



Mosques planning in Iran, Fashion or Culture?

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Abstract

Numerous cultural and regional characteristics prepare the grounds for the creation and development of principles in art and architecture people pursue in various areas. A majority of architectural activities of people will then shape and form based on, and in line with these principles and practices. It has been observed that in a number of cases, a regional principle such as the cultural or geographical border is generalized to a country and within its political borders. If this trend continues, it will change people's attitudes towards the artistic and architectural needs in their region, and consequently their wants. The aforementioned paragraph was considered to be a first idea for a research which aims at challenging the underlying reasons of imposing similarity in construction of religious spaces in Iran, composed of four sets of climates, and several macro and micro cultures. This general and yet not comprehensive study will assess the physical form of sacred tombs, mosques, and other religious spaces in the cultural context and mountainous geographical features of Azerbaijan and it will further investigate why these religious spaces are inclined to bear great similarity to those existing in the desert, warm, and arid climates of central Iran. It has been attempted to investigate various cultural and social factors, as well as the role of decision-making institutions with regard to the structural change. Eventually, the primary solutions that can help incline the architecture towards fulfilling the climatic and cultural needs of people using these structures would lead to the final configuration of this investigation.

Key Words: Climatic architecture, Iranian architecture, Islamic architecture, Local architecture

Introduction

One of the most significant courses in various architectural faculties and universities is the world's history of art and architecture. A part of this history has taken place in countries in which the Muslims have had influences over their history. Some researchers have dubbed some of these countries' architectural works, as Islamic architecture. Regardless of their official name and insignia, the start of recording and collecting Iranian classical architecture history, was at a time when a group of the enlightened academic educated individuals had come back from abroad and dominated the architectural literature of Iran. They were trying to blazon the Iranian architectural features in contrast to what they have witnessed in Europe. This effort unwittingly led to excessive exaggerating and boasting of Iranian architectural works. The westerners, who studied Iranian architectural history such as Arthur Pope, mostly highlighted architectural features near the capital city of Safavid dynasty, Isfahan. The ease of access in investigation and observation for the capital city of Isfahan, and the neighboring architectural works, all of which were located in the desert, arid climates, led them to ignore the other various climates of Iran. The majority of analyses conducted on Iranian architectural works are limited to the Safavid dynasty and the desert climate; hence, they tend to overlook the other available climatic architecture in Iran.

On the other hand, Mohammad Karim Pirnia has written one of the most comprehensive accounts of Iranian architecture. He devoted a lot of his observation to desert climate architecture; hence, in the academic arena of Iranian architecture, the majority of academic research and investigation has been done on arid and hot desert climates. In fact, Iranian architecture history is an equivalent for architectural works done in desert, arid, and hot climate.

As previously mentioned, a number of researchers have labeled Muslim countries' architecture as Islamic architecture. Consequently, the architecture of central areas and regions in Iran is known as Islamic architecture among Iranian academia.

The Architecture of Mosque

Mosques are among special buildings, which act as a hub for cultural, religious, and social interactions of the Muslim people residing in an area. Such buildings are found in Muslim residing cities at different scales. Special groups at community, neighborhood, and city use these mosques. Some of these mosques in the city of Tabriz have been investigated and their general picture has been presented in the following parts.

With regard to classification and definition of construction designs, mosques are the clearest and most salient indication and representation of what is called Islamic architecture. The reason lies in the fact that the existence of a mosque in an area is indicative of the fact that Muslims are living around it. A great majority of traditional and old textures of buildings are made approximately mosques, and because of it. A clear example is the structure of old neighborhoods in Qeshm Island. Considering these facts, the centrality of mosques in shaping public service provision at micro level around it is highlighted. The question in here addresses the fact that whether this gathering and significance is independent of the form and shape of the mosque. Should all mosques look alike? This is the main question the present investigation attempts to answer.

