

Investigating the Role of Shiite Signs in the Sense of Place of the Sacred Places of the Safavid Era; (Cases of Imam Mosque and Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque)

Abstract

In the remaining mosques of the Safavid period in Isfahan city, the principles of architecture can be grasped, serving as the infrastructure for the decision-making of the designers of this period concerning the design of motifs and decorations. Some of these decorations are directly related to Shiite concepts hence its investigation can contribute to understanding the nature of architecture of this period. The method of this research is descriptive and analytical with a quantitative and qualitative approach. It is a combination of qualitative and quantitative; additionally, in the qualitative stage, two separate techniques are used for recognition and communication including Delphi and coding. In the quantitative part, it is inferential with statistical tests. The users of the space in these mosques are those who, due to the lack of accurate information, are calculated using Morgan's table, and the number of 34 people are chosen to select the largest number. The results of interviews with experts were analyzed with ATLASTI software; moreover, in the quantitative part, the causal contribution of each symptom was investigated with inferential statistical tests and using SPSS software. The findings of the research show that the largest factor contribution is related to the shaping of large and small spaces, which include the Mihrab, Hozkhaneh, Shabestan, courtyard and dome, with a value of (1,000) and the lowest factor contribution is related to architectural materials with a value of (0,023). The arrangement of the spaces in the mosques in the Safavid period, specifically the mosques of Sheikh Lotfollah and Imam, led to the formation of a tranquil and beautiful space and created a rich and astonishing amalgamation.

Research objectives:

1. Investigating and analyzing categories of Shiite symbols in Sheikh Lotfollah and Imam Mosque of Isfahan.

۲. Exploring the role of Shiite signs on different spectrums of the sense of place in Sheikh Lotfollah and Imam Mosque of Isfahan.

Research questions:

۱. What are the Shiite symbols of Sheikh Lotfollah and Imam Isfahan mosque?

۲. Which Shiite symbols have more influence regarding spatial sense?

Keywords: Shiite symbols, sense of place, Safavid era, Imam Mosque, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque.

Introduction

With the arrival of Islam in Iran, according to the existing cultural ideas, art and architecture underwent a change and Islamic concepts became one of the most important factors in shaping this phenomenon. This influence was so rich that it created an innovative art and new style called Islamic art. With the introduction and spread of Shi'ah religion, the relationship between religion and art became stronger. However, in most cases, Shi'ah art can be considered the same as Islamic art since there is no obvious difference between them. The most significant variance between Islamic art and Shiite art is referring to issues such as Imamate in art and architecture; furthermore, limiting the construction of tombs for political elders and focusing on their construction on the tombs of imams are also a reflection of the beliefs of Shi'ah followers. During the Safavid period, which is associated with the formalization of the Shiite religion, the relationship between art and religious laws was well established and all the artistic and architectural artifacts reflected the Shiite elements, which are among the characteristics of the art of this era. Before the construction of the mausoleum over the tombs of elders, they sometimes covered the graves of individuals with a canopy, tent or something similar. The use of this type of canopy is based on religious laws and was considered a messenger of heavenly blessings. Gradually, this custom continued and took the form of magnificent tomb buildings.

One of the methods to identify the traditions and beliefs of any people or nationality is to study artistic symbols in a decorative and symbolic manner since elements applied in these arts are in written or engraved form with many concepts that need to be understood, studied and mastered. Symbolization presented within religious buildings is in the form of inscriptions and various types

of decorations including tiling and plaster art. During the Safavid era, which is associated with the formalization of the Shiite religion, the relationship between art and religious laws became well established and all artistic and architectural artifacts reflected Shiite elements that represent the characteristics of the art of this era.

Examining the background of the research indicates that so far no independent work with this title has been published so far. However, several works have investigated the sense of place in Safavid period mosques of Isfahan. Taqvai and Wali (۲۰۱۵) in an article titled "Investigation of the sense of place in Sheikh Lotfollah mosque", have mentioned the role of light in creating a sense of place. Bamanin and Fatehi (۲۰۱۵) in an article entitled "Explaining the place of light in the sense of place (a case study of Sheikh Lotfollah mosque in Isfahan)" also mention light as an element that creates space. In these works, the relationship between Shiite concepts and the sense of place has not been considered, consequently, the issue has been addressed in the present research. In terms of developmental-applied type, this research has a nest-to-nest combination in terms of method. To answer the research question, qualitative research method is used in nest-to-nest quantity. In the qualitative method, the Delphi system is used to validate the extraction of variables, which includes these steps: ۱- first brainstorming for important factors ۲- limiting the main list to the most important ones ۳- ranking the list of important factors that are briefly explained.

In this method, semi-structured interviews with intellectuals have been conducted by extracting concepts from coding. Then, the extracted categories and codes are used in compiling the questionnaire. The interview questions were based on the concepts extracted from the sense of place, and for the correctness of the questions, they were examined and scored by experts using the Delphi method. The validity of the questionnaire using the CVI formula is ۰,۷۸ and the reliability is ۰,۷۲ using Cronbach's alpha. For convenience, a pre-designed coding table is used. Interview analysis is done using Atlas T software and using open and axial coding.

