



## Observing role of Tradition and Identity in Iran's Contemporary Architecture

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### Abstract

It has been concerned about the role of tradition and identity in Iran's contemporary architecture believing that today, these two elements are not in their own place. On the other hand, some architects attempt to mimic the western designs in order to precede the advancements in world architecture making Iran's architecture similar to western designs. Also, to develop an Iranian identity, architects attempt to mimic Vernacular Architecture of Iran as Islamic architecture and/or national identity resulting in giving Iranian identity to the buildings. Generally speaking, it could be stated that contemporary architecture of Iran is immersed in uncertainty about tradition and modernization. Previous experiences dating back to four or five decades ago have shown that despite lots of deficiencies, there is an expectancy for modernization of Iran's traditional architecture concerning today's needs resulting in efflorescence of historic and cultural identity. The main objective of present paper is to observe role of tradition and identity in Iran's contemporary architecture, for this library method including descriptive type within observing texts, books, references and papers has been used. Obtained results report the great change in architecture domain by which preserving traditional and identity principles in today's modern works could be seen.

**Keywords:** Tradition, identity, architecture, art.

### Introduction

In spite of modernization emergence in Iran, tradition has not lost its place in people's life or society ever. To best understand Iran, their related societies and their people, one must first attempt to acquire an understanding of their culture. It is in the study of this area where the Iranian people's identity optimally expresses itself which beliefs, thoughts and also capabilities and abilities of Iranian people give meaning to tradition and this term "tradition" can be only meant with recourse to what people think about it. Long history of tradition in Iran up to early decades in Qajar age is replete with Bitter and Sweet events which it had preserved all aspects of it including the celestial and terrestrial aspects. By the passage of time, Iranian architecture used to be retrieved in the society by which Iranian history could be reviewed which use of innovation in international societies<sup>1</sup>.

Cultural identity of architecture is immersed in values perceived only in traditional buildings, since architecture forms only while the values involve in it regarding that without values, Iran's traditional architecture would be worthless. Certain design elements of Persian architecture have persisted throughout the history of Iran. The most striking are a marked feeling for scale and a discerning use of simple and massive forms. These master craftsmen have shown their considerable skills in the decoration of buildings, adding value to the work of Iranian architects. We had looked at the various disciplines of craftsmanship and artistry used for decoration of buildings, such

as tile works and mosaics, plasterworks, paintings, and so on, albeit not in a systematic way. Decorations of buildings, and design of buildings and internal design have always been regarded as a part of Iranian architecture. The internal and external spaces of buildings were almost invariably decorated. For example, the ancient Egyptians paid special attention to internal decorations of their temples and mausoleums<sup>2</sup>. In Europe too, there has been a long tradition of paying special attention to internal decorations of buildings. The consistency of decorative preferences, the high-arched portal set within a recess, columns with bracket capitals, and recurrent types of plan and elevation can also be mentioned. Through the ages these elements have recurred in completely different types of buildings, constructed for various programs and under the patronage of a long succession of rulers. It is true to say that many master craftsmen have always worked alongside Iranian architects throughout the centuries, particularly with regards to the way Iranian buildings are decorated – both internally and externally. What is "art" in the sense of the Islamic tradition? It is argued that Islamic art has historically been excluded from Western notions of art; that the Western aesthetic tradition's preoccupation with the human body has meant that Islamic and Western art being perceived as inherently at odds. However, the move away from this "anthropomorphic aesthetic" in Western art movements, such as modern abstract and constructivist painting have presented the opportunity for new ways of viewing and evaluating Islamic art and architecture. Drawing upon classical Arabic literature, philosophy, poetry, medicine and theology, along with contemporary Western art theory, the

author uncovers a specific Islamic theoretical vision of art and architecture based on poetic practice, politics, desire and the "gaze." In so doing, he addresses the lack of recognition given to early Islamic thought and aesthetics in comparison with other historical periods and traditions. Traditional art includes traits making it distinctive from other forms of arts, without apparent form of religion religious art could be entitled to traditional art. But religious art includes wide scope including total religious and less religious scopes, i.e, traditional art includes a spectra of traditional art within religious art, but there is not such a non-religious art in traditional art unless with looking at apparent form of religion which in this case such an art with religious issue might be emerged, but this art would not be found with traditional scope. Works by Michel-Ange are those works with religious scope, but the traits of his works are not embedded in traditional art or it does not mean the religious art. Traditional art has to involve religious scopes and cryptic and divine traits have to be used in it, otherwise it might be devoid of divine and religious traits. Otherwise, it can be stated that traditional art is not regardless of religious slogans. Raskin-Morris, scholars in architecture field has chosen mixture of art and material to represent a better definition for architecture<sup>3</sup>.

