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## **Aesthetics and the Manifestation of Spirituality in Islamic- Iranian Art and Architecture with an Emphasis on Conceptual Symbols from the Perspective of Tourism**

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### **Abstract**

As one of the richest intellectual domains of humankind, Islamic culture has played a prominent role in the formation of diverse dimensions of Islamic community. In this regard, the rich Islamic art, which is intermixed with the elegance of Islamic architecture, is regarded as one of the aspects of Towhid (belief in the oneness of God) and divine worldview. Since the mankind is not a single-dimensional creature, and is innately inclined to beauty and innovation, architects have sought to create an original work imbued with spiritual meanings and themes within a material realm through reliance on their experience, thoughts, individual creativity as well as an aesthetic spirit on one hand, and the manifestation of spirituality and other notions on the other. The contemporary human, by setting out on journey on the earth, has made an attempt to seek knowledge and awareness, and Islamic architecture is considered as an epiphany of human nature as well as a manifestation of contemplation and existence in the depth of human spirit, which is believed to be one of the most significant elements of tourism. The present research is aimed at exploring the conceptual symbols in Islamic architecture originating from Islamic worldview, as the rich Islamic principles have inspired Muslim architects, whose thoughts and environment have been influenced by Islamic worldview. The present article has been written adopting a descriptive-analytical method. The results indicate that architectural elements in Iran have not been created without taking Islamic ideology

and concepts into account, but rather all the elements applied are endowed with spirituality and divine symbols.

**Keywords:** Art, Islamic architecture, Spirituality, Symbol, Tourism

### **1. Introduction**

Art, as applied in architecture, is a combination of beauties and invaluable experiences which creates harmony in artistic- cultural milieu, helping the tourists to gain experience and creating beautiful moments for them (Sepcht, 2014: 10).

Architecture is a consumer product for tourism (intangible) as well as a rich cultural asset. Visitors do not travel to a place only to benefit from tangible tourist attractions, but it is also the characteristics and influential ideology in a particular place and culture- architecture, people, food, the way people dress, life style and local diversity that attract them to a given destination (Scerri, 2016: 1). The physical shape that architecture defines constitutes exquisite artistic spaces that feature conceptual symbols for creating a particular feeling. Thus, it attracts visitors to some spaces (Edward & et al, 2008) which serve as a focal point for attention and experience among a variety of tangible and intangible artistic beauties (Scerri et al, 2016)

Among the types of architecture, Islamic art and architecture are identified as one of the most successful architectural styles in world history. When tourism discovers the traditions and cultures of any country, then it will be considered a great attraction to the visitors. Islamic architecture is a powerful weapon to meet the attraction of visitors' fulfillment (Bhuiyan, et al., 2011: 1335). Islamic art emerged roughly with the rise to power of Omayyad dynasty in 41 A.H coinciding with the transition of the Caliphate capital of Omayyad from Medina to Damascus. In addition to establishing the social system, Islamic art and architecture have managed to display the crucial fundamentals of divine thought such as *Towhid*, justice, etc., in various dimensions of individual and collective life. The building of a mosque has been constructed in such a way that it could facilitate worship, and the infinite alternation of arches and columns divide the continuous space to such identical parts that attaining a spiritual state becomes facilitated. Furthermore, the use of Quranic verses and arabesque trceries in the inscriptions of mosques give identity and meaning to the

space and matter. The dome, minarets, Mihrab (niche in a mosque wall marking prayer direction) and the ceiling as well as the inscriptions, tile works, plaster works and keystone works all end up in one single axis and ultimate point. Patterns, shapes and colors in architecture are clear signs of conveying hidden meanings, and the audience attains an intuitive perception of those meanings through his presence in and engagement with the architectural space. Seyyed Hossein Nasr attributes the origin of divine art to a celestial vision which in turn derives from “perennial wisdom”, which lies at the heart of religious message and experience, and since the divine origin is single and also due to profound human unity, it achieves eternity and universality (Nasr, 1379: 110). For a variety of reasons, it could be argued that Islamic architecture, as we know it in Iran has proven to be the most appropriate domain for the emergence of artistic creativity in Islamic community with an Islamic identity in art and architecture, possessing conceptual symbols that have spiritual as well as exalted divine values. Art can enrich and transform the body and soul of its audience. Basically, theology and art are interrelated. Experts need theology and mysticism on one hand and on the other hand, art enables them to illustrate the inexplicable matters. Eventually, art is in need of theology experts so that they can explain divine subjects and make it more beautiful (Khataei, 2016: 40)

Islamic art is replete with symbolic and mysterious concepts in which, the symbols and mysteries of lofty concepts express the inner meanings of art. The only way of observing the concepts and meanings of Islamic art and artistic literature depends on the symbols being taken into serious consideration, and this has been expressed in religious and Islamic civilizations as aesthetics (Majidi, 2015: 113)

Therefore, becoming familiar with the thoughts, worldview and the ideology of Muslim architects in developing a coherent system with Islamic-Iranian architecture, along with a variety of fine arts imbued with religious concepts and divine symbols is among the intended aims of the present research. Reflection on tourism and paying attention to spiritual dimensions could help one to reach perfection, and in this

regard, Islam has stressed the importance of taking journeys in the world and pondering upon the creation of the universe as well as seeking knowledge. Human nature has a predilection to fulfill material and spiritual needs. In this respect, tourism could be considered as a tool for giving meaning to life, a quest for one's identity and spiritual growth. So a tourist is looking for the meaning of life today, and travel is about movement that can meet tourists' spiritual needs. Although tourism is talking about physical movement, it is full of experiences and meaning (Ambroz, 2011). So some researchers believe that tourism is a spiritual concept (Coles, 1991), and historical attractions and architecture have become the destinations for many tourists to visit.

