

The Role of Signs in Intensifying the Sense of Place in Persian Garden

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Abstract | The advent of Islam in Iran and other parts of the world was advocated by notions such as human equality, freedom of opinion, etc., which was highly accepted and welcomed by different suppressed classes of society in that era. Through the practice of Islamic ideology, Muslim artists transformed the art and architecture tremendously, mostly in the fields of language, expression, principles, attributes, and association of these concepts to Quran, the principles of Islam and the traditions of the Prophet. The most significant concept that was introduced after the advent of Islam was the concept of paradise which led to an evolutionary transformation in gardening.

According to Islamic trainings, the plants are highly valued. Paradise in Quran is described as a garden covered with dense vegetation promised to the righteous people. This concept (paradise) led to a considerable transformation in Persian gardening after Islam. This paper aims at visualizing paradise in Persian garden and using symbols and signs to intensify the sense of place in the garden as replica of heavenly paradise. It is a descriptive-analytical research in which the information and data were collected using library resources.

Keywords | Persian garden, Paradise, Sense of place, Sign.

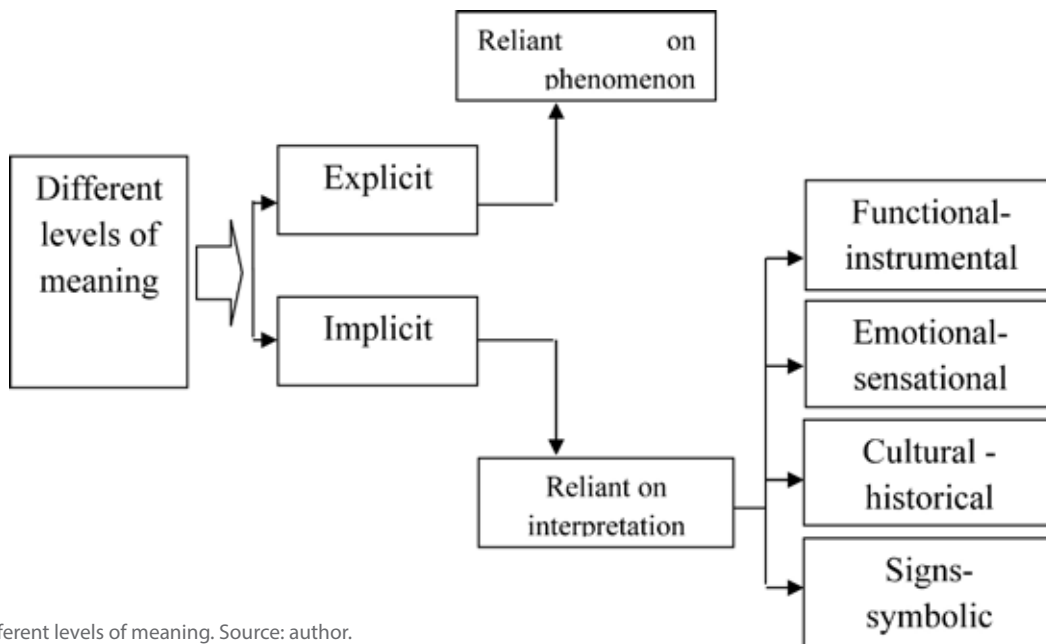
Meaning in landscape interpretation as a place with an emphasis on Persian gardening

A deep scrutiny in the concept of meaning suggests that this concept is understood through stimuli offered to an individual which are different from the individual's experiences, goals, and purposes. The meaning of place results from different factors that are derived from the interaction of human with place. Humans interact with place through various existing elements. In fact, discovering the meaning these factors and their interrelations establishes a communication between humans and the place. Therefore, a main and basic aspect in creating a communication and interaction between these two is the reception and perception of the meanings of place. Accordingly, perceiving the interrelation of human beings and the word without which one cannot understand the subject¹ is greatly important in providing a meaningful perception. Therefore, perception is a common behavior, whose foundation is based on biological behaviors, and above all, the supreme meanings and conceptual consciousness, both of which are perceptual and inseparable requisites of perception (Merleau-ponty, 1960).

