



CHARACTERISTICS OF ISLAMIC AND IRANIAN ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract: *Islamic architecture, building traditions of Muslim populations of the Middle East and elsewhere from the 7th century on. Islamic architecture finds its highest expression in religious buildings such as the mosque and madrasah. Early Islamic religious architecture, exemplified by Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock (ad 691) and the Great Mosque (705) in Damascus, drew on Christian architectural features such as domes, columnar arches, and mosaics but also included large courts for congregational prayer and a mihrab. From early times, the characteristic semicircular horseshoe arch and rich, nonrepresentational decoration of surfaces were employed. Religious architecture came into its own with the creation of the hypostyle mosque in Iraq and Egypt. In Iran a mosque plan consisting of four eyvans (vaulted halls) opening onto a central court was used. These brick-built mosques also incorporated domes and decorated squinches (see Byzantine architecture) across the corners of the rooms. Persian architectural features spread to India, where they are found in the TajMahal and Mughal palaces. Ottoman architecture, derived from Islamic and Byzantine traditions, is exemplified by the Selimiye Mosque (1575) at Edirne, Tur., with its great central dome and slender minarets. One of the greatest examples of secular Islamic architecture is the Alhambra.*

Keywords: *Islamic Architecture, Iranian Architecture.*

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INTRODUCTION:

In the year 622 AD, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) migrated to the city of Yatrib (which later became Medina). There, a community of believers who had accepted Islam prayed in the compound of the Holy Prophet (SAW)'s house. The congregational prayers of this new community in this simple setting - "an enclosed oblong courtyard with huts...along one side wall and a rough portico (the zulla, originally for shade) at one end for the followers" - established the mosque form. This repetition of the plan of the Prophet (SAW)'s house features in almost all mosques, comprising essentially of an enclosed courtyard, a building at one end for prayer, and arcades on the sides. As Islam spread, its art forms developed and were modified by the different climatic conditions and materials that were available in the lands where Islam spread, and adapting indigenous art styles. Islamic Art developed from many sources. Roman, then Early Christian, and Byzantine styles were taken over in early Islamic architecture. The influence of Sassanian art -the architectural and decorative styles of pre-Islamic Persia now Iran became prominent (SakarDattoo). Islamic architecture is highly diverse but unified by climate, culture, and a love of geometric and arabesque ornament, as well as by the mobility of ideas, artisans, and architects throughout the region. These will further be highlighted in the Shah mosque, and its dome, minaret, courtyard, iwan, and minbar. Prehistoric architecture in Iran remains little known but has gradually begun to come to light since World War II. Iran has been home to a major ancient civilization. The region traditionally known as Persia [before the advent of Islam] is now called Iran. Persian buildings vary from huts to tea houses and garden pavilions to some of the most majestic structures the world has ever seen. In Fars province, Persepolis has stood for 2500 years, not only as a symbol of a powerful Achaemenid dynasty, but also as a reminder of achievement and progress in the sphere of architecture. Persian architecture has been a comprehensive embodiment of Iranian psychology and characteristics in different historical periods. This diversity has arisen as a result of particular requirements and the rich tastes of Iranian artists through different periods of history. Geological surveys conducted on the south of Iran reveal rectangular formations inspired by Greek architecture dating to the Sassanid era. From this, archaeologists deduce that the Greek architecture penetrated Iran through the work of the slaves. Other significant aspects with deep influences on Iranian architecture were the vastness of Iranian plateau with differing climates, climatic conditions,



and characteristics of people who had been scattered in various sites. As an example, the architectural styles at highlands and mountainous areas are different from those at coastal and desert areas.

ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) , the Islamic religion was spreading rapidly all across the Middle East and the world. Because of this, there was an increased demand for mosques and spiritual gathering places. The construction of these designated places of worship marked the beginning of the influential architectural creations of the Muslims. Islamic architecture is undeniably one of the most beautiful forms of man-made symmetry and designs. It has evolved within Muslim cultures throughout Islamic history, inspired by spiritual essence. An important factor in every work of Islamic art and architecture is abstract decoration of the surface, whether large or small [1]. The features of Islamic architecture, such as columns, piers, and arches, were highly inspired by the early teachings of Islam and the actions that Muslims make during prayers. Gradually over time, generations of architects and artists created urban centers in Islamic cities, all the while, adding variety and diversity to their styles, with a sense of creativity and experience. Nowadays, people work with the basics of this type of architecture while adding a cultural twist that is best suited for their lifestyle. The uses of brilliant colors is one of the greatest characteristics of Islamic architecture. The Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhrah) in Jerusalem is the earliest Islamic monument. It mostly retains its original form and carries a great significance because it is the spot from which Prophet Muhammad (SAW) ascended to heaven [6]. It has a beautiful form with outstanding details, such as jewels, mosaics representing scrolling vines and flowers, and crowns that come in greens, blues, and lustrous golds. This beautiful creation was the inspiration for the Great Mosque of Damascus. With stone mosaics of shapes like crowns, plants, realistic trees, and even empty towns, the interior of both monuments was meant to represent Paradise for Muslims. The materials and techniques used in Islamic architecture shape fascinating three-dimensional designs. Other distinguished elements of Islamic architecture are calligraphy, light, geometry, floral patterns, and water. These factors are often used in the production of Islamic monuments and are highly pleasing to the eye. The use of each of them relates to the lifestyle present in each monument's location. Every Islamic country has its own form of



architecture and style [3]. The notable different forms of architecture include the early Abbasid buildings, T-Type mosques, and the central-dome mosques of Anatolia. However, the different types are:

- Iwan, which is a vaulted hall or space, walled on three sides, with one end entirely open;
- Sahn, where buildings contain courtyards which are surrounded on all sides by rooms and sometimes an arcade. Mostly all traditional mosques and buildings follow this description;
- Arabesque, which is an elaborate application of repeating geometric forms that often echo the forms of shapes and plants. Arabesque is also often associated with elements of Arabic calligraphy, which is often seen on the walls and ceilings of mosques. The use of gardens is also a notable characteristic of Islamic architecture [2].

Many architectural features have become fixed and eternal in modern masterpieces. They help us locate and notice our architectural roots and remain true to our identity as Muslims. Today, many Muslim planners and architects are now reasserting their Islamic heritage through architectural designs. In this way, we not only are able to relate more to our religion, but we also strengthen our faith and pride in the magnanimous impact that the Islamic Empire has had on our world to this day [8].

IRANIAN ARCHITECTURE

Advent of Islam in Fran (635 A.D.) gave rise to great upheavals in architecture, and laid the foundations for Islamic architecture all over the world. Iranian artists adjusted to the needs of Arabic Islamic culture, which was in turn influenced by Iranian traditions. Architecture continued to be a major art form, but because Islamic tradition condemned the three-dimensional representation of living things as idolatrous. Sculpture declined. Painting, on the other hand, not affected by proscription of the human form, reached new prominence, and the decorative arts, too, continued to thrive. A great surge of building works together with unique decorations and calligraphy appeared in these centuries. The mosque became the major building type in Iranian architecture. The established style of vaulted construction was continued; common features were the pointed arch, the ogee arch, and the dome on a circular drum. Construction of huge gates and massive domes was a common practice in



Sassanian architecture, which reappears in the mosques and palaces of Islamic period. Architecture in Greater Iran has a continuous history from at least 5000BCE to the present, with characteristic examples distributed over a vast area from Syria to North India and the borders of China, from the Caucasus to Zanzibar. Persian buildings vary from peasant huts to tea houses, and garden pavilions to "some of the most majestic structures the world has ever seen. Iranian architecture displays great variety, both structural and aesthetic, developing gradually and coherently out of prior traditions and experience. Without sudden innovations, and despite the repeated trauma of invasions and cultural shocks, it has achieved an individuality distinct from that of other Muslim countries. Its paramount virtues are several: a marked feeling for form and scale; structural inventiveness, especially in vault and dome construction; a genius for decoration with a freedom and success not rivaled in any other architecture. Traditionally, the guiding, formative, motif of Iranian architecture has been its cosmic symbolism by which man is brought into communication and participation with the powers of heaven. This theme, shared by virtually all Asia and persisting even into modern times, not only has given unity and continuity to the architecture of Persia, but has been a primary source of its emotional characters as well[5]. Traditional Iranian architecture has maintained a continuity that, although frequently shunned by western culture or temporarily diverted by political internal conflicts or foreign intrusion, nonetheless has achieved a style that could hardly be mistaken for any other. In this architecture, there are no trivial buildings; even garden pavilions have nobility and dignity, and the humblest caravanserais generally have charm. In expressiveness and communicativity, most Persian buildings are lucid-even eloquent. The combination of intensity and simplicity of form provides immediacy, while ornament and, often, subtle proportions reward sustained observation. Iranian architecture is based on several fundamental characteristics. These are:

- Introversion
- structure
- homogeneous proportions
- anthropomorphism
- symmetry and anti-symmetry
- Minimalism



Overall, the traditional architecture of the Iranian lands throughout the ages can be categorized into the seven following classes or styles ("sabk"):

- Pre-Islamic:

- * The Pre-Parsistyle : The "Pre parsi style" is a style (sabk) of architecture when categorizing the history of Iranian architecture development.

