

## Using Decorations in Architecture of Religious Constructions, Safavid Era, Isfahan (Divine Reflection or Artistic View)

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**Abstract:** Since ancient times, decoration as a complementary for the appearance was a part of original Iranian art. With prevalence of Islam, this approach entered into the process of evolution, until it flourished in Saljuqi era by inventions made in this regard and in Safavid era, according to aesthetic verve of Safavid kings, it reached to its highest place. In this period, due to Safavid kings' inclination to Shiite faith, constructing religious buildings such as Mosque, religious schools and holy shrines with decorations such as "Mogharnas". "tile-making", Calligraphy, fillet, etc. was intensified. The main question of the study is whether decoration works in religious buildings such as mosque or schools is aimed at intensifying spiritual feelings of the audiences or a combination of art and architecture and whether such buildings-with their aesthetic, terrestrial elements - are in conflict with the principle of avoiding Luxury and extravagance and if not, so what is the application of these decorations in such buildings that are considered as the place of meditation and thought for learning religious sciences, self-purification and reaching to divine revelation. This is a research analytic article and its data collection tool is as description, existing hypotheses and library data. In this research, first we interpret each keywords and examine theoretical fundamentals of the application of the decorations, causes and the method of using them in religious buildings of Safavid era and then we start by analyzing some significant construction of that era.

**Key words:** Islamic decorations, islamic frills, the art of islamic architecture, safavid era art, religious buildings of safavid era

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### INTRODUCTION

Decoration is among most important elements in Iranian architecture which eliminates vapidty from the building's appearance and gives it identity and specification. In Islamic art, decoration is intended to show divine atmosphere. Decoration, considered as one of pictorial foundations of Islamic art is an illustrative mean or expression to ennoble the material, surface, color, line, volume, brick, mud, plaster, tile, etc. to reach the horizon of excellence and find semantic color and identity and finally, extra natural characteristics to become divine and immaterial/throughout Iran history, there was always a close association between art and divine customs extracted from the religion. Indeed, faith is of the most important principles shaping art and art I the language to describe most profound doctrines of human being and the manifestation of most beautiful mystic feelings. Many of artworks remained from such days are designed in abstract form and based on symbolistic concepts. The relationship between art and religion was most developed and flourished in Islamic era. Muslim artists, influenced by the teachings of Islam, managed to present many of spiritual concepts in the form of illustrative figures based

on aesthetic principles. Although artists' attention to decorative aspects and bringing elegance as well as respecting aesthetic fundamental has convinced many foreigner experts in the field of Islamic art to remark that by showing such figures, the artists aim to show only aesthetic appearance of the building and such figures lack any symbolistic application. Beauty and grace in artworks of Islamic artists was not the only goal of the artist. Iranian artists have been always so much eager to present divine concepts in the form of mystery and symbol in aesthetic figures and designs (Khazaei, 2007). Figures as being considered by Iranians in their artistic creation since ancient times, reaches to a significant importance after 5th century AD. Due to their high dynamic nature, these figures found widespread use in many places. Another characteristic which lead to use such figures commonly was their expanding character that is attractive by Muslim artists due to its covering nature. In Safavid era, geometric figures were highly employed in tiling operation for the buildings (Abdolmir, 2001). In the combinations of plant figures, the artwork is founded on Persian art figures (Eslimi) which is visually more consolidated, more strong and more solidified and khataee flowers are placed inside Eslimi figures. Generally

speaking, architectural method in Safavid era had a trend towards more simplicity. The geometry of the construction is simple and broken lines are common rather than previously used curly lines and similar proportionalities are utilized in the building. However, various decorative techniques were utilized by architects and artists in its greatest form such as bricking, tile working, inscription writing, fillet, etc. (Karim, 2004). What is summarized in developing a symbolic figure to buildings with public function was promoted by architects who utilized high potential of Safavid kings in developing prosperity and providing built area. Figures having modesty with divine, symbolic content, was only in some specific parts of the buildings in pre-Safavid era (Mansour, 1996). Holy teachings of Islam gradually developed in scientific and cultural context of Muslim communities and were flourished in terms of wisdom, philosophy and mystic teachings. Such atmosphere led to flourish rational life of Shiites and intellectual schools, named as Isfahan divine school, was founded by Mirdamad and promoted by MullahSadra (Naser, 1999). Teachings of this school influenced on life and demeanor of the people in various aspects and artists of all fields by their thoughts and means, tried to convey such concepts. Safavid architects and urban planners also tried to provide symbolic figures showing new Shiite messages by receiving such teachings. In this regard, mosques and religious schools played a specific role. In one hand, like all other Islamic eras as a place to be connected to divine world, they had the highest place and capability in depicting consolidated concepts of Islam and on the other hand, since in terms of political, scientific and social aspects such places were among the most basic places of developing the teachings of Isfahan school, they received certain direct influences from such courses (Safaeepour and Hasanali, 2011). Therefore, Isfahan was the underlying foundation of thoughts which were trying to create their own utopia in their works. Such conception from an architectural work was precedent in Islamic communities but due to existence of a scientific, wisdom, philosophical and artistic consolidated system for Isfahan school in Safavid era, this age had different reflection. Indeed, holy and symbolic role of architectural design in pre-Safavid era was only present in certain points of the building but what happened in re-developing Iranian architectural spaces in this era was a symbolic role assigned to each architectural organ in various constructs, especially in buildings with public functionality in a transcendental conceptual system and this was generalized to the amount that influenced the nature of the building and was synthesized to that (Mansour, 1996). On this basis, various organs of the building were designed so that each reflect a part of Eden as a pictorial sign and as a whole, they reflect the reality of heaven. This was accomplished by help of painted

