishment of the Nematollahi order, it gained a special place in mystical literature.

Despite the fundamental importance of this site in shaping cultural identity and attracting tourists, existing research has primarily focused on its historical, architectural, and descriptive aspects, with limited attention given to its role in the development

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of literary tourism and its impact on Kerman's destination branding. To enrich the theoretical literature in this field, the present study examines the cultural and literary capacities of the Shah Nematollah Vali Tomb through a descriptive-analytical approach, highlighting the various dimensions of this heritage in the sustainable development of tourism in the region.

The main objective of this research is to describe and analyze the cultural and literary capacities of the Shah Nematollah Vali Tomb complex in order to strengthen the cultural identity of Kerman Province and to develop new tourism sub-sectors, particularly literary tourism. Specifically, the study seeks to identify and provide fundamental data for regional tourism development planners, thereby contributing to the economic and cultural sustainability of the region while preserving the historical and mystical authenticity of the site.

Research Background

Before reviewing the articles published in the field of tourism—particularly those focusing on literary tourism centered on the Shrine of Shah Nematollah Vali—it should be noted that most domestic studies emphasize cultural or religious tourism, while literary tourism as an independent sub-discipline has received comparatively less attention. Existing research reveals a limited focus on Kerman and the tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali, indicating that this city and its literary tourism attractions have been overlooked, whereas destinations such as Shiraz (Hafez and Saadi) and Neyshabur (Khayyam and Attar) have been studied more extensively.

Cultural Tourism and Strategies for Its Promotion in Iran, (Yaghobzadeh & Dowlatabadi, 2009). This book deals with cultural tourism in Iran and strategies for its development, focusing on promoting cultural aspects that can be related to literary tourism.

For instance, in a study titled “Qualitative Content Analysis of the Discourse on the Development of Literary Tourism in Iran” Asadi & Bayat (2017) examined the problems and obstacles to the development of literary tourism, strategies for its promotion, and its functions and impacts. Similarly, Ghasemi et al. (2019), in their article “Designing the Historical Context of Tehran with a Literary Tourism Approach: Case Study of the Nasserri Fence”, the integration of literary tourism into urban design.

Another article, “Environmental Capacities of Literary Tourism for the Development of Urban Tourism: Case Study of Tehran City” by

Movahed et al. (2023), analyzed environmental aspects of literary tourism. In addition, the paper “Film Tourism and Its Impact on Promoting Literary Tourism,” (Najafipoor & Heidari, 2014), discussed the relationship between literary tourism and media, particularly film.

Most studies related to the Shrine of Shah Nematollah Vali remain confined to the fields of history, mysticism, and literature. Historical research primarily addresses his life and role in Iranian and Indian Sufism. For example Kermani (1996), in his book “Tazkirah Dar Manaqib Hazrat Shah Nematollah Vali”, discusses the mystic's life, travels, and influences, and examines the role of the Mahan monastery in the development of the Nematollahi order. Likewise, Dahesh (2020), in “The Role of the Kerman School and the Order of Shah Nematollah Vali in the History of Thought and Sufism in India,” highlights the monastery's role as a center for cultural exchange between Iran and India, supported by the Deccan kings. While these studies underscore the monastery's contribution to mystical identity, they rarely address its tourism aspects.

In the tourism field, limited studies have examined the Shah Nematollah monastery. For example, Musa Pour-Askari (2014), in “Comparative Analysis of the Concept of Mysticism in the Architecture of the Mushtaqiyeh and Shah Nematollah Vali Tombs”, emphasized the role of Astana's architecture in attracting cultural tourists and identified it as a symbol of Kerman's mystical identity.

Several other articles (Mehrabi Basharabadi et al., 2012; Kamali, 2022) have addressed tourism in Kerman without mentioning Mahan or the shrine of Shah Nematollah Vali.

Research Method

This research adopted a descriptive-analytical and interdisciplinary approach and used a combination of field, documentary, and theoretical data to achieve the results. Field data included direct visits to the tomb complex of Shah Nematollah Vali, observation of rituals, and interviews with cultural heritage officials, tomb attendants, and tourism consultants in Kerman province. Documentary data was collected from historical texts, mystical treatises, official reports of the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage, and reputable news agencies (IRNA and Mehr) between 2021 and 2025. Statistical data, including the number of Nowruz tourists, the percentage of visitors to Astana, the length of stay, and the trend of changes after the Corona recession

period, were also used. In the analysis phase, the collected data were examined using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods: on the one hand, the statistics of tourist arrivals and the percentages of visit motivation were plotted in the form of analytical tables and graphs (circular and linear), and on the other hand, the cultural and ritual themes extracted from observations and interviews were coded and categorized within the theoretical framework of heritage tourism and cultural identity. This combination of statistical and qualitative data made it possible to explain the relationship between multi-period architecture, mystical rituals, and the cultural identity of Kerman and revealed the economic and social capacities of Astana in the development of cultural-religious tourism.

Research Questions

This study answers the following questions by examining the capacities of Astana of Shah Nematollah Vali in the development of literary tourism and cultural identity:

- 1) Which cultural tourism and literary tourism indicators can be potentially identified within the existing capacities of the Shah Nematollah Vali complex?
- 2) What challenges prevent the full exploitation of these capacities, and how can they be examined in an analytical and evaluative framework (not an executive solution)?

Theoretical Foundations

• Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism, as a branch of the tourism industry, focuses on the historical, cultural, and scientific attractions of a region. According to the definition of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), cultural tourism includes activities that acquaint tourists with the tangible and intangible heritage of a destination. This type of tourism aims to introduce cultural and artistic heritage, customs and traditions, as well as historical monuments and buildings, for educational and research purposes (Farajirad & Aghajani, 2009, 71).

Boniface (1995/2001, 143) emphasizes that “in the course of cultural tourism, the spiritual aspects of local culture, as well as its objective crystallization as cultural heritage, are basic parameters that are highly economically important, and information is transmitted visually.”

Cultural tourism encompasses urban tourism, particularly in historical and large cities, with facilities

such as museums and theaters. It also extends to rural areas, showcasing indigenous traditions of cultural communities—for example, festivals, customs, values, and lifestyles. Today, cultural tourism is highly popular worldwide.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009) reported on the impact of culture on tourism. The report indicated that more than 50% of tourism sector activities are generated by cultural and heritage tourism. The OECD (*ibid.*) also promotes intercontinental tourism under the slogan “unity in diversity,” encouraging the preservation of Europe’s cultural heritage. According to the report, cultural tourism can play a significant role in regional development across different parts of the world.

Cultural tourism also focuses on introducing and preserving cultural heritage while interacting with the living cultures of host communities. Its objectives include encouraging heritage conservationists to demonstrate the importance of heritage to local communities and visitors, supporting the tourism industry in managing activities that respect living cultures, and facilitating dialogue between environmentalists and tourism practitioners about the fragility of heritage sites and the need for sustainability. It further assists planners and policymakers in developing comprehensive strategies for presenting and interpreting heritage sites and cultural activities, with an emphasis on conservation. The development of cultural tourism in a region depends on several factors: the provision and presentation of existing attractions, local and regional support within social and organizational frameworks, and the integration of cultural and natural attractions to create a cultural landscape. This process is accompanied by raising awareness among residents about the benefits and challenges of cultural tourism, which can help preserve ecological heritage and provide conditions for sustainable local populations (Bakhtiyari et al., 2025, 3).

