

Façade Committee: The Deviation of Taste is a Long-Standing Demand

Over almost a decade, façade committees have been established in Tehran and then in other cities in imitation of the center to monitor the architecture of the buildings. This was a response to a demand that goes back several decades after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, which was first called for «identity» and then «Iranian-Islamic identity» in the city and architecture. The heightened sensitivity to «returning to oneself» and the beginning of the «Islamic renaissance» in the first years of the establishment of the Islamic Republic led to the establishment of numerous academic and religious meetings to examine the relationship between «tradition and modernity.» During the pre-revolutionary struggles, the spread of intellectuals» and revolutionaries» dissatisfaction with the regime's self-defeat against the West led Farah Pahlavi, the cultural politician of the regime, to create an artificial and form-oriented movement by combining modern architecture with traditional elements. A generation of monumental architecture, such as the Museum of Contemporary Arts and the School of Management, was the result of this policy. To theorize this process, the «Link of Tradition and Technology» conference was held in Isfahan in the presence of a selected group of famous Iranian and world architects, chaired by Farah Pahlavi. At the same time, the official trend of the country's architecture and what was promoted by the governing body in the guise of the model and law was a mutilated and meaningless modernism dependent on the consumption of luxury goods and imitation of the Western currents. The Islamic revolution represented the demand for the restoration of the historical identity of the Iranian nation. In the years before the revolution, however, no effective action was taken in this regard. The economic stagnation caused by the war and embargo, the ignorance of the relevant administrations in the country, and the gaining power of Western trends in the executive body of the system left no room for a scientific and deep response to the claim for identity restoration. In the 1990s, a study was conducted on the order set by the municipality for façade standards. The study method was similar to the procedure of bulletin makers, who managed the emotions of officials by selecting news. In the city of Tehran, where thousands of buildings were being built at the same time, a few special examples that no one except but a few knew about their existence became a symbol of the trend towards vulgarity; Taking advantage of the unanswered demand of the last century to return to oneself, extraordinary and strange decrees were issued: the use of vulgar colors was prohibited; and to make the rules religious, «prohibition of installing statues on the façade» was also added to the rules.

The excitement caused by this biased and not rigorous study of urban management quickly led to the creation of institutions to intervene in the most private parts of society. Façade committees were formed to approve the façade plan, which was added to the previous technical documents. This committee expressed its existential philosophy to protect public rights. Since then, the façade committee in Tehran and many Iranian cities has become a tool to extend the issuance of permits, make construction more expensive, and impose the taste of committee members on thousands of applicants who need permits. The process of changing the rules has been based on the quantitative rise in technical details and is not related to the demand for national-religious identity. In this period, less effective and complicated details have been added to the basic criteria to justify the necessity of the existence of the committees action. Over a decade of its activity, the committee has failed to restore Iranian-Islamic identity. This claim is confirmed by the demand of the supreme leader of the revolution in the last report of the mayor of Tehran to the council (Rosen Online, December 2023 ,23), emphasizing the movement towards Iranian-Islamic identity in urban architecture. This is the fundamental demand of a multidimensional and complex strategy that cannot be realized by simplifying the problem. Like Farah Pahlavi, who failed to divert the claim for identity with the superstructure and memorial measures, the façade committees will only have dissatisfaction. The perception of identity, in the sense of understanding the continuous nature of a phenomenon, depends on the survival of its existence. The understanding of the existence of a city, which is obtained through encountering and experiencing the space, is first dependent on the survival of the city's existential components. The importance of the existence of the city is associated with its prerequisites and conditions for understanding its nature and identity. In the case of the survival of the city's existential components, we can talk about its defining characteristics. The Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) in organizing the city of Yathrab, named Madinah al-Nabi, also indicates his precision and insistence on the priority of the order of the components of the creation of the city rather than the form of urban elements. The knowledge related to space and place also validates the same procedure and the originality of the existence of the city in relation to its nature to achieve desirability.

By giving priority to the taste of the committee members instead of the taste of the owner, it seems that the façade committees have not conformed to the verse «people are in control of their property» and have taken the wrong path in achieving the great goal they set. Instead of identifying and studying the nature of the city and the main components contributing to its creation, preservation, and expansion, they have completely stuck to the form of urban forms to claim identity. Understanding the identity of the city means having the ability to read its past from the city's present face and experiencing the feeling and understanding of being in a place with specific standards and attitudes. The place whose elements have gradually acquired the color of time and the transformation of the faces have been so gradual and continuous that the sense of separation from the origin does not arise in the observer. It is clear that intervention in a complex phenomenon is of such a degree of importance that it has a direct effect on building the perception of citizens, and in addition to a hundred-year-old social demand, it was also favored by the beloved Prophet of Islam and played a prominent role in his life. First, it is very necessary, and second, it requires a method and is knowledge-based. The cover image by «Samira Sarayani (Saramad)» is a view of Qom City, although it refers to the duality of two traditional and unrestrained views, confirming the confusion of this generation and city management in creating an identity view of their desired city.

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