Semiotics In The Architecture Of Shia Religious Buildings

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Abstract:
This study aims to address the gap in understanding the symbolic connotations and aesthetics of abstract vision in Islamic architecture and to relate it to the spiritual component in every place and at any time. The gap is due to difficulties reading the Shia Islamic artistic plane and visual tools. The study's methodology involves using semiotics as a modern critical tool to analyze the spiritual component of Islamic architecture. The researchers interpret the symbolic connotations of various Islamic architectural elements through analytical and implicit readings. The researchers aim to use semiotics to analyze the spiritual content of Islamic architecture and interpret the symbolic connotations of various elements. The study underlines the significance of symbolic connotation in Shia religious buildings. Furthermore, it stresses the value of comprehending the spiritual aspect of Shia Islamic architecture and its symbolic implications.

Keywords: Semiotics, Shiaism, Symbols, Visual Text., Calligraphy, Denotations, Connotations, Abstraction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most studies, literature, and theoretical references have applied the concept of semiotics. Previous studies and literature on Islamic architecture have mainly applied semiotics to analyze architectural forms' geometric and formal aspects, with limited exploration of the semantics, symbolic aspects, and spiritual content. Manieri-Elia (1996) and other researchers have focused on the relationship between building size, space, and function. Some studies have used pre-prepared models like the Gervereau model, but they do not capture the soul and life of architecture.

Kononenko (2018) identified a lack of harmony between scholars studying Islamic architecture, with scholars from Muslim countries giving more importance to the spiritual aspect and disregarding architectural realities and European researchers focusing solely on specific monuments without acknowledging their religious significance.

In recent decades, the semiotics approach has been widely accepted and considered an effective method for analyzing artwork. This approach also applies to Arab-Islamic heritage, as it allows the study of linguistic and rhetorical connotations, poetic symbols, and other literary elements. Ferdinand de Saussure, a linguist, developed this approach, which focuses on the generation and communication of meanings. The term "semiotics" comes from two Greek words, "seme," meaning sign, and "logos," meaning science. Several scholars, including Chandler, Eco, Leach, Lune, and Berg, have discussed this

approach. (Chandler, 2007; Eco, 1984; Leach, 1997; Lune and Berg, 2017).

Islamic architecture is a combination of modern and religious designs that have developed over time alongside the Islamic faith. (Hamid, 2010). Despite this, there is a lack of scientific research on Islamic architecture that addresses the importance of forms and the inner meanings of their elements. (Medway, 1996), This study uses semiotics to analyze the visual components and their denotation and connotation implications in Islamic architecture, which represent the society's identity. (Cameron and Markus, 2002), The goal is to move beyond the simple concept of Islamic artistic creativity and abstract aesthetics and explore the deep internal perception of Islamic architecture. (Porphyrios, 1981), Semiotics presents a valuable tool for reading and analyzing Islamic architectural text and its visual models. (Leach, 1997).

Architecture semiotics: a critical review

Semiotics, which are concerned with the study of signs and symbols, can be used to analyze and interpret the meanings of artwork, including visual language. It originated from linguistic studies and represented cultural patterns of semantic interpretations, revealing what is behind the artwork. Architecture is a nonverbal language that aims to convey a particular meaning and can provide new insights by emphasizing content and meaning rather than styles and techniques. (Ramzy, 2013). The study of semiotics is well-suited to architecture, as buildings can convey emotions and ideas to those who experience them. Using semiotics can establish a universal language of the built environment, creating a visual vocabulary that carries meanings for the observer. However, the meaning of architecture can vary depending on the cultural and experiential background of the observer. For example, in his design for a cemetery in Modena, Italy, Rossi used abstract symbols

with distant meanings that appealed to the observer's memory and evoked emotions. Rossi's (1984) theory emphasized the importance of memory in creating and interpreting architectural symbols and expressions.

The cemetery design in Modena by Rossi (1984) utilizes various architectural elements to convey symbolic meaning. The enclosing wall with openings around the site represents containment, while the house without a roof or windows represents a sense of abandonment. The large cone in the design serves as a reminder of an idle factory. Rossi's overall layout for the cemetery was based on a symbolic expression of a city plan, emphasizing that the cemetery is a city of different types and periods.