decorative and inscriptions carrying Islamic messages in Safavid buildings and led to the point that as Arthur (1994) comments such buildings turned into the word of god. In Islamic age, sepulchral architecture found significant importance. Meanwhile, primary Islamic community considered building memorial monument as an improper act and was looking for a simple, modest end to somatic life of mankind. After a while, the original simplicity was wiped out and memorial monuments were formed for religious leaders and Caliphs. In Iran, due to religious inclinations such buildings are more obvious in comparison to other Islamic countries. Therefore, in this study, we try to examine how the art rising from Shiite beliefs of Safavid era was developed in decoration of religious constructs such as mosque and religious schools and it is intended to identify its functionality and insisting on it in religious buildings of Safavid governance era based on religious beliefs of the time. Finally, we examine the decorative works in some samples from the masterpieces of religious architecture in that era. The study includes Imam Khomeini mosque, Chaharbagh Mosque and Sheikh Lotfollah mosque, because they represent the peak of Safavid art in architectural decoration.

**Literature review:** Bemanian, 2001, in his Article, “divine piety and the architecture of mosques” says; throughout history, Muslim architects were always attempting to decorate the mosques by commitment to holy orders of Islam and their religion and this is why during all 14 past decades, a precious treasury-including mosques-has been inherited and undoubtedly, architects who have built such mosques were full of divine piety that caused the original architectural identity of past mosques.

Davood (2009) in the article “introduction of the construct, decoration and figures of the mosque and Supreme School of Shahid Motahhari (Sepahsalar)” remarks: glorious constructs erected throughout history for temples, mosques and churches, had a heartfelt background and true love. This love, attention and giving away material and spiritual assets, has been presented based on affinity and heartfelt desire and innate inclinations to the faiths and religions.

Abdolmir (2001) says in his book, “the sense of Unity”: in expression of traditional architecture of Iran from the perspective of Sufism, the artist collaborates in the trajectory of divine creation and considers the world of illusion as the medium between heaven and earth as MullahSadra noted before and then provides a comment about Isfahan architecture in this regard.

### **Theoretical foundation and conceptual framework of the research**

**Concept and functionality of decorations in Islamic era:** A western human in contemporary era might find terms



Fig. 1: Decorative tile with Eslimi patterns in Southern porch of Isfahan grand mosque (Jame' Isfahan)

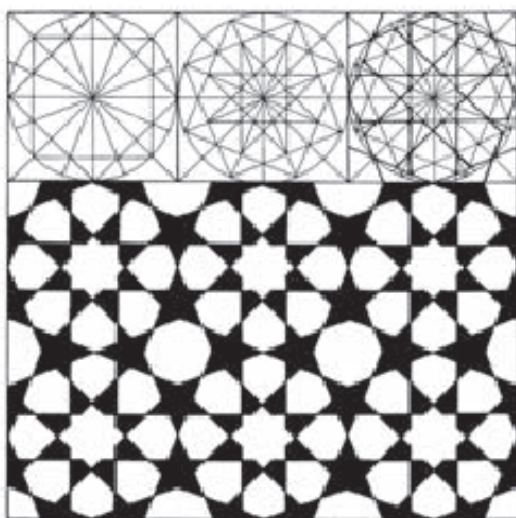


Fig. 2: The method of a sample of Islamic figures, first, circle is turned into octagonal star

such as decoration, figures and patterns as non important concepts, mean while decoration can promote the shape of architecture as an infrastructure for decoration and also be considered as an aesthetic outcome. With prevalence of Islamic age, a new season was begun in the history of architectural decorations and the relationship between decoration and the building. Religious sanctity, although was not expressed by the Prophet of Islam himself but

indicates real fear about the possibility of a king of new paganism, therefore there are scarce pictures of living creatures (pope, 1994).