• Typology of cultural tourism attractions

In the process of typology of tourist attractions, cultural attractions are divided into eight main categories, each of which reflects an aspect of the material and spiritual heritage of societies. These eight main ones are as follows:

Archaeological, historical, and cultural sites: This category includes national monuments, historical buildings, religious monuments, and places that have witnessed an important historical or religious event. Types of Buddhist temples, Islamic mosques, palaces, tombs, ancient mounds and sites, and sacred

places all fall under the category of archaeological, historical, and cultural sites.

Specific cultural patterns: This section includes customs, local dress, celebrations, lifestyles, and religious beliefs that are more evident in the context of rural life and are rarely observed in urban environments.

Arts and Crafts: These attractions include a variety of performing arts and crafts native to each region, which often form part of the tourist's cultural experience in the form of souvenirs.

Attractive economic activities: These include local economic activities that are attractive to tourists and have a specific cultural nature.

Attractive urban places: These attractions refer to urban spaces such as old textures, squares, and urban centers that have cultural and historical value.

Museums: Museums are considered a key component of cultural attractions as centers for preserving, researching, and displaying artifacts.

Festivals and cultural events: These include celebrations, important rituals, artistic events, and any gatherings with a cultural nature that reflect the identity of the community.

Hospitality customs of the residents: The way in which the locals welcome and interact with tourists is considered a behavioral component of the cultural experience of travel.

Cultural attractions are one of the essential components of tourism. Proximity and interaction with the local community are also of particular importance; Jahanian & Nadalipour (2009) emphasize that the friendliness and hospitable personality of the local residents are among the real attractions for tourists.

Richard (1997/2001) citing a list prepared by the European Centre for Traditional and Regional Cultures in 1989, describes the types of cultural attractions. This category includes the following:

Museums and archaeological sites: centers for the preservation and presentation of heritage.

Architecture: famous buildings, ruins, and even entire cities.

Art: Handicrafts, sculpture, galleries, and art events and festivals.

Performances: Music (classical, contemporary, and folk), dance, film screenings, theater, and playwriting.

Literature and language: Language studies, literature, and related tours.

Religion: Religious shrines and festivals.

Indigenous cultures: Ethnic, tribal (primitive), and subcultures.

Cultural tourism is concerned with four main factors: 1) the use of cultural heritage assets, 2) the consumption of cultural experiences and products, and 3) the presence of tourists.

Cultural attractions, as part of the tourism product, refer to all external and formal manifestations and crystallizations of a country's culture that can be seen, displayed, or performed. These attractions are divided into two main categories:

Material cultural attractions: including historical sites, museums, religious buildings (mosques, temples, churches), ancient sites, and cultural centers or new residential areas.

Intangible cultural attractions: including music, performing arts, literature, painting, sculpture, engraving, popular culture (folklore), and handicrafts (*ibid.*).

• **Literary tourism**

As a sub-branch of cultural and heritage tourism, tourism focuses on spiritual attractions related to literature. This type of tourism includes visiting places related to writers, poets, literary works, literary festivals, creative arts, and media productions. Literary tourists seek to gain knowledge about the lives and works of famous poets and writers, visit their birthplaces, burial places, houses, and places that have played a role in the creation of literary works. These trips provide an opportunity for cultural experience, participation in literary ceremonies and festivals, and visualization of the atmosphere of the creation of noble works. In other words, literary tourism arises from interest in an author, literary work, or cultural heritage related to them, which includes birthplaces, monuments, literary museums, and other places related to writers (Bakhtiyari et al., 2025, 101).

• **Multifaceted impacts of literary tourism**

Tourism takes place in an environment that is made up of two main parts: the human environment and the natural environment.

The human environment includes economic, social, and cultural factors and processes, while the natural environment encompasses plants, animals, and their habitats. However, in practice, these two environments are completely intertwined; human activities affect and are simultaneously affected by the natural environment. Tourism, as one of the most important human activities, has significant impacts on the destination environment, where tourists interact with the local community, economy, culture, and the natural environment.

Hence, the impacts of tourism are usually examined in four main areas: social, cultural, economic, and environmental. However, it should be noted that these impacts are multifaceted and cannot be simply

categorized. In fact, tourism impacts often have interconnected dimensions and can be both positive and beneficial, as well as negative and detrimental. These impacts also change over time and with the development of destination areas.

Three key factors influence the intensity and type of tourism impacts: 1) the type of tourism activities undertaken, 2) the characteristics of the host community, and 3) the nature of the interaction between visitors and residents.

Tourism is distinct from other industrial activities because its production and consumption occur in a single location; the tourist consumes the product at the destination. Therefore, the impacts of tourism are largely concentrated at the destination. Furthermore, due to the seasonality of tourism activities, the intensity of impacts is greater at certain times. Seasonality is mainly due to two factors: climatic conditions (such as the amount of sunshine or snowfall) and holiday periods (such as school holidays or annual vacations).

Tourism affects not only the destination and the host community, but also the tourists themselves. These effects are visible in their behavior at the destination and can even be evident after returning from the trip. For example, tourists' experiences may influence their future decisions to choose a destination. Some of these experiences are acquired at the destination, but reflection on them and their impact on subsequent choices can occur elsewhere. Given the multifaceted nature of tourism impacts, they are usually divided into three main categories: economic impacts of tourism, social impacts of tourism, and environmental impacts of tourism.

• Economic impacts of tourism

Research conducted in the field of tourism shows that the greatest focus has been on the economic impacts of this activity. The study of increasing the number of tourists in a destination or destinations constitutes the largest part of tourism research, and most of this research has been conducted by economists. Their main focus has been on income generation and employment generation.

In relation to economic impacts, the following points are usually considered as positive impacts: helping to increase foreign exchange earnings, increasing government revenues, creating job opportunities, and helping regional development. These benefits can be assessed at national, local, and regional levels. Tourism also has negative economic consequences, including inflation, opportunity costs, and over-reliance on tourism (Gharakhlou et al., 2009, 1-12).

Tourism can lead to inflation due to increased prices of land, housing, and even food. When tourist demand for local services in the destination increases, the prices of goods and services also increase. Opportunity costs mean that resources are spent on tourism instead of other economic activities. For example, in coastal areas with rural hinterlands, investment in tourism may replace investment in agriculture, horticulture, or fishing.

On the other hand, over-reliance on tourism can lead to economic crises. This situation is especially seen in small countries where governments see tourism as the best way to develop and, over time, become so dependent on it that any change in demand can plunge the country's economy into crisis (*ibid.*).

Despite these challenges, tourism remains one of the main development options in developed and developing countries. Many countries prefer tourism to other possible options. Therefore, whether in areas where old industries are declining and need to be revived, or in areas that are seeking development but have limited options, tourism can bring significant benefits (*ibid.*).

• Social impacts of tourism

Tourism, as a complex human activity, has wide-ranging impacts on the host society. These impacts encompass socio-cultural, economic, and even political dimensions, and due to the diversity of tourism activities, they are usually multifaceted and interconnected. The type and severity of these impacts depend on factors such as the characteristics of the host and guest communities and the nature of the tourists' activities. The most important positive social impacts of tourism include job creation, revitalization of underdeveloped areas, renewal of local arts and crafts, strengthening of traditional cultural activities, improvement of the quality of social and cultural life of the local community, renewal of architectural traditions, and increased attention to the protection of aesthetic and cultural areas. Also, in developing countries, tourism can lead to greater social mobility, higher wages, and better job prospects by transferring labor from traditional agriculture to service industries (Yoon, 2002).

However, tourism also has negative impacts. Crowding in resorts, decline in the prosperity of traditional activities such as agriculture, overdependence on tourism, value conflict between tourists and residents, and lifestyle changes are among its negative consequences. In societies with strong religious beliefs, the arrival of tourists may lead to changes in social values and the emergence

of national resentments. However, tourism also has negative effects. Crowding in resorts, decline in traditional activities such as agriculture, over-reliance on tourism, value conflicts between tourists and local residents, and lifestyle changes are some of its negative consequences. In societies with strong religious beliefs, the arrival of tourists may lead to changes in social values and the emergence of national resentments.