Modern architecture of Mosque

As previously mentioned in the introduction part, the majority of research and investigation on Iranian architecture has mainly highlighted a special era-the Safavids- and a particular type of climate. Accordingly, this architectural style is profoundly influenced by the local structures, materials, and building and construction technologies. In the mid 1900s and advent of modern materials and building methods, which belonged to the Pahlavi dynasty, Iranians embarked upon building and reconstructing religious spaces with new materials and methods. The new methods and materials were used intended to utilize the best materials and construction technologies in building holy, valuable urban places. This trend continued so far that even for mosques with a dome, a gable roof was designed and constructed both to protect the older structure, and keep up with the innovation wave in the development arenas. Some of these mosques are illustrated in the following pictures.



Islamic Revolution of Iran

With the victory of Islamic revolution and establishment of Islamic Republic of Iran, fresh occurrences were taking place in the realm of construction and , consequently more attention was paid to mosques and religious places.

Considering the ruling system to be Islamic, it was tried to cover such buildings and renovation under state organizations financial support. Accordingly, technical groups were shaped for this issue. The people on these teams had academic civil engineering or architecture education. There still, didn't exist a university field which exclusively studied religious buildings and construction. Architects who had a personal interest in traditional architecture, or religious architecture, or the ones who simply had a governmental job started to work in this field.

While classifying methods of architecture in Iran, some researchers and experts unwittingly shaped a single method or monopoly for building such buildings in the future. They deprived the future generation from the main characteristics of Iranian architecture, its dynamic features. Iranian architecture had been quite dynamic with regard to the construction technology, form, materials, and function of the buildings. Sometimes, Pahlavi dynasty was accused of *not following the conventional method, and making new designed mosques*. Through their field work, the authors have observed cases in which the innovation and creativity in building mosques have created a more mocking or kidding feeling than making progress with regard to method of construction.

What is clearly observed in the construction of religious buildings and spaces in the last decade, the first years of 21st century, is inclusion of such architectural elements in their design, falsely associated with religion, and religious spaces. Disapproving of religious spaces and buildings without the afore-mentioned elements was another observed phenomenon. The necessity of having a dome or minaret for mosques and holy monuments has been a disputable topic among people, religious researchers, as well as architectural experts.

State construction

Some mosques have received undivided attention by government officials thanks to the strategic role they play for politicians and state officials in developing their influence throughout the city. This has caused the creation of occasionally huge mosques including the most decorative elements by the main paths and streets of the city. Such structure and positioning is in serious contradiction with architectural principles of mosques. Since such mosques are constructed with huge budget, occasionally state budgets, they enjoy high quality materials, and demonstrate a huge space to look alike to religious constructions-not necessarily mosques. Of course, they earn the appreciation of viewers not because of their structure, but because of people who attend in them. This is practically a power show by the founders and administrative officials running such places. On the other hand, the magnificence and excellence of Shia Imama's Tombs comes from the great religious leader buried there, and not from founders and executive teams in there. Ordinary people, however, because of a thirst for power, have been led to imitate mosques that they, per se, have emulated other constructions and buildings.

Imposing similarity regardless of shape, land features and facilities, and merely based on the reference form has not only led to the intended results, but it has resulted in a confusion for the administrative officials.

A quintessential example of this is construction of Tabriz Mahdieh, which has been built in a highly dense traffic intersection, and far away from the residential texture of the city. This mosque, as it can be seen, is a symbol of mosques which is a collection of Iranian architectural history with current materials. However, access to this mosque and all people who want to go past it, is one of the greatest problems. Through this simple description, it seems that Tabriz Mahdieh has been constructed to be a religious symbol than an actual place for saying prayers and worshipping. The name 'Mahdieh' is taken from a well-known religious space in Tehran, the capital city of Iran.



Fig 2: Mahdieh Mosque- Tabriz- Iran

A collection of these factors and contributors would represent a series of unpleasant and adverse results which have been demonstrated in the following pictures and graphs.

Conclusion

- Having qualities existing in Isfahan old mosques, dubbed Islamic Architecture, is an ostensible requirement for all mosques, regardless of the fact that sections of Isfahan's design features were because of structural, climatic, and other reasons.
- The question of how structural constructions have given such a shape and form to Iranian architecture is the subject of a comprehensive study to which the present study makes a partial contribution.
- Locating religious spaces takes place based on observation and outer presentation of the building and not on its users and their type of use.
- Using technology to build useless and unnecessary elements rather than paying closer attention to the main coverage of the building has caused no specific progress in the internal design of such spaces.

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