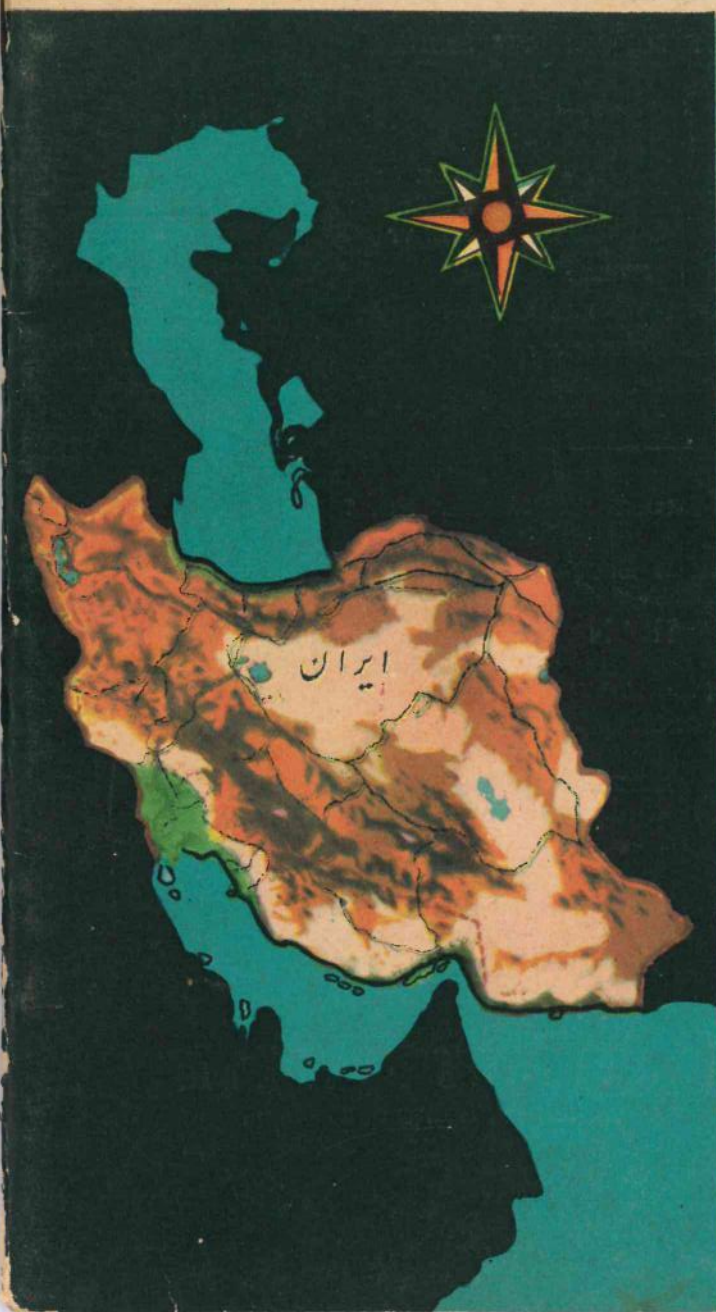


# OUR ASIAN BROTHERS: I-IRAN



BANOO GONDA





**"CITIZENS OF TOMORROW" SERIES**

*ADVISORS :*

G. B. NEWALKAR

S. S. AIYAR

R. S. GAITONDE

H. I. JHALA

C. S. KARVE

BAL SAMANT

MRS. S. M. SIRSAT

*EDITORS :*

SOLI PAVRI

RASIK SHAH

*ART DIRECTOR :*

SURENDRA SIRSAT

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**"CITIZENS OF TOMORROW" SERIES NO. 7**

**Our Asian Brothers—1.**

**IRAN**

*AUTHOR :* ( Miss ) BANOO R. GONDA

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وزارت فرهنگ و هنر

دوستان و کودکان هندی

سلام نونهالان و همسالان ایرانی شما را با این نامه

به همه شما می‌رسانم •

با خواندن این کتاب با کشور ما آشنا تر می‌شوید

و ما کودکان ایرانی هم می‌کوشیم تا شمارا بهتر بشناسیم • با این

کار دوستی ما بیشتر و دل‌های ما نزدیک‌تر می‌شود •

از خداوند درستی و خوشی شما را خواهانم

رضا پهلوی

---

## MESSAGE FROM PRINCE REZA PAHLAVI

My Dear Indian Friends,

Through this letter I am sending to you best wishes of the children of Iran.

I am sure this book will help you to understand my country better. We Iranian children also endeavour to strengthen the bonds of friendship between our two countries. This book will certainly bring us closer.

I pray the Almighty may bestow upon you health and prosperity.

## 1 OUR IRANIAN NEIGHBOURS



It is Meera's birthday today. The birthday party is just over. All her friends have left and once again Meera examines her gifts one by one. She has received such lovely presents. She exclaims joyfully, "This is really a lovely set of fountain pen and pencil ! I am going to use it from tomorrow." Then she opens another loosely wrapped packet and finds a full set of drawing and painting materials. "Mother, just see this !" she says, "How thoughtful of Arvind to have given me this !"



All of a sudden her eyes are fixed on a volume. Could it be a nice book or an album? .... Yes, it is an album: **THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD!** "Quite a huge album, indeed, and how colourful the national costumes of these children are!" she exclaims as she turns the pages one by one. Suddenly her eyes fall on pictures of plump children looking like cherubs. "See, Daddy, how sweet these children are! They look so much like our Pervin's cousins. Let us see what country these children belong to." She bends her little head over the book and reads awhile, "Oh, Daddy! No wonder they look like Pervin's cousins! These are Iranian children. That means they come from Iran—doesn't it?"