One of the most important socio-cultural effects of tourism is a phenomenon known as the “spectacle effect.” This effect occurs when there are obvious differences between tourists and the host community. Observing the lifestyle of tourists can create behavioral changes in the host community. Although these changes are sometimes positive and encourage the local community to adopt more constructive behavioral patterns, in many cases, they are destructive. Local residents become disenchanted with the inability to access tourists’ goods and lifestyle, and this particularly affects the young. As a result, social gaps may arise between generations, or young people may migrate internally or externally to achieve the desired lifestyle. Burns and Holden emphasize that the dramatic effect occurs most when the contact between residents and tourists is superficial and short-term (Sheibaninia et al., 2021, 205).

• **Environmental impacts of tourism**

The natural environment is recognized as one of the most important key factors in tourism. Tourism is highly dependent on the environment, as the environment itself is a major attraction and the context in which tourism activities occur. The relationship between tourism and the environment is complex and interdependent.

The environmental impacts of tourism can be divided into two categories: positive and negative. On the positive side, tourism can help protect the environment, landscapes, and wildlife, help establish national parks and protected areas, and raise public awareness of the need to protect the environment. Revenues from tourism can also be used to preserve endangered sites (Yoon, 2002).

On the negative side, tourism can lead to waste generation, congestion and traffic, water and coastal pollution, erosion of natural trails, and damage to wildlife habitats. The widespread presence of tourists in natural areas sometimes causes the destruction of vegetation and disturbance to animal species. Therefore, proper management of the environmental impacts of tourism and conscious planning to reduce its negative consequences is an undeniable necessity in the path of sustainable tourism development (Sheibaninia et al., 2021, 207). Table 1 summarizes the positive and negative impacts of tourism.

• **Literary tourism in Iran**

Iran’s civilizational history and cultural richness have always been emphasized; however, relying solely on the name of this valuable heritage to introduce it to the world and attract tourists is considered an inadequate approach. Literary tourism, as a precious treasure, has been neglected in our country for years, and its potential in the cradle of Iranian civilization, culture, and literary masterpieces has not been exploited.

Experts believe that the negligence of cultural custodians and the lack of sufficient knowledge of society about the country’s cultural and literary heritage have led to figures such as Rumi, Ibn Sina, and Zakaria Razi being mistakenly attributed to other cultures. While Iran does not take effective action to introduce these myths to the world, countries such as Turkey take advantage of this opportunity to develop their tourism by holding annual Sama festivals and related conferences. Tourism activists and literature professors believe that holding specialized literary conferences, designing tours focused on literary works in the geography of their occurrence (places mentioned in texts or poems), and combining tourist sites with myths and legends –such as Shahnameh reading at Ferdowsi’s tomb in Toos—are among the executive solutions for the prosperity of literary tourism in the country (Kordabadi & Mahmoudzadeh, 2014, 92).

It should be acknowledged that the capacity for creative work in literary tourism is abundant. For

Table 1. Tourism impacts. Source: Authors.

Domain of effects	Positive effects	Negative effects
Economic	Increase in foreign exchange income, job creation, and regional development.	Inflation, opportunity cost, and excessive dependence on tourism
Socio-cultural	Revival of traditions, strengthening national identity, and improvement of the quality of life	Commodification of culture, lifestyle changes, and value conflicts
Environmental	Protection of natural heritage, increased environmental awareness	Pollution, overcrowding, and habitat destruction

example, one can reconstruct the route of famous travelogues such as “Naser Khosrow’s Travelogue” and design a tourist tour based on the routes and houses mentioned in it. Our rich literary history is full of works that refer to the names of various places and houses, and can serve as the basis for organizing thematic tours. The reader of Mahmoud Dolatabadi’s “Kalidar” will certainly be eager to visit the villages of northern Khorasan, which are the setting of this epic novel. In this way, literary works themselves will act as a powerful advertising medium for the development of literary tourism. Great poets have lived in different periods of Iranian history, and numerous tombs and mausoleums of these greats are scattered throughout the country. From the tomb of Khayyam in Nishapur to Hafez and Saadi in Shiraz, Baba Taher in Hamedan, and Ferdowsi in Toos in Mashhad, each of these places alone has the potential to become a hub of literary tourism. Fortunately, our country has a very high capacity in this field, which can be a significant source of income for attracting domestic tourists and especially foreign tourists interested in Iran’s rich literature (*ibid.*).

In general, it can be claimed that literary tourism can generate significant income. On the one hand, this field creates a significant financial overflow for the local economy, and on the other hand, it plays a significant role in the country’s macroeconomics. The development of literary tourism is a tool for introducing and preserving literary works and writings from the country’s glorious history. Since literature is one of the main pillars of cultural heritage and elements that strengthen our national and historical identity, the expansion of this type of tourism will also help strengthen national identity. In addition to immediate economic benefits, this industry will also have strategic and long-term benefits in the field of national security. In the current situation, it is necessary to carry out the necessary organization and infrastructure constructions so that the potential in the field of literary tourism of the country can be realized and its position can be properly explained.

By examining the tourism patterns in other countries, it is observed that they have launched tours for their citizens and international tourists, citing their literary achievements and focusing on the places of birth, life, creation of their works, and tombs. The city of London is known as the first literary tourism destination in the world, and after that, cities such as New York, Paris, San Francisco, and Rome are among the next popular destinations. These cities have benefited from

significant economic benefits by taking advantage of the fame and works of their writers, artists, and poets. Iran’s literary attractions are divided into three main categories based on thematic importance:

- 1) The most important and popular category is the “Houses of Poets and Writers”, which were the places where the greatest Persian writers lived and created their works; for example, the Simin and Jalal Museum House in Tehran, or other houses of great people throughout the country.
- 2) The second category is the “Tombs of Writers”, which are places to pay homage to great literary figures and are scattered in various cities.
- 3) The third category includes “Book Cafes and Book Buffets and Cultural Museums”, which are less important because they are not yet as well-known and widespread as the first two categories.

• Mahan

Mahan is located 40 kilometers southeast of Kerman and on the northeastern slopes of Mount Chopar at a higher altitude than Kerman. This city, with an area of about 1901 square kilometers, has a temperate climate. This region is bordered by Kerman to the north, Baghin and Bardsir to the south, Sirch to the east, and Behranjerd and Rayan to the south. This city connects Kerman to Jiroft, Bam, and Zahedan. In the past, it played an intermediary role in the connection with the old cities of Kerman and Khorasan provinces. The life of the people of this city is mostly provided through agriculture and animal husbandry. Although the name Mahan is mentioned in the chronicles as a village and a town, it has been considered an urban point in statistics and maps since 1355 AH.

It is stated in the book History of Kerman, “Mahan is located in the easternmost mile to the south of this country (Kerman) at a distance of seven miles. It is famous for its pleasant climate. There are 500 orchards there, and their grapes and peaches are excellent. Its other fruits are also good.” (*Vaziri, 1985, 83*).

Except for historical geographical sources such as the Boundaries of the World from the East to the West (from the 372nd century AH, equivalent to 361 AH), (982 CE), and the writings of Ibn Hawqal and Istakhri, the name Mahan is not mentioned in historical writings of the first centuries of Islam in Iran. The change of the center of Kerman’s government from Sirjan to Bardsir (present-day Kerman) during the Samanid period led to the prosperity and importance of this city (*Golabzadeh, 2005, 26*).