Regarding the importance of discovering the meanings of place and its related experiences, scrutinizing the different views and thoughts about the different levels of meaning and their classification methods is and imperative.

A related categorization of different interactions of man and environment is presented by Gibson. This categorization comprises six levels of meanings suggesting a hierarchy of incremental levels in the meaning of urban environments, from perception to communication with non-spatial values and concepts. He believes that the levels of meaning include the direct and preliminary meanings (indicative of the obvious features of physics), fundamental-functional meanings (indicative of the function and practicality of the phenomenon), sign meanings (indicative of the sign aspects of the phenomenon), and the symbolic meaning (Gibson, 1950). The adaptive study of various classifications of the levels of meaning indicates common levels of meaning underlined in various theories. In general, all of these categories can be classified in two general terms, explicit and implicit meanings, according to table 1.

Therefore (Shape 1):



Shape 1. Different levels of meaning. Source: author.

There are different ways of emphasizing and depicting meaning in artwork and man-made creations, most of which are difficult. Decryption and decoding is considered as some of these ways. The richness of each culture has a direct relation with the level of its decoding and its development in the arts of that culture

and civilization. That is why Persian arts, which have intellectual and cultural origins, have exhibited excellent levels of decoding and provided aesthetically pleasing spiritual aesthetic. Besides being a form of art, decoding is basically the key to the different modes of life. In addition to pointing out to different objects and issues,

Table 1: Different levels of meaning. Source: author.

| Ideas about the levels of environment meaning | Explicit meaning | Implicit meaning |
|---|--|--|
| Gibson | preliminary -direct | Functional-instrumental, Cultural – historical (valuable), Emotional-sensational, Signs-symbolic |
| Baret | First level (including presenting data) | The second and third level (including symbolic meaning) |
| Mooris | Referral level (relies on an external factor) | Value level (relies on mind) |
| Bordio | Primary level (including physical characteristics of the phenomenon) | Secondary level (including the symbolic meaning of the phenomenon) |

a code is the manifestation of identity in every culture (Naghizadeh, 2007). A sign is a means of decoding. The sign is further elucidated in the following due its significance.

Sign

Everything that implies other things (phenomenon, concept, object, and subject) rather than itself is a sign. Alike different languages that have different alphabets, various arts (in terms of form and content) have their own signs. The definition and categorization of signs, their relation with their signifiers, and their expression, depends on different factors, especially the artist's worldview and the addressees' thoughts (ibid.). In fact, art uses signs in form of expressions and to express concepts and link people. Signs refer to concepts rather than things, since we communicate at the conceptual level when things are discussed. According to Saussure, sign is totally immaterial (Sojoudi, 2008). "In Islamic world, the Muslim scholars including Iranians believe that thoughts and beliefs have been shaped in the framework of religion, whose source of inspiration originates from Quran and hadiths. Inspired by Quran, they have considered the world of bodies and world of souls, and they regard each body as a manifestation of a truth" (Sadri, 2008).

Sign factors

According to Saussure, the linguist, "semiotics" is the science of studying the role of signs as a part of social life. He introduces this concept as the interaction of the sign (objective conception) and the signifier (conceptual conception) on the subjective role of the signifier (Chandler, 1999). His conception of meaning is completely structured and dependent on the interrelations. For Saussure, the meaning of signs is the resultant of their systematic relation, disregarding of the inherent characteristics of the sign or material basis of things in the world. However,

for the philosopher "Charles Pierce", the "semiotics" is the "formal theory of signs" which is closely related to logic. Pierce introduces a three-dimensional pattern of signs which includes representation, interpretation, and object. He also points out the physical aspects of signs. In his opinion, the subject is signified in reference to a particular idea rather than all its features (ibid). He has examined the symbol in three different aspects including symbol (symbolic aspect), icon (iconic aspect) and index (indexing aspect). Regarding the role of signs in Persian gardening, this issue has been studied in the section called Persian gardening.