"Yes, of course."

"Is Iran a nice place Daddy?"

"A very interesting place, Meera."

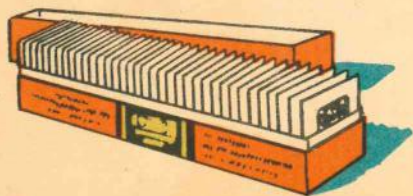
"Tell me about it, Daddy. Is it cold there?"

"Well, Meera, if you want so much to know about Iran, I think I can help you," suggests her father Chimanbhai. "I remember Pervin's Daddy telling me that, during their last vacation, her cousins made an extensive tour of Iran and collected a beautiful set of slides. I believe they have brought those slides here."

"That's a jolly good idea! Oh, that would be lovely!" exclaims Meera. "I remember Pervin telling me that her Aunt Shernaz came only last week from Iran with her children, to spend the summer vacation here."

"So she did, and I think they are the right people to tell you all about Iran."

So the following week, Meera invites Pervin and her Aunt Shernaz





along with her sons Teerandaz and Gayomard, and her daughter Pareezad.

Pervin introduces them to Meera and her parents Sudha and Chimanbhai. Then she turns to Meera and says, "Meera, my cousin Pareezad is studying in the same standard as you are."

"I've heard that it's the first time you've come to India, Pareezad. How do you like my country?" asks Meera.

"I love the countryside here. The greenery around is so pleasing to the eye! You've no idea, Meera, how fond we are of such green grass and trees in our country."

"I suppose you have quite a few deserts in Iran."

"Oh yes, Meera, we do have deserts in Iran, where the soil is dull, brown, drab, and rocky. On your Daddy's request we show you tonight some slides of Iran. I hope you'll enjoy seeing them," says Teerandaz.

"How nice! I'm sure we'll enjoy them very much."

Just then Sudha tells them that dinner is ready and takes them to the dining-room.

During dinner, pointing to the round *purees*, Pareezad



asks, "What are these ? Mummy, why don't you make them at home ?"

Meera, looking up in surprise, exclaims, "Don't you in Iran eat *purees* with your vegetables ? We always have them. Of course, some people eat *chapatties* or slices of bread here."

"Oh, we eat *naan*. It is either oval or circular and it's quite big and thick," remarks Pareezad. "We grow as many vegetables as you seem to in India."

"What do you usually have for a meal ?"

"You don't expect us to be vegetarians, I hope," replies Gayomard. "Mostly we eat mutton, and *naan* made from wheat flour."

"Don't you eat rice ? We have it every day," says Meera.

"Of course, we eat rice, but not everywhere in Iran. Rice is grown mostly in the moist southern areas of the Caspian Plains. These plains are round the Caspian Sea—which is the the biggest lake in the world," answers Shernaz Aunt.

"In the dry areas of India we grow millet and cotton," says Meera.

"We too grow them. We also grow tobacco. Iranians are quite fond of smoking, you know !" Gayomard informs her.

"In India, very many of our labourers chew tobacco and eat *paan* !" says Chimanbhai.

The dinner ends with the dessert—a fruit salad consisting of bananas, mangoes, and pineapples.

"Bananas and mangoes seem to be the favourite fruits here. I saw carts

Caspian sea





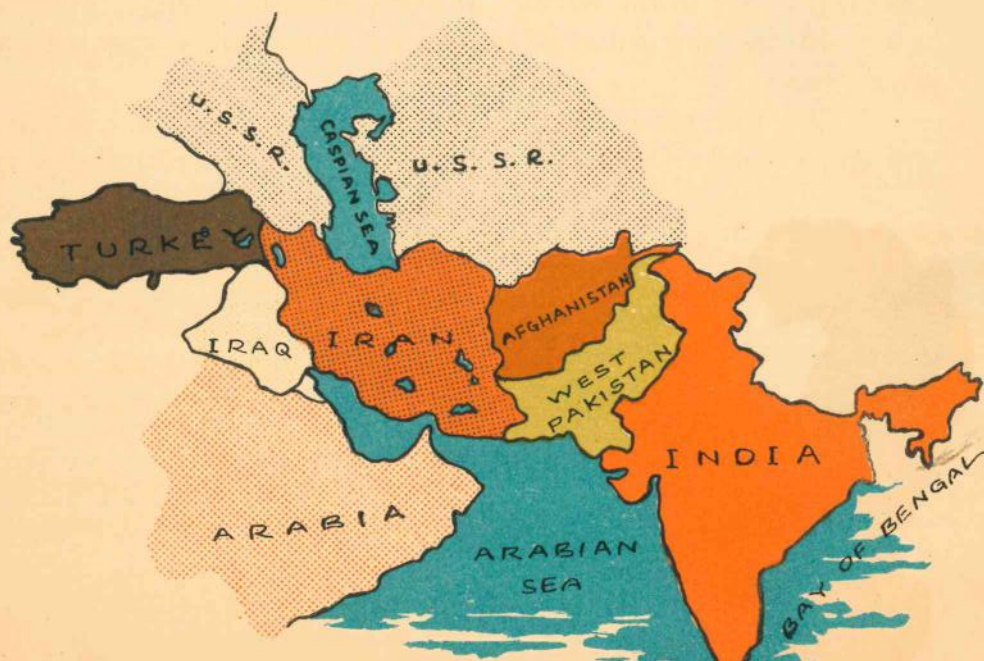
full of mangoes on the roads," says Pareezad.