So, decoration in traditional, Islamic architecture is in a form that takes out the simplicity of the building and shows the foundation of aesthetics in the work. Decorations in Islamic architecture are among the most fundamental and most effective unifying elements which are tools to convey divine, conceptual messages. Islamic artist, by appealing to religious, faith fundamentals, tries to bring a relaxing, holy and sacred atmosphere by help of decorations.

The most complex combinations of the decorations in Islamic era are created based on familiar, traditional concept. Plant is a symbol of natural signs that is a symbol of fertility and blessing. Since the beginning, mankind tried to express high vague but fundamental conception of external word by decorative figures and shapes. Figures coming from vines, rose, lotus, pomegranate flower, etc. and its curls in the artworks of Islamic era was a starting point for a set of meaningful Figures, that is called Persian Figures (Eslimi). Figure of vine stalk was dispersed on the surface of the façade, expanded and found recurrent, aesthetic figures of the leaves. This rhythmic, endless move that was accomplished by repetition of a symmetric pair of leaves and curly lines would lead to bring a balanced design (Fig. 1)

Geometric Figures especially since Parthian dynasty which was to some degrees due to the effect of relationship with Greece and Roma. Geometrical Figures are not just a tool to bring visual or mental joy but undermines a more profound concept. Islamic artists, not only because of the sanctity of portrait and drawing the body and the face of human but also in accordance with theoretical foundations of Islam were using geometrical shapes. In Islam, the science of geology has been employed in the art and in absence of measures and contemporary tools circle is used as a base to proliferate figures and various nested aspects of it which is a symbol of exuberance (god's creatures) from the unity (almighty god) in the world (Fig. 2).

Calligraphic combinations, promoted since Islamic era (Arthur, 1994). In Islam, the art of Calligraphy was considered the most sacred arts among visual arts since it was mostly used to write the verses of holy Quran. One of the characteristics of Islamic art is that none of its methods have been obsolesced in various ages and with birth of a new calligraphic technique, other techniques are not forgotten. Various types of calligraphic styles used mostly in Inscriptions are including Kofi, Naskh, Nastaliq and Sols. Like other Islamic decorations, Calligraphy is



Fig. 3: A part of decorations and calligraphy of Teimuri era, around Isfahan Jame' Mosque's yard

tightly connected with geometry, proportionality and mathematical relations and the proportion of the letters and the degree of curling was based on a certain order. Calligraphic inscriptions were of significant decorative elements in most of Islamic era buildings (Fig. 3).

**The application of decorations in religious monuments of Islamic era:** Single decorative designs that would grace Iranian buildings, especially great mosques was something beyond Beautification. In holy Quran, Surah of "A'raab", verse 31, the almighty god says: O children of Adam! attend to your embellishments at every time of prayer. In verse 32 of the same Surah, the god says: "Say: Who has prohibited the embellishment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants and the good provisions".

As it is evident from the holy Quran, decoration itself in mosques is not taboo but what is forbidden is breaking god's law and rational boundaries considered for each

issue, including the matter of decorations in mosque. The Sharia of Islam does not allow placing the sculpture or drawing or any other figure or picture showing living creature such as animals and plants in places of pray, whether it is mosque or any other place dedicated for it. Disagreement with the picture of living creatures in Islam is considerable in 2 aspects other than the possibility of paganism. First, eternal dignity of mankind, as the creature of the god, is kept so that it is not written on an art work, that is definitely limited and incomplete, or being misused. In other hand, nothing has to act as a medium-even in its relative and temporary form-between mankind and the god.

Therefore such drawings in Islamic architecture especially in the façade of the mosques has been widely applied. Islamic artists have changed the form of plants in decoration of mosques and has given a kind of symbolic form to them that is the sign of paying attention to jurisprudence rules and following it by the artist. Therefor

colors, Figures and generally speaking, decorations have certain mystic conceptions in Islamic art and applied arts have been created usually based on teachings and religious inspirations. Geometrical broken lines, nodes or Eslimi figures and mogharnas as well as layouts are all in special place in Islamic culture and art and a lot of mysteries are buried in their content and appearance.

**Safavid era:** After taking power by Shah Ismaeil Safavi, in 95 AH, the first national dynasty in Iran was established after the emergence of Islam. A religious movement based on Shiite teachings was promoted into a political movement by the unity of its disciples and finally led to a powerful reign under the administration of Shah Ismaeil Safavi which take over the power in Iran for over 2 centuries.

