Place of Teahouse in Performance of Traditional Plays on Iran

Conference Paper · January 2014

2 authors:

Farideh Alizadeh
University of Malaya
24 PUBLICATIONS  9 CITATIONS

Mohd Nasir Hashim
University of Malaya
14 PUBLICATIONS  6 CITATIONS

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

The Music Peripheral... View project

All content following this page was uploaded by Farideh Alizadeh on 01 March 2016.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.
Place of Teahouse in Performance of Traditional Plays on Iran


Abstract—Teahouses have been long considered as effective social-cultural body which were then and in their years of service changed into a fixed place for performance of Iranian traditional-religious performances and some other minor players. The present paper is trying to review the past and present place of a teahouse in the performance of traditional-religious plays and to answer the question that whether we are able to perform Iranian plays in their revived form and establish new places for performance in other contemporary social and cultural centers and bodies. So, main objective of this paper is to give an applied pattern on the basis of the present community needs. In this way we first review the subject of teahouse, conditions for the establishment and formation of the teahouse as a fixed place for Iranian play’s performance and then study and define the special and architectural relation between teahouse and places of performing Iranian plays.

Keywords—Traditional-cultural plays, space and architecture of teahouse.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tea-houses have been always influential and playing a role in the formation of a significant part of the folk traditions and customs, while such influence has been raised and decreased in different periods of time. Performance of some traditional-religious plays and minor plays like narration, declaim and scenery depiction has been made a long term tradition based on the spatial architecture and the location of tea houses and given over from one generation to the other.

It is obvious that with the growth and development of technology, including the presence of effective and powerful media such as cinema, radio and television, major changes have been made in social-cultural place of tea houses and in turn the Iranian plays. However, places known as traditional teahouse are being reconstructed or established currently in some metropolis, small and big cities of Iran, in which some types of Iranian plays are performed, the process doesn’t seem to be stable and in some cases appears as a museum.

In fact, how can we preserve and develop Iranian performances in such places and as well design new places and locations considering the culture of audiences upon review and study of the interaction between teahouse and Iranian plays from the past up to present time. To this end of the body of the present paper we first define the location and the space of teahouse as a media with the capacity to accept different audiences various layers of the community and then design a suitable space for the teahouse for new designs to be established.

A. Types of teahouse

As defined by Alameh Dehkhoda the term “teahouse” is made from the combination of Tea and house and refers to a place in which coffee and later tea were prepared and drank [1]. In Moein dictionary the term is defined as, “The place in which coffee and tea are made and sold”[2]. The term is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as “Coffee Shop”, referred to a small restaurant serving coffee, tea and foods, like desserts used by people to drink and make a chat [3] & [4]. So, relying on documents and historical books from overseas explorers, teahouse, in its early form up to that in the present time, can be divided into six groups based on its performance and function:

i) County and bazaar Teahouses:

It is noteworthy that this type of teahouses was the first places for performances of traditional-religious plays

ii) Private teahouses (pantries):

There were teahouses in which the host served his guests with tea, coffee, pipe and hookah [5].

iii) Road teahouses (teahouse):

They were found along the roads and routes and were mostly used as a shelter and resting place for the passengers and travelers

iv) Temporary teahouses:

They were made temporarily for different occasions especially in mourning ceremonies for Imam Hossein in the first ten days of Muharram, in wedding and big parties [6].

v) Teahouses in well-known eastern bathroom:

Each public eastern bathroom had a pantry depending on its location and condition. In the bathroom pantry coffee, tea, pipe and hookah were served [7] & [8].

vi) Teahouse wagon (peddling):

Some people have no enough capital and a business place to establish teahouse were selling tea and coffee through the city as peddlers [9]. Such peddling tea sellers are now found in the traditional bazaars in Iran.

II. TEAHOUSE AND TRADITIONAL-RELIGIOUS PERFORMANCES

A. Storytelling:

Storytelling is to entertain and impassion the audiences by
explaining and telling attractive and interesting stories using the narrator’s eloquence, the power to dominate and influence the audiences mentally by inspiration and dramatic movements to the extent that at any moment the audience may see him as and story heroes where he play all the characters’ role [10]. In many reliable books of history and drama we read that narration in Iran originates from family parties and gatherings among the tribes, clans, farmers and animal breeders and in villages. At such gatherings, the narration is not appearing as a certain profession or a duty to be arranged by certain persons. So, in family and tribal gatherings, any person of zeal and virtuosity, with some stories in memory proceeded to narrate them. They also narrated and telling the stories at parties, circumcision, festivals of the family congregation [11]. With the development of urban communities, squares, bazaars, inns, teahouses, religious theater houses and some other places were changed into permanent locations for narration and storytelling. The Narrators were telling stories which were closer to the urban audiences’ taste and interest. Since the Safavid period and with the birth of the teahouse, they were the main and principal place of narration and storytelling. Narrators, Shahnemeh Khanan and scenery depict were telling their stories of the peoples who used to gather in the teahouses beside the bazaars, squares, inns and stations [12]. “In Shah Abbas period, numerous teahouses had been established in most big cities through Iran, especially in Qazvin and Isfahan. People from different classes of the community went to such places to idle, visit friends, having fun, entertaining by different games and plays, literary parlance, listening to Shahnemeh poems, novels, stories and watching various dances. Storytelling, narration, eulogy and admiration of Hazrat Ali as well as religious speeches were usually in teahouses. Poets, eulogists and narrators stood in the middle of the scene on a pulpit or footstool reading poems or telling their story, moving the stick in his hand in certain movements” [13].

