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An Investigation of Understanding Realization of the Ritual landscape of Iranian Baths in Islamic Era Through the Texts, Motifs and Structures

Case Study of Ritual Motifs and Manifestations: Ganjali-Khan Bath in Kerman*

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Abstract

The bath and bathing process beyond a place, and consequently an activity related to the individual and public health, has traditionally been a communal activity in Iranian society which, gradually and as a result of the entry of human mentality into an architectural communal space over time, has become subject to the objective-subjective rule. And because of the effects of the social connections, religious beliefs, the influence of classified society and cultural traditions into the framework having the hierarchy of access, privacy, communal and service space, it has become a phenomenon beyond a communal activity, personal practice, or related to a particular social group. Moreover, in addition to surrounding all these groups because of the considerable time spent by the people of traditional society in this framework, and rooting this building in urban plazas, neighborhoods, alleys and lanes over a long period of the history of Iranian human life, the bath has taken an unconscious form, coupled with custom and religious beliefs and, in other words, has become a social ritual.

This paper has attempted to prove the claim that bathing is more than an individual health practice, and in fact is a ritual social activity in the traditional society of Iran, through the understanding of the “social behavior of the bath” and related events by using two following study procedures. These two study procedures are 1. examining library resources including the study of historical and literary texts, besides 2. field study of the motifs and structures of Iranian baths based on the Study of Ganjali-khan bath in Kerman, as one of the most excellent baths in urban plazas in Iran.

Keywords

Bathhouse, Ritual Landscape, Bath designs and motifs, Ganjali- Khan Baths, social Space.



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Introduction

In many societies, including Iran, some of the public areas due to the limitations, capabilities, and the effect of time on them, have taken a concept beyond what is hidden in their frameworks and functions. By investigating historical texts, travelogues, and motifs, it can be seen that these places played active roles in the social structure and life of the Iranian cities in the traditional era.

When recognizing social relationships, folk traditions, decorative motifs, and at the highest level by reexploring collective rituals shaped in the archetypes of these spaces, one can find common mindsets and meanings that have provided a certain spatial quality for the formation of social interactions in these spaces. These meanings could remake the unique social quality of these spaces in various urban areas, in accordance with the society's time-based needs.

These areas, by adding functions higher than the purely physical needs, became meaningful, and are considered as the narrative of the rituals and, consequently, of the public culture. They have been assumed as a kind of ritual landscapes, as well, because of coming from the interactions of human with the peripheral environment based on collective and ritual activities.

It can be said that religion is a subcategory of culture and its landscape while being a cultural one, is called the ritualistic view due to the importance of ritual symbols (Mansouri, 2013, 5).

Rituals places that have a history dating back to the ancient Iran have always had high social and behavioral capabilities shaped by events, culture and social activities. One of the most important areas of quality mentioned in Iranian cities were urban public baths or sudatories, which, in addition to the public and service dimensions, were considered as the most ritual communal spaces of cities and the place of social interaction formation. In ancient Iran, body wash was mentioned in religious texts and has taken

into account individually and communally. On that era, water has always considered as one of the cleaner and purifier things, as well. Since the pre-Islamic period, signs of private baths have been found in the palace of Persepolis (Achaemenid period), the Apadana Palace in Susa, and the palace of Assyria, with the existence of a public and private structure that reflects on the issue of access hierarchy and their special washing rituals in them.

But the development of traditional baths, which has been used by the people before the city's new plumbing system, returns to the Islamic period. The construction of the bath was considered as a social welfare, and the kinglets and officials were building a bath in the city center or in the bazaar (Ghobadian, 1998, 274).

In this research, the social effects of the ritual dimension of traditional Iranian baths after Islam with the case of the Ganjali-khan bath of Kerman as one of the most healthy and complete historical baths in Iran and a unique example of the adaptation of decorations and current activity in space to examine the manifestations of these traditions and motifs have been investigated. This research also follow the theory that the bath, based on the evolution of its role in social construction over time, has not only been an architectural framework, but also, it has been a container for the expression of rituals and social activities in the age of tradition.

Background

Research on the topic of traditional baths and sudatories in Iran has been done for as long as this group of buildings were recognized today, which has been considered from the beginning in the works of orientalist and researchers in the field of architecture and city in Iran.

One of the most important works that studied the roots of cleanliness and wash in ancient Iran is the article titled "Rituals of cleanliness in Zoroastrianism" by Mohammad Mashhadi Noosh Abadi and Abbas

Rajabi Gondareh in 2013.

