India and Iran are closely related with each other from the time immemorial. The contacts between the two countries go back to the beginning of the Indo-Aryan civilization. The ancestors of the Iranians and Indians came out from a common homeland, sharing common linguistic and racial past. After the advent of Islam in India these relations acquired new dimensions and prospered very rapidly.

Historians claim that Iranians and Indians belonged to a single family and lived together for many centuries in the pasture lands of Central Asia. The first Aryan migration from a common home, to India and Iran took place about 6000 B.C. They were divided into two branches, one of them came to the Indian sub-continent and another to Iranian plateau.

There are different opinions among the historians about the native place of the Aryans. According to Saeed Nafisi “Pamir” was the native place of the Aryans. He says, Aryans of Iran and India belong to the same race and same place. Before leaving that place they were living together. The similarities between the Pre-Islamic religion of Iran and India, the teachings of Avesta and Vedas, the similarity between the God and Goddesses worshipped in ancient Iran and Vedic India, bear testimony to their shared past.
Both the Aryan scriptures, Vedas and Avesta, declare that God and Ishwar are one and the same. The “Asur Varuna” of the Aryan religious scriptures of India is the same as the one known as “Ahuramazda” among the Iranians. All the attributes of Varuna enumerated in the Vedas are ascribed to Ahuramazda in the Avesta.

The form of worship prescribed by the Vedas and those by Avesta, is also same. What has been called yagya in the Vedas has been indicated as yasna in the Avesta. According to Saeed Nafisi, in Iran there is a ritual known as Yasna, this tradition is quite similar to the Vedic ritual Yajna or Yagya.

Avestic Gathas and Rigvedic Mantras are very similar to each other. The description of Mehr or Mitra in Avesta and Rigveda is so similar that there is no doubt of both being the same.

The mention of Iran in Rigveda and India in Avesta also indicates the relations between the two in ancient times. India has been referred to in Avesta in four passages, but the really important reference is to Punjab in the Vendidad. It describes that Ahuramazda has created sixteen excellent places, of which the fifteenth is the Sapt Sindhu.

In ancient time Iranian people used Avestan language and their kin in India Sanskrit language. In India, before Sanskrit, Dravidian language was dominant, but after the settlement of Aryans Sanskrit dominated over the Dravidian language.

Old Persian language is a member of the Indic branch of Indo-European family of languages related to it is Zend of Avesta, the language of the earliest Zoroastrian text which in course of time came
to be divided into two distinct branches, Indic and Iranian. In course of time one developed as Sanskrit and the other as Persian.

The political relation between Iran and India started with the conquest of Punjab and Sindh by Darius in 512 B.C. From this year the Indo-Iran relations went on developing uninterrupted.

Achaemenians established the greatest empire in the world of that time. This empire stretched from Punjab, in the East and north of Africa, and from Central Asia to the south-east of Europe, and were divided in smaller units called Satrap. Herodotus, has mentioned that India was the part of Achaemenian empire under Darius. These units were connected with one another by the routes, which were named Jadah-e-Shahi, the most famous are Shush to sard and Shush to Taxila.

During Achaemenid period Iranian culture and civilization influenced the Indian subcontinent in the field of art and architecture, art of writing and state management. Ashoka the great, used the art and architecture of the Achaemenians in construction of buildings. For example, his royal palaces at Patliputra have close resemblance with the Persepolis the capital of Achaemenids. Even the form of Ashokan pillars, with four Lions at the head show the clear influence of Achaemenian architecture. Even the decree of Ashoka found in the form of inscriptions on the pillars is under the influence of Achaemenian king. Most probably, the idea of inscribing the decrees on the pillar by Ashoka lies in the fact that he wanted the same importance and respect for his decree as was the case with the decrees of Darius. According to Ali Asghar Hekmat, there is no evidence of this kind of pillars and
inscriptions before Ashokan period, and this art was borrowed by Ashoka from the Achaeminian kings.

Ashoka used *Kharoshti* language for his writings and the root of this language is Aramaic which belongs to Iranian language.