The oldest remains of architectural elements in the Iranian plateau is the TeppeZagheh, near Qazvin. Elamite and proto-elamite buildings are also covered within this category.

Other extant examples of this style are Choghazanbil, Sialk, Shahr-i Sokhta, and Ecbatana.

- * The Parsistyle : The "Parsi style" is a style (sabk) of architecture when categorizing Iranian architecture development in history.

Examples of this style are Pasargad, Persepolis, Mausoleum of Maussollos, Palace of Susa, and Naqsh-e Rostam.

- * The Parthian style : The "Parthian style" is a style (sabk) of historical Iranian architecture.

This style of architecture includes designs from the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid eras, reaching its apex of development by the Sassanid period.

Examples of this style are Nysa, Anahita Temple, Khorheh, Hatra, the Ctesiphon vault of Kasra, Bishapur, and the Palace of Ardashir in ArdeshirKhwarreh (Firouzabad) [7].

- Islamic:

- * The Khorasanistyle : The "Khorasani style" is a style (sabk) of architecture when categorizing Iranian architecture development in history.

Examples of this style are Mosque of Nain, Tarikhaneh-i Damghan, and Jame mosque of Isfahan

- * The Razistyle : The "Razi style" is a style (sabk) of architecture when categorizing Iranian architecture development in history.

Examples of this style are Tomb of Isma'il of Samanid, Gonbad-e Qabus, Kharaqan towers.

- * The Azaristyle : The "Azari style" is a style (sabk) of architecture when categorizing Iranian architecture development in history.

Examples of this style are Soltaniyeh, Arg-i Alishah, Mosque of Varamin, Goharshad Mosque, BibiKhanum mosque in Samarqand, tomb of Abdas-Samad, Gur-e Amir, Jame mosque of Yazd.



* The Isfahanistyle : The "Esfahani style" is a style (sabk) of architecture when categorizing Iranian architecture development in history.

Examples of this style are Chehelsotoon, Ali Qapu, Agha Bozorg Mosque, Kashan, the Shah Mosque, and the Sheikh Lotf Allah Mosque.

* The Safavid dynasty were chiefly instrumental in the emergence of this style of architecture, which soon spread to India in what became known as Mughal architecture[4].

Available building materials dictate major forms in traditional Iranian architecture. Heavy clays, readily available at various places throughout the plateau, have encouraged the development of the most primitive of all building techniques, molded mud, compressed as solidly as possible, and allowed to dry. This technique used in Iran from ancient times has never been completely abandoned. The abundance of heavy plastic earth, in conjunction with a tenacious lime mortar, also facilitated the development of the brick. Iranian architecture makes use of abundant symbolic geometry, using pure forms such as the circle and square, and plans are based on often symmetrical layouts featuring rectangular courtyards and halls. 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. 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. The columned porch, or talar, seen in the rock-cut tombs near Persepolis, reappear in Sassanid temples, and in late Islamic times it was used as the portico of a palace or mosque, and adapted even to the architecture of roadside tea-houses. Similarly, the gonbad on four arches, so characteristic of Sassanid times, is a still to be found in many cemeteries and Imamzadehs across Iran today. The notion of earthly towers reaching up toward the sky to mingle with the divine towers of heaven lasted through the 19th century, while the interior court and pool, the angled entrance and extensive decoration are ancient but still common features of Iranian architecture [7]. The pre-Islamic styles draw on 3-4 thousand years of architectural development from various civilizations of the Iranian plateau. The post-Islamic architecture of Iran in turn, draws ideas from its pre-Islamic predecessor, and has geometrical and repetitive forms, as well as