Security and the boom created in Safavid era was a proper context to promote flourishing of rational life for Shiites and led to promotion of Iranian Islamic art in all fields. This period is of the most creative ages of Islamic art as well as Islamic philosophy and metaphysics. Various disciplines of the art including Literature, painting, architecture and music which find profound links with Shiite faith and its intellectual-philosophical schools are considered as the mean of expressing thoughts of this faith. Written references prove the existence of relationship between spirituality and Islamic thought in one hand and art from the other hand. The construction of Isfahan as the Utopia of Safavid government is based on doctrinal and philosophical remarks of Isfahan and the symbol and its somatogenic-spatial representation of its concepts.

It can be said that Shah Abbas I could bring a legendary prosperity to the art better than his precedents: all forms and types of expression, from architecture to Miniature and carpet weaving found a kind of Iranian taste and feeling which was unique and original. By choosing Isfahan as Capital, Shah Abbas turned it into a legendary center (Henry, 1998).

Therefore, the atmosphere of this age could be regarded as Shiite-Iranian theme which is influenced by Sohrevardi's wisdom and philosophical thoughts of Mullah Sadra and Shiite beliefs.

**Architecture of Safavid era:** What is evident at first glance in architecture of constructs such as Imam mosque, Sheikh Lotfollah mosque and other buildings of this age is the spatial magic and Figures on the body of this architecture. As Stirlen notes in his Book "Isfahan: the heaven of illustration": full discovery of the underlying message of such buildings requires discovery of figures covering the tiles on the wall. Do they act just as a decoration or they include symbols? if such surfaces are regarded as a mirror they open towards Neverland (Henry, 1998). In this regard, Nasr says: Islamic art reflects

the nature of latent things in "hidden treasures" in the realm of corporality. If we take a look at the façade of buildings such as Shah mosque in Isfahan with its magnificent geometric Figures, facing the reflection of Intelligible world at the world of intangible shapes, we testify this truth (Naser, 1999).

Extensive architectural activities of Safavid era started since Shah Abbas. Most of Safavid age buildings such as mosques, schools and inns were built with 4 porches. Using burl, rainbow tiles for decoration became so much popular, so that religious building of this period were all covered with tiles including the dome, porch, façade, the gate and even the minarets. Calligraphy on tiles also became common in decorating religious monuments and several buildings were decorated with various fonts such as Sols, Naskh, Nastaliq and other types of calligraphy styles (Yousef, 2000). Moreover, since mosques are most significant Islamic buildings, it can be said that Islamic art originally developed in mosques and such buildings could be regarded as most important place to reflect Islamic architecture and art (Refaei, 1998). In Islamic method, all previous teachings were utilized. Most of all, seven color brick tiles were used instead of burl tiles: for example, Imam mosque in Isfahan has burl tiles in its façade which is a masterpiece in tiling techniques but in internal sites since the process of construction had been prolonged, rainbow tiles were utilized. Also, using decorative herbal figures that have been evolved as a single form of Eslimi and Khataee became popular. Moreover, rainbow, enamel and burl tiles with prevalent colors such as azure, cyan, green and while, influenced by painting works in architecture of this era found common application.

Artists of Safavid age utilized the experiences of their antecedents, especially in Saljughi and Teimuri age and by adding some initiatives, they could invent specifications which brought distinctions between tiling art in this era and previous ages. Safavid kings assigned Shiite faith as the official religion of the country and invited Shiite clerics and leaders from other countries then they ordered inscriptions and figures about life and the place of Shiite Imams. In some mosques and holy monuments at early years of Safavid age, a sentence could be found with the title "Ali is promoter of god's message" which is one of the most famous mottos of Shiites. In early years of Safavid administration, this motto was so much applicable. Using a combination of the words "Allah", "the prophet" and "Imam Ali" together shows the beliefs of Shiites on that period. Safavid policy in choosing the name of Ali (peace be upon him) in inscriptions influences on the dignity and respect to the position of Imams in Shiites culture. This is one of the most certain reasons that why there are so many inscriptions that the name of Ali has been carved on it in



that era. Therefore, it might be deduced that some of Safavid Shahs had religious objectives by applying this policy which is giving importance and glory to the position of Imams in Shiite culture. This important point shows brilliant policy of Safavid kings and also shows their real commitment to the prophet and Imams.

