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NADER ARDALAN

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INTERVIEWEE: NADER ARDALAN

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PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted for the Oral History Program of Foundation for Iranian Studies by Shahla Haeri with Nader Ardalan in Boston, Massachusetts in July 21, 1991.

Readers of this Oral History memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Foundation for Iranian Studies is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein.

بنیاد مطالعات ایران
FOUNDATION FOR IRANIAN STUDIES

این جانب متن نوار مصاحبه های انجام شده در ارتباط با برنامه " تاریخ شفاهی ایران " را به بنیاد مطالعات ایران هدیه میکنم تا در اجرای برنامه های آموزشی و تحقیقاتی بنیاد مورد استفاده قرار گیرد.

ملاحظات : اشکالی در چاپ و بخش نوار با اجازهٔ قبلی نادر اردلان صورت گرفته شده.

مصاحبه شونده آقای نادر اردلان

مصاحبه کننده شهریار حائری

تاریخ July 21/1991

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Nader Ardalan was born the renowned Kurdish family, the Ardalans. He grew up in the U.S. and moved to Iran upon the completion of his studies in the United States in architecture. Initially he joined the firm of 'Abdol-'Aziz Farmanfarmaiyan, but later formed his own architectural firm. Ardalan became well-known in Iran for his use of traditional motifs and Sufi imagery in architecture. His works, the Madreseh-e 'Ali Modiriyyat, the Arya Mehr Sports Complex, the Saman Towers, and the Bu-'Ali University of Hamadan all became important landmarks in modern Persian architecture. His recollections shed much light on the unfolding of artistic trends in contemporary Iran.

CORRECTIONS LIST

P.1	Abbasqoli should be 'Abbas Qoli
P.2	Ayyab should be Ayyubi
P.2	Faraggis should be Farangis
PP.2-5	Aliakbar Darwar should be 'Ali Akbar Dawar
P.3	Kaleh should be Jaleh
P.6	Nasqolikhan should be Nas Qoli Khan
P.6	Alliqoli should be 'Ali Qoli
P.6	Ahmade should be Ahmad
P.6	Amirmajid should be Amir Majid
P.6	Majid-e should be Majid
P.7	Mustowfi should be Mostowfi
P.7	Maqadam should be Moqaddam
P.7	Makek should be Malek
P.8	Myamir should br Niamir
P.10	Cortran should be Corcoran
P.12	Lajewardis should be Lajevardis
P.12	gruh-e Sanati-ye Beshar should be Guruh-e San'ati-e Behshahr
P.15	Balehtiar Baktiar should be Bakhtiyar
PP.15-18	Masjed Solyman should be Masjed Soleyman
P.16	Abolqasem Baktiar should be Abol-Qasem Bakhtiyar
P.16	Shoosh should be Shush
P.16	Achmanid should be Achamenid
PP.17,35,46	Persepolise should be Persepolis
P.18	Abdolaziz should be 'Abdol-'Aziz
P.19	Azis should be 'Aziz
P.19	Ahmad-Ibtehay should be Ahmad Ebtehaj
P.22	Darren should be Darreh
P.22	zigarat should be ziguarat
P.22	chilazanbil should be chughazanbil
P.22	Akamadite should be Achaemenid
P.23	Lajvardi should be Lajevardi
P.27	Ahmad Abad should be Ahmadabad
P.28	Feyzal Abad should be Faisalabad
P.29	Shykh should be Sheikh
P.29	Marikesh should be Marakesh
P.35	Syhun should be Seyhun
P.35	Akamenide should be Achaemenid
P.41	Ali Akbar Eatemad should be Akbar E'temad
P.42	Taffeh should be Tappeh
P.43	Takht-jamshid should be Takht-e Jamshid
P.60	"Kham bodam...." should be "kham budam, pokhteh shodam, sukhtam"
P.60	Konha should be Konya

ARDALAN, NADER

ARDALAN, NADER

Interviewee: Nardar Ardalan Session 1

Interviewer: Shahla Haeri Place: Boston, Massachusetts

Date: July 21, 1991

Q: Mr. Ardalan, it's really lovely that you accepted to talk to me. Could I please ask you to start by saying something about your family background and your upbringing? Your father, your mother, your siblings, if you'd like.

Ardalan: Thank you, Shahla. I'd be very happy to, and it's a pleasure to be participating in this program, albeit I'm only an architect. My family background has played a dominant role, I believe, in my own formation, principally, because my parents had been involved with the Western world in their own lives, before I came into being. Therefore, they probably were one of the first families in Iran that were experiencing the interaction between the Occident and the Orient, as far as contemporary Persians were concerned. My father was Abbasqoli Ardalan. He was born in Hamadan in 1900 and he was one of five sons of Fakhrolmolk Ardalan, who had been, of course, one of the senior

representatives of Kordistan in the Qajar Series of family reigns. Prior to that, the Ardalan family takes great pride in documenting their origins back to Salahoddin-e Ayyab in the early periods of 12th, 13th centuries and mythically going all the way back to the time of the Prophet Mohamed and the early beginnings of Hassan and Hussain in the areas that concerned interaction between Iran and Iraq as a regional area at that time. So the family name was indoctrinated into our very beginnings as young children as being a very important aspect, and the key element to it was nobility. Nobility of correct behavior, of good deeds, and of value to country, and of patriotism and love of country. This was deeply ingrained in us as children. On the other side, my mother Faraggis-e Ardalan, was one of two daughters; one of four children of Aliakbar-e Darwar. Only two daughters from his first marriage. Aliakbar-e Darwar, of course, again, very much an individual whose picture is here in our room.

Q: Which one?

Ardalan: There on the right.

Q: Yes, I see.

Ardalan: Of course, an individual who had been held in great respect because of his early contributions in the 1920's and '30s to the formation of contemporary Iranian financial and judicial system. He was educated in Europe, in Belgium and Switzerland,

and brought back into Iran an important contribution in the development of contemporary legal system of Iran. Of course, my mother's family came from Shiraz and so from the plains of Shiraz to the mountains of Kordistan, we children grew up in the valley between the low and the high place. The aspect of my own upbringing, immediately, I remember as an image in World War II when Iran was occupied by the Allies and we had a small courtyard home in Khiyaban-e Kaleh. I remember it had two gardens. The front garden had a lovely little hose, little fountain and an orchard of sorts with quince and pomegranate trees. The back garden held vast cherry tree orchards and that was a great source of joy. As a young boy, that one day my father planted in the ground an apricot seed and over the years I remember that this tree grew and it gave fruit. That was such a tremendous sense of reassurance that life, actually with your own hands, could be perpetuated. In any case, I grew up in this courtyard house from birth to the age of seven.

Q: How many siblings did you have?

Ardalan: Of course, my sister, Patty, was ten years older than I. She, with my mom and dad, had spent her early youth being educated in Belgium because my father, after he received his education at Dr. Jordan's school--at the age of 15 or so he graduated. He then worked, but at early mid career he went to England, where he studied at the London School of Economics. This was now in the '30s and my mother and sister went also to

Europe and lived in Europe for a few years while he was carrying out his studies. He came back with a very incredible document. My father wrote three large volumes on the entire British mint; its operation, its structure and even the equipment that was used in the production of the British mint. He in time helped set up the treasury of Iran and was actually the first treasurer.

Q: Was this his own personal interest, or did he have some connections that it might eventually be used by the government?

Ardalan: Darwar, my father---his father-in-law---commissioned him to journey to make such a study because this was part of the modernization of Iran, and so my father's task, as a person in the financial and in banks, was to go to England to carry out this study in economics, and then to document the British mint, the functioning of the contemporary treasury.

Q: That was in the 1930's?

Ardalan: That was in 1930's. So they then came back and in the period of the war, my father held, I guess, a number of positions. He was both the treasurer of Iran. He was also responsible for the import and export of Iran with regards to major trade. This caused a tremendous antagonism because he was a very honest man, and during the war, you can imagine that such a position would be very ripe for graft. His life was threatened several times because he would have no part of that. So I

remember that we actually had a threat on his life and that precipitated a policeman that would live in our home and a second policeman that would escort my father or our family wherever we went during the war.

Q: Do you know who made the threat, from whom it came?

Ardalan: I guess it must have come from some of the groups that were interested in making a quick buck out of the import-export. You know, the US Army was bringing a number of, for instance, rubber tires that would be thence through the Bridge of Victory, which was Iran's name, to supply the Soviet Union during the war. So you can imagine lots of inexpensive things being brought into a country and then people would love to sell it on the Black Market. So I think it was the Black Marketeers who had made this threat. In any case, we then became highly conscious of the preciousness of this small group: my mother, my father, my sister and I. Then, of course, my aunt and her husband, [unclear], who lived next door to us and then my grandmother. This was a very close-knit family. Also, the Ardalan family was very close-knit of five Ardalans, who was essentially the eldest--by the time, of course, I had come into being, my grandfather had passed away. Fakhrolmolk had passed away, but I do remember my grandmother Shahjan, all immaculate in white. A very tiny, beautiful lady and she had given birth to the most incredible group of men because the eldest was [unclear], who in many of the regimes was Minister and later in his life Senator.