B. Scenery depiction:

Scenery depiction is to tell epic and historic and generally religious stories and narrations based on the scenograph on which the related story’s character and heroes are painted [14]. The narrator carries a rolled scenograph and finding a suitable place he first reads lines of poetry and with the gradually rolls out the scenograph when more peoples are gathered. Rolling out the scenograph he starts to describe and tell the story depicted in an impressive and musical manner with much detail, annotation and mournful tone. Sometimes the narrator covers the scenograph with a piece of cloth and rolling up the cloth gradually he tells the story. When the stories are completely told or after each stage, narrator collects money from the audiences [15].

III. TEAHOUSE, ARCHITECTURAL SPACE AND PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES

Studies show that teahouse as an architectural space has been added to the traditional Iranian architecture (in fact of no Iranian mere architectural existence or root). It had no specific architectural space when appeared first in Iran but quickly and for its certain social place, based on general features of architectural texture, existing buildings and folklore, found certain pattern and special structure using an imitative and eclectic architecture with the use of known architectural styles and methods, in bathrooms, religious theaters and even Iranian gardens. In a time when new requirements and needs were added and new services were performed like narration, eloquence and scenery depiction, spaces like a platform were added to the space and the process of evolution continued up to 1st Pahlavi period.

Interior decoration and special layout of teahouses were different in various places of Iran (for cultural, climatology and environmental conditions) but it had prominent and frequently similar service-cultural special pattern. [16]. Chardin stated that the those in his itinerary as follows: “teahouse is consisted form big and spacious halls with elevated ceiling and water pool in the middle. There are platforms 3 feet in height and 3 to 4 feet in width with a wooden frame on which people would seat in eastern style. The ceiling is usually barrel vault in brick by windows for the light and air to enter [16].

Beeneh -Bathroom space was among the important and influential factors in the formation of teahouses. Beeneh was more distinguished than other spaces in terms of area and decoration and was generally constructed in square or octagonal form. Around the Beeneh there was cloakrooms platform with spaces for shoes under the platforms. Different types of skylight are made on the dome shape roof of Beeneh. Usage of tile was an important element in bathrooms architecture which was then found a decorative and ornamental application. This tiling method was continued up to Qajar period. Figures on the tiles were usually of military and epic contents. Among the human figures painted on the tiles in Beeneh-bath covering we may refer to the figures of mythical heroes of Shahnemeh like Kumars, Jamshid, Rostam, Sohrab, Afrasiab, Fereidoun, ….. [17]. These styles of tiling were transformed from bathroom to those given certain decoration to the teahouses space along with brick walls. In general service-cultural space of those can be defined as follows:

I- Building of traditional teahouses is consisted of an entry door, barrel vault doom-shape ceiling or vestibule, stone, brick or clay columns, places for shoes under the platforms with arc or herring-bone shape opening

II- Plinths of well over the platforms are covered with figures tile to 1 meter height

III- Pools (or small pools) in traditional teahouses are made in geometric or diagonal forms from stone or tile

IV- IN architectural space of traditional teahouses there is a round or a diagonal platform in the building (depending on the pool location) or a semi-round or diagonal platform near the wall for a storyteller or narrator to be placed on. The platform, half meter height from the ground level, is usually made of brick or timber. In big teahouses, there were roofed spaces of the relatively big garden consisted form some blind arcades and small gardens beside a small pool, in addition to the above mentioned items.
IV. CONCLUSION

Generally from the anatomical approach, the teahouse is a combination of spaces and decorative figures of traditional-Iranian architecture which define a new application in native architecture using the adopted space (the space adopted from other cultures). Such combination not only resulted in a mere imitation but it also created an artistic combination of different spaces and buildings which by itself made new and acceptable special formation and can be referred to as a suitable pattern form the adopted spaces which was combined with Iranian architecture. This has been considered in the design and construction of new spaces with new applications and usage to a lesser extent and resulted in cultural dissociation and injection of extraneous and exotic components to the cultural figure of traditional communities such as Iranian biocomplex during the current decades. Under the current conditions, place of teahouse has been lost importance and is not considered by people as before for its anatomical changes and other various reasons such as growth and development of mass media, diversity of restaurants, recreational spaces and gradual changes in the culture in time.

The present paper has a stable attitude to this process and tries to add an element(s) to architectural spaces with certain social place in the current period, such as social centers, stations, passenger terminals and training bodies with the objective to improve their special quality. To this end, non-spatial and artistic element of performance has been used. Having performances in architectural spaces and their physical program would increase the quality of architectural space, indicate and develop both factors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of this research by Bright Sparks Unit of University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

REFERENCES

[8] Ravandi, M., Social History of Iran. Social History of Iran, 2004. 7(3).