"That's because it is the season for mangoes," explains Sudha. "You don't find mangoes in any other season of the year. Of course, you get bananas all the year round. Don't you eat mangoes and bananas in Iran?"

"Hardly ever," says Gayomard. "We eat other sorts of fruits like apricots, grapes, almonds, pistachio-nuts and so on."

"But that's what we get in our Kashmir," interrupts Meera.

"Yes, your Kashmir and the adjoining areas of our neighbours like Afghanistan, Pakistan etc., which have climates like ours do grow these fruits," replies Gayomard.





## 2 IRANIAN SOIL



Dinner being over, Teerandaz and Gayomard set up the screen in the sitting room.

After the shuffle of feet for a few seconds there is a pin-drop silence in the room. The lights are switched off, and the first slide is projected on to the screen.

“Which mountains are these ?” asks Meera as she sees the first slide.

“Our country is surrounded by mountain ranges. These are the Alborz



mountains in the North of Iran, just as you have the Himalayas in the North of India,” remarks Teerandaz.

“I’m sure these mountains cannot be as high as the Himalayas—not as Mt. Everest any how !” boasts Meera.

“Oh, no. Just see this snow-capped peak. It is the Demavand Peak of the Alborz mountains. It is about 5,500 metres high,” explains Gayomard.

“About 5,500 metres ? That is nothing compared to the peaks of the Himalayas,” interrupts Meera. “Our Himalayas are snow-capped throughout the year, they are so high. What about the mountains of Iran ?”

“Well, our mountains are not so high, yet there is snow on them during winter. In fact, this snow melts in summer and forms into small streams that help to supply water for agriculture,” replies Teerandaz. “Our rivers are rather small and at times dry up.”

“Then what do you do to store water for irrigation ?” asks Meera and adds, “Our Indian Government has spent crores of rupees on irrigation in their Five-Year Plans.”



"We too have our irrigation dams," he explains. "This is the Ab-i-Diz river. It is being dammed for power and irrigation. Now, give me the next slide, Gayomard."

"Oh, I know what it is !" ejaculates Pareezad before Teerandaz starts his running commentary. "That is Lake Rezayeh. "We'd been there on a picnic."

"Quite right," says Teerandaz. "There are many large and shallow salt-lakes in Iran. Lake Rezayeh is the largest. The most interesting thing about this lake is that, when we went swimming in it, there was no fear of being drowned."

"Really !" exclaims Meera. "How's that ?"

"That is because the water there is so salty and heavy that it does not let the swimmer's body sink. In fact the lake is so salty that very often they have to chip off salt from the sides of a boat that's been on it."

"See, Sudha Aunty," says Teerandaz, adjusting the slide, "here is a landscape showing the broad ranges of the Zagross and the Fars mountains in the West. Next slide, please."

"This slide shows the area of the Khurasan and Baluchistan mountains in the East," explains Gayomard.

"Well, just as we have the Deccan Plateau in India, there is a plateau in Central Iran," Shernaz Aunty informs the children.

"Oh, Shernaz Aunty, you seem to know quite a lot about India too !" exclaims Meera.

"Of course I do. I was born and bred in Panchagani. My husband is from Iran; that's why I've settled in Iran since my marriage," explains Shernaz.

"Don't you have huge plains like those of our Ganga and Yamuna ?" asks Meera.

"By God's grace, we have a fertile narrow plain in the North near the Caspian coast, and a very narrow sandy plain near the



Persian Gulf in the South. But we are not lucky enough to have big rivers in our country. There are a few short rivers," says Pareezad. Gayomard hands over another slide, saying, "Have a look at this slide."

Teerandaz fixes it up. "It shows the longest and the chief navigable river in Iran. It is the river Karoon. Many of our rivers drain themselves into shallow salty lakes or dry up in the desert," says Gayomard.

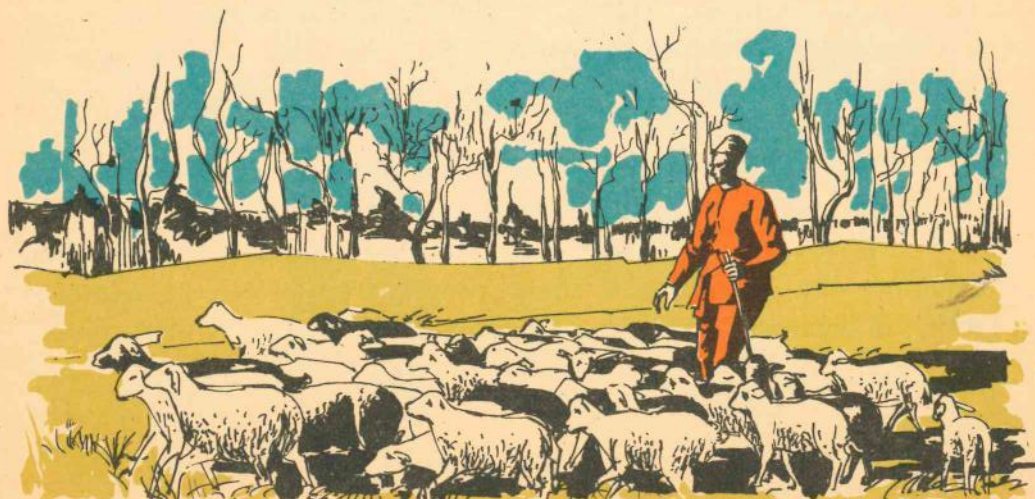
"You say you have a dry climate there. That means you don't have enough rainfall. Isn't that so?" asks Meera.

"That's right, Meera," says Pareezad "Except in the plains where there is about 150 cms. of rain, most of it in the winter months."