Then there was Nasqolikhan, who played a very important role later during the Mosadeq period as the individual who actually went down to Abadan and closed the refinery to the British. Then there was, of course, Dr. Alliqoli Ardalan, who was our ambassador to the United States. Prior to that, to that, to the United Nations, and then subsequent to the United States, Iran Ambassador to the Soviet Union. My father --

Q: He's the fourth one?

Ardalan: Was the fourth one. Dr. Aliqoli Ardalan was the youngest one. [tape turned off] The third eldest was Amiramjad Ardalan, whose sons particularly, distinguished themselves in both the field of diplomacy and the professional field. Amiramjad's eldest son is Ahmade Ardalan, who was our Ambassador to the Soviet Union in the mid '70s, and Majid-e Ardalan, his youngest brother, who was a civil engineer, helped in the construction of the Karaj Dam with Morrison Knudsen, and in time developed one of the very fine construction companies Melli-Salehteman, a national construction company in Iran, and devoted much of his life to building in the Khuzistan region.

Q: It seems that most the Ardalan men had also sons. Did they have any daughters?

Ardalan: Of course they did. Of course they did. In fact, one of the [tape turned off]. Yes, the ladies of the family

certainly have a distinguished career. I'll just indicate one of them. Mehraqdas Mustowfi, one of the daughters of Fakhrolmolk, one of the two sisters of the five brothers that I have mentioned, had, of course, Baqer Mustowfi was the Board of Directors of the National Oil Company and then later on general director of the National Petro Chemical Company. His two sisters, Mehri Safiniya and Huri Maqaddam, these ladies grew in great stature as very strong individuals in Iran. Mehri Safiniya started the Safiniya School, which is a very fine school in Tehran, and then in time became a member of Parliament. And Huri Moqaddam started a number of the international ladies associations--I think Zonta International and some others. You know, in measuring the male and female, we have to address it with relationship to the Iranian condition. The fact that you might have been a member of Parliament is not necessarily a measure of a traditional measure of Iranian women's role and significance. I think that many of the mothers really were classic mothers in that they devoted an entire life to the household, to the house, to the raising of the children, to a very, very fine structured life for the family. Certainly I remember with fondness the many, many, many years spent in our home with my mom, who's still, of course, with us. Now, that has generally been the family background. I do want to say a word about my sister and her husband because they have played a very vital role in my life. Pari Malek married Isa Makek in the United States when we were living in America back in 1950's. Isa, of course, spent a number of years in the foreign ministry,

serving in both Switzerland and later on in Iran. In the foreign ministry he rose to several ranks. Particularly during the period of the '70s he was the Director of Protocol at the Royal Court and had a very significant role with relationship to the visiting dignitaries that came to Iran. I also had the pleasure of designing one of my several private residences for my sister and her husband in Tehran in Pol-e Rumi. Again, later on when we talk about the idea of architecture, they were very instrumental in supporting, again, the idea of integrating the Iranian traditions with contemporary needs in the house that I designed for them.

Q: Where are they now?

Ardalan: They now live in Virginia in the United States. They have three children, two daughters Bibi Myamir, and Minu & Ali, who's just finished college.

Q: So you were talking about yourself leaving Iran at the age of seven.

Ardalan: Oh, yes, of course. So it came to be that after World War II had ended, the Marshal Plan and the Point Four Plan that were American aid programs to countries who had helped the Allies during the war, was going to also be given to Iran. To negotiate that loan and to start that program in Iran, my father was selected as the financial attache of Iran to the United States.

So in 1947, '46, we migrated--my mother, my sister, my father and I--to Washington DC. We went, of course, through the circuitous routes of great departures from the old Mehrabad Airport, where at least a thousand people came out to say good-bye. Then, of course, the two-motored airplane flew from Tehran to Baghdad and Baghdad was clouded in, so they had to return.

Q: They returned back to --

Ardalan: Back to Tehran, where it had to land. This process of good-byes went on for three or four times, progressively the crowds getting smaller, until the last time it was just the immediate family. But in any case, we made our way through to England and then boat to Montreal and then a train to Washington DC.

Q: Did your father have an official assignment?

Ardalan: Yes, he was the financial attache of the embassy. So from the late '40s for a period of five years we lived in Washington DC, and I essentially went to elementary school in America and started from the first grade. Although, I had, I guess, gone to kindergarten school and to first grade in Iran. I remember with great fondness a number of plays that I had participated in. In fact, I remember my first drawings. My first attraction to painting had occurred in Iran. We had been to the movies, which at that time were a tremendous recreation

source for everyone, and the minute I came home, I drew what I had seen and my parents tell me that I was at that time five years old. They said that, "This young man must have some artistic inclination." So from the age of five, I had a tutor that would essentially practice my sketching and my drawing. So from a very early age I had my artistic side very much nurtured.

Q: Was it more like a [unclear]?

Ardalan: No, no, no, no. It was an instructor that would teach me life anatomy and the drawing of objects. When I was in Washington, I continued with this interest. I was enrolled in the Cortran Gallery of Art as a boy of eight or nine, and for several years I carried out still life drawing, pastel, charcoal drawing. I remember with a great sense of personal pride that I could at least reward my parents' support of me, that I was given many honors and awards at the Cortran Gallery of Art for the work that I had done. At the year's end, you know, they would display the work that the students had done, and some of these were selected for first prize. So my family background and my education now become really intertwined. From the late '40s until 1964 I stayed in the United States, moving in the mid '50s to New York, where my father took an assignment representing Iran at the United Nations in one of the capacities dealing with, again, financial and trade matters. We lived in Westchester County. I went through a wonderful period of going to the Boy Scouts in those years. I remember that I rose to an Eagle

Scout. It was a wonderful, wonderful period in my life. I loved the outdoors. I loved going out into the wilderness. This had been very much a part of my upbringing in Iran because the family were noted as great hunters, small game hunters. So I remember my family in Iran always going out every weekend to hunt. So the idea that I could at least carry out as a youth in America was to go hiking on weekends with the Boy Scout program.

Q: Did you get a chance to go back to Iran every now and then during the time you were in America?

Ardalan: No. We really stayed in America and I did not return to Iran until 1959, when I went back for a summer visit. It was, I believe, after my sophomore year of college. Other than that, I had stayed all that period of time, about eighteen years I lived in the United States. Now, after completing my high school education in New Rochelle, New York, I was given a very nice scholarship by the American Institute of Architects to study architecture at Carnegie Institute of Technology, which is now called Carnegie Mellon University. Really, the impetus to go into architecture came because of several factors. One is that I had always this artistic inclination. Two, however, my father had great hopes that his son would become an engineer. The third was that for a number of years, when my father and mother moved back to Iran and before my commencement of college, I lived two years with a family in New Rochelle whose father was an architect. He was a German architect, Gunter Arndt and his wife

Erna and their two sons, Gunter, Jr., and Peter. With these people, who lived on a very modest means, they were rebuilding their home, which was in this beautiful, old barn. They had started from one corner and they had entirely rebuilt this barn, and I lived with them during at least half of the process where we came home on the weekends and we would saw wood, and we would plane wood. I learned enormous amount about the treatment of wood and how you would rub, for instance, lemon oil into finished wood to get the full grain out of mahogany. I grew to love materials. He, in time, of course, wrote a beautiful letter supporting my candidacy for the study of architecture and when the scholarship came for Carnegie Mellon, it crystallized my future. So really at about the age of seventeen I went to a five year program and I graduated in 1961, with Bachelor's of Architecture degree. Architecture was as though it had been meant for me. It was like a glove and hand relationship. It fitted me absolutely beautifully. All my temperament, my artistic as well as my more technical dimensions were geared into union with this profession. I went from the 1960's onto graduate degree work at Harvard University. I came to Boston. Here I met a number of my lifelong friends. Of course, growing up in New York and in Washington, we had come across a very small community of Iranians who had lived there. The Lajewardis, with whom later on I was to build the Iran Center for Management Studies, and his brothers, with whom I was later on to build the gruh-e Sanati-ye Behshar. These were people that I had met in the early '50s as a young man growing up in the small Iranian community that was

there. Now, this explains a lot of why my interview today is in English. I have never received any formal training in Farsi. I have spent all of my life, essentially academically being trained in English, although my mother and father valiantly tried to bring Iranian books to my attention when I was in school. It was really difficult as a young son of an immigrant family growing up in America keeping up with everybody in English, to at the same time, do double duty and learn Farsi. Especially because there was no supporting community of any size to support the Persian language. There was no Persian schools and in the late 1940's, perhaps there might have been six or seven families. That was the extent of the Iranian community in Washington. In any case, I want to say something about that because philosophically I had to at some point come to grips with the language. My real feeling is that it's the world of ideas that count, and if you are able to grasp essential ideas, then the language in which they are grasped is secondary to the primary notions that are involved. So my work, later on as I'll describe, in the study of traditional Persian architecture, which had a lot to do with the study of Persian philosophy, I feel perfectly at ease with the philosophy of Iran related to architecture, without having necessarily to be fluent in Farsi. I did, however, grow fourteen years in Iran, where I established a major firm and I had to carry out a lot of work in my native language. This somehow was miraculously accomplished.

Q: But that's an interesting point. I mean, on the one hand,

you came here at such a young age and you seem to be so much at ease with the philosophy and ideas. How did that come about? I mean, architecture is more or less more within the realm of sciences, rather than philosophy. Of course, there is a philosophy of architecture, but how did it come about for you to have this love affair with the philosophy and ideas that are so deeply rooted in Iranian culture?