The cultural relations between India and Iran started during the time of Anushirwan. During this period we find the cultural exchanges between India and Iran growing in the fields of music, medical sciences, story writing, literature, etc. Anushirwan sent his minister Burzue to bring the miraculous herb found in India. Burzue, in spite of his best efforts could not trace the herb but he found a book named “Panchtantra”. The book contained such fables which had miraculous effect like Elixir. Anushirwan ordered to translate it into Pahlavi. Later on it was translated into Arabic, Persian, etc.

During the time of Behram Gore Sasani Indian music reached Iran from India. It is said that when Behram invaded India and defeated the Indian king Shangul, he requested him to send some Indian musicians to Iran. On the request of Behram, Shangul sent ten thousand musicians to Iran.

The Pahlavi book “Mazikaan-e-Chatrag” describes that Chess reached Iran from India. Chess is purely of Indian origin. The first reference about the chess is found in the stories of Banabhatta by the name of “Shaturanga”. In sixth century A.D. when it reached Iran it became “Shatrang”. It was presented to Anushirwan by the Indian king when Burzovia returned to Iran, and Anushirwan in return sent a Backgammon Board to the Indian king.
Indians had been advanced in the field of science, Art, wisdom and medicine from the ancient times. In Iran Jondishapour University played a very significant role in the promotion of medical sciences. It was due to this university that some Sanskrit, Greek, and Syriac texts were translated into Pahlavi language.

As we know, Anushirwan sent his physician Burzue to India for studying Indian medicine and to invite Indian scholars to Jondishapour. When Burzue returned to Iran some Indian physicians like Kanga went to Iran and helped their Iranian counterparts in translating the books on medicine into Pahlavi. Kanga translated the Sanskrit books named *kitab al-semoom* and *Susruta* into Pahlavi.

We also have evidences of Iranians benefiting from the Indian traditional Ayurvedic system. For example in the Ayurvedic system physicians used wine for the purpose of anesthesia. Firdausi in his *Shahnameh* narrating the story of Rustam’s birth writes that the delivery required surgery so physicians provided wine to Rudabeh and then operation was done.

It is also said that, art of story writing has been transferred to Iran from India. The Iranians were so interested in maxims that ethical books were translated from other languages into Pahlavi. Anushirwan ordered Burzoe to translate the Sanskrit “Panchtantra” into Pahlavi. Another book translated from Indian language into Pahlavi was ‘Story of Blouhar and Bousazf’. It was through translations of these books that the art of story writing reached Iran and then to the Arab world.
Another cultural exchange can be seen in the form of religious beliefs. During this period, Christianity reached India from the west via Iran and Buddhism to Iran from the East. It is also proved that, during the Sasanid period Manicheism (a new religion formed by Mani, born in 214 A.D) came to India. When he was exiled from Iran, he came to India and stayed here for ten years and propagated his beliefs. Later on he was killed by Iranian king Bahram 1 in 273 A.D.

During this period some of the Indian rulers were taxpayers to the Iranian kings. Indian ruler kedar-1 once refused to pay taxes to the Sasanian king, but later on he became obedient and in the Iran-Rome war he was with Iran. It is also evident from the coins of the Ardshir Sasanian’s period that Hunas were the taxpayer to Sasanian kings. In north India Kushanas, Guptas, Pallavas and Harsha rulers followed the Sasanian pattern in the state administration, exchange of ambassadors, etc.

Sasanian King Khusrau parwez was contemporary of Pulakeshin the king of Chalukya dynasty. The evidence of Ajanta caves shows that there was close relation between the two and exchange of gifts and ambassadors to the court of each other were very common.

Suggested Books:

2. Nafisi Saeed, Sarchashma-i- Tasawwuf dar Iran Kitabfarushi-e-Faroghi, Tehran, 1346
3. Donald N. Wilber, Iran: Past and present, New Jersey, 1948,
4. Farhang Irshad, *Muhajirat-i Tarikhi-i Iranian be Hind*, Moassesah-i Motaleat-o Tahqeeqat-i Farhangi, Iran, 1345