One of the important works that detail Iranian traditional baths, how people refer to and its spatial structure is “The Book of Climatic Study of Traditional Iranian Buildings” by Vahid Ghobadian in 1998. In a separate chapter of this book, called baths, he describes the space structure of this building and explains how it is used and its place in Iranian customs and communal practices.

Regarding the attention to the decorative motifs of the bath, Mohammad Ali Mokhlesi in “Decorating and bathroom Motifs” in 2003 deals with the types of bath designs in different periods and techniques. In the same year, in terms of examining the semantic meanings hidden in this type of buildings, Elaheh Rezaei and Mehdi Bataghva in the article “Bath in the Persian Literature of Iran” studied the baths’ position in terms of the formation of popular culture and Persian literacy in poetry.

The study of bath place in Iranian culture and its roots were once again discussed in detail in the article “Bath and Bathing in Iranian Culture” by Ali Mohammad Sajjadi in 2003.

Another research that has been carried out in the underlying cause of the formation and construction of a traditional Iranian bath is done by Mohammad Afroogh in “The Properties of Iranian Baths in the Safavi period” in 2009, in which the material and semantic causes of the construction of the traditional Iranian bathhouse are demonstrated.

Investigating the social roots of bath making along with considering the impact of this public building on Iran’s social and political changes in the article “Bath and its social functions in the middle ages” by Emamali Shabani and Saeedeh Jabbare in 2014 is another important research that examines the extracorporeal effects of the bath by the sample analysis of the events.

By limiting the research area to the Ganjali-Khan bath, referring to the historical and literary texts about this building, new aspects are revealed including

the government’s attention to the effects of the construction of the public buildings with communal interests and the belief in the hereafter reward for it in Safavei time. As written in the letter of Shah-Abbas to Ganjali-khan in the article by Dr. Bastani Parizi about the life of “Ganjali-khan”: In the letter of Shah Abbas in adding the mansion of Harat and Ghandehar to Ganjali-khan, it is stated that “you, finish all the buildings you are responsible for, including mosque and baths and cisterns, ... why so, all the complaints and cries of people are over, but the buildings and good works will remain” (Bastani Parizi, 1966, 65).

A review of the motifs and readings of the meaning and understanding of the views of Iranian baths has been carried out by Shohreh Javadi earlier in an article of the journal “Bagh Nazar” in 2008 entitled “The study and analysis of architectural decoration in the Ganjali-Khan complex, a masterpiece of the art of the Safavi era in Kerman”. She deals with the roots of many of the motifs and decorations of this complex and their semantic analysis, which has been used in the present research as a basis for analysis and study.

Iranian Baths, Formation & Structure

The structure of Iranian baths is rooted in the Iranian pre-Islamic lifestyle and influenced by the ancient religions of this land and the ritual of their attention to cleanliness.

Except for the few works left of the royal sudatories of Persepolis and the Apadana Palace in Susa, there is no proper study to understand the architecture of these baths due to the many wars and devastation of long centuries. Most of the remained works baths in Iran date back to the era after the Mongol invasion, especially the Safavi era, and about the urban baths before this period, for reasons such as the Mongol invasion and the lack of belief of early Mongol rulers to wash the body and head and on the basis of superstitious beliefs, only some notes from written medical and literary documents can be seen. The

main reasons of bath formation in this period are based on two factors:

1. Material necessities and components: include the power to apply the sovereignty of the state, the size of the cities and population growth, the stability of power and the economic development, and
2. Semantic components: include jurisprudential sentences of cleanliness and excrement, cleaning in religions and loving art sense in rulers and kings which can be categorized (Afrugh, 2009, 96).

The evolution of the structure of the bath framework, the diversity and expanse of the spaces and the richness of decorations in them have always been functions of the above two factors.

As in the case study of the historical bath of Ganjali-khan in Kerman, during the days when Shah Abbas Safavi's rule was getting more power, appointing Ganjali-khan as the ruler of Kerman region and by the establishment of safety in the trade and commerce, Kerman economic development along with the importance of the religious scholars and Ganjali-khan's art education led to the construction of the Ganjali-khan's plaza and its precious bathhouse.

Baths, due to their spatial diversity, usually consist of Khalvat¹, Shâh-neshin², Sahn³, Dastshoei⁴, Khazyne⁵ (pool), tün⁶ or hothouse. Each of these spaces was separated by a corridor and a porch to set up the temperature and humidity of each space from the adjacent space. Each of these spaces was related to the particular function that individuals have been involved in a communal ritual by being on those places and a commitment to a particular type of behavior.