Ardalan: Well, I think we're progressing in our discussion, more or less, chronologically, so I guess we'll get to that, and very shortly. In 1964 I had already graduated. I had been working in San Francisco for three or four years building my first major buildings at the University of California and in the city of San Francisco. It became very apparent to me that work in a professional office in the United States was very predictable and I could see in the forty, fifty associates in that firm that in a matter of twenty or thirty years, I would be as they. So I could see myself mirrored in them. At the same time, I had, I guess, the psychological longing for my roots and my personal identity and thus, coincidence would have it, in 1963 and '4, as you know, Iran began another cycle of its contemporary history. It was reaching outward to have Iranian trained professionals return to Iran. It was the beginning of a growth period. It had gone through a major situation in the mid '50s with the nationalization of oil. By the mid '60s it was in a position to now reap the benefits of some of that nationalization and it had the need for professional cadre. Therefore, there was a reaching

out by various institutions in Iran to seek Iranians who had been trained abroad, to come back. So the National Oil Company of Iran was looking for a chief architect and I was a candidate. I was selected and my family and I--of course, now I have to mention that in the late '50s I met my first wife, Laleh Balehtiar Baktiar. We in time had three children together, but in the early '60s that I'm now discussing, my first two children, Mani, Helen Ardalan was born, who is now an architect, a fine architect.

Q: Your son or your daughter? Which one?

Ardalan: My daughter. My eldest daughter. We named her Mani in honor of the great painter. At the same time, in honor of my mother, whose name we had nicknamed Mani. Everyone in my family calls my mother "Mani." This is to indicate the mentality, though, you see. We had stayed in America so long that we thought we would forever stay in America and because my parents had come back to Iran, we thought we would never see my mother again, and so you name your first child in honor of your mother. That's how this remained. Of course, my second child is named Iran, and you can see already the mental associations with the country. She was born in 1962 and in 1964 we did return. We went to Masjed Solyman with the oil company. We spent two years with the oil company.

Q: Just may I ask you this question about your wife? Was she

also one of the Iranian immigrants in America and what was she doing here?

Ardalan: Yes. Laleh was one of many children that the late Dr. Abolqasem Baktiar had, and she was living in America with her mother, with her American mother, Helen. She was in college in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where Carnegie Mellon is located, and we met on a blind date, as chance would have it. That is what she was doing here.

Q: Okay.

Ardalan: So in 1964 to '66 we lived in Masjed Solyman. This was a very, very important transitional period for me because all of my education in the United States had trained me in a very empirical way about architecture, but when I went back to Iran, I found great difficulty understanding the traditional architecture of Iran because it was somehow not based upon the same principles as Western architecture, which had been my early training. During this period of time, I was fortunate in meeting Dr. Roman Gerschman, who was the great French archeologist who had first excavated Shoosh and then was excavating systematically all of the Partheon and Susanide and, of course, Achmanide monuments in Khuzestan. His architect had fallen ill and he needed someone to draw his finds, and so I volunteered to be his architect and on weekends, when I was not working for the oil company, I would draw these archeological finds. This was a very important item,

to see that with a paint brush, a little half-inch paint brush, these archeologists would dust away the thousand of years of history to find a stone, a threshold to, for instance, [unclear], which was one of the precursors to Persepolise that was built there in Khuzestan, near to Masjed Solyman. I think that deepened in my value of architecture. That in time, if you were to build symbolically and if you were to build with strength and that things would remain, that there would be a heritage that would value this. This left profound impressions on me. Still, I was not quite in a state of understanding, but I began systematically to photograph and to draw the traditional architecture of Esfahan, of Kashan, of Kerman, of Yazd, and of course, of the traditional great pre-Islamic monuments, as well. About this time, 1966, the University of Chicago was looking for someone to write a book on Persian architecture and my name was brought to their attention. So it happened that I was commissioned in 1966 by the University of Chicago to write a book on architecture. It took me quite some time to really complete that book.

Q: Did you have to come here?

Ardalan: No, no. I just needed more research. So it took about three years to complete that work because I wasn't satisfied that just simply photographing and measuring architecture would give me the answers that I sought. Because the question I was asking was, "What were the root, philosophical and theoretical basis of

Persian architecture?" When you do something Aristotilian, which is to measure the outside and to measure how a brick fits onto a brick, all that you understand is what came to be known later as the Zahir answer, the manifest answer. But what was lovely about what was becoming slowly illuminated in my mind, was that Iranian architecture and life, its philosophy, and its art, and its music, had a Batin, had an inner meaning, and without the inner meaning, the outer meaning would never have been made manifest. So I worked years at trying to understand this. I took the Aristotilian method of documenting for three years. At that time, 1966, I came back to Tehran. I joined --

Q: From Masjed Solyman?

Ardalan: From Masjed Solyman. I was made a senior member of the firm of Abdolaziz Farmanfarmaiyan, who was a very fine architect, who I had come to know because he had been one of the persons who had performed certain services of design for the oil company. So in my position as chief architect for the oil company, I had met all the architects of Iran, more or less, and he impressed me as an individual who had very fine capabilities that I would like to become associated with. So from 1966 to '72, for six years, I became his partner and in time--his office when I joined was about ten people--in time his office grew up to be more than two hundred people. But I had two layers of interest when I came to Tehran. One was my theoretical layer and one was my actual professional, functional role, the bread winner. The other one

the seeker of the soul. So the seeker of the soul went to Tehran University to teach for free. The bread winner joined Aziz Farmanfarmaiyan and designed--first, we designed the Saman Towers. This was a very, very interesting, I think cultural statement. In the '60s there was a tremendous westoxication, as we now know this word so well. We didn't know the word "westoxication," but most of us who were working and were concerned and who were thoughtful, knew that there was something about this idea in the air. But nevertheless, there was tremendous involvement with trying to bring Western image into our daily life into Iran, at least certain stratas of Iranian society. So therefore, when the first luxury apartment buildings were to be built, Azis Farmanfarmaiyan was commissioned to do this, and he was involved with a group of people, Ahmad-Ibtehay and several people from Siman-e Tehran, who were a group of his old friends from Europe. They were putting some funds together to develop what was going to be Iran's first high-rise, luxury apartments. Since I had had experience in doing high-rise buildings in San Francisco with the firm, I was the person chosen to design this building. Originally, one of these buildings was to have been an office and one to have been an apartment. So the idea of the image of the building grew in a certain way. In time, of course, both buildings became apartment buildings, and apparently, when they were designed and constructed, they were very successful. They sold right away. But into those buildings, a few things are important to know. First of all, Iran in the late '60s had a tremendous labor problem.

[end of side 1, tape 1]

Ardalan: -- late '60s of the Iran construction industry. Iran had very few trained, skilled workers, especially in the building industry. What we decided to do was to bring a new technology to Iran that would essentially be very skilled labor--it would not need a lot of skilled labor. What we did was to import from Holland a new technology that was called "precast" concrete technology. It was a very specialized system that I had used in the United States called "shock deton." I, in fact, helped negotiate to bring this factory to Iran. It was set up and it produced many, many nice, wonderful buildings, including the Saman Towers. Since Iran is in an earthquake zone, whenever you're building a tall building, you have to be extremely careful to have an earthquake resistant design. So we actually have done in Iran one of the most innovative constructions that had ever been done in the '60s, which was to do a precast concrete tower that was built in an earthquake zone. This precast tower, all of the walls and the insides, carried the loads of the building. At that time, this kind of technology had not been really implemented before. We achieved this also with the help of a number of very wonderful French engineers, who helped us in the structural engineering of this work. But in any case, while there was this technological contribution, I became very concerned because what I was doing was, I was building a home in a way that would not necessarily accommodate an Iranian way of

life. Because here we were building the first apartment towers, and the apartment, per se, without a garden, without a courtyard, without the sense of individual privacy that more or less a courtyard house had provided before, and the association with nature. Ultimately, I felt that the building of such towers was not culturally appropriate, nor environmentally appropriate to Iran. When the buildings were actually completed in the 1970's, my theoretical studies had been almost complete. I had already finished my manuscript "For the Sense of Unity." I had taken two years of journeys with my students at Tehran University to a number of the places, such as Shushtar, where we stayed a week and we drew all the systems of waterworks that had been carried out in the Sasanian period, and we even drew how the subterranean houses, with their cooling towers, had been designed. And the courtyard houses of Kashan and others had been drawn and used. By that time, I was philosophically, theoretically ready with a new package of ideas about adaptive environmental design and culturally relevant design. So, while Saman was haled as a great success because it brought new images into Tehran, my own mind was already seeking an expression of what my theoretical work had evolved. Two things helped there. In fact, three things. One was that we were designing, at that time, the Asian Games for the World Asian Games to be held in Tehran.

Q: What year was that?

Ardalan: Well, actually, it was the first of that--the Asian

Games were really held in 1972, but the 100,000 seat stadium was completed in 1970. So my work on that began really, again, in 1968, '69. I remember vividly anticipating the idea of place making. This was an idea that had not been very much nurtured in my professional work before. What does it mean to make a place, and this idea of "makan," of a place, of a unique place, sense of place. So I won't describe what we did, for instance, with the Asian Games in great detail, other than to say that there was an absolute barren, hot, arid, alluvial plain with a valley called Khargush Darren running through it, with a trickle of water that would run in this Khargush Darren.

