

In mid October 2015 I was a guest of the Institute for Physics and Mathematics in Tehran. It is the same Institute where Maryam Mirzakhani worked, the first woman awarded with Fields Medal, one of the most prestigious prize in the field of mathematics. I was honored and very delighted. I was looking forward to meeting the country which gave birth to great poets, philosophers, astronomers and mathematicians.

I was devotedly preparing for my visit by reading the verses of Hafiz and Sadi and especially Nizami who had been systematically studying arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and with a subtle tone introduced astronomy in his beautiful poems Leila and Madznun and Seven Beauties.

My friends who have already visited Iran told me that Iranians enjoyed books and that I would meet very well educated, warm and hospitable people. So it was. I met three people who left a strong impression and made me wish to return to this beautiful country.

The very first day of my stay I got acquainted with Mahya from Kerman. I was intrigued by her dark red almond eyes. She approached me directly and thanked me for respecting the tradition and wearing a scarf. She is highly intelligent but modest woman, she is shy but open hearted, almost childish.

Mahya is a math professor, very diligent and responsible. She lovingly speaks about her students. She invited me to visit Kerman and a village near Bid Khan where it snows even in summer. She took me to bazaar. She accompanied me patiently along the narrow allies searching for hidden shops where I wanted to buy essential oils as a gift for my friends in Belgrade.

I instantly became very fond of Mahya. I chose a blue carpet with the motives from her native place Kerman. She was telling something to the salesman with a serious look on her face after which he lowered the price by one third.

Later on she explained that she had told the salesman that we were math professors. That is why he lowered the price without second thought. The education is highly appreciated in this country especially the people who are passing the knowledge to children. I was moved.

The wool Persian carpet with pomegranate colored flowers became to me the most precious gift in the world. I will put it near the bookshelf to remind me of Mahyu from Kerman and the nice gesture made by a salesman at bazaar.

My second acquaintance was the curious Marzieh from Mashad, a postdoctoral student at the Institute. She has travelled a lot and has many friends around the world. She was taking me to the floral Golestan palace where bright sky penetrates through lace arches. We entered the palace of mirrors where the joyful game of reflections and lights begins.

Small and big mirrors keep changing, forming flowers, kaleidoscope with thousand and one petal with my image in each. Bewildered by magic I am trying to discern myself. Marzieh is amused by my bewilderment.

Fine carved glassworks, stained glass, almost lace filigree, colored glass. Everything is very delicate and gentle and this beauty takes the breath away. We then went to the jewelry bazaar. There was so much gold at one place. Bracelets, earrings, necklaces, rings. My eyes were dazzled by gold. I felt like laughing at the thought that thousands of these bracelets will embrace the hands of luxurious Iranian women. Calm and flaunting, proud and down to earth, Iranian women with their beautiful faces were passing by.

I stopped at shop of spices where I bought cardamom, rose oil, petals of aromatic flowers and much more. The salesman asked where I am from and he gave me one bottle of oil as a gift. With our hands full we stopped at the pomegranate shop. I was pleasantly surprised that they use the same word “nar” for pomegranate as the Serbs.

Marzieh and I were looking for the same words in both of our languages, we were playing. Red pomegranates cut in half neatly aligned in the shop’s windows lure us to drink the juice whose sour-bitter flavors immediately awaken palates and raise us to bliss.

Marzieh gave me Rubie by Omar Hajam as a gift, written in Farsi, English, German, French and Arabian. She explained me the calligraphy. I wished I knew Farsi to correspond with her. I also wished to meet with her in the future.

Prudent and widely-educated, Ali was our guide at the Museum of Carpet and Iranian Cinematography. I asked him thousand questions about Persia, Darius, Zarathustra, Ahura Mazda, Isfahan, Persepolis, invaders, the biggest diamante in the world. I wanted to know about their tradition and customs.

He answered to all of my questions with great precision without missing a single detail. He was surprised by my curiosity and eagerness for the imaginative world of tales and characters that are part of Iranian history. He translated me Hafiz’s verses, talked about Simorg, Magidi, cypresses in Shiraz and all the wealth that this big country and its people have to offer. He explained that cypress is a very common motif in poetry and on the carpets. It is a symbol of free upstanding man, honesty, integrity and virtue all of which adorn these people I have met and became fond of. They made me feel like a little water on the palm. I am grateful to them.