Baths, a place to find community rituals and Social activities

Undoubtedly- before and after islamic era -the bath house was neither the place where the body was washed, nor the ritual place for purity. The use of the places like Patio, the temples of praise of the water goddess (Anahita) and the remains of the baths of

the royal Achaemenid palaces, such as Apadana in Susa, along with the rituals of the cleanliness such as "Sucrement", "Sigur", "Ephah Mann" and ... (Mashhadi Noushabadi & Rajabi Gavandare, 2013, 76 & 77) indicate the importance of washing and wiping and its connection with religious beliefs, communal activities and popular beliefs in Iranian culture (explained in the appendix).

The structural causes of the formation of the most important baths of the Iranian cities during the Sunnah, including the material and semantic components mentioned in the preceding paragraph - along with the amount of financial power and governance facilities, the benefactors or the tradespeople for the construction of this building, made the site of the building more important. The importance, on the one hand, was of providing the public access to the bath and on the other hand, was related to the agent of proximity to the city plaza or the dominion in the town, as a communal service show.

Located in the center of the city and being in the heart of the neighborhood, as the points where the social life has crystalized, along with the communal and ritual dimensions of bathing have made this group of buildings into a suitable communal spaces.

The history of the political social changes of Iran in the middle Islamic centuries shows the fact that the bath along with other Islamic architectural features has always appeared as one of the most influential structures in the history of the developments of this period (Shabani & Jabbareh, 2014, 90).

Accordingly, the importance of baths as communal spaces in the landscape of the Iranian cities in Islamic era such as Kerman is recognizable through the two theoretical aspects of the proper location and the ritual nature of bathing in Iranian culture.

The reasons associated with each other lead to create the bathhouse space in the process of their historical evolution. With the formation of the social character of such a building in the general culture, the importance of understanding the ritual nature and

the location of its construction have been correlative.

• Bathhouse location

“Locating and placing baths at public passages, market places, caravansaries, and proximity to mosques gave them a privileged position which enhanced to its functions in the social developments of the time” (Floor, 1988, 864-865).

Baths as a meeting place of the guilds and the different classes of society throughout the day have always been the site of informing and redirecting the latest news and rumors, on the side of other news channels such as the mosque, the market and the mill. Baths were good places for public notification. A merchant who got into the city from another land went to the bath first to relieve fatigue and, most importantly, to get information about city condition, and thus could have access to the latest news as well as the developments of the city (Fazollah Hamadani, 1979, 206).

For example, the announcement of the gift giving of Sultan Mahmoud to Ferdowsi and in fact the rejection of the Ghaznavi king’s munificence, from the same media came to everywhere (Nezami, 2001, 223).

• The ritual nature of baths

The ritual nature of the bathing as a communal activity and its physical manifestation in the bathhouse structure, which is characterized by the precise division of spaces on the basis of their common functioning, has led to participation, a sense of personal excellence, and a sense of proximity to other participants among individuals, and has consolidated its social dimensions. The continuation of the traditions of ancient religions in Iranian culture and the transmission of previous ritual cleansing sentences in conformity with the new rules of cleanliness and washing with water in terms of the sacred Islamic law is one of the thousands of reasons that facilitated the companionship and versatility of the Iranian people with the rules of Islam.

Rituals are considered as a tool of transferring human beliefs over time, which the physical appearance of

human activities to preserve them has shaped the ritual landscape. The significance of these landscapes is remarkable because it may provide the context of the protection and continuity of the identity of societies as an universal concept in time due to the link with the religious and the beliefs of humans in the past (Abarghouyi Fard & Saboonchi & Farzin, 2018, 7).

Because of the communal presence of women in the bath and the formation of a large social, family, and ... relationship, many marriages, and proposals (matchmakings) were carried out in through being in the bath. Also, by holding some special formalities related to wedding ceremonies such as bridal baths, groom’s baths (usually with relatives and friends), Henna and ... the bath became one of the main areas for holding marriage rituals. The observation of the stone of Henna, the pitcher-basin and the party and musician motifs in Ganjali-Khan’s bath are the manifestations of the effect of marriages on bath (Fig. 1).



A



B

Fig. 1. A, B: Paintings and bathroom tools and their ritual function-Ganjali-Khan bath. Photo: Ahmad Saberi Nahreforouzani, 2017.

From the point of view of their local social function, the baths were places for public meetings and private talks. The public bath was a place for acquaintances, visits, and basically plenty of debates and miffs and reconciliations took place in the bath (Ruholamini, 2007, 13).

“In this regard, one can mention Saadi’s poem that starts with this sentence (on a day, a fragrant flower in the bath / came out from a beloved hand to my hand)” Which implies the communication, companion and making friends of others in the bath and also the positive effects of this companion (Shabani & Jabbareh, 2014, 94).