• Shah Nematullah Wali

Sayyid Nur al-Din Nematullah bin Muhammad bin Kamal al-Din Yahya Kuh Banani Kermani, known as Sayyid Nur al-Din Shah Nematullah Wali Mahani Kermani (731-834 AH / 1330-1431 AD), was an Iranian poet and mystic, to whom the Nematullahi dynasty is attributed. Shah Nematullah is one of the most influential mystical figures in Iran. His parents lived in the city of Aleppo, and his father came to Kij and Makran, and through an alliance with the Shabankara princes, he stopped in the Banan mountain of Kerman, where Shah Wali was born on Thursday, 22 Rajab 731. In his youth, he studied literature, theology, divine wisdom, and jurisprudence, and then entered the Sufi movement (Nafisi, 1995, 188).

His extensive travels to Egypt, Hejaz, Turkestan, and India introduced him to mystical schools such as the Kubrawiyya and Chishtiyya, enriching his perspective (Farzam, 1995, 62). The first part of Shah Wali's travels is during his youth, which included a pilgrimage to Sheikh Yafi'i and took place in Mecca. This meeting took place before traveling to Egypt (Nourbakhsh, 2005, 19). The second part of his travels, which began in Egypt after obtaining permission from the guidance, began in Iran through Azerbaijan. After passing through Ardabil and Sarab, he went to Samarkand and spent several years in Samarkand practicing prayer and asceticism. After leaving Samarkand, Shah Wali went to Herat, where he married the daughter of Amir Emad al-Din Hamza al-Husayni al-Haravi, the granddaughter of Amir Husayni al-Haravi – the questioner of the Gulshan al-Raz – around 771-775 AH. After that, he went to Kohban, Kerman, and settled there, and his only son, Sayyid Burhan al-Din Khalilullah (775 AH), was born in that same place.

The third part of Shah Wali's travels is after his stay in Kohbanan, where he expanded his guidance and engaged in educating the people. After that, he went to Taft and Yazd and built a monastery there. From there, he went to Abarqu and came back to Taft and returned to Kerman and settled there. After traveling around Kerman, he became fascinated with Mahan and settled in Mahan, Kerman, and established a monastery that became a center for teaching mysticism and literature. After he died in 834 AH, his threshold became a symbol of the mystical identity of the region.

Shah Wali then traveled to Shiraz and, after a while, returned to Kerman and spent the rest of his life in worship and seclusion. Shah Wali passed away in 834

AH and was buried in Mahan. The life span of Shah Nematullah Wali has been written as one hundred and three years, a few months, and eight days (Kermani, 1996, 321).

Many works, both in verse and prose, have survived from Shah Nematullah Wali. His collection of poems is over twelve thousand verses, and it is full of profound mystical concepts and themes. The majority of Shah Wali's poems consist of ghazals, which number 1541, and the rest include 33 qasidahs, 4 tarji'i-bands, 54 masnavis, and several qat'ahs, rubais, dubits, and mufradats. All of his prose works are educational. Some have mentioned the number of these treatises as high as five hundred, but so far, the authenticity of attributing 114 treatises to Shah Nematullah Wali has been proven.

Shah Nematullah Wali's fame and popularity in his time did not come from his poems, but rather the source of fame, devotion, and respect for him should be sought in his thoughts, ideas, spiritual beliefs, and miracles. With a little reflection on Shah Nematullah's poems, it is easy to see that we should not view him simply as a poet. In fact, he is not a poet, but rather a mystic who has written down his mystical and spiritual revelations and experiences in the form and guise of poetry. In general, Shah Nematullah Wali is a poet who viewed poetry as a means and tool for expressing his lofty mystical and spiritual concepts, and his primary goal in composing poetry was to express truths (Pahlavan et al., 2024, 235).

In general, it can be said that Shah Nematullah Wali's works, both in verse and prose, are a complete reflection of Ibn Arabi's views, such as the unity of being, the perfect human being, the issue of pole and guardianship, and the science of the secrets of letters and dots. One of the most central mystical concepts raised in Shah Nematullah's Divan can be considered the unity of being. In a way, it can be said that a large part of his poems refer to this important mystical principle in some way (*ibid.*).

Shah Nematullah transformed Iranian mysticism by establishing the Nematullahi path. By emphasizing unity of being, divine love, and self-knowledge, he presented a balanced system that attracted both the public and the elite. Unlike some Sufi movements, he saw mysticism as a tool for social reform. The Mahan monastery was a training base for disciples who took his teachings to India and Central Asia. The patronage of Deccan kings, such as Ahmad Shah Bahmani, who built the original Astana, demonstrates their global influence. These cross-cultural connections strengthened Kerman's mystical identity.

Discussion

• Characteristics of the Shah Nematollah Vali mausoleum

The threshold and tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali in the city of Mahan, 35 kilometers southeast of Kerman, is one of the most prominent examples of Iranian-Islamic architecture with unique historical, artistic, and mystical features. This complex, with an area of about 35,000 square meters, includes sections such as courtyards, porches, a dome house, and a cellar house that were added or renovated in different historical periods (Timurid, Safavid, Qajar). Most of these additions belong to the eras of Shah Abbas I Safavid, Mohammad Shah, and Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (Aghabi, 1997, 52).

The original building of the Astaneh section is a dome located on the tomb of Shah Nematullah and was built during the Timurid period (ninth century AH) on the orders and at the expense of Ahmad Shah Bahmani, the king of the Deccan, who was a disciple of Shah Nematullah (Dahesh, 2018, 290-297).

This building initially consisted of a simple dome that enclosed the tomb of the mystic. In the Safavid period, with the expansion of the Nematollahi order, courtyards and porticos such as the Mirdamad courtyard and the Atabaki were added, whose tilework and stucco work reflect Safavid art. In the Qajar period, the Wakil al-Maliki courtyard and new decorations were added to the complex, indicating the continued importance of the threshold in Iranian culture. This historical evolution has turned the threshold into a living document of multi-period architecture that represents the historical identity of Kerman (ibid.).

Like the dome, the Chelleh Khaneh is also one of the oldest architectural works in the complex. The Chelleh Khaneh was probably built before the Safavid era, when it was preserved during the construction of the portico. The decorations inside it date back to the post-Timurid era, based on the variety of colors (Aghabi, 1997, 52). From ancient times until now, the people of Mahan have been appealing to Shah Nematullah Wali for relief and healing from illnesses by tying a green cloth or padlock to the shrine; however, today, the shrine's servants prevent this practice. Pilgrims also believe that by throwing a coin into one of the shrine's ponds, Shah Nematullah will welcome them back.

The shrine also welcomes pilgrims on various religious holidays; for example, on Eid al-Ghadir, a drum-playing ceremony is held in the shrine's courtyard, and participants are fed. People also fulfill

their vows by buying cloth or clothes for the shrine's servants and donating them to them on this day. According to the people of Mahan, all the pigeons in Mahan belong to Shah Nematullah's shrine, and therefore, keeping these birds captive is a great sin. The people of Kerman, Mahan, and the surrounding cities call Shah Nematollah Vali "Shah Vali." In Mahan, young couples go to the tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali after their wedding ceremony to seek blessings. On the wedding night, the bride and groom and other relatives accompanying them drive around the threshold of the tomb by car. Then, the bride and groom go inside the tomb for a visit and sometimes pray two rak'ahs in the courtyard of the shrine with the intention of happiness and prosperity in their married life. Other ceremonies that have long been held near and in the courtyard of the tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali include mourning on the day of Tasu'a and the gathering and circumambulation of groups of chest-beating and mourning people in this tomb. Also, on the days of Tasu'a and Ashura, a funeral procession is held near the Astaneh; in the most famous form of this ceremony, the body of "Sadat" is carried on the shoulders of mourners and placed on the ground in front of the "Dar al-Hifaza" (House of Preservation), and people mourn and beat their chests around it. Another common custom in Mahan is to circumambulate the body around this tomb, especially if the deceased is from the Nematollahi and Sadat families; after circumambulating the body around the tomb, the funeral ceremony is performed.