The semiotics approach views architecture as having a communicative purpose and therefore analyzes the architectural "sign" about that purpose, considering it to be both an art form and a medium for preserving and transmitting valuable information. The terms "sign" and "symbol" are considered synonymous by Norberg-Schulz, as per Collins (1967).

The architectural symbol is closely linked to the process of a social symbolization and cannot exist independently of it. Signs, on the other hand, are shared and created through social interaction. Social traditions encompass a complex system of signs and symbols, giving content to symbols. Denoted signs have a direct message, while first-level significations form the basis for second-level meanings. These implicit or "second-order meanings" are cultural and built upon first-level semantics. (Collinge, 2019).

Every architectural element or form is intrinsically connected to a particular meaning and cannot be considered in isolation. Moreover, intellectual and moral content cannot exist independently but must

be linked in some way to a symbolic representation. The brain seeks to comprehend these symbols by interpreting the forms that represent them, as explained by Cassirer in 1953. (Cassirer, 1953).

Architecture is a form of communication that does not rely on words but on the message conveyed through its physical forms and shapes. This message can be associated with religious beliefs and holiness and is understood as a language that communicates meanings through tangible elements such as spaces, dimensions, and colors. According to Eco, architecture has two functions: denotative and connotative. The former is related to practical uses, while the latter relates to the broader social and cultural meanings associated with the object. The semantic dimension of architecture is thus an important aspect of its communicative function, and a building can be seen as a form of language with its writing system. (Broadbent et al., 1980; Eco, 1986).

The study of semiotics can provide a unique perspective on the artistic aesthetics of Islamic architecture beyond just examining the physical forms and their evolution throughout history. Islamic mosques, for instance, have symbolic connotations that are not always visible in their architecture and design. Examining these buildings through the lens of aesthetic values makes it possible to uncover the cultural and ideological symbols present in the integration of the structural body, architectural elements, and geometric motifs. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the mosque, highlighting its aesthetic features, clarifying its structural philosophy, and uncovering its deeper meanings and connotations.

Architecture is a complex art aiming to harmonize buildings' utilitarian function and formal expression. These two tasks are complementary yet contradictory, as the utilitarian function depends on technical knowledge and functional efficiency, while the formal expression is based on artistic creativity, connotations, and cultural contexts. Symbolism in architecture is not a goal but a result of this interplay between functionality and artistic expression, which affects the social heritage of architecture. Designs can reflect cultural meaning comically or critically beyond their function or symbolism. Therefore, the evaluation of a building must consider its functional and expressive aspects, as they are essential to understanding its symbolic significance. (Saidi, 2019).

Each building has a unique form and serves a specific purpose to fulfill human needs. However, the connection between the form and the function is not straightforward but a complex interaction that depends on humans as the intermediary element.

The secular state of form comprises physical attributes, including shape, color, texture, and structure, which are perceptible through the senses. It involves using materials to create an entity with a defined space of existence, which humans perceive. The second stage of form is as a signifier, which goes beyond the physical properties of the materials used in architecture. This state represents a deeper level of perception, which includes visual expressions and characteristics that can be compared to vocabulary in a language. The elements of architecture, such as mass, space, and proportions, are linked to form a sentence, and these characteristics create a system based on the relationships between the parts of the same substance. This state of form is organized in aesthetic and utilitarian aspects.

The concept of symbolic form refers to how the material aspects of architecture are transformed into signifiers that carry cultural and social meanings. These forms work with the material to support the sign, with architecture acting as symbols and signs of cultural or social functions. Some scholars view the entire city as a sign, consisting of a signifier and signified, highlighting the semiotic character of the city. (Jansson, 2004; Leach, 1997; Martin-Jordache, 2002).

Symbols play a crucial role in informing people about a place's cultural and social significance, and they guide individuals in their interactions with the site. For example, symbols used in architectural design can help individuals recognize whether a building is a religious institution, a hospital, or a museum. These symbols serve as visual cues that provide information about the nature and purpose of the building, and they help individuals interact with the site in a manner appropriate for their cultural and educational background.

Modern methodologies for the implicit critique of Shia Architectural space text

Symbolism approach to the connotations of Shia Islamic architecture

The section begins by raising questions about the presence of symbols unique to Islamic architecture and the factors that contribute to their symbolic character. It explores whether these symbols are associated with form or function and the theoretical and philosophical framework that gives these shapes specific connotations within Islamic culture. Additionally, it considers that these symbols may not be exclusive to Islamic culture and their connection to global human culture.

