

Water, Nature, and Architecture

Sahand Javanshir*, Elham Khangahi Bala

Sama Technical and Vocational Training Collage, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil Branch, Ardabil, Iran

Received: October 17, 2014

Accepted: January 8, 2015

ABSTRACT

Existing of nature elements, especially water has been always significant and undeniable in Iran's classical architecture; however, it is now losing its importance and is giving its place to huge elements and dead meaningless mass. In this research, it is being tried to analyze the reason of existence of nature elements in classical buildings, its quality, and its relation to human being. The present research is a casual-comparative study whose purpose is to determine the effects in order to discover its probable causes. The method of data-gathering in this research is via library-field study as well as personal observations. The purpose of this research is to search the way of human relation to universe according to real meaning of life. Hope that God may help to do this task.

KEYWORDS: Water; heart; mysticism

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of most researches about nature elements and their relation to architecture done by contemporary historians and researchers, weather Western or Eastern, were to make relationship with the nature existing in today west; and Iran's architecture, with such a high old background, was rarely paid attention.

In Iran's classical architecture, which nowadays is wrongly called "Islamic" by so-called theorists, nature elements, especially water, were always a significant and permanent factor; and it was, for long years, one of the most essential bases of a building.

Statement of Problem

Our constructors and engineers, by blind imitating from different styles of foreign architecture, forgot this basic factor, which was essential to Iranian architecture, and changed it with meaningless open area, vast elements, or stone mass without analyzing the reason of its existence. If it continues this way, our ancient rich architecture will soon be forgotten as if existence of nature elements was a hostile to human being, and existing of one of them is the reason to another's absence.

Symbolic Aspects of Water

This substance is everything that potentially exists. Water, aside from cultural structures, has always one role in creation, mythology, religions, and iconology: it's prior to all form and structure, and also the mainstay of each creation.

Interpretations and meanings of water have close relation to its nature and its essential role in the dry country of Iran. In Iran, water was considered as the messenger of light and purity, and was of high importance, since Iran was a dry country. For Iranians, water was not only a needed substance but also a spiritual effective factor. Water, with its diverse and numerous potentials such as life, freshness, brightness, purity, light, tranquility, statics, movement, etc., caused different feelings in human soul. That is why it has different forms and shapes in all human-made places. This was mostly significant in places like garden where water is one of the completing elements of its background beauty. Water, in the form of stream, canal, pond, pool, fountain, etc., displays the human dominance to nature in order to show it next to him.

The broadness of each garden depends to the amount of water to water the plants. To put it in a nutshell, wherever water existed, garden was inevitable.

Regarding the mentioned discussion, the key words of the present research include:

1. Nature 2. Tune 3. Discovery 4. Nature's tune 5. Heart 6. Mirror of heart 7. Introversion 8. Introversion in architecture

In this part, first the meaning of nature as a word is analyzed in synopsis, and then its meaning in scientific expressions.

Nature as a word

Nature was defined as "the soul by which human was created" (Lesan-al-arab, v. 8, p.232). And it has been synonym to "nativity, clay, habit, essence, taste, creation, temperament, matter, soul, instinct, blood, spirit, etc."

*Corresponding Author: Sahand Javanshir, Sama Technical and Vocational Training Collage, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil Branch, Ardabil, Iran

Among philosophers, nature means thinking ability in whole universe from heaven to the earth's center. In medicine, nature is the ability of body thinking, and "naturologist" is a therapist.

Aristotelians used nature in four different meanings: producer factor, essence of a thing, soul of a thing, and a physically thing. Aristotle himself defined nature as "origin and cause of statics and movement in an object" (Nasr, Seyed Hasan, *Cognition & Spirituality*, tr. by Enshaollah Rahmati, Sohrevardi publication, p.116).

However, nature has numerous meanings, and the most important ones are three: comprehensiveness, the essence an object is made from, and the soul of everything. Avicenna has used nature as protective essence (Motahari, Morteza, *Nashre Sadra*, p.353).

According to Islamic thinkers, Nature is a part of existence levels. In explanation of existence as an umbrella term, it is been defined as the shared spiritual meaning of all objects.