The occurrence of historical, cultural and scientific events represents another type of social function of the bath in the middle ages of Iranian history; In fact, the bath served as one of the important centers for the intellectual development of the society. In a prominent example, the murder of Amir-Kabir in the Fein baths of Kashan is a very influential event in Iranian history in the Qajar era.

“Bath was also a place of admonition and advice; Because the general bathing of mystics and scientists, which usually lasted, was an opportunity for the questions and answers for devotees and people interested in gnostic and wisdom discussion and tips. For example, Mohammed Bin Monavar, the author of Secrets of Oneness (Asrar-o-Tohid), referred to the several of Shaykh Abu Sa’id abi al-Khair’s bathing and the discussions he had with scholars and ordinary people about ethical and mystical issues” (Monavvar, 2002, 255).

Baths in Iranian social history after Islam were a criterion for recognizing social classes. In the baths, there was a distinction between the social lower classes and the upper classes, and people were placed in different position of the baths according to their social status. A very specific example of this distinction can be found in the Ganjali-Khan cloakroom and dressing room, and the wall separating guilds and different social classes (Fig. 2).



A



B

Fig. 2. A, B: Classification in the Ganjali-Khan cloakroom and dressing room. Photo: Ahmad Saberi Nahreforouzani, 2017.

On the other hand, the process of bathing in the sudatory or the traditional Iranian baths consists of various hierarchies and stages that vary according to the occasions or ceremonies. It means, if we consider the ritual to be communal action having methods and styles, for religious, or non-religious purposes, during the time and location-dependent, bathing from the moment we enter the entrance of the cloakroom to leaving the hothouse and wearing the clothes is a communal ritual with methods and is subjected to unwritten human and religious rules.

Ganjali-Khan bath, structure, motifs and rituals

In the study of two factors related to Iranian baths, one

of the most complete Iranian baths in terms of spatial multiplicity and diversity, motifs and decorations and structural hierarchy of Iranian bath was selected that is Ganjali-Khan located in Ganjali-Khan plaza of Kerman.

The factors for selecting this bath are in follow:

1. This bath is one of the traditional Iranian baths which is in good condition in terms of architecture and technical infrastructure.
2. It is one of the few Iranian baths whose motifs and decorating have been the storyteller of the current daily events in the building. This factor distinguishes this bath in comparison with others and provides a unique example of bath motifs and rituals.

In terms of bathhouse locations as mentioned earlier, baths were usually built in the centers of neighborhoods or adjacent to market orders or main lanes. Ganjali-Khan bath, built during the Safavei era by the decree of the ruler of the city of Kerman, in Ganjali-khan plaza, is located near a set of urban public spaces. Ganjali-Khan Bath, which was recently used as a bath and has now become a museum, consists of three sections: cloakroom, intermediate space, and hothouse with exquisite tiles in the style of seven-colored tiles and with varied geometrical motifs, flowers and bush, human limbs and faces and calligraphy inscriptions (Javadi, 2008, 43).

Located in the public and government square of the city and being in the center of the bazaar and communicating with the alleyways and surrounding neighborhoods cause this bath has a special occasion to become a container (form) for the realization of popular gatherings for three levels of public, semi-public(guild) and private one.

In studying the art of architecture and its associated decorations in this bath in order to read its meaning and its relation to the traditions of the community, 2 factors have been involved; 1. Government's will and taste, 2. Applying public power; in the first one, royal art generally had a specific and formal style, and in the second, public art was general, and to some

extent, expressed social rituals and popular beliefs. Occasionally, according to the architecture and space, these two wills became closer to each other and in public buildings such as the public bath of the city, built by the will of the government and used by the public, the ritual and public art had an opportunity to appear in a more excellent and more formal style, and to the same extent, the look of the art of royal luxury has also become like popular art.

In general, the motifs used in the bath can be divided into 3 categories of animal motifs, plant motifs and human motifs.

The presence of human motifs in the bath due to the absence in other spaces of Iranian architecture after Islam, has given a special meaning to it.

The images of youths and teens that the hair on their face just started to grow, as well as the cupbearer and minstrel ladies, were the most important motifs of the human image in baths.

Landscaping of tiles in bath includes panels that were drawn in the European style of Western-style flower and pot painting with a variety of colors and shades; but the selection of flowers and birds and the rotation of the elements is such that it has a history in fine and heavy woven fabrics, especially carpets (Javadi, 2009, 22).

The presence of paintings of human faces and ladies in the banquets in the Ganjali-Khan bath space reflects the human dimension of this space and shows its narrative culturally so that the ritual and social dimension of the bath is also seen in its human decorative motifs as the scene of the unfolding of human relationships and activities (Fig. 3).