• Architecture of the Astaneh

Shah Nematollah's court from the northern entrance includes the Atabaki courtyard, the Wakil al-Maliki courtyard, the Shah Abbasi portico, the Chelleh Khaneh, the Mirdamad courtyard (Husseiniyyah), and the Mohammad Shahi gate. The Astaneh is a masterpiece of the architectural art of the last six centuries, with a combination of acceptable architectural space, very joyful gardening, and mystical purity. The architecture of tombs in Iran, especially the tombs of great men and mystics, since the eighth century AH, when Islamic ideas and mystical beliefs have been deepened in Iran, has been influenced by the sacred and mystical semantic view and has crystallized mystical and mythological ideas. Therefore, the elements, components, spaces, signs, and spatial relationships, and the way in which humans are present in spaces, are beyond the embodiment of their materiality (Talaie et al., 2021, 52).

The lower dome of the tomb of Shah Nemat has a very beautiful decoration, and the Ruin dome is

decorated with turquoise tiles, and on the dome's rim, the phrase "O you who change the hearts and minds, and praise Allah, and praise be to Allah, and there is no god but Allah, and Allah is the greatest" is seen in a brick font made of tiles. The tomb is surrounded on three sides by the portico of Vakil al-Malki, and on the south side of the dome, the portico of Shah Abbasi is located.

The beautiful doors of the tomb were made by "Alishah Najjar". On the northern side of the entrance to the shrine, inside the Shah Abbasi portico, there is a beautiful stone decorated with the names of the Twelve Imams (AS), which was made by a person named Qutb al-Din, a vow to Shah Nematullah. In the southeast corner of the shrine, there is a Khatam-kari door that opened into the Chelleh Khana, which is now part of the portico. On the east side, the eastern portico opens into the Delgoshaei courtyard, which is thirty-two meters wide and forty-four meters high. The founder of this courtyard is Mohammad Ismail Khan Vakil al-Molk. One of the annexes to the threshold is a caravanserai from the Qajar period, which is located next to the western side of the threshold. This caravanserai, whose entrance is located in the north, consisted of a royal residence, a courtyard, and rooms around it. This caravanserai gradually became semi-ruined and was practically unused until a program of repairs and complete restoration of the caravanserai was carried out. The tomb of "Amir Nizam Garosi" is located south of the Vakil al-Molk porch. A museum has also been established in this threshold, which contains exquisite objects, especially objects related to mystics and Sufis, such as kashkuls, turbans, candlesticks, etc. In this museum, two pages of the Quran remain, which are in Kufic script, and the style of its writing certainly takes the book's history back eight hundred years. The tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali is also located in this place. The date of death, place of death, time of death, and place of burial are said to have died in Kerman in 834 AH and was buried in Mahan in the middle of a clean garden.

The existence of writings from religious and mystical books, construction in architecture, calligraphy, carving of wooden doors and gates show that skilled architects, artists, and writers were followers of this great mystic who was thirsty for travel and spirituality. The observation of mystical poems, tiles and inscriptions, the combination and use of seven colors (blue, black, red, purple, azure, white, gray) and seven types of calligraphy (Kufic, Moalek, Banai, Naskh, Nastaliq, Rayhani, Thuluth) in the courtyard of the threshold and the seven entrances and walls and

ceilings accurately reflect the mystical thoughts (such as the unity of existence) and his love and affection for Hazrat Ali (AS) of Haidar Karrar Sahib Zulfiqar.

On the walls of the seven courtyards, on the tombs, the external and internal facades, and all the kashkul of writings, calligraphy, and inscriptions; the art of illumination, muqarnas, stucco, tile work and wood carvings; the manifestation of mysticism is exposed to the view of all pilgrims and lovers of mysticism and lovers of Imam Ali (AS).

The architecture of the threshold is a combination of Iranian-Islamic and local elements that are linked to the mystical and literary identity of Shah Nematullah. The complex's turquoise dome, which stands out from afar among the Mahan Gardens, is a symbol of the sky and spirituality in Islamic architecture. The seven-color tiles with Islamic and floral motifs used in the courtyards and verandas are inspired by the mystical poems of Shah Nematollah and reflect the nature of the region (like the gardens of Kerman). The Chelekhaneh, a space for the asceticism and worship of the dervishes, reinforces the mystical feeling of the complex with its simple but spiritual design. The open courtyards and central ponds, which are inspired by the Iranian garden model, create a relaxing atmosphere for tourists and are consistent with the identity of Kerman gardening.

The tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali was registered as one of the national monuments of Iran on 15 Dey 1310 with registration number 132. In Fig. 1, you can see a view of different parts of the tomb.

The Chelleh-khaneh of Shah Nematollah Vali's tomb, despite its unique historical and mystical values, has so far received little attention in the field of tourism, which makes it doubly necessary to identify and introduce it.

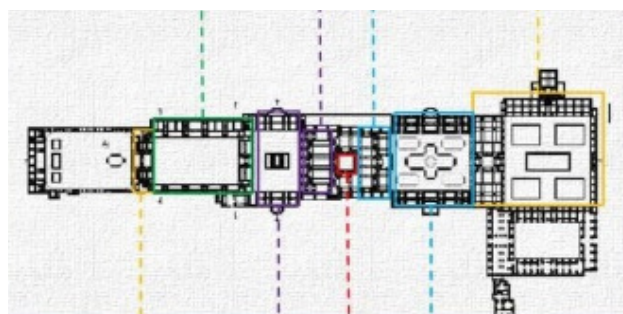


Fig. 1. The tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali (from the northern entrance, one can see the Vakil-ol-Maliki courtyard, the Shah Abbasi porch, the Chelleh-khaneh, the Mirdamad courtyard (Husseinieh), and the Mohammad Shahi gate). Source: Amini Goharrizi & Yazhari Kermani, 2021, 60.

• **The Chelleh-khaneh of Shah Nematullah Vali's tomb**

Shah Nematullah Vali had numerous retreats for worship, asceticism, and inner purification. Among these retreats, the most famous is a chamber located on the southern side of the western porch of the tomb. This chamber is one of the remains of his khanqah, which was built with brick and mud materials. The dimensions of the Chelleh-khaneh are about 2×3 meters. All surfaces of its walls and ceiling are decorated with works of poetry and prose in Persian and Arabic and in various forms. Parts of the lower motifs were damaged due to the flood in 1311 AH. The tombs of the poet and Sufi "Abul-Fa" are located in this chamber, one of the disciples of Shah Nematullah Vali and the sheikhs of the Nematullahi order. The poems and prose texts in this space cover themes such as the prayer of a poor servant to the shrine of Hazrat Bi-Niyaz, the praise and adoration of Hazrat Ali (AS), the praise of Shah Nematullah Vali, and his entry into the land of Mahan. All the colorful designs and writings were executed by Abu-Fa himself (Qadimi Mahani, 2003; Bastani Parizi, 1976).

The difference and uniqueness of the decorations of the Chelleh Khaneh compared to other buildings and holy places is not merely an aesthetic aspect, but rather a reflection of the mystical thoughts of Shah Nematullah Vali. The Sufi artist, consciously or unconsciously, created a work that expresses mystical and Sufi thoughts. This indicates the role of art in transmitting and propagating deep and complex schools of thought in Iranian culture and art.