**The concept of symbolic icons used in decorations of religious monuments in Safavid era:** During Iran's history, there was always a close connection between art and spiritual customs taken from the religion. Indeed, religion was among most important elements shaping art and art was the most profound language to convey the wisdom of mankind and the most significant mystic feelings. In pre-Islam art, this was also significant. Many of artworks left from that age have been presented based on symbolic concepts, artificially. The relationship between art and religion during post-Islam age developed and promoted more than ever. Muslim artists, influenced by the teachings of Islam, managed to present many spiritual concepts in form of decorative figures based on aesthetic principles. Existence of beauty and doceur in artworks of Muslim artists was not the only objective of the artist. Iranian artists were eager to provide spiritual concepts as codes and symbols in terms of beautiful Figures and images. As Imam Muhammad Ghazali comments in his book, "Elixir of felicity" (*Kimiya-ye-Sa'adat*), regarding "beauty": goodness of appearance is the presentation of the beauty of the soul". Mirfendereski also says:

The wheel of fortune with such dinky stars is so beautiful/there is a hidden image for everything that is visible. Indeed, it is Islam's nature and divine customs that conducts the taste and intrinsic aspects of the artist towards this dimension of the art. So, visual artworks of the artists have been embodied artificially with a decorative order (Khazaei, 2007).

Figure of peacock alongside with the tree of life has reserved a significant place in Iran's art. This Figure is often associated with religious concepts. Figure 4 of peacock has been employed not only as a symbolic Figure in post-Islamic artworks but also this bird had been regarded as a sacred bird in Zeroasterism in ancient tiems (Fig. 4).

Figure of "tree of life" is also of the most important individual, symbolic figures in Iran's Sassanid era art. Epidemic presence of this tree in many Iranian artworks is significant. The tree of life has been presented in many artworks left from ancient times, especially golden and silver pots, textile, molding and other Sassanid artworks between 2 peacocks in front of each other. In ancient traditions, the dragon (snake) as the symbol of evil is



Fig. 4: The figure of peacock with the tree of life from sassanid era

attempting to govern over the tree of life. With the governance of snake on the tree of life, drought comes and water on the ground becomes plagued. With presence of these 2 guardians and battle with snake, they hinder the governance of the snake over the tree of life.

In post-Islam age, the form of the tree of life was moderated based on Islamic ideology and has emerged in artworks according to the concept of "the tree of Tuba". In Islamic culture, the tree of Tuba or "Sedre-tol monteha", is regarded as a tree in paradise. There are many quotes and hadiths about this tree. Based on such Hadiths, Tuba is a tree with several branches and houses in paradise are decorated with these branches and everything that elysian wish, grows on these branches. Therefore, the tree is the origin of blessing for elysian. This is one of several trees that has been noted in holy Quran (Surah 53, verse 14-16).

In *Mantiq-ol-Teyr*, written by Attar, peacock has been regarded as a heavenly bird. When Adam and eve were rejected from the Eden, peacock was also rejected because of acting as a medium between them and the evil (in form of snake). Attar rears peacock as the symbol of those who wish to return to heaven without even thinking about the throne of the Simurgh. Peacock is enthusiastic to return to the heaven that he was rejected from, due to being allied with the snake (Khazaei, 2007). The ugly snake became my ally/and made me humbly rejected from the paradise. I am attempting to find a guide/who can bring me out of this dark place towards heaven I can't afford to reach the throne of the Sultan/It suffices me to reach to the Concierge.

I do not deserve the place of Simurgh/I am satisfied with the heaven. Figure of peacock is among figures with significant presence in decorations of mosques and religious places of Safavid era. The figure of two symmetric peacocks in both sides of the water of life's pot with tree of life growing from it, is among figures carved on the façade of Isfahan Imam mosque. Figure of peacock is also visible in decorations of the facades in other religious Safavid monuments including Harounieh holy shrine and 4-bagh school.

The reason of presence for such Figures on the entrance of mosques, religious schools and holy shrines in Safavid era, especially in Isfahan, other than peacock's fame as a heavenly bird, might be due to the fact that this bird is regarded as the Concierge and guide for the people to the mosque. According to the folk's beliefs, the figure of peacock over the entrance of mosques leads to excretion of the evil and also welcomes the believers.

Figure Simurgh also of the images present in decoration of mosques and religious monuments. In epic pre-Islam literature (shahnameh), Simurgh is the symbol of wisdom and cure. If there was a problem for Zaal or Rustam, it would be resolved by guides from Simurgh. Moreover, Simurgh's feather was a cure for their wounds. In Islamic era, Simurgh is present in literature and Iranian wisdom. In poems of Attar in *Mantiq-ol-Teyr* and works from Ghazali, Sohervardi, Shabestari, etc., simurgh has been notified. Here, Simurgh is no longer the symbol of wisdom and cure but the symbol of divine, perfect human, eternity and Absolute unit in Islamic mysticism. Lahiji in his comments on *Golshan-e-Raaz* says: Simurgh is called Simurgh because each color that is present in all kinds of birds can be seen in Simurgh's wings (Khazae, 2007).