The study of symbolism in Islamic architecture will be approached from a philosophical perspective, focusing on its cultural and civilizational impact within urban philosophy. This raises important questions about the legitimacy and control over historical metaphors and the process of abstracting, re-reading, and interpreting them in contemporary Islamic architecture. The study of symbolism in Islamic architecture requires a philosophical interpretation of the forms and symbols used and their associated connotations and signals. It is also important to consider the relationship between form and function, especially as functions transform over time to meet cultural and humanistic needs. Scholars such as Oleg Grabar (1980) have noted the abundance of hidden meanings, symbols, and connotations in Islamic architecture. Although a few serious attempts have been made to identify a visual sign-symbol system in Islamic architecture, some studies have explored the geometric system used in mosques and linked the shapes to their content. For instance, cubic shapes represent balance and perfection in engineering and refer to the Kaaba's shape, while octagonal shapes reflect the throne of God as based on eight ribs, connecting a spherical or hemispherical shape with a cube. Architects such as Paolo Portoghesi have applied these concepts in designing mosques, including the Islamic Cultural Centre and its mosque in Rome.

In his article, Grabar (1980) explains that Islamic architecture holds symbolic connotations related to its forms. He also differentiates between symbols and signs, stating that a sign indicates something while a symbol connotes and defines it without limiting it. Many studies have been conducted on the formal and artistic aspects of individual mosque elements, such as the minaret, a symbol of Islam and Muslims. Jonathan Bloom, for example, examined the historical roots of minarets and their connection to mosque structures,

recognizing their significance as a representation of Islam and its followers (Williams, 1992).

Architects have become interested in exploring Shia Islamic architecture's artistic and formal aspects and linking them with the spiritual content they represent. This has led to the identification of many forms used in Imambada buildings as having symbolic meanings that go beyond their formal design. For instance, the minaret is viewed as a symbol of guidance and access to the mosque. Similarly, the central Dome in a mosque and Imambada represent the universe's four directions and physical components. This trend has brought about a deeper understanding of Shia Islamic architecture and the cultural and philosophical implications of its symbolism.

The repeated use of certain architectural elements in Muslim history has created a perceptual system in mind. This system operates like an electronic brain that collects and processes information, makes choices, and combines and compares them as needed. For example, the Imambada is a building that contains specific elements, such as a hall, Shahnasheen, calligraphy, ritualistic symbols, and arches. These forms have shifted from the formal to the symbolic concept in the minds of Shia Muslims and have become a language of communication in terms of form and meaning. In terms of form, it is a building for commemoration, and in terms of meaning, it is related to Shiaism as an identity of the Shia Islamic community at a general level.

The repetition of certain architectural forms in the Imambada has resulted in their integration into the Shia Muslim psyche, creating philosophical meanings and connotations associated with the mosque's structure. This has made it challenging to introduce changes to these forms, particularly as they are linked to a religious establishment, as many believe them to be unalterable elements that define Imambada's architectural identity.

Abstraction approach to the connotations of Shia Islamic architecture

Abstraction and symbolism are essential elements in Islamic arts, as Muslim artists focus on their creations' essence and symbolic meaning rather than on details or realistic depictions. They aimed to avoid using perspective or physical images and instead moved toward complete flatness to distance themselves from the idea of representing God's creations. In Islamic belief, all living beings who can move belong to God and should not be replicated in any form, including art. This viewpoint is reflected in the artistic approach of Islamic art. (Akkach, 2012).

Abstraction and symbolism play a significant role in Islamic arts, where the artists focus on the essence and symbolic meanings rather than the details of what they are depicting or drawing. Islamic artists avoid using perspective or embodied images and instead strive for complete flatness to move away from representing what God created. This approach to art stems from the Islamic concept of existence, which emphasizes the absolute value of God Almighty, the Creator of the universe, who is beyond imagination or representation. (Ghasemzadeh et al., 2013). The Islamic artistic plane deals with visual elements, including geometric, ornamental, calligraphic, and chromaticity signs, each with its own story and significance, whether spiritual, aesthetic, cultural, or social. According to the Islamic perspective of abstraction, Muslim artists have excelled in producing magnificent works of art by condensing and reducing perceptible visual forms into pure abstract visual signs and

signals. The general approach to abstraction in Islamic arts is due to moving away from the simulated approach, which focuses only on the apparent tangible part of natural and perceptive objects without hinting at the unseen motive power.