In terms of the ritual nature of the bath, it can be concluded that: The bath is one of the important public spaces in which one can clearly see the appearance of the folk beliefs in the formation of a ritual social space. In the midst of folklore of thoughts and beliefs, it can be found the traces of the existence of the demon and the fairy in the bath. In the nightly fairy tales of the long winter nights, the demons and fairies



Fig. 3. Human motifs of women parties, Ganjali-khan Bath. Photo: Ahmad Saberi Nahreforouzani, 2017.

that were dancing and stomping at the nights in the baths scared children. Dekhoda says in the book titled “proverbs (Amsal va Hekam)”: According to the popular opinion, the Fairy tales gather in baths, headwaters, groves, and forests in the darkness of the night (Rezaei & Bataghva 2003, 172). One of the first drawings to draw attention to this regard in Ganjali-khan bath is the façade paintings. Those paintings by drawing of goblins alongside the narratives of Khosrow and Shirin and Bahram Gore point to the depth of the superstitious beliefs among people alongside the stories and the presence of them in the bath, as a popular space (Fig. 4).

In the decorations of Ganjali-khan bath, a rather diverse collection of themes of mentioned ornamentation are visible. In the facade area, hothouse and dressing room are decorated with valuable tiles including flower and bush, flower and pot and bird motifs and epic scenes from Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh. The naturalistic panels in the hothouse and the facade of the bath with a variety of natural colors and shapes (realistic and naturalistic) as well as symbolic and geometric patterns are notable examples in the decoration of the Ibrahim Khan complex (Javadi, 2009, 21).

At both side of the bath entrance, there are two

vertical rectangular panels that have flower vases and the birds on tree branches paintings. Two mountain partridges can be seen on either side of the pot and on the bottom of the panels. The mountain partridge is one of the birds that has been widely used in Kerman art; Parrots, hoopoe, pigeons, and sparrows have also been featured in the motifs of this territory and have been implemented many times in the pattern of carpets and handicrafts.

Understanding the motifs and the art used in this bath as a case study, it can be understood that the mentioned trinary motifs in the forms of animal, plant and human motifs, at three levels, represent the meaning which people and artists get about their surroundings. These three levels include: 1. opinions, beliefs and narrations: embodied in the illustrations of ancient stories, superstitious beliefs and religious icons. 2. Social events and happenings: It mainly includes ceremonies where the framework of the bath has been welcomed and is related to weddings, Henna, celebrations and stomps ceremonies, or has dealt with the social class of the groups using the bath. And 3) Kerman exclusive scenery: It mentions plant and animal motifs that have been most visible and represented in Kerman, although it has taken on a new form in relation to European artworks.



Fig.4. Paintings on the facade – Ganjali-Khan bath. Photo: Ahmad Saberi Nahreforouzani, 2017.

Conclusion

Rituals mean the common and communal actions among humans, derived from religion and the public beliefs with religious or non-religious roots, have been going on during the time and have always sought an opportunity and a place for expression. By finding a suitable Protector and transmitter, these types of human actions has been gradually out of its physical and former meaning and taken a new content. The meaning that it is caused by human and later it is the reason for the continued presence of humans in the space under discussion. Reading motifs, ornaments, space hierarchies, and historical narratives about the actions people have been doing in Iranian baths over time illuminate the connection of these spaces to social traditions and communal rituals and enable them to be recognized as ritual landscapes. A reading that introduces the bath beyond the merely physical and functional dimensions of the bath which has ritual, social, religious, and cultural aspects and in other words, it turns it into something other than a bath - in the sense of the word.

Ganjali-Khan bath, as one of the best examples of Iranian baths, represents a reciprocal interaction and relations among humans in the form of ritual behaviors in the context of a communal space. This is a building, by locating in the center of the city of Kerman, served as a public space and a place to express the rituals, beliefs, behaviors and social interactions and as an excellent example, it shows us how much the concept of decorating and painting of the functional buildings of Iranian architecture is derived from the current activity in the building, social activities and the living tradition of the society.

By understanding the ritual function of traditional bath space and recognizing it through Reverse Engineering, we can categorize the components that have transformed the process and construction of traditional Iranian bath into a communal ritual:

1. Defining communal spaces in the city (especially for women)
2. The possibility of using the bath as a multifunctional space for events and information transfer.
3. The possibility of encountering different social classes and groups.
4. Structuring and decorating the space based on religious beliefs and public opinions.
5. The proper context for the conflict and the expression of the folk and royal art.

Endnote

1. Cloakroom and checkroom
2. alcove coach of bathhouse
3. Central hall of bathhouse or "Beyneh"
4. w.c
5. Pool of bathhouse
6. hothouse- Warm-up location

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