**Architecture definition:** Ruskin and Morris as the architectural scholars have chosen a composition of body and knowledge (substance and art) for this definition. Ruskin in his book of "The Seven Lamps of Architecture" (1266/1846) has defined the architecture as "the art of building and trimming a construct by human energizing human mental health as well as emphasizing the aesthetics, usefulness and spiritual aspects more than the application. The architect relates to a certain discipline far away from the chaos, has a strong organization and geometry and the more important is the creation that displays the beauty and is far from boredom<sup>4</sup>.

architecture in Iranian plateau which it mainly involve a drought filed, is a field of ground –oriented issue in which the ground is used for the architecture, whereas in the wet parts of Iranian plateau, the architecture is not considered. Using the depth of ground and the materials like mud could provide a favorable condition for living in tropical areas. For this, it could be stated that intelligent ideas have been used in traditional architecture of Iran. Using the centrality pattern in the tropical areas in Iran is useless and the observation about the iwan and yard in traditional architecture of Iran and the difference of iwans in perspective of their location is from the evolutionary perspectives in this system. In comparison of two patterns of prominent buildings like mosque and caravansary, the difference of yard and iwan could be observed. One of the specialties of mosques is that they must be pair, for instance symmetry must be kept to attract glance to the center of construction, which is the most important part of building. This point was also considered in caravansary. Yard lays the symmetric facades side by side.

In architecture of caravansary, value of all fronts is almost

equal, considering application of those two buildings, as short-term residences. Their common aspect, from point of view of location of various elements of architecture and various applications, is multifarious. In square-shaped plans of caravanserais, there is a basic difference between lateral places of yard and cornered places. This difference could be found, because repeating lateral rooms in building is rather stable and similar, while rooms in corners and on ribs are quite different. In architecture of caravansary, in fact the most stable part of building, constructed around yard, are residential room and chambers, repeated without basic alternation. Entrances and corners, in which the less important spaces are set, are from variant elements around yard. The direction of buildings based on the ecological perspectives provides the conditions by which the summer and winter spaces would be logically found in designing the environmental spaces. The appropriate direction moreover keeping the residents safe against heat and cold, it would be also helpful against the inappropriate winds. Indoor alleys are a prominent perspective in urban open spaces which it plays very important role in arid regions. The creation of indoor ceilings is influenced of paying attention on ecology and cultural or social factors. In providing the environmental needs for the residents in a region and the convenience conditions, indoor ceilings play very important role<sup>5</sup>.

## Methodology

Generally, research methods in behavior sciences could be observed in three bases of objective, controlling variables and the method for data collection. This research is such an applied type of research reporting that it is descriptive type as well. On the basis of the way for data collection, it could be stated that the present paper is such a descriptive research for that a real data collection is needed. On the basis of taxonomy based on the method of research, this research is such a descriptive survey research. The descriptive statistic methods were used for data analysis. Using descriptive statistics with the objective to summarize the data collection, the proceeding has to be done on the statistical society. Hence, the objective of descriptive statistic is calculating the parameters in the statistical society using demographic variables. Descriptive research is entitled to Non-experimental research dealing with the relations between variables, hypotheses, principles and/or theories within accuracy. It is expected that if variable of 'x' relates to variable of 'y', the probability of predicting such a phenomenon would be possible reporting that obtained results could come useful for representing a new hypothesis. In contrast with empirical project, researcher does not bring about any change in variables for representing a descriptive research type which no condition is necessary for occurrence of events. In fact, in case of no analysis or observation, events observed or described would occur. Descriptive research includes events occurred previously which they might associated to situation at present time. Researcher searches for the issues including data collection to test hypothesis to give a response to the questions represented about current situation. Actually, descriptive researches have

both basic and applied aspects which in applied perspective, planning, decision making processes and policies are used<sup>6</sup>.

## Results and Discussion

On the basis of traditional architecture, simplicity is the main origin in this type of architecture in which rebellious movements against creation system as the main trait for art creativities are avoided. Also, traditional city following natural system are made only from soil in which natural resources have been used as well; Muslim traditional architects had the knowledge and skill to do everything. Actually, traditional architects who made the buildings with brick, mud or wood in any region of the world within any economic and ecological conditions, could create the masterpieces which are unique in the world. Spirituality was the main fact among traditional architects which all of them were well-aware of that - it helped the Muslim architects to build Islamic buildings in all regions of the world as building the constructs with mud, wood, brick and stone respectively in Mali, Malaysia, Iran and India. This innovation appeared in traditional architecture in a way that Muslim traditional architects despite most of modern architects who were well-aware of originality of materials had experience about the reality of materials using in the buildings which they had Intuitive knowledge about the objects. This awareness includes many aspects of reality in materials which it has sustained hidden in perspective of classical physics in the teeth of being surrounded in orientation of Empiricism. Hasan Fathi, Egyptian architect, says about the yard of house: yard with pond, a little garden and sky above it is a symbol of small world showing a big world. Four little gardens in the yard are the symbol of four main elements and Central pool with flooding water in Input and output streams in yard shows everything going on in the world<sup>7</sup>. All the factors mentioned above as the Unitarianism trait in Islam religion or global aspect of this religion and also essence of Quran descended in addressing to the nature of human, as well as other factors as holiness of earth by prophet Mohammad through Institutionalizing ceremonies of praying or esoteric science of geometry and the concinnities related to architecture and many other factors, creation of Islamic architecture as the main Islamic arts has come possible.