In other hands, almost all characteristics of this bird is matched with the Gabriel. Simurgh is often called as the king of birds. His appearance is similar to characteristics of Gabriel, one of adducant angels of divine throne. Gabriel, although regarded as the wisdom or tenth angel based on remarks of Peripatetic philosophers but indeed is assigned to make connection with terrestrial world and bringing revelation for the prophets and this made Gabriel an important character in Islamic culture.

Also, as Sohervardi believes, Simurgh is a symbol of real truth, cure for all pains and his companion is soothing. In mystic poems of Farsi literature, zephyr is the outcome of his breath and this is why many people consider it as the confidant of the lovers. Indeed, being away from the truth and delight in finding it again is shown in the Figure of Simurgh, as Sohervardi, in his "Crimson wisdom" (*Aql-e-Sorkh*) considers tree of tuba as the throne of Simurgh (Khazae, 2007).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a descriptive study and its data collection tool is description, existing hypotheses, as well as literature studies. First, in this study, any of keywords and theoretical fundamentals of decorations, causes and the method of using decorations and the purpose of use in religious monuments of Safavid era have been interpreted and then some selected monuments are analyzed in this era.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Examination of samples:** Here, a selection of significant religious monuments in Safavid Isfahan, as critical points of the Shiite utopia is examined.

**Imam Khomeini mosque, Isfahan:** Undoubtedly, the most important established mosque in Safavid era is Abbasi Grand mosque or Imam mosque that has been planned and constructed simultaneously with Naqsh-e-Jahan complex. This mosque is a unique, giant construct that its vigor of the design and harmony of the colors and figures is always magnificent and is regarded as the best sample of sumptuous architecture which shows the glory of Isfahan in Safavid age.

The shape of dome and its Figures shows a new picture in urban image. Although 2-shell dome structure is a technical outcome inherited from Azeri style and Teimuri era but its combination in urban horizon with such coverage is a unique phenomenon. The dome reminds the abstract form of a symbolic tree. This sign is completed with the coverage of dome with tiles of cyan background full of entwined branches (Safaepour and Hasanali, 2011).

Stirlen considers this pictorial sign as a hint to the tree of life and expressed that: this tree, in the context of the Eden, that mosque is its symbol, is the tree of life that is always mentioned in the orient. The dome is a sign, a natural port, a shelter distinguished from remote distances and the heart of desert. This is the tree of heaven; the tower is a sign that informs about the fountain of the water of life this is the center of the world (Henry, 1998).

As expressed before, the concept "tree of life" is extracted from the Quranic concept "the tree of Tuba". A tree that is originated in the house of the Prophet or Imam Ali and its branches ubiquitous over all believers which could be an imagination of the leadership position and Irrefragible connection between those great rector and their followers that leads to all those various blessings.



Fig. 5: The building inscription-Imam mosque Isfahan-blessings upon the prophet, Imams and particularly over 12<sup>th</sup> Imam

Therefore, dome reminds an abstract tree, grown over a long cylinder with a high volume and shows a giant emerald ball over the horizon of the city. So, the dome with its distinguished cyan color and height is at the spotlight of the city perspective.

Other than traditional visual symbols, inscriptions also play important role which commonly influences on the concept of “Velayah”. In Imam mosque there are 2 inscriptions emphasizing on it. The first one is the inscription showing Blessing upon the prophet, Imams and particularly 12th Imam (Fig. 5). Another one is inscriptions with Sol’s font, written by Alireza Abbasi, dated on 1025 AH over the main façade of the mosque on burl tile. Although, it seems that the subject of the inscription is the date of accomplishment of the facade but there is a delicate point in here: among the statements of the inscription, there is a metaphoric referral to 2 verses of Quran-referrals which might not seem to be so necessary in this historical inscription. The first one is the 1st verse of the Surah “Asra”. This verse that reminds the change of Qabalah of the Muslims from Jerusalem to Mecca, is applied on the inscription of many other mosques. Particularly on internal space of the domes which might be another emphasis on the honor of building mosque. Another verse is the verse 29, Surah “Ra’ad” - previously mentioned and the only verse that the name “Tuba” is mentioned on that. In this inscription, by using the literal definition of Tuba, there is a kind of opacity in applying its idiomatic application. Allegorical referring to the concept of Tuba alongside with paying attention to the kindness of Imam Ali in the text of inscription could be a sign of Shiite definition of the tree of Tuba in perception of the constructors, planners and decision makers (Safaepour and Hasanali, 2011).