Open coding process is an analysis through which the identified concepts and their characteristics are discovered in the data. At this stage, foundational data theory forms the primary categories of information about the phenomenon under study by segmenting information (Creswell, ۲۰۰۵: ۳۹۷), then axial coding takes place. It is the process of relating categories to sub-categories and linking categories at the level of features and dimensions. In this coding, coding is based on a research

category (Lee et al., ۲۰۰۱: ۴۹). Strauss has discussed several main actions in the coding phase, which are shown in the table below (Lee et al., ۲۰۰۱: ۵۰).

Axial coding (Lee et al., ۲۰۰۱: ۴۹):

۱. Expressing the characteristics of a category and its dimensions, an action that begins during open coding.
۲. Identifying various conditions, various actions or interactions, and various consequences related to a phenomenon
۳. Relating a category to its subcategories through propositions that suggest how they relate to each other.
۴. Searching for clues in the data that indicate how the main categories can be related to each other.

This section includes two different samplings in quantitative and qualitative fields. In the first qualitative sampling, ۲۰ experts who had full knowledge of the subject and the mosques of Sheikh Lotfollah and Imam of Isfahan were selected as a snowball, and they were asked to respond to the factors that affect the level of utilization and the presence of different factors. Places were given a score of ۱ to ۱۰, and mosques whose average scores were above ۵ were selected and again referred to experts to confirm their selection. In the next step to interview the experts, in this study, ۴۶ people were interviewed, and from the ۳۷th interview onwards, repetition was observed in the received information. According to the principles of grounded theory, after conducting the first interview, data collection and analysis are done.

Interviewees	Number	Frequency	Cumulative percentage
Specialists of architecture	۱۶	۳۴,۸	۳۴,۸
Specialists of landscape architecture	۹	۱۹,۵	۵۴,۳
Specialists of urban design	۱۲	۲۶,۲	۸۰,۵
Specialists of urban planning	۹	۱۹,۵	۱۰۰
Total	۴۶	۱۰۰	--

Table ۲. Expertise of interviewed persons

In the next step, according to the opinion of experts, managers and heads of universities and the extracted variables, a questionnaire was compiled in the form of a closed questionnaire with five-point Likert answers. The structure of the questionnaire includes questions related to the main question of the research; That is, it was to investigate the change of factor share of sense of place components in Sheikh Lotfollah and Imam mosques. In order to perform the calculations, a score of 5 for "very high impact" and a score of 1 for "very low impact" were considered by each expert, and in order to minimize the cost and time, the questionnaire was distributed among a random sample of the statistical population (sightseers of Sheikh Lotfollah and Imam mosques). The sample size was selected using Morgan's table, which includes 385 people, which were distributed according to the population and the separation of gender.

Conclusion

Islamic architecture is one of the greatest manifestations of the emergence of an artistic reality in the material body. From a historical point of view, architecture is considered the first art that was able to adapt itself to Islamic concepts and was welcomed by Muslims. Islamic architecture can be recognized as one of the most successful architectural methods in the history of world architecture. In a comprehensive view, it is possible to recognize the valuable and dynamic continuity in Islamic buildings, structured into a single format entitled Islamic architecture. The rich Islamic arts, from decorative and applied arts to the construction of the largest religious buildings, are of special importance and prestige. Decorations such as plastering, tiling and painting have been prevalent throughout the Islamic era and have progressed in every era with the facilities of those times. Since the advent of Islam, the mosque has been the most important and main center of gatherings and gatherings. It has been a place not only for offering prayers, but also for finding out about the affairs of Muslims and... for this reason, mosques have a special position in Islamic cities. Islam has played an effective role in the evolution and development of most arts in different eras, especially during the Safavid era.

According to the findings of the research, the formation of large and small spaces had the greatest contribution to creating the sense of place of Sheikh Lotfollah and Imam mosques. The arrangement of the spaces in the mosques in the Safavid period, particularly the mosques of Sheikh

Lotfollah and Imam, led to the formation of a calm and beautiful space and created a rich and unforeseen combination. Also, it is not conceivable to understand and appreciate the meaning of Islamic architecture, especially the architecture of mosques, without interpreting the concept of its space. Difficulty occurs in attempting to understand the concept of Islamic architectural space. Space, as the most fundamental concept of architecture, has always been associated with boundedness. In fact, in terms of sensory perception, it is impossible to imagine the architectural space without determining and defining certain boundaries. Nevertheless, in the Islamic worldview, space is considered to be eternal, omnipresent and "boundless" as a rational perception. This system of spatial formation forms the basis of the positive space continuity plan. This spatial continuity should be considered as carrying a meaning that along with the fulfillment of functional and spatial needs, thus, it will lead to a sequence of moods and emotions and move the audience from one place and one perception to another.

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