Q: Where was that in relation to Tehran?

Ardalan: It was between Tehran and Karaj. It was to the west of Tehran. What started there, started from, I guess, my first awakenings, since my first awakenings were in the areas of Khuzestan where we had our first zigarat in chilazanbil and the use of earth and mud earth. That project has a very strong, I would say, preIslamic influence in its work because its imagery and its metaphors were all dealing with the Zigarat, with the great mound idea. But its place making ideas had to do with the idea of paradise garden, which is again a very Akamadite idea that we know historically through the recordings that have been made. So what we essentially did was, we took four million cubic yards of earth from this valley and mounded, compacted it at one end to create the slope for the seating of 100,000 people. At

the same time, this compaction created an earthen dam and so we flooded this valley and it became a natural reservoir of water. This natural reservoir of water was then used to pump and irrigate 165 hectares of landscaped area, within which was then set all the playing fields and the other sports facilities. So today, when you go to the 100,000 seat stadium environment, it's a total microclimatic change. You have created an entirely vegetated environment with water, water recreation and the idea of this earthen stadium. Of course, the stadium was then followed by other covered arenas, but already the theme and the idea that was in my mind, was beginning on Aryamehr Stadium, as it was called then. I guess it's now--I do not know what it's called today. That theme was the theme of the great mound building of earth structures of the Ilamite and early Acamenid constructions.

Q: That's interesting because the sense of unity has more to do with the whole idea of Zahir and Batin, manifest and latent. Whereas, this one seems to predate that idea. Is there any relation between this whole idea of mounding and is there an idea of unity there, to the relations to --

Ardalan: Oh, I think so. Oh, I think so. I think that, you know, theories take a time to jell, to become crystallized. Any architectural project takes years to conceive and to build. So some theories that you have, have only begun to blossom and they're not fully yet clear in your own mind. So you're using

those pieces that have been enunciated. In this one, actually, when you see the stadium from the outside, you see a very plane mound, which is surfaced in brick and concrete. Then you see several great gateways into it. As you penetrate through this gateway, however, you suddenly are inside an incredible interior. So I think that the idea of Zahir and Botin are here, but it is not in this building. It's not in these buildings that this idea was made fully manifest. It was really made manifest and realized, I think, first in what was called the Iran Center for Management Studies. In 1970 my friend from childhood, Habib Lajvardi, had a great idea. That was to try to bring Harvard Business School, where he had attended and had graduated, to Iran. This was also very much supported by the various businessmen of Iran and the ministries related in Iran, to try to develop at a higher level the management skills of Iranian management. The land was chosen in Vanak, again, a very dry, treeless site. The idea was that a school of management should be designed here. There were a number of proposals immediately given by the Board of Directors about what the image of this should be. One wanted it to be a tower--a Western image tower. Others said that it should be just like Harvard University. I listened to all of these.

Q: Were these architects who were making decisions?

Ardalan: No, no, these were really the Board of Directors, members of the Board of Directors who were businessmen. I then

visited the Graduate School of Design and the Business School in 1970. I met with the professors who were going to come to Iran to carry out this work, and I actually went to all their classes. I found that, first of all, there were several unique ideas that characterized the Harvard Business School. It was based on a group of six students working together, or eight students working together as a basic unit. Then it would go into a discussion group, maybe it would be sixteen people. Then it would grow to be something like fifty people. There were case methods. So really, the process of their study was something that I absorbed. When I went back to Iran, we developed an idea for the design that was, however, uniquely out of the image of Iran, as I had carried out in my work. One was, again, this idea of place making, and an important image was the Bagh-e Fin in Kashan. Here, 19th century garden, but which recapitulates gardens which have been in Iran for 2000 years. The idea was to create a school in which the walls would be living walls. That is, you would have the dormitories, where the students would live, on the perimeter and at the center you would have the library, and around the center and the walls would be the great garden. Then at the gateway would be the administration and at the other end of the wall would be the classrooms.

Q: Was your book published by then?

Ardalan: The book manuscript was ready. The book had not yet been published. The book doesn't get published, really, until

1972 and 1973.

Q: But it was in conjunction with your work.

Ardalan: It was definitely in conjunction with that. The Sense of Unity, which is the book that was published by the University of Chicago, had a subtitle and the subtitle is "The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture." I struggled an enormous amount with the subtitle. Finally, I met one day a fellow professor, who said to me, "Why do you bother with a subtitle? Why don't you just call it A Sense of Unity?" I said, "Well, because --

Q: Who was Persian or American?

Ardalan: No, no, it was an American. He said, "Why do you bother with a subtitle? Why don't you just call it A Sense of Unity and people will find out what it is when they open the book?" I said, "No, I want the title to be a gateway, to have an indication of the special emphasis of the view." That special emphasis in these three to four years of research that I was glimpsing, even when I wrote the Sense of Unity--by the way, in this work I was aided and assisted by Laleh Balehtiar, who I asked to coauthor this work with me. The reason for it was that she was also investigating the history of Islamic philosophy at Tehran University and she had great interest in the bibliographical and academic understanding of this subject. The

Sense of Unity, also, owes, I think, a tremendous debt of gratitude to the guidance that Seyyed Hosein Nasr gave to its evolution. Of course, it owes a lot of debt to many architects who were my mentors who never knew that they were instrumental. But you see, in the late '60s, one of the great architects in the world was a man called Louis Kahn. Lou Kahn lived and worked all over the world. He lived in Philadelphia. He was one of the great teachers at the University of Pennsylvania. This individual had an idea about architecture which dealt with the measurable and the unmeasurable, and he did a series of beautiful buildings in Ahmad Abad in India, and later on in Dakha, in Bangladesh and also in the United States, many of these that I visited. In Iran, later on, we were to work with one another. Before his death in 1973, we were to spend at least a year trying to do some projects in Shahestane Pahlavi in the central park of Tehran. In any case, Kahn's idea of the measurable and the unmeasurable triggered in my mind to look for the unmeasurable in Persian architecture. The reason why Kahn was looking for the unmeasurable was that he was very deeply influenced by Egyptian architecture, which also has this unmeasurable or mystical dimension in much of its ancient buildings. In fact, Kahn very much admonished that I would visit Luxor and other Egyptian monuments. In fact, it was very, very strange that the year, the day that I and my family were to go to Luxor to visit the Temple of Luxor and the Valley of the Kings and the Queens that he had directed that I would go to visit, when we landed there, we read in the newspaper of Kahn's death. So there was a tremendous

synchronicity involved with these guidance that you get from friends and associates.

Q: But you said he didn't want you to go there?

Ardalan: No, he wanted me to go there. He said that, "I think that for you to understand some of the things that you are struggling with, both in Persian architecture and philosophically what I'm dealing with, I think that you ought to journey to Egypt because there is also an ancient world, which has many mysteries in its way of bringing architecture into being, symbolically." So this is a way of saying that the Sense of Unity dealt with the idea of the Sufi tradition in Persian architecture because I found that when you wanted to deal with architecture, you had to go into who was producing the architecture. The architecture was produced by craftsmen. When you went to find who these craftsmen were, such as masons or carpenters or plasterers or mosaic layers and makers, you would find that these people were very much involved in craft guilds. Craft guilds had a master and that there was a master-apprentice relationship, which went all the way back to ancient times of the discipline of the master being both a spiritual master, as well as a master of the trade. I would like to say that in time, as I journeyed to other parts of the world, for instance, to Pakistan, in Pakistan in the early '80s, I was commissioned to do a series of hotels for the Aqa Khan. When I went to Feyzal Abad, I sought again to find what were the traditional crafts of this area, and I was told that the

traditional crafts were plaster work and mirror work in plaster. I asked to be shown the master of that guild. When I went to see that master, his name was, for instance, Shykh Mahi, he was exactly the prototype spiritual master, as well as a master of the trade. In fact, when I was interviewed by him and when I interviewed him, it was at the footstep of his mausoleum that his apprentices were building out of love for him. In time, in a few short years Shykh Mahi died and is buried in this environment. When I journeyed to Morocco, to Marikesh, to Fez, I also came across exactly the same phenomenon. When one now studies most of the ancient traditions of the world, whether it is in Japan, or it is in India, or it is in Iran, or Egypt, you come across the idea that the craft guilds and the master of the craft guilds have an enormous amount to do with how the architecture came into being. So therefore, these esoteric traditions, which had been secret traditions, which had been sineh be sineh, which had been breast to breast, were beginning to, of course, die in the onslaught of the contemporary world. But still, at the time that I was in Iran and I was operating as a young professor at Tehran University and I was moving from one place to the other, I was able to experience people who had this kind of background.

Q: Were you able to find any such masters of guilds?