The internal space of the dome is covered with converged, concentric Eslimi and Khataee branches. The

general geometry of internal decorations of the dome shows the concept of movement from exuberance to unity. Existence of golden Shamsheh at the heart of the cover signifies this geometrical pattern and the concept of unity coming from it. Although in many patterns, movement from exuberance to unity is shown in coverage figures but what is unique and creative in here is providing an image of the Eden shown in the form of colorful flowers and white Eslimi branches over azure context. Also, the creep of luminous strips through the application of octagonal networks helps the feeling of suspension and imaginary environment of this unique picture (Fig. 6).

This image could be the continuity of the Picture of the subjective image of the heavenly tree, shown in external coverage of the construct and now it is felt inside the environment. Entwined branches of heavenly tree (Tuba), covering all the space of under coverage area and has provided pervasive peace around itself.

In internal site of the mosque, two rows of inscriptions exist under the dome and one row of inscription over the Sanctuary and the content for all of them is related to the leadership position of Imam Ali (Velayah). The upper inscription is placed under the reticular drum which quotes a Hadith related to the executorship of Imam Ali by the Prophet Mohammad. Also in this inscription the story of Qadir Khom event is observable (Fig. 7).

In the inscription over the Sanctuary, there ARE also narrations quoted by the prophet that clarifies the position of the acceptance of Velayah of Imam Ali in comparison to the other religious acts. Using such concepts under the dome are scarce before and shows the great attention of the constructors to the concept of Velayah of Imam Ali in constructing this mosque (Safaepour and Hasanali, 2011).





Fig. 6: Internal coverage of Isfahan Imam mosque concentric and converged Eslimi and Khataee branches movement from exuberance to unity-the image of the Eden



Fig. 7: The upper inscription of the internal coverage of the dome, under reticular site-the story of the declaration of Executorship of Imam Ali based on the words of the prophet and the Story of Qadir Khom

**4Bagh Abbasi school, Isfahan:** Outer coverage of 4bagh school, like Imam mosque is covered by Eslimi and Khataee concentric, converged branches that shows the concept of the tree of life and movement from exuberance to unity. The building inscription of the drum includes blessings upon the prophet of Islam as well as other prophets and the name of the Prophet Muhammad and Imams. Also an inscription is placed over reticular site

with Sols and Naskh font that its content is Alleluia and pray and regards upon the prophet and other Imams (Fig. 8).

In the construction of 4bagh school, there are 2 rows of inscriptions with Sol's font. The upper inscription is in the drum, under reticular site, showing a narration known as "the Hadith of Manzila" which shows the divine position of Imam Ali. In under row, there are other hadiths



Fig. 8: Outer coverage of the dome, 4bagh School-Eslimi and Khataee concentric, converged branches-the concept of the tree of life

such as “Thaqalayn” and comparison between Imam and some prophets, narrated by the Prophet Muhammad (S. A. W) which emphasizes on the position of Velayah. The inner coverage of the entrance for the school is comprised of geometrical elements around the center of the coverage with a solid geometry and point symmetry. This coverage and other samples of Mogharnas that provided a geometry of stars and polygons can undermine referrals to the universe. “Among geometrical figures, those with star or Shamsheh mostly remind us the sky. The network of concentric circles under Figure of star nodes reminds the accurate position of the orbits of the stars and apart radius of Shamsheh is like beams in the starry sky. Although these nodes are not a detailed picture of stars and celestial orbits explained in the literature of astronomy on those days but only simple geometrical abstracts as a metaphor” (Golru, 2010). Shamsheh as the canonical element over the coverages, is a referral to the sky. In present sample, we see more significant expression of it by help of decorations. Making Shamsheh with golden yellow tiles strengthens the symbolism of subjective Sun at the heart of the coverage and the focus of the perspective (Henry, 1998). However, the intrinsic meaning of the Sun could be guessed from the content of the

inscriptions carved on the coverage more accurately. In the decoration of centric lay out, the expressions “the Judgement is the exclusive right of the God” (Al-Hokm Le-Allah) and “there is no god except Allah” (La Ilah Illa Allah) are on inscriptions with Kufi font that presents Monotheism in the environment.