If we presume that all the elements employed in constructing Islamic-Iranian religious places enjoy divine meanings, we can discover a relationship between Islamic ideology and worldview in the construction of Islamic architecture. A question has also been raised as to how Muslim architects and thinkers have managed to employ unity and religious conceptual symbols in Islamic architecture, creating spirituality in it. The present research proceeds to investigate the systematic structure in Islamic-Iranian architecture, placing emphasis not only on conceptual symbols in it but also on the manifestation of spirituality, which has drawn the attention of both domestic and foreign tourists.

## **2. Method**

At first, a descriptive- analytical method has been adopted in the theoretical investigation and the principles of research. However, with respect to the theoretical approach of the present study, the method applied in this study is also a “formative” and “semiotic” type, and the data required for preparing the theoretical discussions came from factors such as understanding Islamic identity, Islamic-Iranian architecture and conceptual symbols in Islamic architecture. For data collection and analysis, the researcher studied books, articles, other research studies and authentic scientific websites. Also, the comparison of theoretical concepts to the reality and fields of research in Islamic architecture, has been written, and has been used in related topics.

## **3. Theoretical Principles**

A

The nature and inner inclinations of humans for ascending to a great place have shaped their life and have explained the meaning as a message guiding and leading next generations in this manner (Pakzad, 2013: 20). Overall, the objective of Islamic art and architecture is the creation of a space that helps humans with the process of understanding their evolution and eternity in the presence of only God leading them from darkness of ignorance to the everlasting light of eternity (Zolfaqarzadeh, 2014: 40).

The definition of Identity: In Mo'ain Dictionary, identity is defined as "Essence of Creator, existence and whatever identifies a person" (Mo'ain, 2002:1223). In Amid Dictionary, identity is defined as "the reality of the object or person that encompasses his essential and natural attributes, or whatever personifies or identifies a person" (Amid, 1374). Therefore, identity includes a combination of qualities, features of acquired behavioural patterns, which distinguish a person, race, nation or civilization from other races, nations or civilizations.

### **3.1. Islamic Architecture**

Islamic architecture is an architectural style, which has come into being under the influence of Islamic culture and has its own specific features. Nogrehkar (2013), a member of faculty in Tehran University of Science & Technology has replaced Islamic architecture with the term "the architecture of Islamic era". In his view, the predominant feature of architecture in Islamic era is paving the ground for the human's journey from multiplicity to unity.

### **3.2. Islamic Art**

The term *Islamic art* is attributed to a kind of art that is a manifestation of spirituality and devotion, being at the service of the exaltation of human thought and deed, not lead to weakness and deviation in his thought and deed. In regard to committed art.

### **3.3. Symbol**

Symbol is a "mark, sign, or a word that signifies or represents something else, a hint or mystery" (Aryanpour, 2007: 2258). In science, it could also be used synonymously with the term *code* (Mohsenian Rad, 2006). Accordingly, we arrive at the meaning of the term symbol, which means a concept that contains an image that conveys hidden and underlying significations of an object.

### **3.4. Spirituality in Islamic architecture**

Islamic architecture originates from the language of the Quran, suggesting the depth and richness of the Islamic civilization by virtue of its intrinsic sense of spirituality. In fact, reaching exaltation, grandeur and the magnificence of God, which have been embodied in different dimensions of human existence creates such an exuberance in human spirit that he invariably becomes immersed in the holy spirit of God, to whom we shall return.

### **.5. Spirituality in tourism**

The relationship between human beings and the environment is considered to be a dynamic one; as a result, the information that one gets from the environment is not always definite, but becomes validated through individual deeds. The information acquired from the environment has symbolic and signifying characteristics. It also has some features that stimulate mental reactions, and has some messages that created needs. The aesthetic values and qualities are given to the environment by people as they need to experience the environment as a pattern of meaningful relationships. In order to discover meaning, an observer does not have to pay attention to all the factors in the scope his vision (Kakhaki, 2013).

Mankind in his life has taken strides on the path of a quest for discovering the nature of existence, and to this end he has set out on journeys so as to seek wisdom and gain experience in communicating with earth, environment and the creator of existence as well as discovering the meaning of life (Willson, et al. 2013: 153). Values that individual experiences when travelling are like the guiding principles, and are considered as a way of understanding the truth and meaning of life (Schwartz, 1994).

### **4. Research Findings**

#### **4.1 A discussion on the architecture of the Islamic world**

Islamic architecture could be recognized as one of the most accomplished styles of architecture in the world, and one could identify a valuable and dynamic continuum in Islamic monuments. Islamic art is characterized by a combination of arts from a number of neighboring countries, particularly Iran. In the wake of Iran's conquest, many conventions and styles of Persian Empire were adopted by early Muslim architects. Broadly speaking, the monuments of Islamic era could fall into two main categories:

- A. *Religious buildings*: mosques, mausoleums, schools, *Husseiniyas* (places of mourning), *Takaya* (places of religious retreat) and *Musallas* (places of prayer);
- B. *Non-religious buildings*: bridges, palaces, caravansaries, bathhouses, bazaars, castles and water reservoirs

#### **4.2. Intrinsic features of art in Islamic architecture, spiritual atmosphere and tourism**

Muslim artists tended to use their creativity for reviving their inner beliefs as well as generating a set of embodiments, spiritualities and unique works of art. Not approving of the descriptions of the figures of living creatures that were common in ancient Persia, Muslim artists gradually began to define a new method, and consequently they broke away with the art of contemporary Romans and Byzantines. According to Muslim artists, art works are the ones that for the most part address the communication of the message of Islam. Islamic art is distinct from that of other cultures in light of not only form, image, elements, spirituality and its components but also even in terms of subject matter and meaning. In all the forms of Islamic art, one could discover both explicit and implicit messages that invite us to observe and learn about them. Islamic art is characterized by the similarity between geometric design and crystal forms. The most evident manifestation of spirituality and the supreme human identity could be uncovered within the innermost layers of art in mosques; this is the kind of art in which human's heart, soul, vision, belief and faith, along with his body parts and organs are all set in motion in the process of discovering the truth and origin of Creator. The mystery of Islamic art lies in its spirituality, purity and intrinsic mystical truth. In this regard, exploring the underlying spiritual teachings in Islamic art and architecture is one of the most fundamental steps taken in reviving the Islamic identity in Iranian architecture.