• **Visual and calligraphy features**

Upon entering the chellakhaneh, the first notable element is the abundance of writings and calligraphy lines. The inscriptions are written in various colors and in two pens, Thulth and Nastaliq. Thulth writings are mainly in Arabic and in praise of divine saints and infallibles, while Nastaliq poems are mostly written in Persian and have themes of love, mysticism, and path. Symmetry and mirroring are evident in the space of the chellakhaneh; the walls facing each other have similar forms, although they differ in color and content. The roof of the building is decorated with twelve bergamots that together form a shamsa. In the center of this shamsa, there is a small spherical volume that is divided into twelve sections with yellow and green colors and is considered a symbol of the twelve-pointed hat of Shah Nematollah Vali (Qadimi Mahani, 2003). The dominant colors in the decorations of the chellekhaneh include red, blue, green, yellow, and white. Gray colors are less noticeable, and some colors are close to black due

to their darkness. The prominent feature in the coloring is the predominant presence of white. The color composition is such that white is often placed between two colors and plays a buffer role. In addition to its aesthetic value, this also has a mystical meaning; white is a symbol of the pure existence of Shah Nematullah Wali, who has been receptive to all segments of society for their guidance and guidance.

One of the most important principles of belief of mystics and Sufis is the principle of "unity of existence." This principle is reflected in the decorations of the chellekhaneh. The widespread presence of calligraphy reminds us of the special place of letters in mysticism; letters in Sufi thought are a means of expressing deep mystical concepts, especially the principle of unity of existence. The artist's limitation to calligraphy is a reference to the place of intellect, wisdom, and the perfect human being in Sufism.

From a formal perspective, the repetition of the circle in the decorations of the chellekhaneh is of particular importance. The circle symbolizes unity, rotation, and holds a prominent semantic position for Sufis. This geometric form is one of the main symbols used to express the unity of existence. Finally, white, as the background and dominant color, carries a mystical meaning. In the Holy Quran, white is also considered a symbol of purity and clarity. Since all colors arise from white, its presence in the decorations of the chellekhaneh overlaps with the lofty concepts of mysticism, especially the unity of existence.

• **Cultural interactions**

As a place for cultural and spiritual interactions, the Shah Nematollah Vali Throne has had important social impacts on local communities and tourists, and helps strengthen the Kermani identity. Pilgrims and visitors learn about Kermani culture by participating in mystical rituals or purchasing local products. Tourists also feel a connection to Iranian history by listening to the poems of Shah Nematollah or observing the architecture. These interactions strengthen mutual understanding and introduce Kermani identity as part of Persian culture. These experiences instill an Iranian-Kermani identity in the minds of visitors.

• **Cultural identity and the role of Shah Nematollah Vali's throne in cultural identity formation**

Cultural identity formation is a dynamic process through which a society ensures social cohesion and cultural continuity by reproducing and strengthening its values, beliefs, and traditions.

The Kerman School of Thought, whose foundation

dates back to Shah Nematollah Vali, is considered one of the prominent currents of thought and mysticism in Iran. In the course of the history of Islamic thought and path, from the beginning of the emergence of Islam to the contemporary era, eight great and influential schools have emerged, each of which has played an important role in shaping the intellectual and spiritual life of the Islamic world in a specific period. Of these eight schools, five have been formed in the territory of Islamic Iran: Khorasan, Maragheh, Kerman, Shiraz, and Isfahan. Although these schools borrowed some of their elements from previous movements, after their consolidation and establishment, they had a significant impact on the schools that followed them.

The founder of the Kerman school, Shah Nematollah Vali, played a decisive role in the development and continuation of Shiite mystical thought by writing important treatises and works in the field of Islamic Sufism and mysticism, as well as by cultivating prominent students. His influence went beyond the boundaries of Kerman and found a stable place in the context of the political and cultural developments of his era.

The descendants of Shah Nematollah Vali, due to their family ties with the Bahmani dynasty, organized poverty circles and held mystical gatherings at the court of the Deccan. These activities, along with the dissemination of the teachings of the Kerman school in the Indian subcontinent, played an important role in promoting Shiite mysticism and the spread of Persian language and literature in this land, leaving behind a lasting legacy (Dahesh, 2018, 1).

Therefore, the Shah Nematollah Vali Threshold is known as a symbol of Kerman's cultural identity, beyond a valuable historical monument. This threshold, relying on the rich mystical and literary heritage of the founder of the Kerman School, provides a platform that both strengthens the sense of belonging and local pride among the Kerman community and, as a cultural-tourism center, introduces this identity to domestic and foreign visitors.

With its multi-period architecture and mystical-literary elements, the Shah Nematollah Vali Threshold not only reflects Kerman's identity but also provides a rich experience for literary tourists that helps strengthen the culture and economy of the region. The manner and extent of the presence of the four architectural elements in the successive courtyards of the tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali has a meaningful relationship with the perception of mystical meanings

and spiritual journeys of the seeker in the minds of the audience of the space and leads to people experiencing a different perceptual quality when present in each courtyard (Talaie et al., 2021, 52).

Before entering the building, the tall elements, namely the four minarets and the dome, house in the urban landscape, challenge the audience's visual experience and inform the presence of a religious building. In the front courtyard, the structure of the space has created a balanced quality of meaningful signs. The presence of the elements does not have superiority over each other, and a complete and moderate world of purification elements has been provided to prepare the pilgrim for a spiritual journey in the first step of being in the space (ibid.).

Inscriptions containing mystical poems and motifs inspired by Shah Nematollah's Divan introduce visitors to his mystical literature. The dome and tiles of Astana, which depict mystical concepts such as the unity of existence, lead tourists to a deeper understanding of the Perso-Kermani culture. Mystical rituals, such as reciting dhikr in the courtyards, are also accompanied by the poems of Shah Nematollah and keep the literary identity of the region alive.

Astana's geographical location at the foot of the Jupar Mountains and its proximity to the Shazdeh Garden have increased its natural and cultural appeal. The architecture of the complex, with its open spaces and natural lighting, conveys a sense of spirituality and tranquility, which is attractive to literary and mystical tourists. In the analysis of the building, based on the understanding of the four mystical journeys, the journey from earth to water, air and fire and the passage from the world to purgatory and the afterlife, in accordance with the four elements, sensory perceptions of spaces, exemplary images of elements and components and proportions and the movement towards the imaginary world have been consciously used in the building so that the representation of the myth of creation and death can be perceived and understood in the transition from the sequence of spaces.

In the Shah Abbasi courtyard, the brief presence of water, plants, and sun, in a space with small proportions and elongation against the direction of the main path of movement, requires a kind of pause before entering the threshold courtyard and crystallizes the myth of silence and contemplation. The use of the students' rooms around the space makes this meaningful. In the Vakil-ol-Molk courtyard, the structure of the space reproduces the myths of life and heaven to the greatest extent

possible by controlling the sunlight and wind, emphasizing the dynamic presence of water, plants, and soil in the courtyard, and in the Atabakan courtyard, the relationship between the objects of the elements becomes a representative relationship and encompasses the meaning of human life.

The tilework, stucco molding, and the cheleh-khaneh reflect the art and spirituality of the region. For the residents of Mahan, this complex is a reminder of their historical connection with Persian mysticism and strengthens their sense of cultural pride.

The tilework motifs and the decorations of the threshold can inspire Kerman artists to create works of art, including patch-embroidery, which is one of the prominent handicrafts of Kerman. Also, the poems of Shah Nematollah are reflected in traditional music and local recitation of dhikr, and help preserve Persian literature. These links perpetuate Kerman's cultural identity in the form of art and literature.