There is same technique with the other Shamsheh for carving the holy name of Allah and Muhammad in upper row and Imam Ali in under row. The position of the inscriptions shows a hierarchy of the existence of god towards the prophet and Imam Ali which-alongside with the color combination of the Shamsheh (metaphor of the Sun) can represent the meaning of the coverage. This meaning introduces god as the origin of the light of the universe and prophet and Imam as the mediums of delivery of divine blessings. Development of the concept of Velayah for god and the prophet and Imam Ali and emphasis on their leadership and scientific position of the prophet and Imam is also shown in other inscriptions of the space. 2 inscriptions, one by Sols font, showing prophet’s Hadith “I am the city of knowledge and Ali is the gate” and another in Kufi font, showing a part of the hadith “Ali’s love determines our share from the inferno or paradise” are among most important samples in this





Fig. 9: Inner coverage of the dome, Sheikh

regard. Installation of these inscriptions over the façade of the school is considered as a symbolic emphasis on the position of Imam Ali as the scientific mentor.

Therefore, the content of inscriptions in 4bagh school can be classified into 2 general categories: Inscriptions with Sols and Kufi fonts containing beliefs of Shiites, famous prayers, narrations and hadiths of the prophet, verses of Quran that comprises the major part of the decorations of the building and are commonly in southern part of the school in various positions such as roof, walls, etc. Also, high orderly application of names such as Allah, Muhammad and Ali emphasizes on 3 principles of Monotheism, prophecy and Pontificate. High application of the great names of the god (referring to Jowshan Kabir pray), using holy numbers in repeating sacred names of Allah, Muhammad and Ali and the mottos “The god is the greatest”, “the governance is dedicated to Allah”, etc.

Inscriptions on Nastaliq font showing poems about the Velayah of Imam Ali and eulogy of Shah Sultan Hossein, the founder of the building and his devotion to the Imams and their holy family which observable in different parts of the school, façade and Northern porch (Qobad and Bahareh, 2011).

**Sheikh lotfollah mosque:** The most distinguished conceptual flash of such Figures and inscriptions are presented here. In this building, a dome is covered with

figures of eslimi branches and flowers which unite in a consolidated context towards the center of the space around medium Shamsheh. The most significant concept of the figure is a moderate move from exuberance to unity that has covered the geometry of the space. Symmetry of the main elements of the space alongside with the variety of piddling elements has enriched this feeling. It seems that this concept is in harmony with the content of the inscription carved on upper drum. In this inscription, there is a hadith from the prophet about the significance and the value of presence in mosque. The words of the inscription also refer to monotheism and consider the creation, conduction, starving, curing and life and death of the mankind related to the order of the god. The under inscription of the reticular drum includes Juma Surah (Fig. 9).

Figure 9 inner coverage of the dome, Sheikh Lotfollah mosque, movement from exuberance to unity in this sample, the proportion of azure and cream colors are different with other samples and cream is the prevalent color with white dots. Azure has been decreased in general spaces and is only prevalent in inscriptions. Another characteristic is the significance of decorative curls and continuity towards the floor. This has caused that the perimeter of cornering is continued visually towards the floor and this has increased its spatial effect on the audience (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Decorative curls of layout, continued towards the floor, Sheikh Lotfollah mosque, Isfahan

### CONCLUSION

In the art of decorating religious places in this era, the concept “the exemplary heaven” is notable. The emergence of this concept in previous ages is mostly shown in the walls of the mosques but in Safavid era, be help of rainbow tiling techniques, the architect has more facilities to provide this concept even on the coverage over dome and underneath it. Therefore, the tiles are covered ith Eslimi figures full of colorful flowers in an azure context that reflects the image of the Eden by the content of inscriptions writing the verses of Quran and narrations of innocent Muslim leaders.

After a short scrutiny over applied arts of selected monuments of Safavid age and determining the range of using decorations and their characteristics I each building, we find that in Islamic age, particularly in Safavid era, this art has been formed according to the principles of Islamic ideology and especially Shiite faith, it was not towards providing artistic effects. As Davood (2009) says: glorious constructs erected throughout history for temples, mosques and churches, had a heartfelt background and true love. This love, attention and giving away material and spiritual assets, has been presented based on affinity and heartfelt desire and innate

inclinations to the faiths and religions. Also Mohammadreza (2001) in his study, “divine piety and the architecture of mosques” says; throughout history, Muslim architects were always attempting to decorate the mosques by commitment to holy orders of Islam and their religion and this is why during all 14 past decades, a precious treasury including mosques-has been inherited and undoubtedly, architects who have built such mosques were full of divine piety that caused the original architectural identity of past mosques. Therefore, Safavid era architect by using such figures and decorations, aims not only to beautify and provide a fantasy environment but also to connect and reach the desired divine perfection in the shade of unity.

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