

CONCEPT OF 'SACRED SPACE' IN TRADITIONAL TURKISH ARCHITECTURE

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Keywords: Sacredness in Architecture, Traditional Turkish Architecture, Sacred and Profane

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to make a conceptual analysis of the term '*sacredness*' and '*sacred space*' in traditional Turkish residential buildings. This research starts with providing an outline of the basic concepts that have mostly been used to clarify lifestyles in traditional Turkish house types.

Traditional Turkish houses are located in a wide geography and show characteristic differences. Construction methods, material selections, number of stories, space allocation, relationship among the spaces etc. are some of the most featuring characteristics that show differences from a region to another.

Although forms and construction methods and materials of traditional Turkish houses in different regions are characteristically different in essence and they were shaped in completely different ways, it is clear that dwelling customs of inhabitants of these houses bear some conceptual resemblances to each other. What they have in common, however, is that all house types of different regions represent architecture of extreme meanings in the same space as profane and sacred.

Sacredness or the concept of sacred in architecture has mostly been discussed by directly referencing to the religious architecture including churches, mosques, shrines, temples or some other buildings in which people perform religious rituals of their beliefs. The role of this concept--sacredness--in shaping spaces and/or the relation between various spaces in traditional house types in Turkey has mostly been neglected. Günay was among the leading figures who have indicated significance of way of life of the users in the formation of traditional houses. In spite of the fact that physical features of man are more or less universal, and even though the climate they live in and the building materials they use may be identical traditional houses of different nations shows characteristic differences from each other. *Günay explains this situation as follows: "...the history of various people, their culture, their economic and technological levels, their religion and traditions influence their way of life, and subsequently their houses."* [1]

Inhabitants' beliefs are among the one of the most significant criteria that shape the configuration of the inner spaces. Forms and plan types of Turkish houses have intentionally been excluded from the scope of this study. This research is an attempt to clarify reflections of users' lifestyles (including religious belief) on the sacredness of the room in the traditional Turkish house. User requirements can be analyzed under two major titles as follows: profane and sacred. Beliefs and customs of the users are the main source lay behind the concept of

sacredness. In this research, reflections of the users' belief in the formation of inner space of the house will be studied.

This research will be done in the following way: after this introduction, chapter II provides an outline of the room of traditional lifestyles. In order to understand the role of religious beliefs in the formation process of the room of traditional Turkish house, religious influences have been analyzed in the following chapter. The next chapter titled as " What makes a space sacred?" is devoted to conceptual analysis of space in terms of 'sacredness.' Finally, the way of life of dwellers has been analyzed under the heading "sacred and profane spaces."

The Room of Traditional Lifestyles

What the most appreciated argument about traditional houses is the perfect harmony of the inner spaces with the users' way of life. This attitude has been notified by Blaser [2] with an example from traditional Japanese houses. Traditional Turkish house too is the example of this kind of attitude that pays attention to the harmony between the house and dwellers 'way of life' as well as the nature.

The room is the main component of the Turkish House.[3] In the Turkish house in Anatolia the rooms reflect the old nomadic way of life.[4] Regarding the featuring characteristics of traditional Turkish houses, several questions are called to mind, but among which especially the following one needs to be thought in order to understand design thoughts of the time: how was the life within?

Room of the traditional Turkish house is a place that houses multipurpose human activities in different time of a daily usage. The multipurpose usage of the room and furniture-free floor surface is the main characteristic of traditional Turkish room that enables dwellers to use this space for various activities including profane requirements like eating, sleeping and sacred rituals like performing Islamic prayers. The room does not contain much furniture.

The primary characteristic of the room in the Turkish house, according to Küçükerman [5], is that of a unit serving specific purposes within the house. In other words, it is possible to say that a room in traditional Turkish house is a multipurpose space satisfying profane and sacred requirements of its inhabitants. This kind of multilayered relations occurring in the same space was defined as intraspatial relationships. [6]

It is used as a place of worship, eating, chatting, sleeping etc. in different time in a day. In case of room's usage, there is no sharp distinction between profane and sacred in terms of space. Although the religious rituals take place as the part of daily life, the room or the house itself is not a sacred space in its generally understood meaning. Rather there is a sacred direction (orientation to Mecca) to which all Muslims turn their faces when they perform religious rituals of Islam.