The magnificence and beauty of Iranian architecture, especially in Islamic era, depends on its decoration and embellishment. Embellishments and ornaments such as mirror work, brickwork, plasterwork, tile work, masonry, woodcarving and painting were

prevalent throughout the Islamic era, making progress in each era by benefiting from the facilities of that era. In Islamic architecture, attempts were made to direct more light into the interior of the monument by applying the laws of light reflection through using mirror work in hallways and ceilings. The element of space in the architecture of Islamic era is intended for the presence of humans, and other elements such as the walls and parts of the construction gain their identity based on that. In Islamic architecture, in addition to the enclosed interior space, the open and green exterior space or atrium is of prime importance. Moreover, in the architecture of this era, the ceiling is not designed like the floor; while the floor is flat due to being inspired by the ground in nature, the ceiling is designed by following the example of infinite, celestial heaven. The only prominent and intriguing element in the exterior or facade is the *Iwan*, which is designed like an arch of triumph for the entry of humans, which refers to the importance of human being versus a construction. In the architecture of mosques, their form and construction, which have been constructed according to the criteria of religious age, lays a celestial meaning. In the appearance of the mosque and in parts of its architecture such as in *Mihrab*, windows, openings, as well as in all the doors with arch-shaped tops and arcades, a square shape has been applied underneath. This kind of shape is commonly observed in mosques with domes. In these buildings, the dome has a circular shape and volume, representing the roof of heaven and an exalted place, and perfecting the transcendental state of the building appearance (Kazemi and Kalantari Khalilabad, 1390: 44). As we proceed, we will elaborate on some of the features that gave rise to artistic beauties in Islamic architecture. However, the intellectual philosophy of Mulla Sadra as well as the Shi'a beliefs that dominated the Safavid community, who believed in Purgatory, thrived favorably in Isfahan school of thought, and more emphasis was placed upon the concept that expressed, "the existence of God the Almighty is the only real and genuine being". The urban development inspired by Mulla Sadra's school of thought, which has been represented in Isfahan school of thought, has referred to one single meaning despite diversity in form and in it the parts and the



whole all signify common meanings and concepts, which represents Islamic art in an Islamic city (Roshan and Sheibani, 2015: 163).

Spirituality is an inseparable element of Islamic art and architecture, which is inherent in symbols and forms, so that a tourist can understand and receive these factors because of the surrounding atmosphere. While travel led tourists to search for meaning, it can be construed as spiritual generating framework (Ambroz, 2011). In tourism area, having the first look at tourism, they construed it as one of the factors motivating tourists to travel; therefore, each type of tourism has the capacity of deep-thought and fulfillment of the level of spirituality which strictly depended on tourism understanding and viewpoints (Haq and Newby, 2009; Vargheese and Prabhu, 2012). It means that tourism is based on spirituality and tourists can seek meaning of life, spirituality and God on their trip. First it seems difficult, but when architecture factors are explored, it will become clear.

#### **4.2.1. Form**

The figures used in Islamic architecture are indispensable from the conventional meaning of mathematics, not least geometric shapes. Geometric shapes and numbers do not merely have a quantitative characteristic as it appears, but rather they possess a qualitative and symbolic aspect, some part of whose reality resembles their quantitative aspect. Every number and figure, in light of its symbolic meaning, is a reflection of a hidden unity and quality in the essence of that unity which gives a transcendental quality to all qualities, putting them in an original state. For instance, the square shape of *Ka'bah*, which is also observed in yards and traditional buildings, is not merely a square or rectangle, but it is rather a symbol of stability and perfection as well as a reflection of a square-shaped celestial dome whose terrestrial image is represented by *Ka'bah* itself. Therefore, such a function creates a spiritual space and atmosphere in religious places (Alinejad Qomi, 2005: 290)

#### **4.2.2. Light and Spirituality**

Islamic architecture, particularly in Iran, lays a special emphasis on light. The inside of a mosque resembles some light that has been

reflected in the form of material figures, reminding us of the verse called “Noor” (light). Light is the most prominent element of Iranian architecture, as it not only serves as a physical element but also as a symbol of divine wisdom and being. Light is a spiritual and sublime presence which has infiltrated the roughness of matter, turning it into a noble and supreme form worthy of being the container for human soul; hence, his essence is also rooted in the world of light, a world which is nothing but the world of spirit. (Alinejad Qomi, 2005: 291)

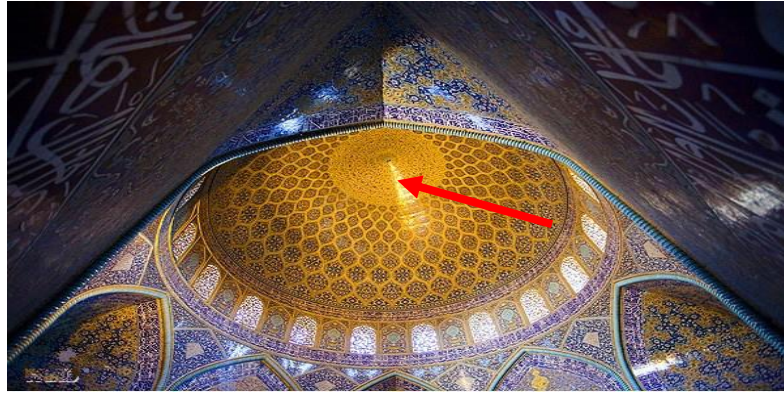


Fig.1. Light and Peacock tail to show the direction of *Qiblah*  
(Sheykh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan)

#### 4.2.3. Color

Color originates from the refraction of light. Light, in its non-refracted form, symbolizes the divine being and wisdom and colors symbolize images or numerous refractions of being. They create a state in human soul and a spiritual ambience, which is compatible with their qualitative and symbolic reality. Just as light has been important in Islamic architecture, so have its colour and harmony played an important role in all types of Iranian art. In Islamic architecture, the presence of sublime essence of God is ubiquitous. In the earliest white mosques, the absolute poverty in their construction reminds us of a being that solely possesses all the existing wealth. Likewise, in the elaborate, colourful vaults and the entrances (geometric shapes and *moqarnass*), one could see a harmony that refers to the manifestation of unity in multiplicity and the moving of multiplicity back to unity (Alinejad Qomi, 2005, 292).