"The Persian Garden is apparently a place for cultivating plants, but it implicitly indicates the promised paradise in Quran. Therefore, Muslim artists has tried to embellish and decorate the garden's appearance, so that a Muslim feels a place where one can enjoy the perceptible beauties and praise God for his abundant infinite worldly blessings while showing dignity and asking for God's compassion to enter his eternal promised land" (Haghighatbin, 2010). In Persian gardening, the existence of trees, streams, the flowing water, palaces on the highest part of the garden and the springs ... are all symbols of the eternal paradise as described in Quran (ibid.). Using signs in Persian gardens has been very effective in enhancing the sense of place. Therefore, the following part of this paper explains and clarifies the role of signs in these gardens more precisely.

The role of signs in intensifying the sense of place in Persian garden

As aforementioned, both Saussure, who has studied the signs in terms of social aspects and believed in the influence of mental factors in shaping signs, and Pierce, who has studied the process of signs, believe that the "context" is effective in interpreting a sign. They also consider the context as an influencing factor

in "making meaning" which is a significant feature of signs (Sassanian, 2010). The Persian garden offers place-making by focusing on "meanings" and tries to highlight the identity of space by underlining the various climatic, cultural and social components; thus increasing the addressee-place interrelations and highlighting the sense of place. On the one hand, the sense of place originates from mental experiences like memories, traditions, history, culture, society; and, on the other hand, it is influenced by the objective and physical context of the environment.

The most influencing factors in creating the sense of place can be categorized in "meanings" and "physical structure" of space. Physical factors increase the meaning and improve the functions by enhancing the quality of design. They create a series of perceptions, satisfaction, and ultimately a sense of place by making various human needs meet (Falahat, 2006). Consequently, this concept (sense of place), which is the resultant of the interrelation of man, his mental imagery, and the environmental characteristics, can be influenced by signifying factors in many aspects. In fact, the signs can be related to the sense of place both is objective (physical and functional signs) and subjective (meaning signs) aspects. The signs and their effect in creating a sense of place are also of particular importance in Persian gardens. The signs in Persian gardens can also be discussed in terms of physical and semantic aspects. In this paper, the semantic aspects of signs are discussed. The signs used in Persian garden are semantically related to Quranic features derived from the visualization of paradise. Apparently, increasing the sense place in garden has widely dominated the designs.

The Quranic aspect of signification in Persian garden (Visualization of paradise features in Persian gardening)

In Quranic descriptions, paradise is explained by elements that are close to human mind and imagination in terms of appearance, while having some metaphysical features in terms of nature and entity. With the advent of Islam, Muslim artists and architects used some ancient symbolic forms differently, with different meanings such as Islamism. Geometric, natural, and line patterns became very important in architectural decorations. A huge alteration in gardening was also observed. The Muslim Iranian architects tried to visualize all Quranic features of the paradise in their gardens and visualize the eternal paradise in their design. The Holy Quran, which itself manifests the glory of God, has described the eternal paradise based on the images of mankind from greenery and joyfulness of nature. The Muslim architects, by virtue of these descriptions, have built gardens in this world that truly embody the eternal paradise described in Quran

(Honarfar, 1975).

According to Islamic principles, the plants are of great value and importance; so that in Quran, paradise is the finest place promised to the righteous people and described as a garden covered with plants. This concept (paradise) led to great transformations in Persian gardens after Islam. Two types of paradise are described in Islamic religion, one is the worldly paradise and the other is the promised (eternal) paradise.

"386 verses of the Holy Quran has introduced paradise using synonyms such as Jenna, al-Jenah, Jannāt, Jantain, Hadaeq, and described the parts of paradise in words such as Al-nahār and Al-oyoun, among which 81 verses refer to worldly paradises and 306 refer to eternal paradise. In four of these descriptions, the worldly and eternal paradise have some commonalities" (Ansari, 2007). In Islamic belief, the worldly paradise is different from the promised paradise, and it is believed to be located in the sky, not on earth (contrary to the Jewish beliefs), which is in fact a transitional paradise².

