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## Full Length Research Paper

# INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE OF BATHROOMS IN IRANIANS TRADITIONAL SOCIETY AND BELIEFS

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### Abstract

General bathrooms are built and used cross the periods in most of nations especially during the Islamic period and in Islamic territory. These buildings like the other Islamic relics indicate the art of builder. The skills could be seen in construction techniques, decoration and tile works. In The city of Rasht several bathroom are remained from Qajar period. One of these structures is bathroom of Haji that is located in Saghari-sazan quarter. The name of building comes from its owner, Haj Mohamad Jafar. It is going to be destroyed because of improper conservational programs and environmental conditions. This structure is divided to two separate sections allocated to women and men. The main portal and environs of bathroom are decorated with portraits of Rostam fighting with White Dave (Daves are sinister and diabolical characters in Iranians ancient legends that are mentioned in religious text such as Avesta) and women in the garden. The bathroom is formed by five sections including apodyterium, alcove, a corridor between alcove and main section of bathroom (Miandar), caldarium and Khazineh. In this paper we are trying to present several sections of this Qajar building being destruction.

**Keywords:** Rasht, Qajar, Architecture, Bathroom, Haji Bathroom.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Geographic location

The building is located in the old quarter of Saghari-sazan on the Badi Allah pathway. The bathroom is among historical monuments such as Rahmat-e- Sami'I in the east and Hozey-e-Elmiye (religious school) in the west of bathhouse that belongs to Qajar period.

### Chronicle and appellation building

The building according to inscription in southern face (main face) belongs to Qajar late period (1891AD). The name of this bathroom is Haji because the name of landowner was Haji (Haj Mohamad Jafar Hajfros). The bathroom was recorded in 2004 years in Iran national monument list.

### Architectural features

The bathhouse has several sections such as entrance, apodyterium, Long place (Long is a traditional wear for bathing in Iran instead of pants in past times), alcove, a corridor between this section and main section of bathroom called Mian Dar (between doors), and Caldarium (Fig1). The

total form of bathroom is rectangular with 48 meters length, 16 meters width and 7/5 meters high.

- 1-Latrine
- 2-Apodyterium
- 3-Caldarium
- 4- Khazineh
- 5- Long place
- 6- Miandar

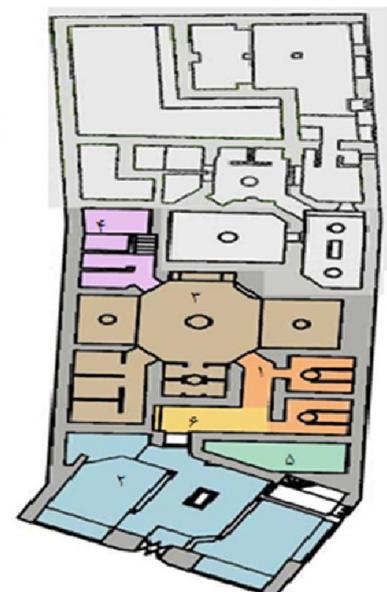


Fig 1. Plan of bathhouse

### Entrance

The main entrance is a cream wooden door, 180 centimeters high and 1 meter wide with wooden symmetric windows in each side that comprise the southern face. This entrance contains successive double doors that are between the outer space and the inside of the bathroom. In fact its filter for decreasing heat exchanges outside temperature and inside temperature. This is the main entrance (Fig2). The building has also two other doors, women entrance and men entrance. The men entrance is related to coffee shop (Fig3).



Fig 2. The main entrance



Fig 3. Other entrances

### Apodyterium

This is a rectangular space with approximate dimensions of 3.4 in 6.5 meters that upon entering the building we encounter. The cloakroom has two platforms in two sides with about 1 meter height (Fig4). At the center of bathroom is a pool for washing and cleaning the feet before enter to hothouse. Its dimensions are 90 centimeters width and 140 centimeters length. In the eastern face of the bathroom are wooden windows with the height of 4 meters. Similar windows are in southern face.

In the northern wing is a staircase with decorative tiles which is covered by wall in next periods. Entrance of hothouse is located on the left of the northern side.



Fig 4. Apodyterium space

### Mian Dar

This is a corridor with 4/7 meters length, 2 meters width and 3/8 meters high. Pissoir and toilet are located at this part.

### Caldarium

This is an octagon space with 32-sq.m area that is divided into some parts for wash clothing, and washing. The Caldarium is about 7 meters high with a main dome that has a skylight.



