

## Influence of Western Culture on House Architecture from Jalal Al-e Ahmad Viewpoint: A Focus on Pahlavi-Era Houses in Urmia

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### ABSTRACT

#### Research Problem:

In every society, culture plays a fundamental role in expressing abstract ideas through tangible forms, and architecture serves as a crucial medium in this process. People in different cultures live in ways that are distinct from one another, making it necessary to design built environments that are compatible with the behavioral patterns and cultural practices of each community (Momeni & Masoudi, 2016). Architecture and the living environment significantly shape people's daily lives. Therefore, urban and architectural structures should be formed with respect for local customs and cultural preferences (Heydari, Alasti & Belkhari Ghehi, 2023). Some architectural theorists argue that culture is one of the most influential factors in architectural design, particularly in residential architecture. Hence, the configuration of residential spaces in any region whether urban or rural should align with the prevailing cultural context. The house, as a space for social interaction, carries a unique identity shaped by the culture and social characteristics of its environment (Mohebbi-Garmi, Farmehini & Ghiaei, 2021: 519). During the Pahlavi era, Iran experienced significant transformations in various social, cultural, and economic domains, influenced by Western culture. Architecture was one of the fields deeply affected, and residential design was no exception. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, a prominent critic of that period, regarded the Western influence on Iranian architecture as a key factor in structural and cultural changes in housing. He referred to this influence as "Westoxification" (*Gharbzadegi*). Concerned with cultural disintegration, Al-e Ahmad traced the roots of this cultural rupture to historical events such as the Mongol and Timurid invasions, the Iran-Ottoman wars, and the Constitutional Revolution. He believed that the penetration of Western culture resulted in the erosion of traditions, weakening of cultural identity, emergence of social conflicts, and devaluation of traditional values, ultimately leading to a sense of rootlessness (Fathi Rasikh, 2007: 145). In his works including *Westoxification*, *The Three-Year Report*, *Seven Essays*, and *A Hasty Assessment* Al-e Ahmad critically examined Western culture from artistic and social perspectives. His insights can provide a deeper understanding of the cultural changes in residential architecture during the Pahlavi era. Urmia, due to its geographical location and historical interactions with foreign cultures, was one of the first cities to be influenced by Western culture. The presence of foreign missionaries and the establishment of modern schools, hospitals, and libraries introduced Western culture to the city (Kavianpour, 1993: 445). During the Pahlavi era, these influences intensified, leading to significant changes in the city's residential architecture, which reflect the broader trend of Westernization. Pour-E'tesami (2020), in his article *An Introduction to the Analysis of Western Cultural Influence on Contemporary Residential*

*Architecture in Iran During the Qajar and Pahlavi Periods*, examines the transformation of residential architecture from the Qajar era to the late Pahlavi period. He demonstrates how traditional principles such as privacy and the use of inner courtyards were gradually weakened under Western influence, leading to a loss of architectural identity. Similarly, Majdi and colleagues (2023), in their study titled *Principles and Criteria Influencing the Physical Identity of Contemporary Iranian Architecture: A Case Study of the Second Pahlavi Era*, highlight how European modernist ideas shaped Iranian architecture during this transitional period, resulting in a quasi-modernist architecture influenced by international styles. Given the importance of cultural identity in architecture and the increasing dominance of Western styles during the Pahlavi period, it is crucial to examine how these changes impacted Iranian housing design. Analyzing residential architecture in Pahlavi-era Urmia through the lens of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's cultural critique can offer a deeper understanding of the cultural consequences of architectural transformation and provide a framework for evaluating cultural influences in contemporary Iranian architecture. This study aims to investigate the influence of Western culture on residential architecture during the Pahlavi period, with an emphasis on Jalal Al-e Ahmad's perspective and an analysis of selected case studies in Urmia.

**Research Question:**

How are Jalal Al-e-Ahmad's views on the impact of Western culture on architecture reflected in residential buildings from the Pahlavi era in Urmia?

**Research Method:**

This research follows a descriptive-analytical method, utilizing data collected by field observation, analyzing historical documents, and interviewing with both residents and experts. The study utilized purposive samples, focusing on 24 Pahlavi-era houses that demonstrate the architectural transformation influenced by Western culture.

**The Most Important Results and Conclusion:**

The results of the research During this period, the removal of social elements such as courtyards, the use of non-native materials, and the imitation of imported forms led to fundamental changes in architectural structures. These changes not only weakened the identity of Iranian architecture but also resulted in the standardization of designs and a decline in creativity in building construction. Moreover, the incompatibility of some buildings with the regional climate and an excessive focus on appearance reflect the expansion of consumerist architecture and a diminished emphasis on traditional and local principles. Overall, these transformations led to a weakening of the connection between architecture and Iran's indigenous culture.

**KEYWORDS**

Western Culture, Pahlavi-era Architecture, House Architecture, Urmia, Jalal Al-e- Ahmad