"We in India get heavy rainfall in the mountains," says Chimanbhai.

"On the mountains in the north-west of Iran there is only about 75 cms of rainfall—that is, about as much as in Poona," says Shernaz Aunty. "Let's have a look at some of our deserts."

"That's the Dashti Kavir Desert in central Iran," says Teerandaz, arranging the slide. A picture of sand-dunes appears on the screen. "There is hardly any rainfall here."







Physical Features of Iran

"A desert," muses Meera. "That in turn means very hot summers and very cold winters." Looking at the next slide, she asks, "Where are these people going with their flocks of sheep and goats?"

"These are Iranians who live in the valleys. They go to stay on the higher slopes of mountains in the summer and come back to the valleys in the winter with their flock" explains Pareezad. "You see, Meera, the climate of Iran is one of extremes. Frost is very common in winter. But the heat in the summer months is intense, especially in the low-lying areas and in the deserts."

"Our Delhi, too, has extremes of climate. It is terribly hot in summer and very cold in winter," says Sudha.

"It is the same with Teheran, the capital of Iran. Just imagine—the temperature there ranges from 15°C. in winter to 44°C. in summer !" exclaims Gayomard.

“That must be terrible ! Thank God, there isn’t a single place in India with such extremes of temperature,” says Chimanbhai with a sigh of relief.

“Look at this slide,” says Teerandaz as he adjusts another slide.

“Ah, what lovely grapes and water-melons !” cries Meera, her mouth watering.

“The grapes and water-melons of Iran are famous. Besides these, in the southern parts of Iran, dates are grown in the oases of deserts,” explains Shernaz.

“But you said before that you grow pears, apples and apricots, peaches, figs, pomegranates, almonds and pistachio-nuts too,” says Meera enviously. “You see, I am so very fond of all these fruits, and nuts that I’ve not forgotten them ! Anyway, how lucky you are ! You get to eat so many fruits—such a lot of them grow in your country !”

Looking at the next slide Sudha says, “Look, what’s that boy doing up there ?”







"Oh, that ! He is collecting water-melons. To do that a basket with a circular ring is fixed to the end of a long stick," explains Pareezad.

"Here is another slide showing how dates are collected," says Teerandaz. These men are so accustomed to climbing up date-trees with this rope support that they reach the top in no time," adds Gayomard.

"Even here men employ the same method to climb tall trees," says Chimanbhai.

"Here is a third way of collecting the fruits," says Teerandaz adjusting the next slide. "When the tree is not tall the Iranian gardener employs this method."

"It reminds me of a game I used to play as a boy," says Chimanbhai. "We used to climb up a bunyan tree to catch the 'thief.' Oh, it was such fun !" he adds with a sigh.

"What do you do with all these fruits ?" asks Sudha. "I mean such quantities of them that remain after the country has had all its needs ?"

"Other countries buy them from us, of course," says Shernaz Aunty. "In fact, Iran ranks first in the world for export of dried apricots."





"Are they canned?" asks Meera. "No, we dry these fruits and export dried fruits. But we also make wine out of grapes. Our city, Shiraz, is famous for its wine," says Gayomard.

"And Shiraz is famous for its rose-attar and rose-water too," puts in Pareezad.

"That shows that lots of roses grow in Iran, doesn't it?" says Meera.

"Quite true," says Gayomard. "Our Iranian poet Saadi has written volumes of poems on "*Gulistan*," meaning 'the garden of flowers.'

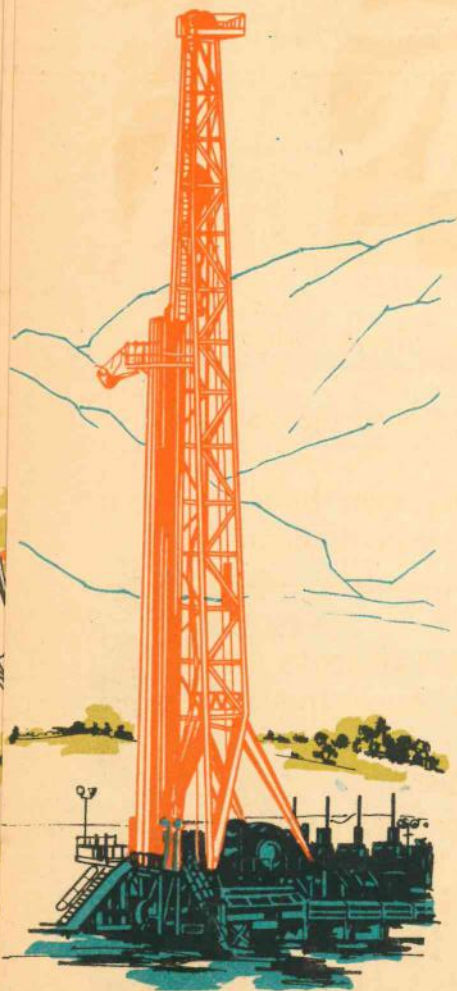
"Tombs of Shaikh Saadi as well as Hafez—another great Iranian poet—are also situated here," adds Pareezad.

"This traditional city of roses and nightingales, of gardens and poetry, is now fast developing into a modern city," says Teerandaz. "Through a new pipe-line it is now getting natural gas which helps run a great many industries. Shiraz now has become a medical and nursing education centre, perhaps, the best not only in Iran but also in the whole of the Middle East," he proudly adds.