Fig. 2. A perfect artistic mixture of color and light and the creation of a spiritual atmosphere in Nasir- al-Molk mosque, Shiraz

The features that create artistic beauties in Islamic architecture were mentioned above. Subsequently, different aspects of Iranian-Islamic art will be explicated through forms and signs.

#### **4.2.4. Introversion**

Introversion exists in Islamic art as a principle. By a simple evaluation, one could find out that in this kind of art, the real value has been ascribed to the essence and the inner core, and the external layer is merely superficial. Its internal and enclosed richness determines the genuine essence and existence of the construction, which is superior to the facets of the external space. According to the oriental thought, not least in Islamic lands, the essence of space lies in inner layers and the inner life generates the essence of space.

#### **4.2.5. Centralism**

The movement from dispersed elements (multiplicity) towards central unity is noticeable in most of artistic spaces and Islamic- Iranian architecture. This internal and central space could be something other than the central life, which is the coordinator of all activities, and has put the centre of the space in a place where a turning point is likely to occur.

#### **4.2.6. Reflection**

In most of the spaces in Islamic- Iranian architecture, the components have ascended in vertical and horizontal axes, and in order to reach the centrality of vision, the line of vertical movement in open spaces has been adjusted in the direction of sky and light, which has led to the fusion of light, sky and reflection as visual outcomes. This reflection is a symbol of immaterial depiction of human life and his inclination towards a sublime and eternal reality.

#### **4.2.7. Connection with nature**

Empathy with and respecting nature are deeply ingrained in culture. The presence of nature in Iranian art is a multi-faceted one. The internal and external contrasts like the passing of time introduce pictures in which gracefulness; serenity and silence of nature pave the way for silence, worship and pondering upon the dimensions and the vastness of the world.

#### **4.2.8. Geometry**

The geometry of Iranian art conforms to the following law: intricacy in multiplicity in the hidden synthetic potential and a return to unity and centrality, creating symmetry and a calculated replication of

columns and spaces within its formative hierarchy represent a replication of an eternal truth.

“Verily, for all things Allah has appointed a due proportion.”  
(Quran, Surah At-Talaq, verse 3)

In human sciences, geometry has a close relationship with the concept of “Qadr” (divine pre-ordainment) in the Quran. Engineering in the realm of Islamic art is a reproduction of the images of the world of ideas in both material and abstractive dimensions. The abstractive dimension represents itself in abstract images, and the material dimension is a symbol of meaning that emerges in architectural form. (Bolkhari Ghahi, 2005: 393)

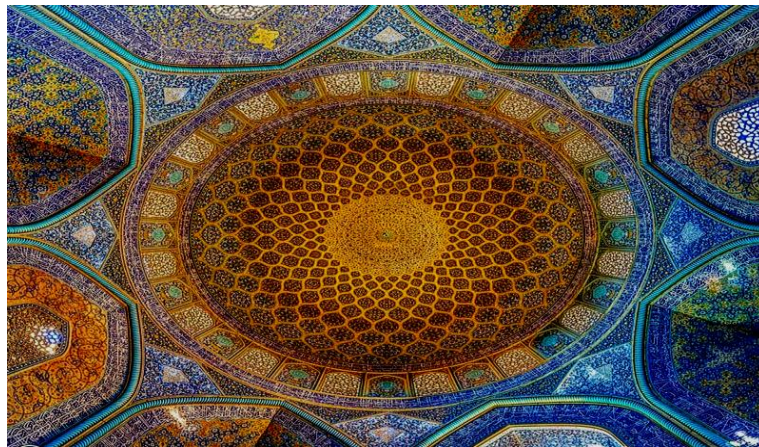


Fig. 3. Beautiful geometric shapes: multiplicity in unity and unity in multiplicity (Sheykh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan)

With regard to arabesque traceries, it is worth noting that the starting and ending points are often the same; and according to some analyses, it is a mystery for reminding us of the beginning and end of everything from everlasting divine essence, and the return of everything to Him: “We belong to God and to him we shall return” (Quran, Surah Baqarah, verse 156) (Navaei & Hajghasemi, 2011; 274)

#### **4.2.9. Transparency and continuity**



In Islamic- Iranian art, the path of human movement or his outlook possesses a continuity so much so that space overtures in horizontal and vertical lines cause transparency within the walls and columns. Therefore, the ultimate perspective becomes revived in an infinite horizon. Space has never been specified with certainty and the ambiguity of its intricate components is due to enriching a perspective, which could not be interpreted in a limited scope. In fact, maintaining space continuity is one of the salient features of Iranian- Islamic architecture.

#### **4.2.10. Mystery and Ambiguity**

A sense of spiritual grandeur in the simplest and purest manner in the formation and composition of Iranian monuments has been taken into account, and has created works whose message could be received by a particular sensory perception.

#### **4.2.11. Harmonious (symmetrical) balance- Subtle equilibrium**

In Iranian- Islamic art and architecture, the harmonious balance between the building and the natural environment is palpable to the extent that the building is compatible with nature as though it were one of the living creatures in it.