Fig 5. View of Caldarium

### Khazaineh

The only remained hot water khazaineh is located in the northwestern wing that is separated from other spaces of bathroom by four steps. Its dimension is about 2 & 1.9 meters and is covered by latticed dome roof. Next to the hot house is a space for high social status people and elites.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The wall is made with red bricks, and the floor in some parts is brick paved.

The roof in main part is domed and in some parts is gable roof. Inner walls are coated by plaster and lim. Some parts of Inner walls are decorated by tiles, such as alcove. The dominated ornament is tile works especially in the entrance.

### Bathrooms architecture from the traditional medicine view

In classic science, world is made by four element (Classical elements include earth, air, water and fire), and human health is depended on the balance between this four elements. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) says the building of bathroom is similar to human's nature in Stoixeion (four elements) and humors (consist of Choleric (cold and dry), melancholic (hot and dry), sanguine (warm and wet), and phlegmatic (cold and wet) temperaments) and soul (consist of normal soul (in liver responsible for grow of body), ego or sensual soul (in the brain responsible for sensation and movement) and animal soul (in the heart is responsible for sustaining life); it means stone, water and air.

Therefore, bathrooms are made based on four humans' temperaments so that bathrooms have four sections including: warm, cold, dry and wet. Bathrooms usually are made lower than ground surface for easy warming. Apodyterium is dry and cold and is parallel with fall season and is Choleric in humans. There are platforms for rest and clothesline and niches for clothes (Razavi Barghaei, 2009: 66). The next section is the Caldarium that is wet and cold and is equivalent with phlegmatic and winter season. Here costumers receive the long massage and then the body is ready for warm and wet place and thus the body is not exposed to sudden change of temperature and humidity (Razavi Barghaei, 2009: 66). After this section, a second hot house section is located with a pool of hot water that is called Khazineh situated. This section is similar to hot and wet temperament, sanguine in human and similar to spring season. Washing act happens here. The walls of Caldarium are made of alabaster to sustain humidity and warmness and beneath the floor there is a layer of tar which has made it waterproof. The roof of this section is higher than other sections and the light comes in by skylight in the roof. Behind the hothouse is the furnace which is separated by a latticed partition wall so that the heat comes into hothouse by this hole. Sometimes this furnace lay beneath the Caldarium; in this situation the floor of the hothouse would be warm and water of Khazineh would become heated. The Next section is a special place for high rank people to rest before leaving the bathroom. This section is the hottest section in the bathroom and is like the warm and dry temperament and melancholic moods in humans resembling summer season (Razavi Barghaei, 2009: 67).

### Interpretation of figures

Above the entrance one of the most famous scenes in Iranian legend is presented. This scene is from Iranian national book called Shahnameh (Kings Letter), and depicts the fighting between Rostam and Dive Sepid (Fig6). This picture is interesting because of Iranian political and industrial weakness during Qajar period. At this period, Iran was humiliated because of two catastrophic failures in war with Russian Empire. After these defeats North West of Iran was separated and assigned by Russian empire. Apart from these events many other disasters took place in this was this picture a protest to Iranian situation in Qajar period? According to the inscription

inside the entrance, the artist of this tile works was Mashahadi Yousef Kashi Saz who built this bath in 1308 A.H. On the sides of the entrance there is a picture of garden and women who take the jardinières (Fig7).



Fig 6. Pediment of entrance



Fig 7. Decorative tiles in both side of main entrance

With regard to Islamic text, we know that the first figures in Iranian bathrooms go back to Timurid periods. At this period baths were covered by tiles which were decorated by flowers, sprig and Islamic design. After Safavid dynasty, animal, human and plant appeared on the tiles. Human scenes in Safavid period include youths, drawer women and musicians. After Safavid dynasty during Zand and Qajar dynasties this scenes were replaced by military and epic scenes. During the Qajar period which coincides with prevalence of lithography technique in Iran, books were available in society and among citizens. Therefore different social ranks were introduced by news and scientific progresses. Illustrated books of epic stories like "*Shah\_nameh*" (Kings Letter) and "*Khamseh*" (Quintuplet) by Nezami that in previous periods were conserved only in private library of elites and high rank persons became available (Beigmoradi 2014: 55) and therefore their pictures were represented in public buildings such as bathrooms.