It should be noted that in most of the verses that describe the worldly gardens (paradise), the power and wisdom of the Almighty God in creation and cultivation of plants and trees, their fruit production and their mortal and temporal entity is emphasized. These verses are used to remind the detachment from the material world³. The eternal paradise is the paradise of the immortal and spiritual universe without a sun or a sky from which no one leaves after entering such a place.

Iranians depict their mental image of paradise in green and delighted gardens with the help of symbols and signs. The Quranic descriptions of the eternal paradise is furtherly described in detail as follows.

Greenery and joyfulness

The Holy Quran has described paradise in 81 verses by using the terms Jenna, al-Jenah, Jannāt, Janntān, and Hadaeq⁴. These words all stem from the word Jan which means covering. Jannāt is the plural form of Jan and addresses a garden with shading trees (Pic. 1).

Eternity and perpetuity

Everything in the eternal paradise is perpetual, everlasting and interminable, and no alteration takes place in paradise. Perpetuity is a human spiritual tendency by which Satan deceived Adam according to Quran:

"Then Satan whispered to him; he said, "O Adam, shall I direct you to the tree of eternity and possession that will not deteriorate?" (Taha, verse 120). In other Quranic verses, the mortality of worldly paradises and its beauties are mentioned, and the eternal paradise is promised (Ansari, 1999).



Pic.1: "Persian Garden" Park, Deh-Vanak, Tehran, Iran.
Photo: Mehdi Haghighatbin, 2016.



Pic.2: Fin Garfen, Kashan, Iran.

Source:http://cdn.yjc.ir/files/fa/news/344_1953411/3/11/1392.jpg

Paradise chambers

In two verses, Paradise chambers beneath which the rivers flow: "Paradise [elevated] chambers beneath which rivers flow"; those who have believed and done righteous deeds - We will surely assign to them of Paradise [elevated] chambers beneath which rivers flow" are described⁵ (Pic. 2).

The rivers and springs of Paradise

The most splendid descriptions of paradise is explained as: "paradises beneath which rivers flow", "paradises; beneath them rivers flow", "perpetual residence; beneath them rivers will flow", "perceptual paradises beneath which rivers flow". They are the superb images of paradise mentioned in 41 verses of Quran, in which gardens are described with flowing waters beneath (its trees and chambers, not its underground); as righteous people in paradise wish⁶. They are also described as places where the tree branches shade over the waters and the waters flow underneath. In addition, in four verses, there worldly paradises are described with flowing waters.

The holy Quran has pointed out to four rivers which flow beneath the paradise chambers. This is stated in verse

15 of Surah Muhammad: "Is the description of Paradise, which the righteous are promised, wherein are rivers of water unaltered, rivers of milk the taste of which never changes, rivers of delicious drinks, and rivers of purified honey, in which they will have from all [kinds of] fruits and forgiveness from their Lord, like [that of] those who abide eternally in the fire and are given to drink scalding water that will sever their intestines?"

In verse 6 of Surah of Dahr it is noted that: "A spring of which the [righteous] servants of Allah will drink; they will make it gush forth in force [and abundance]" (Pic. 3).

The waterfalls of Paradise

The waterfalls of Paradise are another beautiful picture that is mentioned in verses 30 and 31 of Surah Al-Waq'iah: "And shade extended and water poured out", for the companions of the right who are placed in shaded and widespread areas near the waterfalls (Pic. 4).

Trees, plants, shades and fruits

The trees and their pervasive shades are the most magnificent features of paradise that have been explained



Pic. 3: Fin Garfen, Kashan, Iran.
Source: <http://medomed.org/wp-content/uploads/03/2012/Jardin-persa-pabellon800-x600.jpg>

in Holy Quran. Tuba, Lote, and Talah trees exist in paradise according to Quran.