#### **4.2.12. Inner eye**

In order to appreciate the artistic concepts of this land (Iran), one ought to understand the particular cultural view from which these concepts have originated. Understanding this architecture would be virtually impossible without a passionate exploration of the hidden psychological and spiritual terrains where wisdom, knowledge and emotion are interlinked. The familiar forms of Islamic- Iranian art and architecture or the symbols and signs in our Islamic art play a key role in achieving these concepts; however, could one arrive at the semantic core and the meaning of Islamic art by dispensing with these familiar signs and symbols, exploring other avenues? The answer to this question is not going to be easy whatsoever

### **5. Spiritual affects of Shia spirit and Infallible Imams in Islamic architecture**

An important part of architecture is based on rules, engineering and mathematics, being measurable and explicable scientifically; however,

if we want to study a set of buildings from an artistic point of view, we should focus on some aspects that cannot be measured from scientific and mathematical viewpoints. Art expresses some subtle and precise facets that are beyond the reach of science, yet it influences our heart and soul powerfully. According to some researches, if we want to weigh up Islamic arts on a scale, we have to put architecture on one side and all the rest of arts on the other, as Islamic architecture includes all the arts, having attracted the skill and craftsmanship of all artists by virtue of its unparalleled attraction and potential. Paying attention to religion and spirituality and inclination to Islam in Islamic- Iranian architecture and urban development is nothing but a manifestation of the interaction of spiritual body and spiritual soul. It seems that urban management based on justice represents a sound understanding of the status and role of the Islamic rule that mentions: Do not inflict injury nor repay one injury with another (Khosravi, et al., 2016: 28).

Another point to bear in mind is that artistic manifestations in the architecture of holy shrines and mosques exclusively originate from Shia spirit and spirituality. Devotion, strong enthusiasm or passion is the main incentive of these works of architecture and their dazzling beauty. Art critics have mostly regarded these manifestations as the characteristics of Iranian taste and talent, the main reason being that the devotion to Infallible Imams turned the inner copper in an Iranian artist into pure gold like in alchemy, and paved the ground for his talent to create masterpieces in both arts and literature which are unparalleled even in great world civilizations. Iranians have attained an elevated status thanks to their devotion to *Ahlul- Bayt* (the descendants of the Prophet), and this is the essence and mystery -hidden from the view of strangers- which has made Iranian art stand out in Islamic era, and that is why it lends itself to various research studies. Profound religious faith, pure spirituality and their devotion to Infallible Imams are the main assets of these artists. In fact, the most incredible art works in the world have originated from spiritual beliefs and incentives, all of which have come to being under the influence of a common driving force: immaculate and sacred celestial beliefs (Ashrafi, 2006: 50).

#### **6. The status of conceptual symbols in formation of spiritual space and atmosphere in Islamic architecture**

Since art and symbol are complementary to one another and go hand in hand, a set of arts employed in mosques possess a message

which, if discovered, could help us understand Islamic- Iranian art. The structure of dome, minarets, columns and *Mihrabs* each conveys a message to the spectator in one way or another. Paying attention to these symbols and their messages could help us realize that these messages are all perpetual and mystical. Through centuries, Islamic art in mosques has provided an environment in which Muslims can live and work with a constant remembrance of God, reflection upon the concept of beauty, which originally solely springs from God, who is in a sense the absolute beauty. Knowing about the thoughts, worldview and ideology of Islamic architects in order to create a coherent system within the structure of Iranian- Islamic architecture, along with various types of fine arts containing religious and spiritual meanings, as well as divine symbols in constructing Islamic-Iranian religious places could suggest all divine meanings; however, the relationship between ideology and Islamic worldview exists in the structure of Islamic architecture. Therefore, as we proceed, we will investigate the elements of Islamic architecture, conceptual symbols as well as the ornaments of Islamic architecture in Iran and the meanings that derive from indigenous arts and architecture which are rooted in beliefs, culture and dominant values in the society, and originate from the mental image and typology of the prevailing architecture in Islamic community (Sargazi, 2013: 51). All the symbols of spiritual manifestation in Islamic architecture have been displayed in figure 1, which will be elaborated on afterwards.

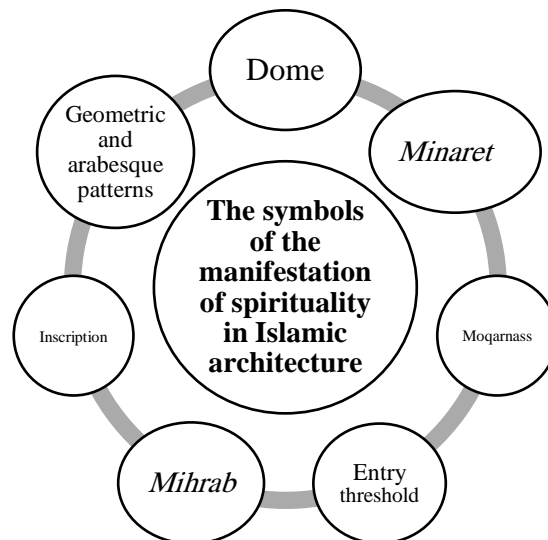




Fig. 4. Spiritual manifestation symbols in Islamic architecture

### 6.1. Dome

Since Sassanid period we have witnessed dome-shaped buildings in Iran, such as *Qal'eh Dokhtar* castle and *Kakh-e- Ardeshir* (Ardeshir's Palace) in Firuz Abad, located in Fars province. The earliest domes were shaped like vaults with semi-circular arches, but over time, they changed in shape from semi-circular to circular by completely rotating around their vertical axis. This is how domes came into being. The main problem with circular dome was how to place it on a square base; nevertheless, Muslim artists and architects came up with a simple solution; they put the four angles of the square, in the form of a vault, between the cube and the dome, and the dome was built from inside through diagonal vaults in the space between the joining point of the two walls in the sides of the room inside the angle in the corner of the room.