Muslim artists used mathematics to express spiritual content through visual values. Their artwork was not merely decorative but aimed to convey ideas and concepts. The Muslim artistic tradition excelled in four areas: interlaced decoration, architecture, painting, and calligraphy. Westerners refer to the intricate Arab art of interlaced decoration as arabesque (as seen in Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Ali Ebn-e Hamze Imamzadeh is a holy place in Shiraz.Iran

Soucrce : https://www.dreamstime.com/ali-ebn-e-hamze-imamzadeh-shiraz-iran-ali-ebn-e-hamze-imamzadeh-holy-place-shiraz-image132387053

Figure 2:Ali Ibn Hamzeh Holly Shrine, Shiraz, Iran
Source : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Imamzadeh-ye_Ali_Ebn-e_Hamze_%28Shiraz%29_001.jpg

As previously mentioned, the abstraction principle was fundamental to Shiaism, as it spoke to both the mind and conscience. Muslim architects discovered that the content of their means to achieve abstraction included connotations representing the divine order and metaphysical values. Consequently, geometric shapes with symbolic content emerged, inspired by society's culture, prior arts aligned with the Islamic faith, or through formal and aesthetic structures, which expressed the values of rhythm and abstraction.

Islamic abstract formations often display the equivalence of geometric heights (as seen in Figures 1 and 2) in various forms, such as geometric shapes, botanical motifs, and inscriptions. Muslim artists used this visual sign to convey social, spiritual, and aesthetic connotations to the viewer without relying on embodied images. This conveyed the ideas of justice and equality, important concepts in the Islamic faith,

without resorting to direct pictorial mimicry. In contrast, religious iconographers in Byzantine and medieval art used embodied images of saints and apostles of equal size and height to express the concepts of justice and equality. These concepts are integral to the shared beliefs of all monotheistic religions, such as truth, goodness, benefit, and beauty.

Visual approach to the connotations of Shia Islamic architecture

Islamic and Christian arts of the Middle Ages have different approaches to visual representation. While Christian art often utilized closed frames and specific visual directions to draw attention to a central icon or location within a church or other architectural structure, Islamic art took a different approach. Islamic art tended to avoid enclosing the visual text within specific architectural spaces and instead sought to convey spiritual and cultural ideas through abstraction and symbolism without relying on embodied images or perspective. To emphasize the significance of Christ and religious stories, Christian Middle Ages art often utilized closed frames and geometric designs to isolate the inner space from the outer space. This approach directed the viewer's attention toward specific central icons and stories, and the design philosophy was in line with the spiritual and theological beliefs of the time. As a result, interior windows in this type of architecture were often small to limit the amount of natural light entering the space and to create shadows necessary for embodying statues of Christ in a way that aligned with the Christian aesthetic and spiritual perception. Islamic architecture contrasts with Christian Middle Ages architecture in that it does not enclose the visual text within closed frames or determinants. Instead, Islamic architecture keeps the visual text open on various abstract surfaces without confining the viewer's gaze to the interior

space. This is particularly evident in Shia architectural spaces like Imambadas, where visual signs are distributed in all directions, and the viewer's gaze is free to roam beyond the boundaries of the drawn surface. This approach reflects a rejection of rigidity and closure in spiritual, moral, and social behavior. Muslim architects also expanded and inclined windows to allow natural light to enter and illuminate all surfaces, conveying the importance of the believer's insight into the face and light of God from every direction. This approach contrasts with Christian architecture, which uses small interior windows to create shadows and focus attention on specific central icons or stories. The architectural visual discourse in Islamic art stresses the significance of the believer's perception of God's presence and light in all directions and places. This is emphasized through the use of open spaces and multiple directions, allowing for a sense of connection and ritual experience from any location, and one can associate with the tragic effect that happened at Karbala.

The Islamic belief is that God is not confined to a specific physical space or location but rather present everywhere and at all times. This belief is reflected in the abstract designs that adorn the interior walls of buildings, which use visual elements to attract the viewer's gaze and direct it in multiple directions, both inside and outside the building. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2020), these visual elements carry a deep meaning, reflecting the convergence of temporal and spiritual aspects and the intersection of earth and sky. Through this open and harmonious aesthetic discourse, Islamic art conveys a sense of beauty and spiritual and ritualistic values.