Ardalan: You know, the interesting thing about Iran is that in Iran, we, as a group of people, are already so spiritual that in comparison to much of the rest of the world, already we live

every day of our life in this very cosmic way. I mean, just think about Nowruz and other relationships that you have. By the way, the mystical Sufi tradition that I addressed has definite preexisting preIslamic context. This is a tradition of a way of looking at life. So if one were to look at it, such a tradition goes all the way back to what is called the Hermetic Tradition. It goes back to Hermes Trismagistus. It goes back to ancient Egyptian work. At the same time, very much the same things we have been finding going back to very ancient, mystical dimension of the Zorastrian faith. My work was not to study religion. My work was to study the impetus to art and to the creative process. That is really what I went after. That's why the Sense of Unity is organized the way it is. It first begins by concept of existence and then it goes into concept of space, and concept of shape, and concept of surface, and color, and material. I think that that book was like a road map about how to design within a more indigenous pattern. Something that, perhaps, later on now, when we go and we now look back in retrospect, the revolution in 1979, etcetera, people were also maybe thinking about such things related to other facets of life. For us, this kind of theoretical revolution--and I say "us" because there was a handful of young people who were involved with this. There were some of my students at Tehran University. Some of these students came and joined me when I set up my company called the Mandala Collaborative, Sherkat-e Mandala, in Tehran in 1972, and we carried out very methodical coincidence, professional and theoretical work, trying to extend this vocabulary and grammar of

traditional Persian architecture. Therefore, you see, the Iran Center for Management Studies was the first test case, really, of the full blown theory and the interesting point about is that is was reviewed as a success the day it was opened by the King and Queen of Iran, and at the same time, after the revolution, it's one of the key theological centers in Tehran, still being very popular with a new regime. So there must be something sui generus, there must be something universal about what is being done in these theoretical days and in that place making and that architecture, that can appeal to both a very Western oriented mind of an Iranian, as well as a very, let's say, fundamental Orthodox mind set. At the same time, I must say to you, many of the Westerners who came and lived and taught at the school, loved it as well. So I would like to say that possibly we are touching on certain things which are sui generus to humanity. Of course, since Iran is such an ancient land, I'm sure that there are in Iran the residue of a lot of primary architectural place making ideas, which are just generically accepted by humanity. Such as the idea of the Paradise Garden. In any case --

Q: May I just say, it seems that actually your book and your work were somewhat prophetic in the sense that what you just were seeing as an artist, was later on to be transferred into people's discontent with their possessing their place, where they were living. It seems to me that what you talked about, this thing being sui generus and the whole idea of Makan and place making, because people were upset about --

Ardalan: Oh, I think so.

Q: I mean, now that I am listening to me, sounds as if it was prophetic.

Ardalan: Well, you know, I'm sure that prophetic has not very much to do with it, but I think it was so blatantly evident in the 1970's, and now we go to the other cycle. We went from the mid '60s to, let's say, '73 where Iran had a certain income and therefore, a certain amount of possibilities that it could build. From 1973 Iran suddenly had this windfall income and the amount that it was going to build was enormous. So consequently, the amount of mistakes that we could make was also enormous. That's where you're right. That's when this thing started to really show itself. Most of the models that had been brought back to Iran by people who meant, I think, very well--whether they were educated in France, in Germany, in England, in the United States, or in Italy, because that's really the five sort of countries in which Iranians had gone out to study. But since we had 100,000 Iranians studying in the United States, versus much less in the other countries, the impact in the United States in the '70s became much more rampant. What I think immediately started to happen is that these people brought back models of progress, of so-called progress, and the models of so-called progress had very little to do with both the philosophic cultural dimension or the environmental limits of Iran. I remember people

complaining to me that in houses that I did, I was still designing courtyard houses with closed walls. They said, "Why don't you tear the wall down, open the garden out to the street so that people could benefit from the landscape onto the streets?" Now, this was a classic statement about doing a house in Boston or in Chestnut Hill, which is a complete different ecology, completely different way of living life because a house there exists as an isolated object with grass and lawn all around. The Iranian house was just the opposite. The garden was on the inside and the house was all around because we aimed for privacy and this idea of Zahir/Batin was very important to us. So people were not understanding the philosophic base of their culture that they were throwing out, and they were trying to espouse other shapes and ideas of living without fully digesting what was happening. So I do believe that a lot of what we went through in the late '70s was the wrong environment buildings, both in the individual unit of house or place of work, as well as the wrong environment of city.

Q: Do you think some of these mistakes that were made have to do with the fact that there was tremendous increase in the ability to buy things or to do things? I mean, this money that came in. Do you think if that money hadn't come in, we would have been more cautious in making plans or implementing them?

Ardalan: Of course. Of course. I'm sure we would have been. You see, we went through a situation where there was a lot of

wealth and the wealth had to be consumed. So we took all the ready images and it was just like buying a Sony radio, as we want a Western house. If we had had less income, I'm sure that we couldn't have afforded that Western house.

Q: Were conserving.

Ardalan: But at the same time, if we had had more models available that received the seal of approval, so-called, that were both indigenous to our culture and to our climate, then I think people would have been using those. Actually, some of that happened. When the Iran Center for Management Study was built, it was built using this buff brick in Ajor-e golbehi. Up till that time, this was viewed as the common man, the poor man's brick and it was not very elegant. Suddenly, after this building was built and it received such high praise, Ajor-e golbehi became the standard for a lot of people because it carried with it the symbol that it was used in a very prestigious building, and so it means that this is a sign of arrival or of a good place.

Q: Why do you think such models, such more indigenously inspired models, did not become as dominant as the [unclear] progressive in the Western --

Ardalan: That's a very good question. I'm sure that you'll interview and speak and do a particular research on that. In the article I wrote for the Encyclopedia Iranica, I give a context of

what I thought might be a brief answer to that. I'll give you a summary. I think that, really, just before World War II and following World War II, up to the '60s, the School of Architecture at Tehran University was the premier place in which Iranian architects were trained. Well, how did the School of Architecture there get started? It was set up by a very gifted man, Henri Goddard, who had later built, of course, the very nice Museum of Archeology in Tehran. Henri Goddard students, such as Dr. Mohsen Forughi, for whom I hold a lot of high regard, but he and Dr. Hushang Syhun, and later on, others such as Ghia (?) even Aziz Farmanfarmaiyan, all were [unclear] graduates. The [unclear] in the 1930's and '40s was essentially producing an architectural idea, which was the idea of the object. The idea of the isolated, beautiful object, which are manifested most significantly by, for instance, the great monuments that both Forughi and Syhun built to the great men of Iran--such as BuAli Sina monument in Hamadan or Hofes Tomb, etectera---were the classic idea of the object in space. True, that in a certain way in the Akamenide and Sasanian periods, we were building some objects in space, but definitely from the Islamic conquest of the 7th century on, we reduced the concept of object building and we were making much more something that was called the "seamless garment." That is, everything molded into one another. So if you were to fly over Esfahan, you would understand the seamless garment. It is one great brick with some holes punched into, the holes being the courtyards, which were the lungs of the city or the lungs of the house. This idea of the seamless garment, of

what is another theory that was written about in the Sense of Unity is called positive space theory. It's a very interesting idea. It's picked up today by the most leading architects, even of the United States and world. For instance, Ian Tai and other people use this theory called space positive architecture. They take it right from the Sense of Unity. They acknowledge it and they talk about it as coming out of Iran. This idea of what we're speaking about, of an undifferentiated, continuous pattern of a social fabric without objects suddenly being made the main elements, such as you find, for instance, in Paris. You know, you find the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, etcetera, these objects in space. Iranian architecture in the last 1400 years has been very, very much removed from that way of architectured building. But the contemporary architecture that came principally from the [unclear] to Iran through Tehran University was object oriented buildings, and [unclear] influence. Yes, they did take their students to study, but they came back with motifs, so they would build, for instance, the great buildings that were done for many of the bank buildings or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or the Ministry of War, has the Persepolise stairs and the lion eating the bull, etcetera. These are all just symbols or objects being taken. They weren't studying the philosophy of the place making or the social idea of the building. I think, in fact, one of the great, great lack of attention of the [unclear] school was twofold. One, it had no social content and, second, I think it had no ecological understanding. So they just took motifs. They would take the head of a bull from the column in Persepolise and

it would become an object in space, and we're not an object in space. That's against Zahir/Botin. Zahir is very, very plain. It has only a gateway that says, "Something lies between you and I. It's inside there and it lies hidden for you to discover it." Whenever you make an object, the object shows itself and there is no inside. So this was, I think, one of the shortcomings of our education in Iran. Tehran University was then transformed. In the late '60s, groups who had been educated in Italy, who had been educated in the United Kingdom and America to a small extent, penetrated and replaced the French speaking and French educated background. I would say Tehran University principally stayed in that melange of three cultures with some indication mainly to the Italian way, for ten, fifteen years. Melli University was the other school of architecture. Again, that had not such a [unclear] precursor. It almost went directly Italian. Again, the school that you had there, from that period of time, had a very interesting social content. So there was social understanding, but at the same time, there was a very leftist thrust. So they were not at all interested in looking at the indigenous, Iranian concept of Zahir/Batin, because that had a religious implication and they were anti-religious. So now comes some key elements, I think, that are interesting professionally. How, then, this group of architects working in Iran with the various government agencies interacted. In 1970 the first International Congress of Architects was held in Esfahan. A group of us promoted that this would come into being. I, by that time, was very anxious to have some place to

present the Sense of Unity research. Some of my other friends at Tehran University were very much interested in other aspects that they felt had been totally neglected. So we produced an invitation through the Ministry of Housing Construction and maybe fifty of the top world ranked architects were invited. Lou Kahn being one of them; Buckminster Fuller, Paul Rudolph and many names came.

Q: Were these government sponsored?