In this way, the dome was constructed on the base of an octagonal. In other words, they originally changed the base of the dome to a square and then to an octagonal and after that they placed the dome on top of it. In this manner, the heavy weight of the dome and the pressure it exerted were distributed among all the angles of the octagonal. The corners of these angles, which had turned into a triangle, were appropriate places for some ornaments. Islamic domes tend to move



Fig. 5. The beautiful gilded dome of Imam Reza Holy Shrine

upward due to their gentle and mild curve. In fact, they moved from multiplicity toward a single unified point. An upward movement from the stem of the dome toward its peak suggests oneness of God. The most exquisite ornaments have been applied to the surface of the domes, and the best colours and the most transparent tiles that manifest the glitter of divine lights as well as a variety of floral patterns and heavenly shrubs have decorated the azure domes of mosques. (Abedi & Abbasi, 2015: 51)

The basis and construction of the dome from the lower cross-section to the apex of the dome, the inherent and the spiritual movement, refer to sincere human devotion to the worship of God to the highest point. Resting of the dome on an octagonal base is not merely a technical form of architecture, but rather an illustration of the throne of God, which according to a Hadith (tradition) is carried on the shoulders of eight angels. The dome is an allegory for the sky, being associated with the spiritual world. In addition, in the Quran it has been mentioned that the ceiling of heaven has been erected on columns that are not visible. The piers and columns are the carriers of the ceiling, and the dome also symbolizes an infinite, endless heaven. The spiritual importance of the vacuum in the dome house of mosques is one of the results of a strong connection between spirituality and the metaphysical principles of Islam and Islamic architecture. Moreover, the Holy Prophet of Islam (*S.A*), according to a tradition, has described a grand dome in his *Mi'raj* (Spiritual Ascent) built from white shells, and on its four corners the first four words from the surah "Fatiha" had been inscribed: "In the name of God the beneficent the merciful".

Also, four creeks from water, milk, honey and heavenly drink flew from them, which are the eternal creeks of heavenly bliss. It could be inferred from this tradition that shell might represent the spirit of God, which covers the pearl (creatures), by the dome; in other words, the shell symbolizes the throne of God, which has encompassed all of His creatures. Perhaps this tradition could be regarded as the spiritual model for any holy building with a dome which Islamic architects have benefited from, for the cube-shaped part of the building in their view represents the cosmos and the four corners of the building symbolize

the spiritual and corporeal elements of the universe; furthermore, the mosque space could exemplify a loop positioned between heaven and the Hereafter, and its floor with its allegorical indentation is an allegory for the material and earthly world (Bassij, 2001).

## 6.2. Minaret

One of the parts annexed to the main plan of the mosque is the elevated building of minaret, and it is from this part of the mosque that muezzin's call to prayer is recited and Muslims can hear it. In the dictionary, minaret means a place for holding light, and it was basically a narrow tall building which was built in the middle of roads as a guiding pole. Because they used to light a fire on top of it to make nocturnal journeys less difficult for wayfarers, they were called minaret or a place for holding light. Minaret is a building that existed even before the advent of Islam. Even though only a few of them have been left, the evidence shows that minaret, or the pole for guiding caravans on the road was also built in Pre-Islamic era.



Fig. 6. The beautiful gilded dome and minarets of the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Abolfaz- ul Abbas (A.S.)

Over time, minarets were constructed with ornaments of brickwork, tile work, and *moqarnass*, and they were embellished by vegetarian patterns and Quranic inscriptions. At any rate, this architectural element took a long journey from functioning as the pole for estimating the distance and the guiding tower on the roads to the

light tower, and Muslim architects and artists used it as an elevated building from which the call to prayer was announced. These towers of light, which lead people to the most sacred place, i.e. the mosque, still serve as guiding towers, yet they now guide and lead people towards God and sanctifying and glorifying Him. Every time with the call to prayer from the top of the tower of light, people are called out to move towards God by doing a virtuous deed (prayer) and hastening towards salvation. The beautiful music of Azan (call to prayer) is played from these minarets all across the public areas of the city so that people can hear its divine sound and respond to it if they want to (Abedi & Abbasi, 2015: 50- 51).

### 6.3. Moqarnass

In Islamic- Iranian Architecture, Moqarnass is made to create geometric harmonies and beauties and human scale, the refraction of light and sound, the secondary ceiling, above all it has been used to represent Islamic concepts such as unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity. It also refers to the world of being and its creator.

In Islamic architecture, the dome and the cubic space underneath are joined through the creation of moqarnass. The innovative space of moqarnass resembles the relation between heaven and earth. The dome symbolizes the heaven and the cubic space underneath it represents the earth, and the moqarnass arches regarded as the linking point between heaven and earth (Madadpour, 1995: 269). Moqarnass is considered a technical element in architecture besides its role as an ornamental element. Moqarnass shapes in Islamic architecture were employed first



Fig. 7. A beautiful moqarnass and the existence of a point symbolic of the center and axis of cosmos

in the corners and angles of domes. Originally, when they wanted to erect the enormous building of domes, they required some technical factors in order to prevent the collapse of the heavy roof of the dome because the domes in Sassanid era collapsed due to lack of necessary strength and resistance. As mentioned above, Muslim architects came up with some unique technical and artistic innovations, which were unprecedented in the world of architecture through the application of dome-shaped ceilings and adopting the styles of earlier architecture. They divided the ceiling of the dome, which rested on a square-shaped base in Sassanid era, into hexagonal and octagonal bases and eventually positioned the dome upon octagonal bases; therefore, the pressure exerted by the dome-shaped ceiling, which was transferred to octagonal side corners, prevented the collapse of the dome. These octagonal angles appeared as small triangles which also served an ornamental function. Afterwards, in later stages the art of moqarnass became widespread using flexible materials such as plaster.

Thus, the most prominent ornamental element in Islamic decorations is moqarnass, which is reminiscent of the frozen rocky façade of stalagmite in caves. Moqarnass also bears a great resemblance to honeycombs, which are built one over the other for arranging the buildings or for gradually changing from geometric shapes into other shapes, and especially from square shapes to circular shapes on which the domes are rested. In constructing the moqarnass, Muslim architects have become so adept that they prevent the building from becoming heavy, putting the pressure instead on the base of the building. Moqarnass leads to the equilibrium, solidity, and strength of the building, and looks as if it were the roof of the sky that rests on the cubic volume of the earth. Moqarnass, which is itself a kind of intermediary shape (it is neither ceiling nor side wall) has been able to provide the magnificence, grandeur and spirituality of the sacred building and it could also be considered as an element that refers to matter and spirit, that is, the movement from the square of the earth towards the circle, or the central point of heaven, which suggests that heaven descends to earth, and earth ascends to heaven in geometric and



crystal shapes of moqarnass, and human being is positioned in between (Aghazadeh, 2007: 49).