### 3 THE IRANIAN OIL



“We have so far talked of fruits and flowers but don’t you suppose Iran to be all fruits and flowers,” says Gayomard. “How about showing that slide of the derricks?” Then turning to Meera, he says, “I suppose you know what derricks are.” He then continues, “Iran’s chief wealth lies in her oilfields, which cover about five-sixths of the country.” “One of the richest oil fields of the world is in the Southern Region,” Teerandaz informs Meera. “Gayomard, next slide, please.” Then, turning to his audience, he remarks, “Just look at this picture. This is the Oil Refinery at Abadan; it is the largest in the world.



“What a huge steamer it is !” exclaims Meera, when she sees the next slide.

“It’s one of the tankers that carry oil all over the world,” explains Teerandaz.

“We have our Stanvac Refinery at Trombay, near Bombay,” remarks Meera. “It is sponsored by the American Standard Oil Vacuum Co., now merged in ESSO. Has your country received any foreign help ?”

“In the beginning, for many years, a British company helped Iran to operate the oilfields. It was called the Anglo-Iranian Oil Co.,” replies Gayomard.

“Why do you say *was* called ?” asks Meera.

“As years went by, the spirit of nationalism, was growing and the people of Iran did not like the British owning the Company – not even a part of it – and so it is nationalized, i. e. our nation owns it now,” boasts Pareezad.

“I am so glad to hear it. When did this happen ?”





His Majesty  
Muhammed Reza Shah

“In 1951, under the leadership of the late Mohommad Mussadique, the then Prime Minister of Iran, the oil industry was nationalized.”

“That’s wonderful !” exclaims Meera.

Then she looks at the ring on Shernaz’s finger and says, “Shernaz Aunt, I’ve been admiring that lovely sapphire ring on your finger ever since we were at the dinner table. I can’t get it out of my mind. I suppose you brought it from Iran with you, didn’t you ?”

“Yes, Meera, Iran deals in precious stones like the turquoise, the topaz, the emerald and the sapphire,” replies Shernaz.

“But I consider iron and coal far more precious for industries than these precious stones,” retorts Gayomard. “You girls are crazy over jewels. I am glad Iran does possess iron and coal mines as well.”

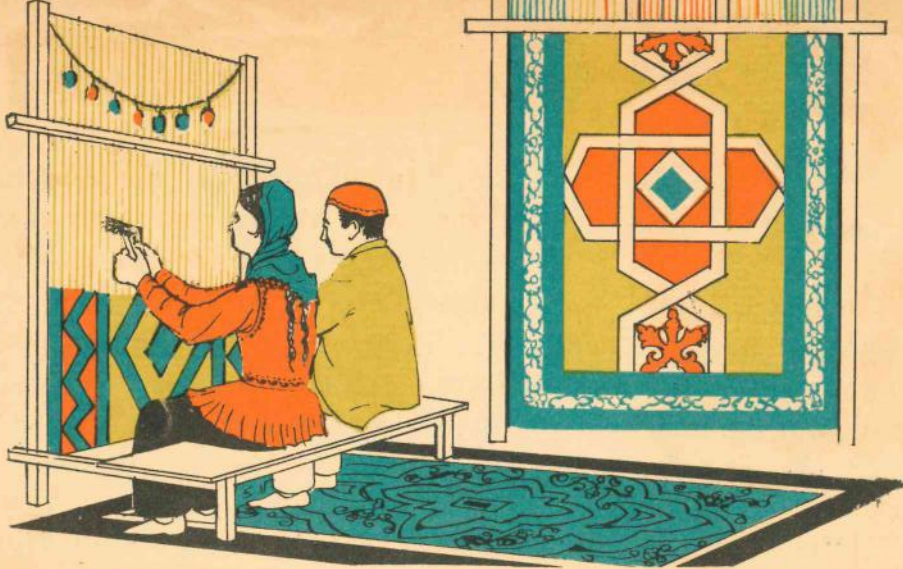
“What other things is Iran famous for ?” asks Sudha, who has been quiet for long.

“For its beautiful carpets and rugs, of course,” butts in Parveen.

“Let her see for herself, Pervin. See this slide,” says Teerandaz, adjusting it, as the lights are put out again.

“Ah .... how beautiful ! How exotic !” cries Meera.

“Iran has been famous for this cottage industry of making carpets and rugs from ancient times,” explains Gayomard. “The craft is handed down from father to son.”



“Meera, you must come to Iran some time. You’ll find women, young and old, working at the looms. They are quick with their nimble fingers. Indeed, they are experts at it,” says Pareezad. “True, in some places, a few men too weave carpets.”

“Men weaving carpets! How surprising and funny!” laughs Meera.

“Objection, please! What’s so surprising and funny about it?” asks Gayomard. “Do you mean to say that we men do not know what art is?”

“I don’t think you know your country well,” remarks Sher-naz Aunty. “We visited Kashmir the other day and found boys and men weaving and doing beautiful embroidery work there!”

“Oh, please don’t get me wrong, Aunty. You see, I judge other boys by my brothers! I have two brothers. Both have gone abroad for their studies. They are both grown-up men, but I’ve never seen them even sewing their shirt buttons on,—leave aside doing embroidery work!” laughs Meera.

“Will you leave my sons out of it?” chimes in Meera’s mother.



There's an atmosphere of mirth around, and the Irani boys all enjoy it.

Changing the mood, Meera says, "Do you know, our school is taking us on a trip to Kashmir this summer, and sure enough I am going to join it. In the last Diwali holidays I went with the school trip to Bangalore and Mysore. I bought a lovely silk piece from there."

"Oh, we too have lots of silk mills in Iran," says Pareezad. "Do you know why? Because lots of silkworms are reared on the mulberry trees there. Then we rear sheep, which give us wool."