Symbolic connotations of shapes and elements in Islamic architecture

Symbolism is essential in Islamic art and architecture to move beyond the physical world to the spiritual realm. Islamic architects use abstraction to convey meanings related to the belief in the oneness of the Creator, monotheism, and connecting with the sky. The use of light in Islamic architecture symbolizes God, the Creator of the universe, as described in Islamic thought. Design elements such as open inner courtyards and minarets emphasize the connection between the earth and the sky and the importance of the principle of monotheism. Through abstraction and symbolism, Islamic architecture aims to distance itself from the material world and convey spiritual and philosophical concepts.

Symbolism is an integral part of the design of Imambada buildings, and it is evident in their layout and orientation. These structures are designed to be oriented in two distinct directions. The first is a horizontal plane that links the building to the Grave orientation, typically north-south. The Shahnasheen space within the Imambada is oriented in the same direction to contain ritualistic symbols such as the tazia and boot (coffin). A second is a vertical plane represented by domes, finials, alarms (flags), and parapets. All these elements work together to create a highly symbolic space infused with meaning and significance.

3. Findings and Discussions

The findings based on the semiotic study on the secondary and primary qualitative data depict the following connotation of architectural elements in Imambadas.

This section will discuss the existing literature and the primary data and inferences drawn from the existing literature. Additionally, this section will identify any research inadequacies and deduce the key findings based on the analysis.

Connotations of architectural elements in Shia religious building: xsImambadas

Islamic art and architecture exhibit multifunctional characteristics that serve representational purposes and functional ones. In this context, we provide a philosophical and analytical explanation of some Islamic architectural elements, highlighting their purpose and symbolic significance.

- **Domes**

Figure 3: Red lighting during Muharram outside the Imambada at Rampur, India
Source: Author

The Dome is a popular type of ceiling often used to cover

Figure 4: Colourful lighting during jashn (happy celebration) outside the Imambada at Lucknow, India Source: Author

large square spaces while providing adequate lighting and ventilation. Its unique shape allows windows to be placed in the neck and body of the Dome. In Islamic architecture, the Dome symbolizes the sky's vault and the spiritual realm. Its spherical shape represents the universe, and its orientation towards the sky indicates the direction in which the believer's heart and mind should be focused. Additionally, the Dome is associated with the universe's movement and infinite rotation, representing a holy quest and an infinite circle toward God. (Al-Ubaidi, 2021). The use of colored electric lights in Islamic architecture serves a dual purpose. During periods of mourning, such as when remembering the tragedy of Karbala, the lights are often red, symbolizing bloodshed and sorrow (Figure 3). The lights are typically green, white, or blue during normal days. (Figure 4) The use of these lights is not only aesthetic, but it also captures people's attention and creates a sense of association with the place.

- **Arches**

Figure 5: Arches inside the Imambada at Kolkata, India
Source: Author

Figure 6: Shahnasheen arches with a sword carved symbolic of Imam Ali (as) Zulfiqar (sword)   inside the Imambada at Lucknow, India
Source: Author

◾The use of arches and vaults in Islamic architecture serves both aesthetic and functional purposes and often feature intricate floral and geometric designs and often bear the names of Ahly-Bayt, specifically Ali(as) and Hussain (as) inscribed on them. They symbolize the transition from the material to the spiritual world, welcoming and inviting individuals to enter a sacred space. These architectural features continue to serve as symbols of Shia Islamic architecture and culture (Figures 5 and 6).

• **Courts**

Courtyards, which are open or partially covered spaces, have multiple functions within an
Figure 7 (A & B): Court space used for processions and lamentation in the Imambada at Lucknow, India

Source: AuthorImambada. During the Moharram mourning ceremony, they are used for the ritual of lamentation, known as matam, which involves chest beating. They also serve as a space for the procession of ritualistic symbols, such as the tazia and

taboot, which are taken outside the courtyard and brought back into the hall to be kept at the Shahnasheen as part of the ritual. (Figure 7 A &B). Beyond their ritualistic use, courtyards also have symbolic meanings in Islamic architecture, representing inward orientation, purity, and stillness.