**Architecture in Islamic communities:** The goal of contemporary theoretical and critical discourses on knowledge, art, and education in the Islamic world is to improve and foster the appreciation of Islamic architecture and urbanism to promote excellence of research in this field, to enhance the understanding of Islamic culture, and to promote knowledge and the protection of the Islamic cultural heritage. The mission of the program is dedicated to the study of architecture, urbanism, landscape design, and conservation of architectural and urban heritage in Islamic societies. The development and advancement of knowledge related to architecture and urbanism in the Islamic world is the core of the program, exemplified by its construction, acquisition, assimilation, dissemination, and application to contemporary interventions in communities with

Muslim traditions. In support of the vision and mission to improve the quality of the urban environment in the Islamic world, the objective of the program is to educate future architects, urban designers, landscape architects, and urban planners, to appreciate, comprehend, and guide the development process of architecture and the urban built environment and the socio-economic and socio-political contexts within which it exists. Graduates will develop an in depth understanding of building and planning principles characterizing Islamic cities.<sup>[8]</sup>

**Islamic identity and its symbol in traditional architecture:** Urban centers in Islamic cities evolved over long periods of time with generations of craftsmen whose sensitivity and experience added variety and a diversity of styles to the environment. The architecture of the Islamic world throughout history adapted to different cultures and existing traditions of buildings without weakening the spiritual essence which was its source of inspiration. The identity of the city lays in the relationship of its elements. These relationships were generated by the harmonizing of the community with the forces acting on it that enabled the interaction of cultures, building methods and methods to evolve an Islamic identity in the same way a language maintains its own identity even when it absorbs outside words. Islamic-Iranian identity before constitutionalism is known as a mixture of Iranian and Islamic culture, so that components of Islamic-Iranian identity include national norms and values as hospitability, chivalry, cultural heritage like traditional arts, national myths like Rostam and Esfandiar, national symbols like flag, geographical traits like ecology, religious beliefs like religious ideas, traditions and rites.

Here, there is a question as “how factors forming identity manifest in architecture?”; in this relation, artists use traditional patterns in order to give identity to his/her art work. Along this, concept of style used to analyze the history of art and determine the identity of art work found an active role in creating art work. This method using in Iranian architecture to revitalize architecture with identity is entitled to the method used to rehearse the previous patterns, but the fact that “whether this method is used to create architecture with identity or not?” is not discussed here. Use of symbols is another method using to give identity to architecture. People with any culture and in any region have specific symbols for giving identity to the architecture<sup>8</sup>. These symbols could be entitled to religious and national symbols. Howard Mark Schultz does not believe in building as only occupying space which here the only thing prioritized the most is disclosure of place and making relationship between earth, texture of structure and the sky. Form and space of nature as a specific connector between earth and sky gives identity to place<sup>9</sup>. These traits are seen more in comparing traditional architecture which density of region in traditional architecture and its deep relation with earth depict everything. Importantly to say, traditional method can be used in order to give identity to architecture. Also, any image in decorative architecture includes great deal of values including values generated of people’s ideas and insights in the society<sup>10</sup>.

With decorative architecture, architect could appear the ideas of society working in the construct by which giving identity to architecture would come true in the end. To perceive identity of Iranian architecture, observing principles of Iran's traditional buildings and finding about their notions could come useful<sup>11</sup>. According to viewpoints of Dr Pirnia, Iranian architecture traits include five principles as People-centered, avoiding absurdity, self-sufficiency and introspection which all these could be seen in all traditional buildings.

According to the facts mentioned above, symbols of identity in architecture could be found associated to dimensions of national identity. Rehearsal of previous patterns could be a symbol of national cultural heritage, national myths and national symbols. Using the symbols could be found associated to national values, myths and national symbols and religious beliefs<sup>12</sup>. Designing with regard to principles of traditional architecture has its specific place at geographical dimension. Decorations in relation with national values, religious beliefs, myths and national symbols found meaning<sup>13</sup>.

## Conclusion

Analysis about Iran's traditional architecture shows that in spite of diversity and complexity of buildings, few principles, bases and patterns have been applied in different forms in architecture. Moreover the evolution of architecture in Iran, Iranian architecture stands on evolution of principles, bases, patterns and also such an intelligent activity. It has to be paid attention on the point that glance at principles of traditional architecture is found without use of technology, repeating the forms. Through the observation of the present paper, it has been concluded that, however, the architecture in Iran has been changed in perspective of economic result and materialism in the procedure of life in the modernity elements. Hence, to preserve the resources for the future generation- we have to act in accordance with the acts in the worldwide. The application of new energies in the construction and making the architecture coordinated with ecology could help us in the optimization and control of energy consumption by which the pollution of environment would be avoided. This leads to the increase of life quality and convenience in the human's life in their mind and physics. Today, despite representation of sustainability issues, practically all the principles were being used by previous generation- in fact in the past all the architects were good at utilizing the natural resources and energies.

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