Compared to Hafeziyeh in Shiraz or Saadiyeh, Shah Nematollah's Astaneh has a distinct identity due to its desert location and focus on Sufi mysticism. Unlike Hafeziyeh, which is more literary, Mahan's Astaneh offers a blend of mysticism, architecture, and local traditions. This distinction makes it a unique destination for cultural tourists.

Also, due to the presence of tourists in this area, we will witness a boom in handicrafts and agriculture, which helps preserve Kerman traditions. Patch embroidery and gardening, which are rooted in the culture of the region, are passed on to new generations through Astaneh tourism. This economic-cultural link makes Kerman's identity resistant to the changes of globalization.

• Rituals and beliefs of the people of Mahan in connection with the shrine of Shah Nematollah Vali

From the distant past to the present, the people of Mahan have known Shah Nematollah Vali as "Shah Vali" and have sought refuge in him as a holy and dignified figure. One of the common rituals in this region is tying a green cloth or padlock to the shrine of the tomb with the intention of relieving oneself or recovering from illnesses; although in modern times, the servants of the tomb prevent this from being done to maintain order and the building. Another belief that is common among pilgrims is to throw a coin into one of the tombs' ponds. According to this belief, throwing a coin will cause Shah Nematollah Vali to welcome them again in the future.

On religious days, especially Eid al-Ghadir, the tomb witnesses special ceremonies such as playing

the tambourine in the courtyard and feeding the participants. Many people also fulfill their vows by buying cloth or clothes for the servants of the shrine and donating them on this day. Another common belief is that the people of Mahan believe that all the pigeons in the city belong to the shrine and that keeping these birds is considered a great sin.

The connection between tradition and everyday life is very clear in these rituals; for example, young couples go to the shrine for blessings after the wedding ceremony and on the wedding night. They, along with their families and relatives, first drive around the shrine by car, then enter the courtyard for pilgrimage and sometimes say two rak'ahs of prayer in the courtyard with the intention of getting lucky.

The shrine of Shah Nematollah Vali also has a special place during religious mourning days. On the days of Tasu'a and Ashura, rituals such as beating the chest, mass mourning, and processions of the Sadat are held. In the most famous form of this ceremony, the body of the "sadat" is carried on the shoulders of groups of mourners and placed on the ground in front of the "Dar al-Hifaza", then people mourn around it.

Another tradition that is still popular is the circumambulation of the body around the tomb; this ritual is especially performed for the deceased of the Nematollahi and the Sadat families. After the circumambulation, the burial ceremony is held at the designated location.

This set of rituals, in addition to its religious and mystical aspects, carries cultural and social elements that have played an important role in shaping the identity of Mahan throughout history and attracting pilgrims and cultural tourists.

According to discussions with officials of the province's cultural heritage and tourism, in Nowruz 2023, considering the arrival of about 11,500 tourists to Mahan, about 90% of this number have definitely visited Astana. It is inferred that this 90% was mainly focused on pilgrimage or a combination of pilgrimage and cultural visit.

Also, unofficial annual statistics report about 200,000 people arriving directly in Astana. According to the opinion of the Supreme Tourism Advisor of the province (2025), a significant part of non-Nowruz tourists are mixed; that is, after visiting Astana, they go to the Shahzada Garden or other historical sites.

By combining this data and the opinion of local experts, a realistic estimate can be presented in a [Table 2:](#)

Pure pilgrimage: Often includes tourists who come with religious and mystical motives; this group mostly

Table 2. Percentage of tourists' motivation to visit Astana. Source: Authors.

Motivation	Approximate percentage of total tourists in Mahan
Pure pilgrimage (main purpose: spiritual visit to the shrine)	55%
Combined pilgrimage + cultural tourism (visiting the shrine along with historical and natural attractions)	35%
Non-pilgrimage tourism (gardens, architecture, nature-based tourism, without entering the shrine)	10%

comes from the southern and eastern provinces of Iran, sometimes arriving in Astana in caravan buses.

Pilgrimage and cultural tourism: The most important group that has grown post-COVID; they combine religious experience with visiting the Shazdeh Garden, the foothills of Jopar, and buying handicrafts (pottery, pottery).

Non-pilgrimage tourism: Mostly includes nature lovers and foreign tourists who are interested in the historical-architectural aspects of Astana but do not have a religious motive. The Economic Impact of Astaneh on Kerman Tourism

• **According to the opinion of the Supreme Advisor to the Tourism Industry of Kerman**

Province in 2025 and based on field research conducted by the General Department of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism of Kerman Province, between 2021 and 2025, and after the recession caused by the Corona pandemic, the tourism industry of the province has faced a growing trend. In Nowruz 2023, about 11,500 tourists entered the city of Mahan, 90 percent of whom visited the historical and religious Astaneh of Shah Nematollah Vali. Most of the tourists during this period were from the southern provinces of the country who had traveled to this region due to the pleasant climate of Mahan.

In Nowruz 2024, the number of tourists entering the city of Mahan increased by 10 percent compared to the previous year. This trend continued in 2025, and the number of tourists and visitors increased by about 15 percent compared to the previous two years. These figures indicate the high potential of this region for the development of cultural and religious tourism. This growth in demand highlights the need for investment in infrastructure and welfare services.

Creating and improving accommodation facilities, developing eco-tourism resorts appropriate to the presence of domestic and foreign tourists, improving health facilities, and welfare services are among the most important priorities. Also, improving tourist signs and signs in the city and on the routes leading to Astana will be key solutions to facilitate

and target tourist visits. In general, the current conditions have provided a unique opportunity to maximize the tourism potential of Mahan and Astana Shah Nematollah Vali, and coherent planning and institutional support can consolidate the position of this destination in national and even international tourism. According to the report, Shah Nematollah Vali's Throne, as one of Kerman's most visited attractions, has had significant economic impacts on the Mahan region and the province. These impacts, particularly in terms of local businesses and indirect employment, help preserve cultural identity through the economy.

The presence of tourists increases demand for local handicrafts, agricultural products, and services. For example, patch embroidery, while being recognized as one of Kerman's traditional arts, reflects the ancient art and cultural identity of the city.

Mahan's garden products, such as pomegranates and pistachios, are also offered to tourists, boosting the region's agriculture. Eco-tourism lodges, which have sprung up in Mahan in recent years, are examples of small businesses that benefit from Throne tourism. The boom in tourism in the region helps create indirect jobs, such as tour guides, drivers, and local vendors. According to unofficial reports, about 200,000 tourists visit Astana annually, which will create numerous job opportunities. For example, young people from Mahan work as guides or are in charge of accommodation, which helps reduce rural migration.

As a central attraction, this place activates other economic sectors. The proximity to the Shahzdeh Garden and the Kerman-Bam route encourages tourists to visit other attractions and strengthens a chain of economic activities (transportation, food services, handicrafts). This chain makes the local economy dynamic and helps preserve cultural identity through traditional products. Furthermore, using the analysis of field interviews with the Supreme Advisor to the Tourism Industry of Kerman Province (2025), official reports of the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism of the province,

and IRNA and Mehr news agencies between 2021 and 2025, statistics will be presented, including the number of tourists entering the city of Mahan, the percentage of visits to the Shah Nematollah Vali Throne, the duration of Nowruz stay in Kerman, and the trend of changes after the Corona recession period.

The main goal is to convert this interview-based data into analytical charts (Figs. 2 & 3) to visually display changes and correlations; in addition to statistical clarity, it will also allow for in-depth analysis of the economic and cultural impacts of tourism in the province.