Some persons think that these pictures are for fun or for embodying the power that bath give to human. With regard to the fact that in Islamic sentences painting is forbidden and execrable, therefore these scenes have other implications. Some writers, such as the writer of "*Taghvim Al\_Sehh*" and "*Hefz Al\_Sehh Naseri*" said that the reason for beautiful girls, battles and heroic scene is for revival of indignation and lust. According to old medic believes the temperament related to these two powers will weaken when people go to bathrooms: in the bathrooms are figures which raise the lust power such as

shindig scene, and some raise the anger such as battle scene. In bathrooms are scenes to raise the intellectual powers such as savant or lust and anger, and God weaken both in the bathroom, so this scene were showed in bathrooms (Mokhlesi, 2005: 268). Other reason for these pictures relate to the health and soul of humans. As "*Hefze Al-Seheh Naseri*" cited: The predecessor sages gave suggestions regarding how to built the bathrooms after subtlety consideration and came to the conclusions that although bathrooms have many benefits but it enervates the power and exhausts the soul. Therefore, they decided to present the pictures on walls of the bathrooms. These pictures are in three categories including animals, sensuals and naturals which each have special benefits.

For animal power they draw picture of braves person and armed cavalry soldiers that each other have a sword and another pulling the dirk and another arrow put in Chachi bow<sup>1</sup> and pull strongly and for sensual power there is portray of beautiful woman and men of black hair in win drinking and other in dance. For natural power there are pictures of gardens and fruit trees such as pomegranate, peach; therefore other kind of pictures was not suitable. It is one of the reasons of pictures in Iranian bathhouse from medical view. The images of devils or demons are one of the popular images that could be found in bath houses which have rooted from the beliefs of the people as they believed that bath houses are the home of devils and demons. This issue is also mentioned in one of the stories of "*Tazkarat al Oliya*" book: A beggar intended to go to the bath house, he was not permitted to enter and said "with an empty hand, you are not allowed in the devil's house, how they can let you in the Lord's house?" (Attar, 1387:122).

In "*KimiayeSa'adat*" book it is mentioned that because the bath house is the home of devils, when entering, one should recite a special prayer; it also recommends not to go the bath houses in the evenings and at nights because it is during these times that the devils spread (Qazzali, 1376:133). Considering the immoral conducts that could happen in the bath houses, devils could be considered as a symbol of such corrupt practices. In a hadith, Abu Amameh narrated from Holy Prophet that when Satan was cast out of heaven he said, Lord! Now that you descended me on the earth and took your mercy away from me, give me a home! He was answered: "the bath house is your home" (Foroozanfar, 1376:448). In the writings of the mystics, the bath house is a place for self-mortification and killing the passion and desires. For instance, sometimes Molana was noted to spend several days in the bath house (Tabasi, 1390:70). In the writings of poets and mystics, the pictures depicted in the bath houses are the manifestation of a dead and lifeless body and the presence of an empty, false, and worthless entity. Molana believes that the bath house can be the home to the fairies and also demons; it depends on the person whether he/she promotes the evil nature or the human nature (Rezai, 1382:178).

### Conclusion

Haji bath house in the city of Rasht is one of the most precious works of the Qajar era. Like other Islamic bath houses, it involves four parts which are apodyterium, alcove, Miandar, caldarium and Khazineh. This bath house includes great images of gardens, beautiful women, and the scene of Rost

and Div battle. It also has tile work inside with geometric designs. Considering the historical sources and texts, one could come to this conclusion that the construction of bath houses in the Islamic eras was based on the physical and psychological needs of people which also influenced the depictions and designs in the bath houses. Therefore, depicting scenes such as the battle between Rostam and Div points to the battles between the good and evil forces or between anger and lust.

On the other side, the popularity of lithography in the Qajar era led to publishing of several epic books the depictions of which were used in public places like bath houses. With regard to the old people thought that bath houses were the place of demons and fairies, it seems that it refers to the immoral acts that might have occurred in the bath house; therefore, men could be tempted by the evil temptations or fight them out and win. However, old physicians believed that the existence of depictions of horse riders, gardens, fruit trees, and beautiful women was a response to the physical and psychological needs of people. On the other hand, old people believed that the existence of these images was for enjoying and spending time until when the bath time arrives or the body is dried and the person can get dressed and leave the bath house. The fear of bathing at night or the existence of Genie in the bath house is rooted in the beliefs of old people.

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<sup>1</sup>chachi was a famous centre in Iranian bow making

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