Ardalan: Government sponsored, but essentially I would say four or five young Iranian architects structured this discussion.

Q: Did you have to submit a plan to the government in order to get permission to have them?

Ardalan: They were very interested.

Q: Was this through [unclear]?

Ardalan: No, no, this was through the Ministry of Housing and Construction. The Minister of Housing and Construction was very eager to help support these kinds of things because they wanted to have some immediate -- I mean, any government body wants to have an immediately tangible product and a conference is an immediately tangible product. At the same time, they were interested in bringing in world figures because that would bring

attention to Iran. We were very interested because we thought we would gain ammunition, we would gain support. If we only demonstrated to these people what was in our minds, then we would gain support, and in that way legitimize what we thought was a more sane way, rather than this absurd aping of Western patterns. So in Esfahan a wonderful series of conferences occurred, exactly that kind of confirmation did occur. The Queen inaugurated the session. She felt very touched by what she was hearing and I think that because she had already a background into architectural education, she immediately could sense that there was something of value here. So I felt that from that period of time on, she was very much a supportive figure in the resurgence of a new Iranian identity in architecture. Definitely she was a person that in many other venues and in other domains later on, supported the idea of an integration of indigenous Iranian architecture. She was trying to do it in her own way by the clothes that she would wear, etcetera. Now, whether that was successful or successful, I'm not going to talk about that. But in architecture, I felt that there was a person that could be even considered a patron to this movement.

Q: It's interesting that despite her support and, of course, that became quite evident. I remember her wearing the indigenous dresses and all that. Despite her support in the realm of architecture, apparently that line of thinking didn't become as dominant as the one that was thinking of the progress and modernization and highways built.

Ardalan: Of course, because that had to do with media. The movies that you went to and the magazines that you saw were all coming out from the west. So in comparison, this was a five percent impact, versus ninety-five percent impact, but it was five percent. It was better than nothing.

Q: Of course.

Ardalan: So in 1970 this was held and, of course, that's the point. Although we'd hoped for a tremendous effect, the effect was marginal because architecture is marginal. Architects are marginal in the overall thrust of society and the images and the policies. But in any case --

Q: Marginal as city builders?

Ardalan: Marginal as an impact. I mean, you know, classically it has been documented by the great Greek planner, [unclear], that only about four percent of a country's buildings are done by architects, and ninety-four percent are done by other ways, by private means, non-architects, using the simple construction that exists. Of course, those people were highly motivated to try to become suddenly very Western. You see, there was the equation of progress with Westernization. This was what our conferences were trying to deal with. Philosophically, we were trying to say that progress was spiritual progress; progress was social progress.

Progress was not a GNP progress. This was, of course, by some members of government viewed as--in fact, they were very anti this kind of view. Now, in 1973 and '4 --

[end of side 2, tape 1]

Q: This is the second tape of Shahla Haeri interviewing Mr. Nader Ardalan and today is July 21st, 1991. Please, Mr. Ardalan, you were talking about Bu Ali Sina University.

Ardalan: Yes. In 1974 I received an invitation to participate in the design of an interesting new university, which was an experiment, because it was to be the first Franco-Farsi University in Iran. It was a project to be jointly sponsored by the Iranian Ministry of Education, as well as the French Ministry of Education, and it was to be a regional university, very much dealing with these ideas that we've been talking about--Sense of Unity ideas, indigenous ideas. It was to be a university that would train people that would essentially be able to relate to the indigenous needs of the various regions of Iran. This one being regionally related to Northwestern Iran, it was focused on that part of the country. Dr. Ali Akbar Eatemad was the chancellor of the university and we worked with him, particularly in developing this project. To show you how the projects in Iran would work--and most large projects would take anywhere between three to five years from inception to realization as a minimum. So you were really gauging a lot of dynamics in this period of

time. This was to be for about ten thousand students. It was to incorporate, also, their housing, the facility and administration housing and their sports. Originally, it was to have been built on a place called Taffeh mosalla, which you may know Hamadan has this very prominent hillock, and Taffeh mosalla being what it is, people would at some point be upon the hill to pray. But the reason for its choice was that it was an open site within the city, and more or less located near the bazaar. So the theme had been that we would build on this city, but we would try to also build a piece of the university by rehabilitating part of the bazaar, and in this way to get some social uplift because we would invest in the city. Ironically, in time it cost so much to build on top of this hill because it was made entirely of stone--it was a stone hill--that this idea proved far too expensive and the site was relocated to somewhat distant in the area of ganjnameh.

Q: Was anything built and then left?

Ardalan: No, no. It was designed, but not implemented. At that time when this was also changed, we had a change in administration and Dr. Farhad-e Ryahi became chancellor of the university. We designed a university, taking great care to preserve all the existing orchards on this existing site. In fact, the first pieces of the university were commenced, but then not completed because of the change in regime. But recently I've been sent photographs that the university has been, the first

phases have been completed from our existing plans. This particularly university, again, tried to use indigenous systems of construction and signs and symbols of architecture that would be more indigenous to Hamadan and Persian architecture. Already, by this time then, when we would make such proposals, it was expected that the idea would be in this manner. Instead of a high-rise building, it was only two stories high and it was a very introverted looking series of buildings. We were actually, again, assisted in this project by a French architect, George Candilis. This was very much typical of all projects in Iran. All the major projects in Iran, although they were commissioned to Iranian architects, there was a sense that association with a foreign partner would enhance the work. By this time my firm was already a very large, sizeable firm and actually, we had more capability in our firm than our French counterpart.

Q: Why? I mean, why this need? I was about to ask you, in fact, why was there such need or such perception of foreigners enhancing projects that were conceived by Iranians?

Ardalan; Well, in 1974 the amount of projects that the government had on the boards were so extensive and if you actually compared it to the amount of available capability indigenous to Iran, you would have a shortfall. So there was a need, but this need was not the same in every firm. Some firms were very highly evolved; some firms were not so evolved. It was just the method of obtaining work at that time that you really

did have to have an associate. Of course, we all made sure that in any of these associations it was very clear that we were interested in pursuing certain lines of thought, and if people were not interested in pursuing these lines of thought, we would not associate with them. But in any case, you must know, I don't have anything against good ideas from anywhere that would improve our product. So here you had a man who was one of the great elder statesmen of a period of European architecture who had been to a lot of universities--Berlin University, Toulouse University--and to my credit, I think, had the Iran Center for Management Studies and a few small works. So I could benefit from this background. I mean, I never have had that kind of problem.

Q: I meant more as a political decision. Was it intended to give it an impression that it is something more modern, Western, progressive?

Ardalan: I think that in our case it was that we were associating so that no I's would remain undotted. That is, you would be aware of a very vast experience, which I think we all welcomed. I mean, we visited these universities in Berlin, in Toulouse and learned some things about technique, whether it was how to build in concrete or how to do a new classroom idea. But in any case, this was the motif of most of the projects in Iran. There were these sort of associations. We also were commissioned by the Institute for Children and Young Adults to do a creative

art center in Tehran.

Q: What was it called?

Ardalan: Kanoon-e Parvarashe-e Fekri. The reason I say some of these is that a lot of these designs were complete in drawing form, but then remained dormant for ten years or so and just last year my son came back from Tehran and he brought pictures of the fact that, for instance, this Creative Art Center, just below the old Intercontinental Hotel in what is called Parle Laleh, is now being built. So it's very interesting that in these past ten or twelve years a lot of my work has been built in Iran without my being there. In fact, there are a lot of publications that have even taken old documents that we have, papers that I have made, that I have written, and now they have translated them into Farsi and they have appeared about Iranian architecture.

Q: Do they credit you?

Ardalan: Yes, they're in my name, but I never saw the translation, or no one ever communicated with me to discuss the translation. But nevertheless, it's interesting that these things are sort of happening. So about this time in 1974, the Second International Congress of Architects took place. Again, this was to keep this momentum of relevant architectural design alive, and the Congress was called "The Interaction of Tradition and Technology." Again, this was inaugurated by the Queen of

Iran. It was very well attended from architects from around the world, and by that time --

Q: Was it in Esfahan again?

Ardalan: No, this was in Persepolise, in Takht-jamshid. By this time it was more or less acknowledged that the ideas of indigenous, culturally relevant form and of environmentally adaptive form should be used. This was now not terribly questioned. Again, I think that the impression that I had of the conference was that it was marginal, that the thrust of the main society, with the vast economic gains that they had. Tehran was growing. The buildings that were going on had a bit more of Iranian character, but very little to do with indigenous place making and real correct environmental design. We continued with our work. We developed a number of new cities. We were commissioned to do a new city for the Petro Chemical and Mitsui in Mah Shahr.

Q: This is after the conference? This is as a result of the conference?

Ardalan: No. This was just progress of work going on. I don't think that we gained commissions by the conference. I mean, sometimes in America you go to a place--you see, in Iran you never marketed for your product. You were given work because --

Q: Who would give you the work?