#### 6.4. Entry Thresholds

One of the architectural characteristics of religious places is entry thresholds, which have appeared in mosques as tall gates, which end in the yard. These tall gates with their great heights remind us of the infinite mercy of God. When first entering the threshold, one feels that God's mercy embraces all His servants by observing the magnitude and height of the gates and groups of people who eagerly step into the house of God.

This is why at prayer time when the doors of God's mercy open, the call to prayer is echoed inviting Muslims to "Hasten towards

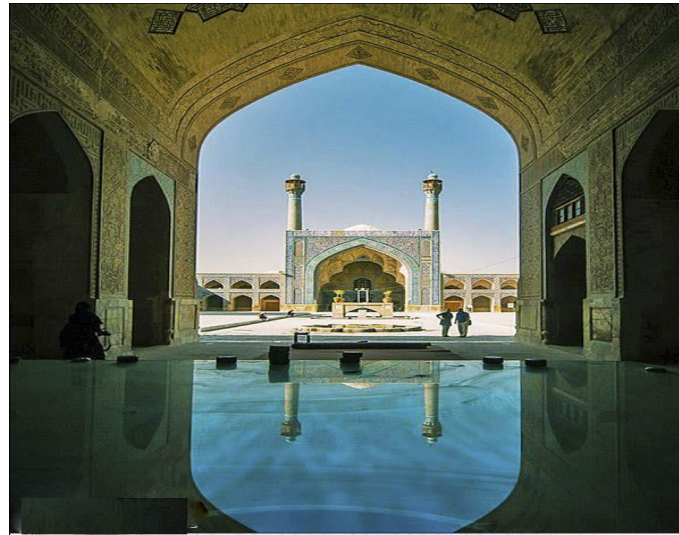


Fig. 8. The magnificent entry threshold of Imam Mosque in Isfahan

redemption" under the shelter of God's mercy. Recession of the entry which has glorified and beautified the mosque entry by means of a plethora of ornaments with various moqarnasses apparently invites pilgrims to go inside and welcomes them (Agazadeh, 2001: 106). After entering the elevated threshold, one can see a vast courtyard in the middle of which a huge pool catches the eye, which is intended for purifying the worshippers. Purification, cleanliness, and the creation of

spirituality are the major conditions for worshippers. Purification and cleanliness have been the precondition for entering the territory of God in all human religions ever since their inception and no worshippers or wayfarers would be permitted to enter it without purification. Likewise, in mosques the pool and ablution house for cleanliness are the main components of the building, and the worshipper cleans his appearance and gets rid of any sort of inner impurity and filthiness, warding off the Satan and then stepping into the sacred divine realm.

#### **6.5. Mihrab (a niche in the mosque wall marking the direction of *Qiblah*)**

The word Mihrab in dictionaries means the noblest place for sitting and the noblest place in the mosque. In Islamic architecture, Mihrab is the recession in the middle of Shabestan (hall) wall, which is located in the direction of Mecca showing Qiblah. The congregational prayer Imam stands there and the worshippers say prayers following his lead in his back in the direction of Qiblah.

In fact, Mihrab is the heart of a mosque, and in terms of shape, it resembles a lamp that sheds light upon the place of worship and

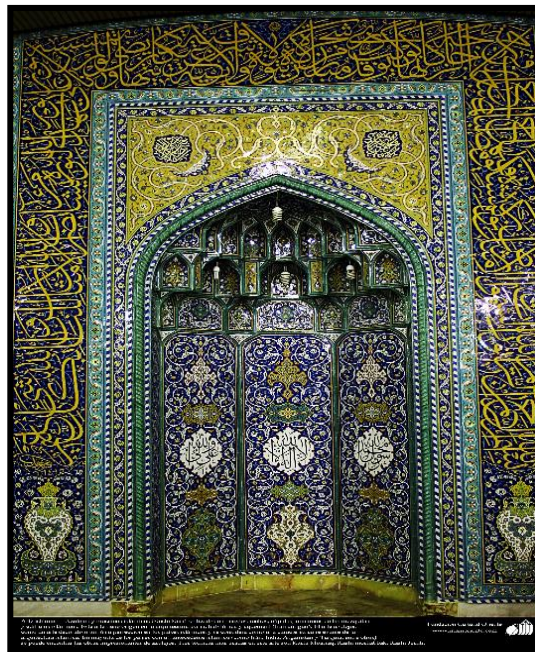


Fig. 9. Mihrab and its spiritual space  
(Surah Noor)

illuminates the direction of Ka'bah and God in the darkness of ignorance and oblivion. Mihrab is the most spiritual and ornamented part of a mosque, and the most glamorous and magnificent art works have been applied to this small space. Various kinds of plaster carving, tile work, different kinds of ornamental lines and vegetarian patterns and Quranic inscriptions have appeared in it. Furthermore, Mihrab is a place for the glittering of divine light, and is a gate opening to paradise. This sense or concept is noticeable from the arch shape of Mihrab and the verses of Surah Noor that have surrounded it.

Mihrab is made like a sign and symbol marking the direction of Qiblah, and it is the place where congregational prayer Imam stands. It is made as a kind of empty space in the angle of the building, laying a wise emphasis on the immateriality and spirituality of Islam. Nowadays, the first part of the mosque building to be decorated is Mihrab and the next one is the entry threshold, which is due to sacredness of the mosque building in comparison with the surrounding buildings. Mihrab is also decorated to suggest the spiritual relationship between Qiblah and divine presence and orients religious deeds in a universal radium, attracting the attention of all the believers to a single unified center (Abedi & Abbasi, 2015: 55- 56).

