

The Impact of Restoration on the Sacred Preservation in Attracting Tourists

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ABSTRACT

Tourism today is one of the important economic issues and a significant factor in social and cultural connections. Religious tourism is one of the main forms of tourism, encompassing visits to religious sites and the performance of religious ceremonies. The city of Mashhad, after Qom, is one of the religious cities of Iran, housing many historical sites. The presence of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) attracts millions of visitors to Mashhad every year. Historical buildings, stories from centuries past, and testimonies from human history connect us to our cultural and historical roots. However, these historical structures are often exposed to dangers such as destruction, negligence, and decay; thus, their restoration is crucial. Restoring historical buildings is essential not only to appreciate architectural beauty but also to preserve cultural heritage in attracting tourists. In this regard, the aim of the present research is to examine the impact of the restoration of sacred sites on attracting tourists. The Goharshad Mosque is one of the prominent structures in the architectural collection of the Razavi Shrine, which has undergone restoration at various times. This article discusses the role of restoring this religious historical building. The mosque, due to its location in the heart of Mashhad and proximity to other important attractions in the city, serves as a focal point for tourists and those interested in history and spirituality.

Introduction

Today, the tourism industry in the world is one of the important sources of income and, at the same time, a significant factor in cultural exchanges between countries. It holds a special place as the largest service industry globally. According to the World Tourism Organization, which is affiliated with the United Nations, tourism is the largest active industry in the world. When a community transforms into a tourist destination, its quality of life, value systems, family relationships, attitudes, customs and traditions, behavioral patterns, and many other economic, social, and cultural components are affected (Taghvaei et al., 2019).

Pilgrimage is an important cultural phenomenon and the main factor driving tourists toward religious tourism sites. It represents a significant form of population mobility with extensive implications for human society and evolution. Graburn (1983) fully describes the structure and ceremonial role of tourism and considers it akin to religious pilgrimage. Pilgrimage resembles a type of movement or "tour" in which a person travels from their starting point to a destination (the pilgrimage site) and then returns, akin to tourism. There are various types of tourism, including nature tourism, historical tourism, health tourism, sports tourism, electronic tourism, and religious tourism (Egresi et al., 2012).

Religious tourism overcomes climatic barriers and is not significantly affected by seasonal changes in the number of tourists visiting a city. For this type of tourist, the destination is not the only important aspect; their experience begins from the moment they leave their starting point and encompasses all the events they encounter along the way.

Religious buildings are unique assets in their respective art and culture, embodying shared values and serving as a significant source of public identity in living communities, in addition to their economic value to the city. Imams can, by preserving their cultural functions, become custodians, producers, and promoters of Islamic cultural values and norms. By reviving customs and preserving historical and cultural sites due to their unique architecture, they can help increase religious tourism (Kasimati and Dawson, 2009).

The preservation of religious heritage is not merely the conservation of some old stones. There is a vast heritage, especially in rural areas, that lacks protection and needs safeguarding for future generations. This is a part of our living heritage, where religious buildings can serve as community centers for various events and applications, providing local people and others—such as tourists and visitors—reasons to visit. The tourism economy is currently becoming one of the main pillars of the global commercial economy and is receiving increasing attention in both developed and developing countries (FĂINIȘI, 2023).

Historical centers, relying on sustainable economics and emphasizing tourism, can become sources of significant economic utilization. Considering the aforementioned points, the revitalization of historical centers and the restoration of their prestigious and superior functions, in light of their capacities, is essential. Since Iran is among the top ten countries in the world in terms of tourism, with over nine thousand pilgrimage sites, more than half of which are shrines and blessed burial places of Imams, the tourism industry—especially religious and pilgrimage tourism—can have profound impacts on economic, political, social, environmental, and technological transformations at international, national, and local levels. Therefore, the restoration and revitalization of historical religious fabrics and their utilization are justifiable both economically and culturally. This study thus focuses on the impact of the restoration of blessed sites on attracting tourists.

Definition of Tourism:

Tourism (or travel) is the temporary travel of people to destinations other than their usual place of residence, aimed at exploring and utilizing natural and historical attractions, spending leisure time, achieving mental and spiritual peace, establishing business relations, learning about cultures and customs of different nations, and more.