Ardalan: I think mainly the structure of work came through the government for most of us who had good sized firms. The process was that it would be organized through the Plan and Budget Organization and then the specific ministry that was responsible. For instance, if it was a university, Ministry of Education would have someone who would be represented. If it was housing, the Ministry of Housing would have someone to be involved. So we received a commission to do, actually, in time, three or four new cities. One was the new city in Bandar-e Mah Shahr that was to support the Petro Chemical industry. That was for two hundred thousand population. Again, this city was designed with the intention of adaptive design in terms of climate, but with the idea that there was such a rapid pace to build it, that we had to import new industries to build these housing in a very short period of time. I think that that in time has proven not to be very successful, the idea of importing a lot of technology to build rapidly. Ultimately, I think, the quality of the work deteriorates and, really, I experienced that just next door to us there was housing being made for the workers who would build the city, and it was being made by a local contractor, using very traditional means. He built, I think, a far nicer or equally nice first little housing in the same period of time that we did with all of our industry. So I think that one of the feedbacks that we have is be very, very careful about introducing a lot of high technology into traditional societies.

Q: How was the whole idea of population growth and increasing population taken into account with these new projects?

Ardalan: Well, first of all, I might say that in the late '60s the first idea of master planning was coming into being in contemporary Iranian work. That came through the auspices of Victor Gruen, which is an American, Los Angeles based planning firm that associated with Azia Farmanfarmaiyan. So during the time that I was with Aziz, I worked many years on the new master plan of Tehran. These plans normally would try to take demographic projections for over a twenty-five year period and study them over increments of five year terms. The root fallacy of this kind of master planning was that if you actually took the demographic trends, Tehran in 1968, let's say 1970 and you projected it out to 1995, Tehran would have grown to be sixteen million people. Yet, the government, when they heard these demographic projections, said, "This is rubbish. We cannot afford to have a city more than six million, at maximum eight million, because we can't get enough water into the city, etcetera, etcetera. So you'll design only a city of six million people or eight million people." So I think that master plans are one thing and the true sense of appreciation of what these numbers mean is another. I believe that it takes some generations to get used to this process of planning. So when you have the governmental authorities indicating that demographic projections must be forgotten, it's a perfect indices that

they're not taking the master plan seriously. In any case, the Tehran plan did lay the fundamental, main routes of movement: east-west of Tehran. This was the famous golabi plan, the pear, Tehran conceived as a pear, meaning the old Tehran, Tadjrish at the head of the small part of the pear and the lump at the bottom mainly the old city. Then in between it was really the Shahestan area or Abbasabad, so-called, and that it was to grow east and west to Karaj. I think that the main circulation lines were manifested and have been built. It's just the fact that I think Tehran today is twelve million population.

Q: Just about.

Ardalan: I mean it's some number like that, and today is 1991. So I think that the projections that we were making at that time were just about right. Now, following the Tehran master plan, the exact same model was used to do master plans for all the major cities of Iran. In fact, it was very interesting. Just last month I had a gentleman come and visit me, a very fine architect who remained and has been working in Iran. He has been doing planning in Iran, and when he showed me, he brought to me the master plan of his last work, when he opened, I could see every image, every diagram is exactly the same diagram and image that we used in 1960 in the master plan of Tehran. That is, there was like a stamp of approval about a way, and then everybody had to use this way. It might be correct; it might be completely erroneous; it might be irrelevant. I don't think it's

erroneous; it's sometimes irrelevant. Also, I don't think people grow. One of the phenomenans that I have come across from people who have gone back to Iran in the last ten, twelve years, have been there and come out, is that they say that the ideas about architecture and planning that were evolved in the mid '70s haven't evolved any further than that. People are still dealing with the same ideas. It hasn't advanced in terms of how now do you solve it; how do you implement it. They reached a certain peak of ideas. I was saying, here's a gentleman that came out doing a huge master plan, but yet, from page one to chapter ten, he's following the same rule book that was established back twenty some years ago. Those rule books were partly brought from planning in Western societies, so I don't think that the master plan idea has had the kind of commitment because master plans must be also economic plans. We viewed these not really as economic plans. Also, in Iran, speculation of land --

Q: How do you mean you didn't view them? You mean conceptually you didn't view them?

Ardalan: No, I mean, in Iran the master plan by the governments were much more viewed as physical plans of where roads and utilities should go, than as economic investment plans. So consequently, when there wasn't that kind of economic investment or commitment to the plan, the plan would never survive. [tape turned off] There was--and I'm sure that it still continues--the fact that land speculation was intimately associated with master

plans. That is, he who knew where the master plan would grow a new road or would tend to develop, that area of land would have fantastic speculation of purchasing of land in advance for low prices that then could be resold at higher prices. So there was a tremendous sense of secrecy, then, in keeping the master plan unknown or unfolded to the masses. I believe this is an indication of a problem sui generus to Iran. That is, this lack of citizen participation. No one was really trusted to know about these kinds of elements, such as what are the aims of the master plan. There was no participation of the citizenry in the development of the master plans. So today, for instance, when we do master planning here, you go through a rigorous citizen review process of one community, of a town and another town, before you can obtain a plan. Today, or twenty years ago in Iran--it hasn't changed--you do not have citizen participation review process. Now, it may be that the citizenry are not educated enough to take care of it, but then that tells you something about the process. You pick a process called a master planning process without the component of citizen participation, and so it is in a way doomed. Its destiny is sealed. It won't be anticipatory enough with regards to the real needs of the people. Well, in any case, the master plan process did produce a whole series of different works. Most of us who were serious about our work really did bring the best capabilities that existed in the world. For instance, to find a new site for the city of Mahshahr we had to actually select what was the best new site with regards to land, hydrology, ecology, demographics, transportation, economics,

etcetera. Through this process my own maturing about environmental adaptation grew. I had the great fortune of working with a wonderful man called Ian McArd, who was the director of the University of Pennsylvania's regional planning department, who was a great environmentalist and wrote a book called Design With Nature. Some of these kinds of capabilities came to Iran and, in fact, this same gentleman helped with a project that we were commissioned by the Department of Environment to do called Pardisan, which was a recapitulation of the world, actually, on a site in Tehran. You would then be able to study the different environments of the world and the different adaptive mechanisms of survival of humanity. This would be ready lessons that then even children could come through, such as the Museum of Natural History or ethnography, or aquarium or a zoo or other environments. These would be educational tools. I think this project, called Pardisan, essentially started by Skandar Firuz as an idea when he was Director of the Department of Environment. These kinds of projects I hope one day will be built in Iran because they are both recreational, educational and innovative in the way that it would give personal pride to a country that you've built actually such an entity. Around this time, a third sort of milestone occurred in Iran. This is back in 1976. The National Library of Iran Competition, the so-called Pahlavi Library Competition was held. By this time, even in the instructions to all competitors, the ideas of Sense of Unity are already into the booklet in terms of describing how the contenders should design their work to be

culturally relevant and environmentally adaptive. Not in terms of viewing their design, but in terms of viewing them criteria. This is a picture of the jury that was made out of the many of the world architects who came to participate in the jury of this competition.

Q: These were the jurors?

Ardalan: These were the jurors of that particular competition. It, at that time in 1976--that's me. I was president of this jury. In 1976 it drew six hundred participants.

Q: Was it an international competition?

Ardalan: International competition.

Q: Was this one of the first or few competitive projects or were usually the projects placed in competition or government sponsored?

Ardalan: No. In Iran the International Competition was very infrequently used. The process that was used really was that the Plan and Budget Organization had a set of registered architects and it had ranked and categorized them. Certain groups, group A, B, C, and D, for instance, the groups that had the most capability, the largest offices, the most technical capability, that had done the larger works were able to carry out large

works. The smaller projects that came were given to the smaller firms or to the firms that were just newly formed. Then in between were ranked others. There was so much work that no one was short of work. The telling thing about Iran is that at the time of the revolution in 1978, there was more fee paid to architects and engineers to do drawings and designs of projects than were actually spent on the construction of projects. That is, there was so much on the drawing board. Now, this is both good and bad news. It's good news in that if anyone ever made a survey of what was on the drawing boards in 1979, you would see a tremendous maturing of Iran architectural capability. It was really, I believe, a highlight, high mark. The bad news was that so much effort had been put into technical theoretical development and so little in the ground, that people didn't see the products of what they were promised and so they were left dissatisfied. I believe that our own history, that is, our own architectural history, I think will show that we did reach a very fine high level in the late 1970's in architectural development. Then, of course, there was a period of a lull in which the revolution did not have the principle aim of going into developing new work, nor the economic means, I suppose, when there was a war. So that now that the country begins to grow again, I think that a valuable thing as a challenge to the present regime, is if they would revisit and critically evaluate the projects that were -- Because the country spent their resources to train and bring all that work to that level, and it will take an enormous amount of resources to get that capability

back into the Iranian professional cadre. Because, you know, most of the professional cadre in Iran left. I mean, of the million or so people that left, most of them of the professional cadre left. You know, I think that we had approximately four or five thousand architects and engineers of various degrees or proficiency at the time of the revolution. I think that easily more than half of that group left the country. At that time the population was thirty-eight million and now it's close to fifty-five or sixty million, and your number of graduates in our universities have not increased from the time of what was being produced at that time. So we must be in a dearth of capability. I'm really very, very optimistic about the fact that there will be some amelioration to get this kind of capability back into the country to help with the rebuilding, or else the country will go through exactly the same process, hit and miss, that it did in the '60s, you know, because it's a learning curve. Or else the people will just be repeating whatever people had been doing in the '70s, like I was saying, about these master plans. I mean, the master plans come and they're using exactly the same images with no growth after twenty years.

Q: Do you think that not much is being done in terms of looking for indigenous solutions? You have already laid the ground work.