"Which other animals do you rear besides sheep?" asks Chimanbhai.

"We also rear goats and cattle, and our beasts of burden are mules, donkeys, horses, oxen and camels," replies Pareezad.

"Since many types of animals are reared in Iran, the leather industry must be flourishing there," says Meera's dad.

"That's right! It is a flourishing trade. We also have cigarette, soap, and glass factories," says Gayomard.





Electricity  
by wind



Railways



Oak



Sheep



Sugarcane



Oil



Agriculture



Cypress



Desert  
Salt  
Mines



Factories



Dates



Mineral  
Mines



Irrigation  
Projects



Airports



## 4 THE CITIES OF IRAN



The next slide is projected on the screen, and Meera speaks up: "Oh! These are caravans – aren't they?"



"Oh, yes. In fact, caravans did play in the past an important role in the communication system of Iran, especially in the desert and rocky areas," says Gayomard. "To day, however, they are used by villagers for transporting goods like watermelons. The caravans pass through the oases i.e. the only green spots in the deserts. These oases are the





halting places where the villagers get water. Here they rest, eat, drink and make merry.”

“Aren’t there motor-roads or railways ?” asks Pervin.

“In other areas there *are* motor roads. In addition there are several railway lines in Iran. There is one that starts from the Caspian coast. It passes through Teheran, the capital city, and reaches Bander-e-Shapoor, the southernmost portion of Iran on the Iranian Gulf. This is the longest route. Two more routes shoot out from Teheran – one goes east through the province of Khorasan and the other goes northward to Tabriz. Nowadays, the Government of Iran is planning to have more railways,” says Gayomard.

“There must be airways too, because a friend of Daddy’s once went by plane to Russia via Teheran,” remarks Meera.

“Oh, yes, we have very nice aerodromes at Teheran, Mashahad, Tabriz and Esphahan,” answers Pareezad.



“Here’s a picture,” says Teerandaz, changing the slide, “of our aerodrome at Teheran.”

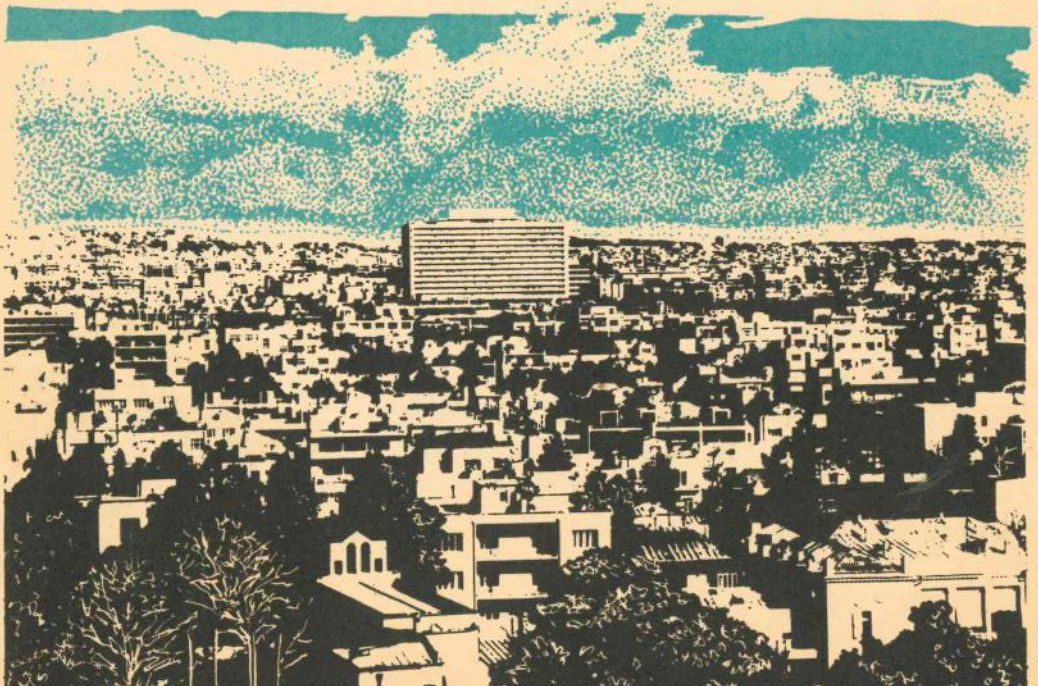
“Is Teheran like Delhi in any way ?” asks Meera.

“Yes, in a sense. It is our capital as Delhi is yours. Teheran is situated in a valley of the Alborz Mountains. It is thickly populated. It’s a very modern city with super-markets, television sets and all the rest. Here is a slide showing our super-market. Teheran is also the cultural, educational and commercial centre of Iran.”

“Now look at this picture of the university building of Teheran,” says Teerandaz, as the slide is changed.

“Has Teheran been the capital city from the very beginning of Iran’s history ?” questions Meera.

“No. Teheran has been the capital for about the last two hundred years. Before that Chazvin and Ghagvin and Esphahan were the capitals,” says Shernaz Aunty.





"Where is Esphahan?" asks Sudha.

"In the midst of a lovely oasis in the mountains of Central Iran," says Gayomard. He now projects the next slide.

"This is the great Esphahan Square," says Pareezad. "It is the second largest square in the world, next only to the Red Square in Moscow."

"Just see," continues Gayomard describing the picture, "on two sides of the square are these very exotic tile-domed mosques with beautiful tile mosaics. There is a very colourful bazar on the third side here and this is Ali Kapu Pavilion on the fourth."

"Give me that envelope, please," says Gayomard to Teerandaz.