Another characteristic of tourism is its contribution to the preservation and maintenance of natural blessings and historical remains from past generations for future transmission. In specific forms, such as ecotourism and cultural tourism, tourists learn to engage responsibly with cultural heritage and enjoy nature while avoiding destruction and harming these unique attractions. Local tourists are those who travel within certain areas and cities (Yeganeh and Bash Afshar, 2012).

In general, tourism can be divided into several categories:

- Travel to religious and pilgrimage sites
- Travel to natural areas

- Travel to historical places
- Medical travel

Historical Fabric and Tourism Development:

Historical attractions include historical and cultural sites that are of significant importance as cultural heritage, making them very appealing and noteworthy to tourists. The most important of these attractions are religious, spiritual, and commercial sites such as mosques, churches, temples, and markets (Heidari Chianeh, 2010). The historical fabric is considered one of the most important components of the identity of any society, and its emergence follows adherence to climatic structures and culture (Flamaki, 2005). A coherent collection of architecture, culture, economy, and social exchanges in a historically rooted urban structure leads to the development of historical fabrics over time. The emergence of this fabric necessitates giving importance to the climate and paying attention to the local cultures of the region (Mo'ayed).

The historical fabric, with its inherent spatial and cultural value, is the best indicator of urban identity. Therefore, it plays a significant and evident role in shaping the identity of the city while its vitality and growth prevent the city from losing its identity and from internal decay, thereby limiting unchecked development (Shamaei and Pourahmad, 2005). The historical fabric of cities is characterized by its historicity, dense structure, and interwoven elements. The presence of a historical fabric distinct from other urban fabrics enhances the importance and attractiveness of the city, presenting the entire historical fabric as a singular attraction.

The historical and cultural fabric is the best marker of urban identity. Consequently, it plays an essential role in city identity formation, preventing the loss of identity and internal decay while limiting unregulated growth. Historical and cultural fabrics within cities are regarded as significant components that symbolize the culture, architecture, and city planning of a locality and are considered parts of the social identity of each ethnic group and country. They have received special attention in many countries around the world to attract tourists. In our country, which has a long-standing history of urban settlement, these fabrics embody elegance, beauty, and the creative spirit of the people who have shaped them over many years according to their traditions, culture, and lifestyle. In other words, the old fabric represents the original core of the city and reflects the thinking and perspectives of our ancestors on various aspects of life, and therefore deserves special attention. Historical and cultural fabrics serve as the ancient and historic core with significant actual and potential capacities for welcoming tourists (Kordi, 2002).

Restoration of Historical Religious Buildings:

The restoration of historical buildings reflects a profound commitment to honoring, preserving, and maintaining our cultural and historical heritage. Historical buildings are testimonies of the past, telling stories through stone, wood, or metal that bring the lives of those who came before us into the present. These structures are not only products of architectural art but also guardians of the values, beliefs, and traditions of bygone eras. The importance of restoring historical buildings is evident not only in preserving their aesthetic appeal but also in their ability to educate, inspire, and connect people to their cultural and historical roots. Restoration of historical buildings plays a vital role in preserving the cultural and historical heritage of a community. These buildings offer a window into the past, allowing people to understand how previous generations lived and created. Here are several key reasons why the restoration of historical buildings is so important:

- **Preserving History and Culture:** Historical buildings preserve the memories and values of a nation. Through restoration, they become living documents of the past, establishing a fundamental connection to cultural and historical roots. These structures serve as windows to the past, safeguarding the memories of the communities that created them. They are not just physical structures but also visual stories of human experiences, upholding traditions, values, and collective memories. Through restoration, these buildings continue to narrate these stories and forge essential links to their cultural and historical roots.
- **Understanding Architectural Evolution:** Historical buildings showcase the evolution of architectural styles and construction techniques over time. Restoration provides an opportunity to study and appreciate these advancements.
- **Promoting Cultural Tourism:** Restored historical buildings often become major tourist attractions, contributing to the economic development of their regions. Cultural tourism can strengthen the local economy and raise awareness of cultural heritage. Restored historical buildings frequently turn into key tourist attractions, enhancing economic growth in their areas. Cultural tourism draws visitors

from around the world, generating income for local communities and bolstering the hospitality industry. It can also increase awareness of cultural and historical heritage.