The doors and walls of Paradise

The Holy Quran has spoken about the doors of paradise in four verses mentioning that the righteous people enter from every door⁷. In one verse, it mentions the existence of a (closed) door and a thick wall or fence⁸ between paradise and fire. The number of doors are not mentioned in Quran; however, some interpretations, including Majma-Al-Bayan and Isna-Ashari interpretations believe in existence of eight doors for entering paradise⁹.

The vastity and width of paradise

"And a paradise as wide as the skies and earth". The word width refers to the vastity of paradise, and suggests that

paradise is so wide that the human's imagination is unable to grasp (Ansari, 1999:101).

Visual similarity and intrinsic contrast to the nature of the world

The Holy Quran emphasizes on the visual similarity of paradise with the nature of the world in verse 25 of Surah Al-Baqarah: "And give good tidings to those who believe and do righteous deeds that they will have gardens [in Paradise] beneath which rivers flow. Whenever they are provided with a provision of fruit therefrom, they will say, "This is what we were provided with before." And it is given to them in likeness. And they will have therein purified spouses, and they will abide therein eternally". Obviously, the eternal paradise is different form the nature of the world:



Pic.4: Shazde Garden, Mahan, Kerman, Iran.
Source:<http://www.ana.ir/Media/Ima>
[ge/635976068063831837/11/02/1395.jpg](http://www.ana.ir/Media/Ima/ge/635976068063831837/11/02/1395.jpg)

- According to verse 108 Surah Al-Kahf, everything in the eternal paradise is perpetual, everlasting and interminable, and there is no evolution there¹⁰.

Emphasis on the center

"There is a sacred tree in Islam, neither of the east nor of the west " (Surah An-Nur, verse 35). It is located at the center of universe as the symbol of enlightenment, guidance and eternity. Light is God that illuminates the world. This tree is often described as a reversed olive tree. The Tuba tree is also found in the center of paradise and feeds on four rivers of milk, water, honey and drinks" (Pourkhaleghi, 2002: 110).

All or some of the above features have been used in Persian gardens in different ways and in accordance with the garden type, to define an identity and a sense of place in Persian garden. This identity does not refer to the material entity of Persian garden (including shape, name and quantitative proportions) disregarding of

human culture. In fact, it addresses the relation between the "identity" of the individual and the garden and its environment. This relation reflects the values, culture and life of Iranians and visualizes them in Persian garden landscape. In this relation, every individual is considered as a part of the garden and the garden is recognized as part of people. This manifest a sense of unity and integration with the garden. The use of familiar forms that originate from the ancient Persian culture and the use of symbolic and meaningful elements that are often related to religious beliefs can be considered as the methods used in Persian gardens to induce and highlight identity. Using the form of Chahar Bagh, that has a historical record of several thousand years, and using elements that remind paradise and visualize its beauties described in Quran such as the concept of paradise or the sprinkling springs are some examples of this relation. Diagram 2 illustrates the visualization of Quranic descriptions used in Persian gardens.

Conclusion | Alike Persian architecture, Persian garden is designed proportionate to human scale. In contrast to western styles such as French gardening which is very exaggerated in dimensions, width and scale with no sense of enclosure, all spaces and dimensions in Persian garden are designed proportionate to garden elements including the trees, watercourses and etc. to provide a sense of proper enclosure. This feature disallows any sense of detachment due to having a weak enclosure or any sense of fear and panic due to offering a strong enclosure. In fact, the trees, flowers, hedges, watercourses and etc. in Persian garden offer an appropriate private enclosure proportionate to human scale in which the features of the landscape are quite obvious, especially in the main axis that are wider. Nature is highly valued in Persian architecture. During

various epochs of Persian architecture, the Muslim architects have tried to visualize all features of paradise suggested in Quran and recommended in Persian culture, in their gardens and the courtyards of their residences. They have tried to design and build gardens that visualize the eternal paradise. The Persian architects have tried to design a garden (paradise) in line with the characteristics of this world (evolution), that illustrates the images of the eternity and offer beauty and enjoyment (the fruits of various climate regions) in all climates and all seasons of the year in a closed ecosystem separate from the external environment. Accordingly, the use of symbols that are related to Quranic descriptions of paradise has been highly significant to intensify a sense of place in the garden as a visualized paradise (Table 2).