As soon as the slide is projected, Meera exclaims, "Oh, what a lovely building it is! Is it a mosque?"

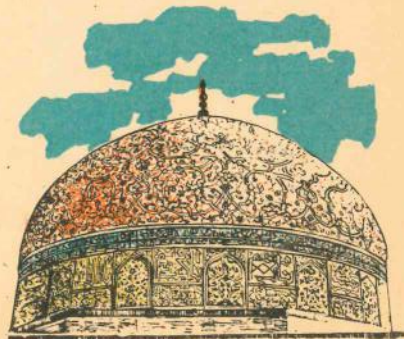
"No! It is a 'Madressa,' a theological college in Esphahan. Esphahan is famous for its examples of Iranian architecture. This Madressa has magnificent minarets, walls, and domes with beautiful intricate designs in turquoise blue," explains Teerandaz.

"You said something about the Tabriz airport. Where is that city?" asks Meera, curious to know more.

"It is near the northern border of Iran. Tabriz is a big market town. Originally caravan routes used to go in different directions from here," Gayomard informs Meera. "Here you see a slide of a lake at Tabriz known as Shah Kuli."

"Since Iran has the Persian Gulf as well as the Caspian Sea coasts, there must be ports along these coasts?—Right?" questions Meera.

"Oh yes, we do have them," says Teerandaz. "Gayomard, pass me the







slide of Abadan, please. This is Abadan, where there are oil refineries. It is an important port."

"There are also the ports Bunder Abbas and Bushire," says Pareezad.

"Which language do the people in Iran speak?" asks Meera.

"We speak Farsi, i. e. Persian. Its script is like the Urdu script," answers Pareezad.

"Which religion do you follow?" asks Meera.

"We are Zoroastrian Iranians," says Pareezad. "But most of the people of Iran follow Islam, and of these the vast majority belongs to the Shiya sect. We find Zoroastrian Iranians mostly in the cities of Yezd and Kerman."

"I wonder, Daddy, if we could get these slides here?" asks Meera.

"I have my doubts," replies Chimanbhai.

"Anyway, they are available in Iran," replies Pareezad.

"How much did you pay for them?" asks Meera.

"Well, I don't remember the exact amount, but it was somewhere around twenty-five rials per slide," answers Teerandaz.

"Rials? What's that?" asks Meera.

"That's the currency of our country. Just as you have Paise and Rupees, we have Shahis, Rials, and Tumans."

"But, Shernaz Aunty, how many rials make a rupee? Or better still, how many rupees make a rial?" asks Meera.

"That's simple to answer; I can tell you that," butts in Gayomard. "For a dollar we get 75 rials."

"And a dollar today is equal to seven and a half rupees," says Sudha.

"Oh! It means that 7.50 rupees are equivalent to 75 rials," adds Meera.

"That's right! It works out to 1 rupee=10 rials," confirms Shernaz Aunty.





## 5 IRAN AND INDIA

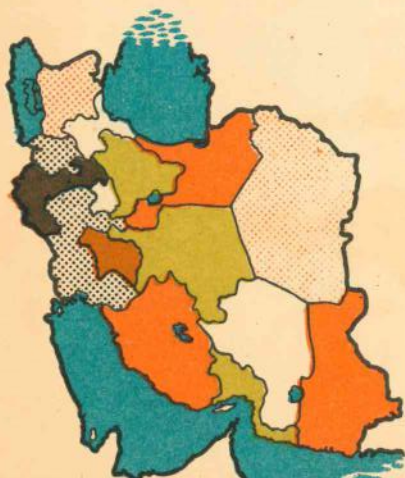
"We will now show you a few slides of our history," says Pareezad. "Let me tell you at the outset that we are a part of the Indo-European family known as the Aryans, from which originates the word 'IRAN'. There is a river known as Oxus. It was there that the ancient Indo-Europeans first established themselves. From there, some of them migrated towards the present Iranian plateau. But alas! Our history is a sad story of invasions."

"Ah! that's our story too!" says Chimanbhai. "We, too, have been invaded from time to time."

"Our country has been invaded by several nations," continues Pareezad. "There were the Medes, the Parthians, and the Assyrians, who invaded Iran. Then there was a revolt by a Persian prince named Cyrus, who established the Sassanian Dynasty."

"I have heard of Cyrus before. Is it true that he built up an empire for Persia?"

"Yes, it was a vast empire, right



from the Nile in Egypt to the Indus in India. Then began a new period. The Muslims of Arabia conquered Iran."

"But the Muslims who conquered us," says Teerandaz "themselves learnt a lot from the Persian civilization."

"This is exactly what happened in India too!" exclaims Chimanbhai. "The Moguls who invaded India also learnt a lot from us, and in return brought their culture with them."

"Next came an invasion from the Afghans!" continues Pareezad. "This time it was Nadir Shah who rebuilt Iran. He expanded the empire and invaded India."

"Is this the Nadir Shah of the famous Peacock Throne?" questions Meera.

"Yes, the very same," replies Shernaz.

"Now," continues Pareezad "we come to the Pahelavi Dynasty in the 20th century, which is the beginning of modern Iran. That, in short is our history. We are proud of it, particularly of those glorious periods of Cyrus and Darius, and Reza Shah Pahelavi and the present ruler Muhmmad Reza Shah. Our poets like Firdausi and Rumi, Hafez and Saadi, have enriched our literature. The silk routes through Khorasan gave us contact with China and Japan. Then, there was the great Marco





Polo, who travelled through Iran. Our great mosques and mausoleums and monuments like the Persepolis are there to remind us of our glorious past, and now under our benevolent ruler we are growing from strength to strength."