- **Preserving National Identity:** Many historical sites are symbols of national identity and sources of pride for citizens. Restoring them helps to maintain this cultural identity. Numerous historical landmarks serve as national symbols and represent a nation's identity. They remind citizens of their history and cultural achievements. Through restoration, these structures assist in preserving and transmitting cultural and national identity.
- **Protection Against Natural Degradation and Disasters:** Historical buildings are often at risk from environmental factors like weathering, erosion, pollution, and natural disasters. Through restoration and appropriate protective measures, damage and destruction can be delayed or prevented, thus safeguarding these invaluable cultural treasures (FĂINIȘI, 2023).

Religious Historical Buildings in Mashhad:

Mashhad is the second largest city in Iran after Tehran and the foremost city in Iran in terms of pilgrimage and tourism destinations, significantly influencing the formation of pilgrimage culture and tourism in the country. As the capital of Iran during the Afsharid period and due to the presence of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), Mashhad has always been of interest to rulers and kings throughout history. Therefore, it contains buildings of significant value from various historical periods.

The presence of the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) in Mashhad and the migration of various tribes to be near the Imam, along with the construction of numerous buildings throughout history, have made Mashhad a city of great value in terms of historical architecture. Some of these buildings include: the architectural complex of the holy shrine of Imam Reza, which is a unique treasure of art and architecture, featuring the golden dome, minarets, the bell tower, the Ismail Talayi water fountain, the Radkan tower, the Goharshad Mosque, the four arches of Baze Hoor, the Parizad School, the tomb of Pir Palandoz, and dozens of other structures. Among the buildings located outside the architectural complex of the shrine are the Mashhad prayer hall, the bath of Mehdi Qoli Beik, the Khajeh Rabia mosque, the historical-cultural complex of Tus, and the cultural garden-tomb complex of Nader Shah. This research focuses on the restoration of the Goharshad Mosque.

The Vastness and Meaning of the Goharshad Mosque:

The Goharshad Mosque is the largest mosque present within the complex of the Holy Razavi Shrine, with an area of 2,850 square meters, making it the oldest courtyard of the shrine in terms of historical significance. Therefore, it is considered one of the most important cultural-historical sites in Mashhad and a symbol of Islamic architectural art in Iran that attracts pilgrims and visitors, drawing attention from archaeologists, tourists, and other enthusiasts. The Goharshad Mosque is located south of the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) (see Figure 1) and is currently used for Friday prayers, religious retreats, and other religious ceremonies.

This mosque is remarkable due to its structural integrity, characteristics of Islamic architecture, unity in design, tile work (both intricate and simple), plasterwork, and other outstanding artistic decorations. A building that, after 600 years, still stands strong and showcases Islamic architecture and art from the Timurid period. Different sections of the Goharshad Mosque have been repaired multiple times as necessary. During the Safavid era, when the mosque suffered significant damage from the Uzbek invasion, it was repaired, and in 1083 AH, after an earthquake caused further damage, it was restored. Additionally, damages caused by Afghan invasions and the Mahmud Sistani uprising were addressed during the Afsharid and Qajar periods. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, restorations were conducted in various parts of the Goharshad Mosque, and a series of fountains and water features were installed in the middle of the courtyard, further enhancing the mosque's beauty and grandeur. However, the true essence of this mosque cannot be fully understood merely by recounting its history. A notable point is that every place establishes spatial and visual connections with its surrounding environment, and the internal aspect of the mosque's research is derived from this fact: proximity. This proximity serves as a catalyst for the meaningful experiences of pilgrims and visitors, and the presence of the Holy Razavi Shrine (PBUH) adds to its significance. The Goharshad Mosque, located next to the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), is considered a part of paradise and a sacred place. Its sanctity lies in transforming multiplicity into unity, allowing external chaos to yield to internal tranquility. A place for conversing with the noblest being must also harbor the most sublime offerings. The profound inner tranquility emerges from the connection with the transcendent truth, which in turn becomes the foundation for the highest human creativity. (Tajdini, 1993).

Figure 1: A view of the Goharshad Mosque.



Historical Foundations of the Goharshad Mosque:

The history of tomorrow is the events of today. Every building is constructed within its historical context and expresses the concerns and beliefs of the people of that time. Thus, understanding the historical foundations of a building requires examining its calendrical bases and interpreting its various material and spiritual dimensions. Therefore, it seems that the formation of different artistic schools throughout history is rooted in the testimonies and aesthetic tendencies of the people of that era.