Tune as a word

Tune has a vast meaning in Persian literature, each of them determining one real aspect of it. Tune (ahang) is derived from ahangidan in Persian which means "take out, bring out, absorb, and intend".

Also, it has the meaning of sound, song, music, voice, verse, rhythm, and rhyme in poetry. For instance, in Persian Poetry of Molavi tune is used in different meanings:

In one single verse tune has two meanings: the first is intention, and the second is song.

Tune is also one of the basic meanings of "build or intend to build". It is also synonymous to "get along with, be tender, be suitable, and be accurate".

Discovery

Discovery, as a word, means "to reveal, to uncover, to end darkness and to find something new"; it has been also said that "to uncover something that has been never uncovered by the same person".

Discovery is a mystical meaning which means shading of light to the heart of a mystic. Discovery is a kind of cognition gained by someone's own heart with a spiritual and thinking ability in solitude, and not an acquired knowledge.

Nature's tune

The purpose of combining tune and nature, here, is the amazing match of nature elements as the lowest level of existence.

According to Islamic thinkers, nature tune means the muse in the universe, permanent movement in existence, order in nature, and in Quran it is worship of earths and heavens (Sadeqahmadi, Mahdi, *Tune in nature*, 2003, p.48). In Quran, it is instantly repeated as the permanent worship of objects. Anyway, nature's tune metaphorically means having purpose and being smart in movement to the existence destination which is dominant in all objects and places of the universe.

Heart

Heart is the instrument of cognition by discovery which is paid attention in Quran and mysticism. Heart is the center of cognition and insight and the place of human thinking ability. In a Devine tradition it is said that the heavens and the earth do not have the capacity for me, but the heart has this capacity. It shoes that human heart has the potential to get to the highest level of existence. Mystics see heart as a "mirror" which reflects the truth.

In Islamic mysticism, one should pure the mirror of heart in order to be able to see the truth of existence (Nahj-ol-Balaqeh, verse 220).

To get this level is arriving to poverty and doom level: the only thing which cannot be found in God's place. And this is the manifestation of God's beauty and compassion.

Method

The meaning of method here is the mystical method to join the real love in the universe, which is God, described in Attar's "seven cities". This cities start from Demand, and after levels of love, cognition, disdain, monotheism, and astonishment reach to the level of doom (Elahi Qomshei, Hossein, 1997, p.246).

In another interpretation, this method consists of three levels. First, one part of human ego should die by mortification; this level shows God's justice and magnificent. Second, one part of human ego is expanded and human body goes beyond its limits and embrace the universe; this level manifests God's beauty and compassionate. The third level is to join God via doom and remain; in this level, mystic passes all the levels and sees God's face (Nasr, Seyed Hossein, *Islamic art and ideology*, 1996, p.165).

Introversion

Introversion is a basis in Islamic mystic's method. Introversion is synonymous to solitude and meditation in which the mystic focuses its human power to know his heart and ego, and to join God by doing this as Muhamad (p.b.u.h) said: "Whoever knows himself, he knows his God".

Introversion is according to major jihad in order to purify heart and ego so that one finds the God's cognition⁴⁹.

Molavi, on order to show the importance of introversion, makes an example: if a castle gains its needed water from outside, it will be vulnerable at war time.

Introversion in architecture

It is a kind of association of different building in a city in which all houses and mosques situate side by side around the yards and squares.



Fig. 1: Perspective of Isfahan

This architectural model, which is also known as central yard, was common in desert cities in Iran. It is the opposite of extroverted architecture. In introverted architecture, the emphasis is on inside beauty and tranquility which is hidden in the empty place in situated center. This inside tranquility symbolizes the mystical method.

Talking to nature: preface to cognition

There are some reasons which made human to use nature at minimum level. It has a direct relation to modern architecture in most of which the only use of nature is visual background and beauty. In fact, by taking apart from direct relation to nature, one suffices to mere visual beauty. This can be seen in today's apartments and blocks.

Results of talking to nature

Some of the results of talking to nature are making a kind of deep inside relation between human and nature, associating with nature at a high level, and also personifying nature elements.