surfaces that are richly decorated with glazed tiles, carved stucco, patterned brickwork, floral motifs, and calligraphy. As such, Iran ranks seventh in the world in terms of possessing historical monuments, museums, and other cultural attractions and is recognized by UNESCO as being one of the cradles of civilization. Each of the periods of Elamites, Achaemenids, Parthians, and Sassanids were creators of great architecture that over the ages has spread wide and far to other cultures being adopted. Although Iran has suffered its share of destruction, including Alexander The Great's decision to burn Persepolis, there are sufficient remains to form a picture of its classical architecture. The Achaemenids built on a grand scale. The artists and materials they used were brought in from practically all territories of what was then the largest state in the world. Pasargadae set the standard: its city was laid out in an extensive park with bridges, gardens, colonnaded palaces and open column pavilions. Pasargadae along with Susa and Persepolis expressed the authority of The King of Kings, the staircases of the latter recording in relief sculpture the vast extent of the imperial frontier. With the emergence of the Parthians and Sassanids there was an appearance of new forms. Parthian innovations fully flowered during the Sassanid period with massive barrel-vaulted chambers, solid masonry domes, and tall columns. This influence was to remain for years to come. The roundness of the city of Baghdad in the Abbasid era for example, points to its Persian precedents such as Firouzabad in Fars[7]. The two designers who were hired by al-Mansur to plan the city's design were Naubakht, a former Persian Zoroastrian who also determined that the date of the foundation of the city would be astrologically auspicious, and Mashallah, a former Jew from Khorasan. The ruins of Persepolis, Ctesiphon, Jiroft, Sialk, Pasargadae, Firouzabad, Arg-é Bam, and thousands of other ruins may give us merely a distant glimpse of what contribution Persians made to the art of building. The fall of the Persian empire to invading Islamic forces ironically led to the creation of remarkable religious buildings in Iran. Arts such as calligraphy, stucco work, mirror work, and mosaic work, became closely tied with architecture in Iran in the new era. Archaeological excavations have provided sufficient documents in support of the impacts of Sasanian architecture on the architecture of the Islamic world. Advent of Islam in Iran (635 A.D.) gave rise to great upheavals in architecture, and laid the foundations for Islamic architecture all over the world. To be sure, no Persian building from the first two Islamic centuries have survived, but from third century onward, Islamic building flourished rapidly



and marvelously expanded during the next centuries. A great surge of building works together with unique decorations and calligraphy appeared in these centuries. The new chapter which was opened in the Islamic period led to the creation of remarkable religious buildings. Iranian arts such as calligraphy, stucco, mirror work, and mosaic work, became closely tied together in this new era. Islamic architecture and building decoration are among the most beautiful means of expression. Decoration does not play such an important role in any other type of architecture. The archaeological excavations have provided sufficient documents in support of the impacts of Sasanian architecture on the architecture of Islamic period. According to a classification suggested by Zaki Mohammad Hossain, the fourth period of Iranian architecture (from 15 through 17 Centuries) is the most brilliant period. Various structures such as mosques, mausoleums, bazaars, bridges, and different palaces have mainly survived from this period. In the old Iranian architecture, semi-circular and oval-shaped vaults appeared and Iranians showed their extraordinary skill in making massive domes[2]. Domes can be seen mainly in the structure of bazaars and mosques, and particularly in the historic buildings of Isfahan. Iranian domes are distinguished for their height, proportion of elements, beauty of form, and roundness of the dome stem. The outer surfaces of the domes are mostly mosaic faced, and create a magical view. Islamic architectural monuments of Iran are extremely versatile. Different valuable samples of such monuments are already surviving in smaller and larger towns of Iran. One of the richest artistic centers of Iran is the city of Isfahan. In some art works created in Isfahan, such as doors, seven famous arts of joinery, gold beating, embossing, lattice work, inlay, raised work, and painting are used at once. Extremely fine doors are decorating various religious buildings in Iran, Najaf, Karbala, Damascus, and other sacred towns of the Islamic world. Even some of these doors are kept in major local and foreign museums because of their high artistic values and decorative arts used in them. Shrine of Imam Reza, 8th Shi'ite Imam at Mashhad, Shrine of Fatemeh the Immaculate (Hazrat-i-Ma'sumeh) at Qum, Shrine of Shah Abdul Azim at Shahr-i-Rey, and Shah-i-Cheraq Shrine at Shiraz, as well as numerous splendid mosques, open up new vistas of the Islamic art of Iran to the visitors. Shrine of Imam Reza consists of 33 buildings embodying Iranian Islamic architecture through 5 continuous centuries. Halls, porticos, ivans, minarets, and belfries of religious buildings and mosques have been decorated with a great number of arts such as tile work, inlay, mirror work,