When Timur (Tamerlane) achieved complete conquest of Iran in 807 AH and dominated the entire Turkistan, he summoned artists and craftsmen to Samarkand and Turkistan. Shortly thereafter, when the Timurid capital moved from Samarkand to Herat, the distinctive values of the Herat school began to take shape over time. It is said that "this school had a significant impact on the emergence and artistic quality of other schools around the world. Some art historians have dubbed the emergence of this school as the great Renaissance of Central Asia" (Harati, 1990).

In the era of Shahrokh Mirza, Herat regained its former glory. Although Timur had destroyed its walls during his conquest of Herat and took many artists to Samarkand, Shahrokh Mirza, with the help of his wise wife, Goharshad, and his children, Baysunqur Mirza and Mohammad Taher, compensated for many of Timur's devastations due to their enthusiasm for city development. During this period, Samarkand, Herat, and Shiraz—the major centers of Timurid rule—flourished more than ever before. During Shahrokh's reign, the cultural renaissance that had occurred in Transoxiana permeated all of Khorasan, leading to the establishment of a new ethos in architecture. In this era, we witness a comprehensive amalgamation of message, form, and materials in most artistic and architectural works. The Goharshad Mosque can be considered an example of this significance (Hasanpour, 1998).

Specifications of the Goharshad Mosque:

This mosque is located to the south of the Razavi Shrine and is connected to the corridors of the Dar al-Siyadah and Dar al-Hifaz. It has a courtyard of 2,800 square meters and a total area of 9,400 square meters. The mosque encompasses four large iwans and seven prayer halls. The dome chamber behind the iwan has single-story prayer halls that link the various sections of the mosque together. According to the inscription in Thuluth script in the southern iwan, this mosque was constructed in 821 AH / 1418 CE on the orders and with the assistance of Goharshad Begum, the wife of Shahrokh Timuri, and over the centuries, it has suffered significant damage. The Goharshad Mosque—named after its founder—took nearly 12 years to complete, and the main architect was likely Qavam al-Din Shirazi, one of the most renowned architects of the Timurid period.

Architectural Aspects of the Goharshad Mosque:

The Goharshad Mosque is a garden of light and color. Color carries a wide array of semantic meanings. The turquoise gem of the Razavi Sanctuary is the Goharshad Mosque, and the architect has paid attention to the potential of color in expressing its spiritual values. It is said that "the reflection of light on the colors at different times creates unique displays. The difference between the prayer hall and the iwan gives unity to the work, while all the colors and the colorful interior space lead to a profound inner tranquility." Tranquility is an intrinsic quality of the sacred spaces that invites reflection. "A sacred place is one where meaning

descends and manifests, and the seeker of meaning becomes familiar with this space." We believe that regardless of distance, one can direct their heart sincerely toward the revered shrine, offering greetings and prayers.

Islamic architecture is one of the most important and debated branches of architecture in the world, constructed upon geometry, mathematics, and art. In this context, "the Goharshad Mosque is one of the most beautiful architectural works of the Timurid period" (Rahmatian, 2013). Professor J. Christie Wilson, author of "The History of Iranian Industries," lists this mosque among the twelfth global architectural structures. "Although Isfahan is the pinnacle of Islamic architecture, this architecture has a legacy, such as the Goharshad Mosque, whose architect was Qavam al-Din Shirazi, and there is a temporal gap of 100 to 150 years between these buildings. In fact, the Goharshad Mosque represents the jewel of our architecture, whose influence in form, motifs, and geometric principles has flourished in Isfahan" (Balkhari, 2007). The inspiration for all the refined fantasies and creative craftsmanship of Isfahan's architects and artists originates from this mosque. The Goharshad Mosque is regarded as a center for the most creative artistic expressions of its time.

The colors are utilized so powerfully yet delicately that they even influence the geometric structure of the mosque. The colors of this mosque resonate with the principles of creation: "Red and yellow, green and blue correspond to fire, air, water, and earth, representing the four primary elements of creation, where the first two are active and the latter two are passive. The white inscription against the deep blue background creates an inspiring contrast, one that leads to beauty. The architect of the Goharshad Mosque has always dedicated great attention to the fundamental principle of luminosity" (Mosaddeghian Torghabeh, 2005).

In the heart of the mosque, there is a spacious courtyard surrounded by four iwans and two-story corridors. The name of Qavam al-Din Shirazi, the architect of the Goharshad Mosque, appears on the left inscription of the base of the iwan, within a rectangular frame.