Ardalan: I'm sure there are. I'm sure that there are. I am sure that today there are well meaning, young architects in Iran who are fervently committed to this, but if you count them, they

will be two handful of people.

Q: Is the condition ready for that?

Ardalan: And is the condition ready for that? I think that, in fact --

Q: Do they get support from --

Ardalan: Exactly, exactly. You see, the same thing that we were speaking about before. You have to build a public conscience about it. So we tried to build a public conscience about it through international conferences that would give support to ideas, through competitions that would give support to this idea, and then actually through demonstration of the built work. People would go to it, they would say, "Oh, yes. How nice. This is both Iranian and it's modern." Now, whether today's regime is fully at ease, relaxed enough to let this happen, one doesn't know, but at the same time, that's a challenge. If you can have various conferences that really bring East and West to talk about the problems of growth, enormous problems of growth, much more than we ever had on our hands when we were in Iran. At the same time, to build with far less resources. We had a much smaller population with far much more income. Today you have a much larger population with much less income.

Q: May I take you back to one thing you said before, and I think

it was very interesting and I'd like to pick up on that. It was the notion of civic participation. Now, you mentioned that there was not any possibility for the citizens to participate in the projects that were being made. Who prevented that and did you or people who were involved in these projects ever suggest this idea, that this was a very important component that was missing? What was the dynamics of that, that missing dimension of planning and implementation?

Ardalan: I mean, I think the answer is self-evident. Iran was and probably still is a very hierarchic society, autocratic by structure. So therefore, the issue of democratic participation, I believe, is a novel idea. So it hasn't been tested out. So when we were operating, we were operating within an autocratic process. Now, in retrospect I can remember that as a child, in my mind, it was ingrained in my mind that politics is dirty business, stay away from it and keep your nose involved with what you're doing as an architect or whatever that you're doing in your own sector. So we were like a lobotomy performed on most of our minds not to be involved in the political process. Therefore, the good aspect of the political process, meaning citizenship, was also erased with the less aspects that politics has to deal with. So therefore, I believe that there was neither the preparation in anyone, whether it was the client or the architect, to promote participation. Nor, I guess, have we tested, do we know whether the citizenry would be really involved. I do want to say, however, to you, that there are few

indices in which for me I found that the citizenship participation and the participation of the people was truly beautiful and meaningful, and perhaps had it been given some kind of chance, or still if it were given a chance, it may be a valuable tool. I remember in 1965 I had been one year back in Iran in Masjed Solyman and there was a call in Masjed Solyman to design a school for the children of Masjed Solyman. Yes, the oil company had its schools, but the people that lived in Masjed Solyman as sort of an indigenous population, had no school. I was asked to design that school.

Q: Who asked you that?

Ardalan: It must have been someone in the oil company related to liaison was the expression--between the oil company and the community. In any case, I felt it a wonderful opportunity and I donated my services free of charge to design what came to be called the Dr. Iqball School, and it was for, I think, three hundred or four hundred students, elementary school. By golly, the local contractor gave much of his work free of charge. People brought various contributions to make that school happen. As I recall it now, and I made a point to remember this number, I think that the school came out costing fifty cents a square foot to build. It was a stone building with [unclear] made out of reeds, which were from the local reed beds in the marshes in that area of Khuzestan. So in such a local self help build process I did see a tremendous sense of participation. Perhaps in trying

to do some of the university work in Hamadan where we were trying to take derelict old pieces of the bazaar and to rehabilitate them, again, there was a sense of citizen participation by people telling us stories about what this place had been like and how they would welcome that it could be activated because it would activate their immediate vicinity. I just think that it's an area that has not been tested out. At least it wasn't in my fifteen or fourteen years of work in Iran, but that's part of the process of what is called anticipatory design. You really can't anticipate your client in your own isolated mind. You have to do it through this kind of feedback process.

Q: Was this not suggested to the government who was commissioning that you do it?

Ardalan: The government would have thought it ridiculous. I mean, these were works carried out for the people. You know, it is Big Brother designing for the people, you know, well intentioned. Paved with all good intentions, but if it hadn't been for our own research to try to understand some of the indigenous life patterns, rights, rituals, signs and symbols, we could have designed anything and it would have been approved, and some were. I mean, if you take a look at that retrospective, what I'm suggesting about architecture of Iran in the '70s, you'll find some works that were completely off the wall. I mean, completely still irrelevant and some that are very relevant. Of course, you know, architecture is a subjective

art. So, while I may feel that it's relevant, another pair of eyes looking at it, may find critical issue with it. Well, I think we've gone through quite a bit about this story. I can only tell you that in the late '70s there was an interview that I participated in in Newsweek magazine. The interviewer asked me, "Well, how do you see the future?" and with absolute candor, I responded that, "I see the future in Iran in my field as something that could be a great breakthrough in the integration of our traditions and contemporary ways. I see something quite beautiful that could happen as a new synthesis, as a new creation." On the other hand, I could also see it as being utterly cataclysmic. It all depends on the leadership and which path we're guided. They printed that in Newsweek.

Q: Another prophesy, huh? [laughs]

Ardalan: And I was duly chastised for my cataclysmic comments, but by golly, it came to be cataclysmic. But I want to go back to something personal, rather than the other areas that we have discussed. That is, the lesson of Iran for me and why I think every night in our dreams we dream of Iran and we want to return and to work there and to contribute there again. Because I found in Iran a most profound personal meaning for my existence, and I couldn't find it--I would not have found it, I'm sure--had I not returned to Iran, had I not gone through this burning. You know, Rumi speaks about "Kham bodam Polehteh shodam sulehtam". I visited with my wife and family Konha and all the family, all my

four children, my wife, Shahla, who I married in 1977 and who has journeyed with me through all these journeys and has gone through with me the ups and downs of the past fourteen years. I think what we really have gained, what I have gained, is this idea of the hidden inner meaning of life in my own self, in my family, in expression, the seal, the divine hidden within one, and the idea of the manifest that is only somehow an outer shell to protect this hidden treasure that lies within us. Surely we relate back to Qoranic admonitions, but at the same time, when I speak about these things to my Zorastrian friends, they're equally able to tell me about expressions from the Avesta. That touches the same subjects. So it is another way of looking at life. It's a gestair. It's a world view. I believe that there is a --

[end of side 1, tape 2]

Ardalan: No, I'm addressing the idea of our Iranianness. I'm not addressing it as a limited point of view, but I'm addressing it as a very ancient culture that has contributed so much to the formation of world thought that we now, in fact, lose sight of how much contribution the country has made to world views and still, I would imagine, it has to contribute to world views. Forgetting politics; forgetting the transitory nature that fifteen years ago we were held in highest of esteem and then eight years ago we were held in the lowest of esteem, forgetting all these vacillations, but looking with certain equanimity to the overall long range contribution of Persian culture, I really

think that we owe to ourselves and the world to maintain a conscious, verbal, visual, audio remembrance of what it is that we offer to the world, with no sense of great prejudice at all, but as a memory of world culture. I think that this memory of world culture has a lot to do with our architecture and our arts. If we can just preserve the architectural traditions that we have and the arts that we have, I'm sure that we're going to be able to once again make a very, very important contribution to world culture. That's what drives me. When I came to teach at Harvard in 1977, when I sensed a need to emphasize my academic dimensions, and that's why I came away from Iran.

Q: Is that when you left Iran?

Ardalan: I left Iran in 1977 and I established a branch of my firm here, of course, going back and forth to Iran almost every two months carrying out a lot of my work. But I came here with the intention that if one was going to make an impression on this idea of integration of tradition and contemporary life, or tradition and technology, one had to also do it at the root source of some of this work. So Harvard and MIT and Boston and this area are such a seed bed of the growth of world thought, of academic thought. So if one can also present in these environments our cultural views, and legitimize them and dignify them with the stature that they deserve, that's also a contribution. That's another reason why I go back to this issue that I addressed. I really believe that we're going to go

through an entire other phase. It's an awakening that all of us are sensing. You know, there's a new consciousness. This new consciousness has to do with an enormous amount of understanding and sharing by all the great world cultures. We now know so much more about the indigenous Indian cultures of America and the Hopi and their rights and their rituals, as well as the aborigine, as well as this, as well as that, and what are we going to do with this new awakening? Because all of these new awakenings and these new educational tools about these ancient traditions are teaching us that there are these hidden messages, these symbolic dimensions, these transcendent dimensions within an outer world that we live, which is highly material, highly what you might call deterministic, highly measurable, as Kahn would say, and yet, the unmeasurable exists. The Zahir and the Batin both are complimentary. So this fusion of the inner and the outer, I believe, is a new quest that is going to happen. It's part of our contribution. Now, you may say what does this have to do with the oral history of Iran? Well, I think the oral history of Iran goes on. My challenge to the Iranian is, what do we do next? Not what did we do. That has been done. Whatever you did is for the record. What now remains for us to do? What have been our messages and our lessons about our relationship to the environment? What have been our ways of integrating the transcendent within social change? If we can answer those, I believe that we're going to be making, again, a new contribution in this new [unclear] consciousness that exists in the world. That's, I guess, my next mountain to climb.

Q: I want to thank you so much. I would love to go on and ask you more questions.

Ardalan: Please don't. [laughs]

Q: Thank you very much.

End of Interview