Religious Influences in traditional Turkish houses

Influences of the users' way of life, which include worldview and religious belief of inhabitants, goes far beyond the other influential factors such as climate, existing material, regional factors over the general design solutions and construction methods of traditional Turkish houses. In other words, houses of different nations reflect the worldview of the users. This fact of worldview took its lead directly from religious belief and customs. A house universally

represents inner world of its users. The most crystallizing influence of religious thought and customs is that traditional Turkish house generally represents introverted way of life. The family is inner and private and so the house was closed to the outside world. "*The gardens and interiors of houses are separated from the streets by high walls; the windows are latticed.*" [7]

Another major influence of religious belief of Islam in traditional Turkish house is the division of inner spaces as Harem (Women's quarter) and Selamlık (Men's quarter). The Harem's space is so private that access is not allowed to the people from outside the family.

The Moslem religion demands its believers performing ritual prayers five times a day. Additionally, the ablution should also be performed before each ritual prayer. Since each room is thought as an independent unit with the man and his wife, there is washroom and ablution closets within the room so as to meet profane and sacred requirements of the family.

No specific space has been allocated for worship within the house. [8] The only obligatory rule about the inner space of a house (room) when performing ritual prayers is that the inner space must be kept clean all the time since this is the place of worship in different times of a daily usage.

Turkish custom of sitting on the floor by kneeling and performing the ritual prayers directly on the floor plays an important role in the usage of the floor in such a basic way. Küçükerman especially put an emphasis on philosophical thought by the following verse: "*whatever he is doing, man remains in close contact with Nature with little more than a very thin, almost symbolic, barrier between himself and the earth.*" [9]

In addition to all, as Günay noted in his book, Islamic worldview as the 'temporality of human life' has played an important role in building methods of traditional Turkish house. The main *building material is wood and the building method is generally timber frame.* [10] So that houses were not built to last perpetually like mosques, rather they were built to last for a temporary period like human life-period.

What makes a space sacred?

It is the fact of meaning that makes the space sacred. It is not easy to make visible the sacredness of a certain place in the house, since it is invisible in essence. Rapoport defines demonstration of sacredness of a place as 'symbolic process.' [11]

Concept of sacredness in traditional Turkish houses is directly related to the customs and beliefs of inhabitants. In case of traditional Turkish architecture it is certain that religious belief is among the most important criteria that shape space formation and configuration. In addition to the factors as the climate, materials, construction systems and economy [12], the basic 'idea of dwelling' took its root from domestic traditions and way of life. In order to understand concept of sacred space in traditional Turkish house, it is necessary to clarify the major requirements of users. Conception of Sacredness in traditional Turkish house is not a visible and tangible and there is no any symbolic marker indicating the boundary between profane space and sacred space.

Dwellers give the space meaning of sacredness by performing religious rituals time to time. The sacred space can also be rephrased as religious or spiritual space since religious

activities give the sacredness to the place. It is not the matter of physical properties of a space but rather the meaning assigned to that place through the ritual activities taken place in it.

The family is the most sacred conception in Islam. Introverted life of traditional Turkish house took its lead directly from religious thought of Islam. In other words, a house is sanctuary from the pollution of the mundane world. But this concept of sacred space is not the same with that of religious buildings like mosques .

The purity of a house is acknowledged through the spiritual performers of dwellers like daily religious rituals, gatherings at certain times for various occasions including religious festivals, funeral and Quran recitations. All of these ritual activities and family privacy creates multidimensional spatial characteristics comprising extremes in itself.

Sacred and profane spaces

"The sacred and profane space and time concepts have influenced the architecture and the utopia history closely."[13] The paired concepts of 'sacred and profane' was first profoundly discussed by the German theologian Rudolf Otto, in the *Idea of the Holy* (1917). Dilemma between conceptions of sacred and profane is universal and has mostly been discussed in light of religious thoughts. Mircea Eliade [14] describes these contrasting concepts as follows: *"...two modes of being in the world."*

Another important study in clarifying the meaning of profane and sacred spaces was Larry E. Shiner's *'Sacred Space, Profane Space, Human Space,'* in which Shiner [15] briefly summarize Eliade's conception of sacred space and profane space and reconsider these paired concepts in light of analysis of human spatiality in its manifold dimensions.