One of the important features of the Goharshad complex is the beautiful mihrab located at the end of the iwan. To the right of the mihrab stands the Minbar of the Imam of the Time, constructed in 1213 AH by Master Mohammad Khorasani using carving techniques, made of walnut wood without the use of metal nails (see Figure 2). This minbar resembles those found in the Mosque of Al-Aqsa and the Mosque of Khalil al-Rahman in Jordan. The courtyard floor is paved with hexagonal Khalaj stone, and in the center of the courtyard, a recently constructed octagonal basin has been installed, featuring lotus-shaped motifs, adding a unique beauty and freshness to the mosque's atmosphere (see Photo 3). Among the other beautiful features of this mosque are the inscriptions and hadiths written by Baysunqur Mirza, penned by the famous calligrapher of the Safavid era, Mohammad-Reza Imami Isfahani (Javadzadeh, 2001).

Figure 2 - The mihrab of the Goharshad Mosque.



Restoration of the Goharshad Mosque:

Various parts of the Goharshad Mosque have been restored several times as necessary. During the Safavid era, when the mosque was severely damaged, it was repaired during the reign of Shah Abbas. In 1033 AH, following an earthquake in Khorasan that caused damage to parts of the mosque, restoration work was carried out. Damages from the Afghan invasion during the Afsharid and Qajar periods were also repaired. After the Russian bombardment in 1330 AH, which damaged the dome and iwans of the mosque, a fundamental restoration took place in 1330 AH (see Figure 3). The dome of the iwan, affected by the wide span and the severe earthquake, suffered damage over time and underwent several restorations. In 1330 SH, it was extensively rebuilt while preserving its original features. In 1311 SH, the base stones inside the iwan were replaced, and the floor was paved with marble. In 1318 SH, the base of the dome was adorned with mosaic tiles inscribed with verses. The Minbar of the Imam of the Time, which had also been damaged over time, was repaired in 1328 SH by Master Haidar Niknam. During this period, to prevent damage to the minbar, it

was enclosed with iron rods, and the lower part was made glass, placing the minbar in a strong and clear glass case.

After the Islamic Revolution, further restoration efforts were made in various parts of the mosque, with one of the most significant being the moisture removal from the walls and floors. Regarding the current condition of the Goharshad Mosque, Dr. Yaqoob Daneshdoost states: "All the floors of the mosque have been excavated and replaced with a covered furnace system. This system has empty spaces that prevent moisture. However, the previous condition of the mosque was such that even the furnace system could not completely absorb the building's moisture. Therefore, we created a channel around the base of the mosque and installed a fan at the entrance to ensure that air circulates beneath the mosque. Currently, there are vents under all the windows, and this airflow is directed via pipes to the rooftop." This restoration expert highlights the overall dryness and successful reinforcement of the mosque's structure, stating that the only issue in reviving this historical monument lies in the tile work. He hopes that these efforts will be recorded in the history of the country's heritage so that future generations can learn about the restoration and historical changes of this ancient mosque.

Conclusion

Tourism is considered one of the essential needs of human societies in the present era and one of the main drivers of the global economy. The flexibility, bright prospects, and rapid growth of this industry require serious attention and scientific engagement to harness its potentials. Historical urban spaces play a central role in this context. The Tabriz Bazaar, due to its global reputation and valuable internal capabilities, has a high potential for attracting tourists from all over the world. However, it has not been as successful as it should be due to internal weaknesses and external threats that have affected the market.

Restoring historical buildings is a noble and essential mission in our efforts to preserve and share cultural and historical heritage. These structures are not merely stone and brick edifices; they are our connection to the past and the source of our understanding of who we are and how we got here. The importance of preserving these cultural treasures cannot be overlooked, and their restoration is a lasting effort and expertise. This research focused on examining the impact of the restoration of the Goharshad Mosque on enhancing tourism. Mashhad, with the presence of the holy shrine of Imam Reza, annually welcomes millions of visitors from across Iran and the world, which presents a suitable opportunity to introduce other valuable historical sites in Mashhad to tourists. This, in turn, can lead to economic, social, and cultural advancement. The Goharshad Mosque, situated within the architectural complex of the Razavi Shrine and visited by millions each year, can play a significant role in attracting even more tourists. Thus, with investment and the restoration of historical buildings like the Goharshad Mosque, efforts can be made to enhance tourist attraction, ultimately leading to economic progress.

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