Findings

Based on interview data and field research (Kerman Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, 2025), the average Nowruz stay at the provincial level is still short; specifically, in Nowruz 2023 and 2024, Mahan tourists were mainly recorded with a stay of two to three nights, which is consistent with the previous finding at the provincial level (41%). The short stays, despite the growth in the number of tourists, indicate a lack of multi-day travel packages and sufficient infrastructure to keep tourists in the destination.

From an analytical perspective, this pattern means short-term but limited benefits for the local economy; while investing in eco-tourism accommodations, developing cultural events, and strengthening welfare services can sustainably increase the average length of stay and, consequently, economic returns. The Mahan region, by attracting 90% of tourists to the Shah Nematollah Vali shrine, has the potential to become a cultural-religious tourism hub.

After the recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (2021), Kerman province's tourism industry has seen a steady growth trend. The forecast chart shows that tourist arrivals to Mahan have been steadily increasing from Nowruz 2023 to 2025—a 10% increase in 2024 and another 15% in 2025. On an annual basis, around 200,000 visitors have been recorded in Astaneh Shah Nematollah Vali, which has not only stimulated the development of local businesses such as patch embroidery and garden products (pomegranates, pistachios) but also activated indirect jobs such as tour guides, drivers, and food services.

The forecast model suggests that with continued investment in infrastructure, upgrading amenities, and installing tourist guide signs, the growth rate could reach a sustainable level of 15–20% per year,

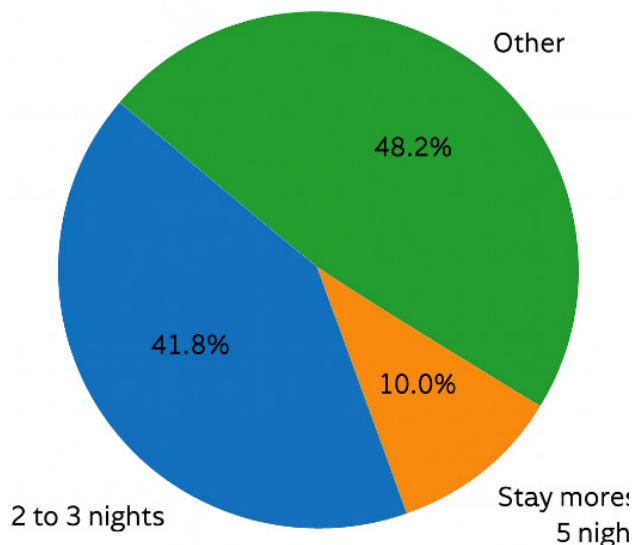


Fig. 2. Pie chart – Length of stay of Nowruz tourists in Kerman. Source: Authors.

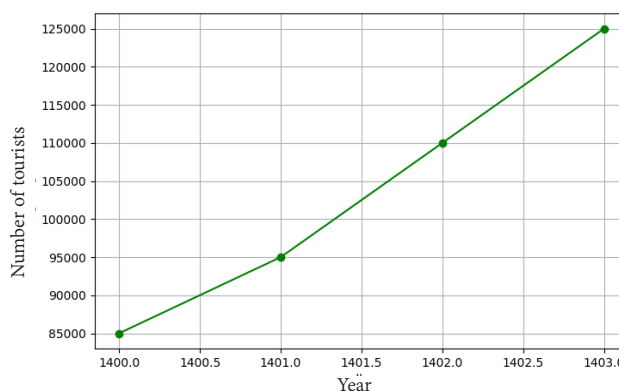


Fig. 3. Line chart - Kerman tourist attraction forecast trend. Source: Authors.

solidifying Mahan's position in national and even international tourism. This dataset emphasizes that tourism in this axis is not only an economic activity, but also a mechanism for strengthening cultural identity and preventing the migration of rural youth.

Conclusion

The present study showed that the tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali in Mahan, Kerman, due to its rich mystical and literary heritage, is a multidimensional, pivotal attraction that plays a fundamental role in strengthening the Persian-Kermani cultural identity and developing literary tourism.

The findings of this study show that this complex, by focusing on the mystical heritage of its founder, has created a deep sense of cultural belonging among the residents of Mahan and has activated a

sustainable socio-economic chain by combining arts such as patch embroidery and agriculture. The multi-period architecture and local rituals (such as dhikr-khwani) have made this place a unique destination for spiritual and literary experience, which provides an opportunity to convey Kerman's rich culture to international tourists (especially in areas influenced by Iranian mysticism, such as India).

Despite the aforementioned potential, the analysis showed that the literary and mystical dimension of Astaneh has not been fully integrated into the destination branding system of Kerman city, and the potential to attract higher tourist numbers (more than 200,000 people annually) has not been realized. Studies show that the main motivation for people to travel to Kerman, and especially the city of Mahan, is to visit the Astaneh of Shah Nematollah Vali. About 55% of tourists come to this place with a purely spiritual and mystical purpose, 35% combine pilgrimage with cultural tourism and experience the tomb, the Shazdeh Garden, the Jopar Mountains, and Kerman handicrafts, and only 10%, without religious motivation, pay more attention to the architecture, nature, and history of the region. Overall, Kerman is a religious-mystical destination for most people, whose cultural and natural capacities enrich the travel experience. Two main paths can be distinguished: a group that comes solely for pilgrimage and a group that combines pilgrimage with cultural tourism. Based on these results and considering challenges such as the deterioration of the building and the need to preserve its authenticity against commercialization, to strategically exploit this potential, it is suggested that a comprehensive program be developed that includes the restoration and structural conservation

of the building by implementing systematic plans and standardizing infrastructure such as access routes and amenities; these measures should be carried out with an emphasis on preserving the historical and architectural authenticity, especially in the tilework and dome sections. In addition, the development of literary tourism is important through the design of specific packages centered on "literary-mystical experience"; these packages could include workshops on reading the poems of Shah Nematollah Vali and introducing his influences on the literature of the Indian subcontinent. Empowering the local community is also an important part of this strategy and can help preserve cultural authenticity in economic activities by holding workshops for residents, especially women, on improving skills related to literary tourism guidance and producing handicrafts inspired by mystical symbols. Finally, designing combined routes between Astaneh and other natural and historical attractions in the region, such as the Shazdeh Garden, will allow for an increase in the length of tourists' stay and provide a comprehensive experience of Kerman's cultural identity. Table 3 lists the components of the literary tourism potential of Astaneh Shah Nematollah.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in relation to the authorship or publication of this article.

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Table 3. Literary tourism capacity indicators in Mahan. Source: Authors.

Capacity component	Key indicator	Current status	Literary tourism potential
Mystical and Literary Heritage	Center of the Kerman school and the Ni'matullāhī Sufi order	Strong presence in historical texts; central role in Kerman's identity	High: attracts scholars, Sufism researchers, and classical poetry enthusiasts
Visitor Attraction and Numbers	Tourist arrivals in Mahan	Steady growth post-COVID; approx. 200,000 visitors in 2025 (2025)	Medium to high: indicates a strong demand base for specialized development
Local Economic Impact	Activation of local business chains	Flourishing handicrafts (e.g., patch embroidery), food services, and eco-lodges	High: potential for multi-day cultural experience packages
Quality of Visitor Experience	Duration of tourist stays in Mahan	Short: mostly 2–3 nights (reflects lack of long-stay infrastructure)	Serious limitation: requires development of cultural packages to extend stays
Architectural Structure	Fusion of historical periods (Timurid, Safavid, Qajar)	Multi-layered complex reflecting Iranian-Islamic architectural history	Medium: potential for specialized architectural and mystical-historical tours

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