#### **6.6. Geometric and Arabesque patterns**

What is this lofty roof smooth with many pictures? In the world acquainted with this mystery, Sage there is none.





Fig.10. Exquisite geometric shapes in Islamic architecture

One of the other extraordinary features of Islamic architecture in creating a spiritual atmosphere is its ornaments, which have been applied in various forms to all Islamic buildings in proportion to them. Namely, Islamic ornaments play an important role in not only the beauty and decoration of the building but also in its strength and coloring. Hence, "decorative arts are attributed to a kind of art that other than its specific features should be beneficial in terms of its patterns and colors." Ornamentations are arrangements that make the architectural construct more pleasant or enrich a work of architecture, just as the world of creation is not monotonous, and enjoys great diversity.

Islamic architecture symbolically refers to the world of creation and being, which itself abounds in plentiful diversity. Intricate and elaborate geometric patterns which are composed of one circle that in turn accommodates within itself all the other geometric shapes, and circle in Islamic architecture is extensively applied in the majority of geometric and arabesque patterns, is suggestive of perfection. On the other hand, arabesque patterns and shrubs that exemplify the ever-green

garden in paradise all represent the creativity of Muslim artists in creating innovative designs (Abedi & Abbasi, 2015: 57-59).

One of the most prevalent ornaments in Islamic art and creating a spiritual atmosphere are “arabesque trceries”, which are characterized by interwoven and intricate shapes of buds, branches, leaves, flowers and plants that have been referred to in the Quran, best known as heavenly plants. Plants including dates, grapes, pomegranates that are mentioned in the Quran have been employed in an abstract manner in the decoration of the building. Arabesque trceries have fluid movements that compel the onlookers' gaze to exuberantly alternate between motion and stillness while catching a glimpse of the embellished surface. The gaze of the spectator does not stand still anywhere, moving everywhere from the external margin towards to interior and vice versa. Just as God the Almighty freed our lives from uniformity, tedium and material harshness by creating beauties and decorating and coloring the nature, so did the Muslim artist, making use of ornaments, enriched and refreshed a rough object or work of architecture by following the example of his creator and understanding the semantics of the world. As a result, beauty and harmony are two quintessential components of Islamic decorations, which symbolically refer to the grace, and grandeur of God.

#### **6.7. Inscription**

The most superb visual art in Islamic word is calligraphy, especially writing the holy Quran, which is the best example of religious art. In addition, the components the Arabic inscription contains ornamental qualities whose magnificence and beauty are unsurpassable. This writing might change from a glamorous rectangle, which by means of vertical column-shaped lines has attained equilibrium, to the most spiral and fluid lines. The inscriptions that lie on the inner walls of prayer area or have surrounded the Mihrab not only remind the believers of its words, but also draw their attention to the rhythm of the shapes and its spiritual figures and grandeur and might of divine revelation.



Fig. 11. Different types of inscription and writing in Islamic architecture

Arabic is written from right to left on a horizontal line. The right side is actually the terrain for working and trying, and the left hand side is a place for heart and therefore is a journey from without towards within. The consecutive lines of a text could be regarded as analogous to the seams of a cloth fabric. In fact, the symbolism of writing resembles that of weaving in that both of them refer to cosmic axes (Alinejad Qomi, 2008: 301).

### 7. Conclusion

Tourism means moving from one point and returning to that point during completion of a process during a process; Therefore, this travel not only led to people's movement but it was also dependent on experiences which occurred before travel, starting point from origin, entertaining in destination and returning to the travel starting point. So researchers believe that tourism is a spiritual concept, where the tourist is looking for a meaning. Seeking the meaning of life is one of the most important reasons motivating people today to choose to travel to historical destinations with a rich heritage. Therefore, architecture is an attraction through which a tourist can find spirituality.

The comparison of the results of the present study with a similar research has been examined. The results of this research show that today tourists seek to use the culture, identity and ideology of the Islamic world, especially in Islamic art and architecture; therefore, one of the spaces in Islamic art is Islamic architecture. In this space of unity

and manifestation of unity, the unique creation of a physical body of the Islamic architecture is one of the main factors in the formation of a sacred identity and culture. This concept, based on the principle of monotheism in the Islamic world-view, has been the originator of the principle of movement from plurality to unity. The results of this research show that Islamic architecture is derived from the language of the Qur'an and that the depth and richness of Islamic civilization is utilized by the soul. This is in such a way that the belief in monotheism and faith in the teachings of Islam as manifestations of the aesthetics of Islam in Islamic architecture manifests itself. What distinguish Islamic art and architecture from a variety of other artistic styles, is the meaning, concept and spirituality that are rooted in it. The familiar forms of Iranian-Islamic art or architecture, or the symbols and signs of our Islamic art in reaching these Concepts play a key role. Today's tourists are also looking for travel and movement beyond physical displacement and benefiting from material gain and spiritual enjoyment, familiarity with history, culture, cognition, experience, curiosity, and excellence in the sense of consciousness based on the nature of God-given self. For this reason, Islamic architecture plays a key role in attracting tourists and is one of the most important tourist attractions.

According to a similar study by Susan Khataei in 2016 entitled "Tourism Boom by the Islamic Art Spiritual Attractions in Iran Perspective Elements", different works of Islamic art in Iran's perspective that have occurred in different periods and areas all have the same message and truth, indicating the harmony and magnitude of Islamic civilization and culture. The unity of art that leads to the ideological unity can attract many tourists and can limit the boundaries of time and place beyond the limits and the spiritual connection with all its audience and believers. Islamic art and architecture derived from religious sources and appearance (in shape) and within it. Forms are meaningful in general and created in general in Islamic art, and nothing is empty of "meaning". The general feeling of foreign tourists about the observation of Islamic-Iranian works is one of surprise, admiration and spirituality. In this study, the role of ornamentation in mosques and shrines in Iranian-Islamic architecture has been emphasized to create

spiritual relationships with audiences. As a result, the importance of the spiritual relations of the audience with works in the attractiveness of tourism is effective.

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