stucco carving, stone carving, painting, illumination and muqarnas (honey comb work). Muqarnas is a sort of stalactite work, and an original Islamic design involving various combinations of three-dimensional shapes, corbeling, etc. which was used for the decoration of mosque portals. It can be of terra-cotta, plaster, or tiles. The value and respect given by Iranians to their religious leaders, have deeply penetrated in their traditional and Islamic architecture. The Iranian Muslim artists have decorated the interior and exterior surfaces of religious buildings, domes, belfries, and mosque minarets with the most beautiful tiles in terms of color and design[8]. During the Islamic period, several palaces, bridges, avenues, and gardens were either built or reconstructed in various towns of Iran, particularly in Isfahan. Historic monuments of the latter town are so numerous that nowadays it is compared to huge museum of art works. Foreign travelers called it "Half of the World". Sir Jean Chardin (1617-13) a dependable observer and a French traveler who made journeys to Persia and visited Isfahan during Safavid period, said in 1666 that the town had 164 mosques, 48 madrasas (schools), 182 caravanserais, and 373 baths. The great maydan (square) at Isfahan called Naqsh-e-Jahan (world image) contains a galaxy of excellent architectural works of Iran. The square is situated in the center of the present city of Isfahan, and has been described as unique by world archaeologists in terms of architectural style, dimensions, and splendor. No doubt, by the end of 16th century, no such maydan had been constructed neither in Iran, nor in other countries of the world. This unique phenomenon of art and architecture is a creation of experienced and creative Iranian architects. The most famous architectural works of Maydan Naqsh-e-Jahan are Masjid-i-Shah (now Imam Mosque), Shaykh Lutf' Allah mosque, and the Al Qapu Palace - seat of government - situated in their full splendor at the north end, east and west of maydan, respectively. The southern side of maydan leads to the great bazaar of Isfahan, which is one of the most attractive and beautiful bazaars of the east, representing the great era of Islamic architecture with its buildings, the maydan and its historic monuments during the Safavid period (1491-1722). Architectural monuments of Isfahan are known for better in western countries compared to other architectural masterpieces of Iran. They enjoyed a legendary fame in European countries at the time of their construction. Foreign merchants, travelers, and ambassadors have appreciated the beauties of Isfahan in their own languages. During the recent centuries, too, many famous Iranologists and archaeologists have traveled to Iran



from all over the world and carried out deeper studies concerning the architectural monuments of Isfahan. As the result of such- studies, numerous books and articles have appeared in connection with the Islamic art of Iran, particularly its architecture. The Masjid-i-Shah (Imam Mosque), begun in 1612, and, despite Shah Abbas' impatience, under construction until 1638, represents the culmination of a thousand years of mosque building in Persia, with a majesty and splendor which places it among the world's greatest buildings..In designing and constructing domes, minarets, ivans, halls, Shabistans, and Mihrabs of this mosque, Iranian architects have made use of their utmost degree of taste and artistry. Inscriptions of the mosque have been written on colored tiles by the most famous calligraphers of Safavid period. The massive dome of the mosque is of double shell type, the highest exterior point of which rises 54m above ground. Its interior and exterior facings are decorated as beautifully as possible with plain and patterned tiles[4].

CONCLUSION:

Islamic architectural design and construction combines various secular and religious styles that span all of Islamic history. The bulk of Islamic architectural characteristics are visible in mosques, tombs, forts and palaces, but the evolution of Islamic architecture can be seen best in the construction of the mosques. The first three mosques that were originally constructed on the Arabian Peninsula were simple, open spaces. There was significant evolution over the next 1,000 years as mosques began to acquire distinctive features like domes, minarets, courtyards and grand entry ways that have been adapted to various cultures around the world. Iranian architecture or Persian architecture is the architecture of contemporary Iran and the Iranian Cultural Continent. It has a continuous history from at least 5000 BCE to the present, with characteristic examples distributed over a vast area from Turkey and Iraq to Northern India and Tajikistan, and from the Caucasus to Zanzibar. Persian buildings vary from peasant huts to tea houses and garden, pavilions to "some of the most majestic structures the world has ever seen. Iranian architecture displays great variety, both structural and aesthetic, developing gradually and coherently out of earlier traditions and experience. Without sudden innovations, and despite the repeated trauma of invasions and cultural shocks, it has achieved "an individuality distinct from that of other Muslim countries. Its paramount virtues are several: "a marked feeling for form and scale; structural inventiveness, especially in vault and dome construction; a genius for decoration with a



freedom and success not rivaled in any other architecture. Traditionally, the guiding formative motif of Iranian architecture has been its cosmic symbolism "by which man is brought into communication and participation with the powers of heaven. This theme has not only given unity and continuity to the architecture of Persia, but has been a primary source of its emotional character as well.

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