Another important result of talking to nature for human is feeling satisfied for his live existence. When a person plant a seed and the seeds grow to a plant, or when he put dead leaves by a tree so that the orange is more watery he feels satisfied for "participating in nature's perfection process". This deep feeling can merely cause by personal experience. It is made due to unifying with nature's tune and its recycling process as though human is a part of nature unifying with it. Unifying of human and nature is like the satisfying feeling of a drop joining a sea.

Light, color, and water

Light, color, and water are three elements of Islamic architecture aesthetics. Light is the major factor in Iranian architecture, and it is a symbol of God's wisdom. Color is born from light, and water is the reflection of nature in Islamic architecture. Here is a synopsis of their definition:

Light

Light is the manifestation of God whose existence is inevitable in Islamic architecture, especially in mosques. "God is the light of heavens and earth" and this belief has a role to soften the rigidness of stones in a building. Metaphysical manifestation of light on a physical building is the main axis of Islamic architecture aesthetics. In a building, the floor is bright, the walls are shining, and a huge chandelier is sustained from the ceiling which causes a reflection of light.

Color

Color is made from light's diffraction and indicates the existence of real light (God). According to Islamic thinkers, white is the symbol of absolute existence; black – as the cover of Kibbeh – is the main symbol of sublimity; blue, turquoise, and gold in Iranian-Islamic paintings are manifestation of inside meaning of different colors. Psychological aspects of colors are also highly emphasized in Quran.

Water

In Islamic philosophy, water is the basis of existence: "We set everything live by water". It is also the cause of purity. This congenital characteristic (which purifies bugger objects) is so attached to Islamic architecture which purifies the building.

Existence of water in Islamic architecture, especially in mosques, not only is due to purification of worshipers to do religious rituals, but also purifies the building itself. The tight relationship between water and Islamic architecture can be felt from diverse verses in Quran; water is the buffer between "Him" and existence.

Conclusion

This research showed the spiritual existence of water and nature in classical buildings, and the human need to water and nature beyond his all physically needs. Unfortunately, our today architecture, which is a mere imitation of western desacralized architecture, has ignored the real meaning of a building⁵⁰.

In today's architecture, water is rarely something beyond H₂O, and its spiritual meanings and its effects on human-God relation is totally ignored. This made human as a physical object with no soul and sprit which makes the life hard and meaningless.

It is the time to return to the spiritual meaning and real purpose of life, and to rebuild living place according to sublime model of classical architecture so that water, wind, dust, and fire lead us to the real destination of life.

Notes

1. Dekhoda dictionary
2. Professional expressions, Dekhoda dictionary
3. Dekhoda dictionary
4. Dekhoda dictionary
5. Dekhoda dictionary
6. Abdolhossein, Zarinkoob, The value of Safavi heritage, Amirkabir publication, p.221
7. Refer to Mystics book
8. Whole objects in the universe – weather in heavens or earth- worship and admire God
9. Intuitive wisdom
10. It is said in a tradition that if a person worships God truly for 40 days, he will gain pure cognition.
11. Desacralized

REFERENCES

1. Poorhadi, Akbar, 2002, Today's & yesterday's tale, Architectural University of Yazd, 2002
2. Javadi, Shohreh, Sacred places related to nature, Bagh-e-nazar magazine, no.8
3. Olia, Mohammadreza PhD, Worshipping of a place, University of Yazd, 2002
5. Dekhoda, Aliakbar, dictionary, University of Tehran, Mordad 1963
7. Sadeqahmadi, Mahdi, discovery of nature's tune, Architectural University of Yazd, 2005
8. Sadeqahmadi, Mahdi, discovery of nature's tune in water, Architectural University of Yazd, 2004
9. Hedaiati, Amin, Farnoosh, Afarinesh newspaper
10. Kasmai, Morteza, Khoozestan's architecture, Khoramshahr, Tehran, 1984
11. Kuinsburger, O H, designing guide, tr. by Morteza Kasmai, Tehran, 1989
12. Nasr, Seyed Hossein, Cognition & Spirituality, 2004
13. Nasr, Seyed Hossein, Nature & Islamic thinkers, 4th edition, Azar 1998
14. Nasr, Seyed Hossein, Islamic art & spirituality, 1996
15. A New look at qanat: water society or water civilization?, Davood Rahmanian, no.773