"It's strange," says Chimanbhai, "that Iran, once the home of one of the oldest of religions—the Zoroastrian religion—has very few Zoroastrian Iranians today."

"Well, yes, Iran today is a muslim country, with a sprinkling of Zoroastrian Iranians," replies Teerandaz.

Meera continues, "When you talk of Zoroastrian Iranians I am reminded of our Zoroastrian Indians, i. e. our Parsis and Iranis."

"Yes, these Indian Iranis and Parsis are a friendly link between India and Iran," says Chimanbhai. "The relations between India and Iran have been very old and cordial, and even in this century we have kept our ties of friendship. Several cultural missions have visited Persia, the most important one of which was led by our great poet Rabindranath Tagore."

"That's right !....and I have read somewhere—I don't remember exactly where—that Jadhav Rana, the then Rana of Sanjan, accepted the Parsis in his kingdom very hospitably," rejoins Perveen.

"I wonder whether somebody has made up this story," says Chimanbhai, "but I've heard somewhere that the first Iranians who settled in India sent a messenger to the then ruler of Sanjan with a request to be allowed to stay in Sanjan. In answer, the Rana of Sanjan set before them a bowl of milk full





to the brim, meaning thereby that his kingdom was already over-populated. The Iranian leader understood the message and returned the bowl after having added sugar to it."

"Daddy, what did the leader mean to convey by adding sugar?" asks Meera.

"When the leader added sugar it dissolved in the milk and sweetened it," explains Chimanbhai. "But the milk did not overflow. The leader wanted to convey that the Iranians would not overburden the population but on the other hand they would try to sweeten the life of the people."

"Just as the sugar sweetened the milk in the bowl," adds Sudha. "But as far as I remember, these people who had settled at Sanjan, were Parsis."

"That's right, they were Parsis," says Shernaz Aunt. "As these Iranians came from the province of Fars they were known as Parsis. So, you see, the relations between the two countries are indeed very, very old. Even in the present century many a time great men from each country visit the other and help the exchange of culture. Look at this slide."

"Oh! That's Tagore. Our great national poet," exclaims Meera.

"When he came to our country he received a warm welcome wherever he went," says Shernaz Aunt.

"Now who could this person be?" asks Meera seeing a slide.

"This was our leader, Reza Shah, the father of the present king," answers





Teerandaz. "He was an army officer named Riza Khan. He was the man who made modern Iran."

"Now before I show you the last slide I should like you to know that Iran, like any other country, has its own folklore and folk stories."

"How wonderful!" exclaims Meera, "Why not tell us one, eh?"

"Oh, yes, please do!" join the others.

"Very well, then," says Pareezad. "I'll tell you the story of one known as Aresh the Archer.

Long ago when King Manucher ruled over Iran, there was a great war between the Iranians and their neighbours the Turanians under King Afrasiab. Manucher had lost quite a lot of Iranian territory. As the war had drawn on and on, both the armies were anxious to stop the war. But what about the lost territory?

After much discussion, Manucher and Afrasiab came to a solution. An Iranian archer was to climb a high mountain near which the last battle had been fought. He was to shoot an arrow northwards. A boundary from the point at which the arrow touched the ground was to be drawn. Afrasiab was sure that he would not have to lose much territory. He thought, "After all, how far can an arrow go?" But he was mistaken. He did not know Aresh the Archer.



Aresh, who lived in a small village, was a tall, strong, and handsome man with a pure and simple heart. He was an excellent archer. He was a very great patriot. He thought that there must be many archers in Iran, who were superior to him. It is said that the Spirit of the Earth appeared before him, and giving him extra strength asked him to go to Manucher and offer his services. But there was one condition. Aresh would have to sacrifice his life for his country. For Aresh the freedom of Iran was much more important than his own life. Without any hesitation he accepted the condition. He went to the King and told him of his vision. He said, "I'll use all my strength to shoot the arrow and when the arrow pierces the ground, my body shall lie lifeless on the ground."

When Aresh shot the arrow, the Spirit of the Earth lifted the arrow up and did not allow it to strike the ground. The arrow travelled for half a day through the air and ultimately got stuck in a walnut tree. It had travelled far. The Iranians were jubilant, for they had recovered all the territory that they had lost in the war. But the day of victory and joy was a day of loss and sorrow too. The hero of the victory, Aresh, lay dead on the mountain peak. He had sacrificed his life for his country.

But is Aresh really dead ? He lives in the memory of every Iranian. Every year we hold a feast called Teergan. Every young Iranian then prays for the strength of Aresh and his patriotism.

"Now let's end our show with this last slide of the National Flag of Iran," says Teerandaz.

. Immediately Shernaz, Pareezad, Teerandaz and Gayomard



stand to attention. Meera and her parents follow suit. "Why, it's like our Tricolour with the horizontal stripes. Why, even the colours are almost the same," ejaculates Meera.

"No, we don't have the saffron colour as in your Indian flag. We have red instead. Besides, the green stripe is on the top and the red one at the bottom, with the white stripe in the centre. Then, again, in place of your Ashoka Chakra, we have a golden lion and a sun on the white stripe. As you can see, the lion is holding a sword."

Then the Iranian children along with Shernaz Aunty, sing, "Shahenshaema-Zindabad" (Long life to our Shah), the National Anthem of Iran. Meera, Chimanbhai, and Sudha then sing "Jana-Gana-Mana," the Indian National Anthem.

The visitors thank the hosts for a delicious dinner and the hosts thank the visitors for an interesting evening. Good nights are said. The guests depart and leave Meera wondering if any day she would see Iran.

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