Table 2: Visualization of the features of Qur'anic paradise in Persian garden. Source: Haghightbin, 2010.

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Visualizing the features of the eternal paradise in Persian garden | Emphasis on the center | Ferdows is the highest point of the garden where the pavilion and the water distribution point is located |
| | The vastity and width of paradise | Creating a subtle width and vastity as a distinct identity of Persian garden results from using a specific geometry and applying all natural and artificial factors, and etc. This strategy are devised to associate the garden to the vastity of paradise. |
| | The doors and walls of paradise | Having an enclosure is one of the main characteristics of Persian garden, which has been an integral part of gardening practice in different ages. |
| | Trees, plants, shades and fruits | Due to climatic conditions, shading trees are often planted in Persian gardens. Productive trees are also planted in these gardens to have fruit during the four seasons. |
| | The waterfalls of paradise | In order to bring a diversity of sounds and beauties to Persian gardens, the designers have always used water in various methods such as displaying it as waterfalls to show a considerable volume of water. |
| | The rivers and springs of paradise | Flowing water in Persian garden is distributed with various appearances throughout the garden and under the trees. Putting water in earth and draining it from certain places (Qantas) provides the image of paradise in Persian garden |
| | Paradise chambers | The pavilions in Persian garden symbolize the paradise chambers (houses). |
| | Eternity and perpetuity | The eternity and perpetuity of the eternal paradise in Persian garden is consistent with sustainability of the garden. |
| | Greenery and joyfulness | Deciduous and evergreen trees are both planted in the garden to offer greenery and joyfulness in all seasons. |
| | Visual similarity despite intrinsic contradiction | The presence of streams, trees, plants, and fruitful trees altogether supportd the idea of having fruits in all seasons similar to paradise. However, the earthly gardens are mortal, while paradise is eternal. |

Endnotes

1. Objective factors in landscape
2. See also: Tabatabaie, 1984:154-183.
3. In verse 60 of Surah An-Naml, verse 30 Surah 'Abasa and verse 63 Surah Al-Haj the power and wisdom of God are mentioned. In verse 66 Surah Al-Baqarah, verses 32 to 46 Surah Al-Khaf, verses 147 and 148 Surah 'ara, verse 16 Surah Saba, verses 25 to 27 Surah Ad-Dukhan, verse 30 Surah Malek, and verse 17 Surah Qalam The Holy Qur'an has declared the mortality of worldly gardens and the destructive consequences of being affiliated to them by narrating the stories of the peoples of the past.
4. See also: Tabatabaie, 1984:254.
5. The terms Jannāt, Janntān, Jenah are derived from the word "Jan" which means covering. Janan (that means heart) and Jān (that means life) are derived from this word as well
6. And those who have believed and done righteous deeds - We will surely assign to them of Paradise [elevated] chambers beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally. Excellent is the reward of the [righteous] workers, verse 58, Surah Al-'Ankabut.
7. See also: Gasser interpretation, Vol. 1, p. 53, and Roz al-Janān and Roh al-Janān, Vol. 1, p. 168.
8. Ar-r'ad 23: Gardens of perpetual residence; they will enter them with whoever were righteous among their fathers, their spouses and their descendants. And the angels will enter upon them from every gate. Al-Hadid 23: there is a conversation about the existence of a wall between the people of heaven and hell; and a wall will be placed between them with a door, its interior containing mercy, but on the outside of it is torment.
9. See also: Al-Tabrasi, 1971: 55 and Al-Husseini, 1971: 374.
10. "Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds - they will have the Gardens of Paradise as a lodging, wherein they abide eternally. They will not desire from it any transfer". If we look at this issue with worldly standards, a Paradise without any transformation would be exhausting; however, since the human reaches his/her desire (seeing Allah), transformation or leaving such a place does not make sense. See Motahari, 1995.

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