Larry E. Shiner is among the leading figures who showed a new approach to the common method of juxtaposing profane and sacred together and emphasizing contrast between the two by drawing attention to the manifold dimensions of human spatiality. In place of this radical polarity, Shiner sketch in a description of "lived space", which *"is the possibility of both homogeneous space of objectifying thought and the luminosity of sacred places."*[16]

In the traditional Turkish house, the same space is used for various purposes in different time of the day. The sacredness is attained by the religious activity of the dwellers. The division between inner and outer world or sacred and profane is marked only symbolically. Distinction between the realms of profane and sacred in traditional Turkish houses is not as clear and visible as the barrier between private space (Harem--Women's quarter) and semi-public space (Selamlık-Men's quarter).

Al-Attas, in his *'The Islamic Worldview,'* wrote that "Islam does not concede to the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane; the worldview of Islam encompasses both al-dunya (this world) and al-akhirah (the world to come.)" [17]

The multipurpose usage of inner space (room) of traditional Turkish architecture reminds Larry E. Shiner's [18] original approach that is going beyond the sacred-profane dichotomy and suggesting to begin discussing the concept of sacred space from the concept of *'lived space.'*

Another significant criteria about the multipurpose usage of the same space in traditional Turkish architecture is the 'time phenomenon.' Space usage cannot be understood without taking into the account the time factor. Each activity in the house is bounded with a certain time period. The same space (room) is used for various daily activities like eating, gathering, performing ritual prayers (Islamic religious rituals), playing, working or studying, and sleeping. The key factor for the space usage is the time. The certain time period of the daily schedule is devoted to the each one of the above mentioned activities, regardless of they are profane and/or sacred.

Conclusion

Although forms and construction methods and materials of traditional Turkish houses in different regions are characteristically different in essence and they were shaped in completely different ways, dwelling customs of inhabitants of these houses bear some conceptual resemblances to each other as all house types of different regions represent architecture of extreme meanings in the same space as profane and sacred.

A room in traditional Turkish house is a multipurpose space satisfying profane and sacred requirements of its inhabitants: It is used as a place of worship, eating, chatting, sleeping etc. in different time in a day. In case of room's usage, there is no sharp distinction between profane and sacred in terms of space.

Religious influences in traditional Turkish house can be summarized as visible/tangible and invisible/intangible properties as follows: introverted way of life of the house; harem (Women's quarter) and selamlık (Men's quarter) sections of inner space; having washroom and ablution closets within the room so as to meet profane and sacred requirements of the family to comply with the demands of Islamic religion; keeping the floor clean all the time since this is the place of worship in different times of a daily usage. In addition to this, Islamic worldview as the 'transience of life' has played an important role in building methods of traditional Turkish house.

It is the fact of meaning that makes the space sacred, which is directly related to the customs and beliefs of its inhabitants. Conception of Sacredness in traditional Turkish house is not visible and tangible and there is no any symbolic marker indicating the boundary between profane space and sacred space. It is not the matter of physical properties of a space but rather the meaning assigned to that place through the ritual activities taken place in it.

In short, it is not the material, construction methods, or the position of the room in the traditional Turkish house that create sacredness but rather the human basic activity that goes beyond profane feelings and attain sacredness to the place. Entering a sacred realm from a profane means changing the mood from mundane world to the spiritual mind, which can be achieved by performing one of the religious rituals of Islam.

It is also important to note that users' philosophy of life as contentment with very little during their daily activities, which are inspired by tradition, customs and religion, is another major source in the multipurpose usage of the floors of the room. The multipurpose usage of inner space (room) of traditional Turkish architecture means going beyond the sacred-profane dichotomy and suggesting a new concept of sacred space from the concept of 'living space,' which comprises everything related to the human psychology including contrast of extremes like material & spiritual, matter & spirit, profane & sacred.

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