• **Ornamentation**

The use of ornamentation in Shiaism represents the spiritual concept of monotheism and is often showcased through geometric shapes that do not have a clear beginning or end, stemming from a single central point. The vegetal shapes and floral patterns showcase dynamism and movement within the design. Hillenbrand (2003) explains that the use of vegetal shapes in ornamentation allows for a dynamic representation of nature and life within Islamic art. (Figure 8)

Figure 8: Floral ornamentation and use of Quranic verses (calligraphy) on the Shahnasheen area and the arches in Imambada, Lucknow, India
Source: Author

The story of Karbala, similar to many other narratives in the region, is mainly transmitted through the oral tradition, but it is also expressed through various forms of iconography, such as scenic portrays of the event that connects the people and build a charged atmosphere within the Imambada. (Figure 9)

Figure 9: Scenic paintings inside the Imambada
Source: Google

- ▪**Flag/alarm at the top of the Dome**

Figure 10: Flag on the top of Dome at Imambada at Jaunpur, India
Source: Author

Figure 11: Flag changing ceremony at Imam Hussain Shrine tomb at Karbala, Iraq.
Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/panjetan/21761479463

The Alam, or the flag, is a prominent architectural feature that is placed on top of the walls or a dome of an Imambada. (Figure 10) It indicates that the Shia space and its color represent certain emotions or occasions; the color of the flag is significant, changing to black during Moharram to symbolize grief and mourning and then to red afterward to represent happiness. The flag or alarm is always placed on the highest point of the domes and parapets. (Figure 11)

- **Banners/ Torah**

Inside the Imambada, the black banners with Quranic verses and the names of Ahlulbayt are often displayed, serving as a symbol of grief and connecting people to the space and the event of Karbala. Similarly, outside of the Imambada, these banners also serve as a symbol and reminder of the event, creating a sense of association and connection between the people and the Imambada as a place of mourning and remembrance. The black banners are traditionally put up inside the Imambada at the beginning of the month of Muharram, which marks the start of the mourning period for the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and his companions in the Battle of Karbala. The banners serve as a visual reminder of the occasion's solemnity and help create a mournful atmosphere in the Imambada. (Figure 12)

Figure 12: Black banners inside the Imambada at Kolkata, India
Source: Author

• **Calligraphy**

The art of beautiful writing in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic is referred to as "khushnavisi," from which the art of calligraphy, or "khattati," is derived. Islamic calligraphy is commonly practiced in several styles, including Kufi, Naskh, Thulth, Muharraq, Riqa, Diwani, and Nastaliq.

Imambadas are often adorned with decorative inscriptions of Quranic verses or the names of Ahlybayt, mainly found on walls, arches, and columns. These inscriptions hold significant symbolic value, representing the incident of Karbala and the sacrifice of the Ahlybayt. (Figure 13)

Figure 13: Calligraphy on the Chhota Imambada, Lucknow, India
Source: Author

For architecture to have symbolic meaning, it is necessary to consider the history and the adaptation of historical values in architectural design. Architect Robert Venturi emphasized the importance of the visual aspect over form, with architectural identity being highlighted in the confirmation of the visual image. Venturi and Brown, 1986). Venturi believed architecture should act as a symbol in the space and not merely serve a functional purpose. He placed emphasis on local

values in architectural design, as opposed to the translation of functional programs and construction requirements. ((Venturi et al., 1977).

4. Conclusion And Recommendations

The study employed semiotics to analyze the symbols and their symbolic meanings in Shia Islamic architecture by utilizing content, abstraction, and visual text.

Islamic architecture is often studied through historical narratives and religious descriptions, rather than modern critical methods like semiotics. However, semiotics is becoming an increasingly attractive method for analyzing Islamic arts and architecture as a creative space that can be further analyzed and theorized. This may be partly due to the numerous scholastic approaches within Islamic thought.

Our analysis aimed to examine the connections between the visual components of Shia Islamic architecture and their symbolic meanings within the semiotic framework. By examining these relations at both the surface and deeper levels, we aimed to provide a critical understanding of the implicit interpretations associated with each symbol and the connotations and signals they convey. This involved exploring the relationship between artistic forms and ritualistic functions, and the expression of spiritual faith, especially in cases where these symbols' functions have evolved to adapt to changing cultural and societal needs. Our analysis revealed a wealth of insights into Shia Islamic architecture's rich cultural and symbolic meanings.

This study on the semiotics of Shia Islamic architecture should be viewed as a starting point for further investigation and analysis. It is meant to encourage the adoption of more advanced critical methods in modern research that delve deeper into the cognitive layers of Islamic art, architecture, and its symbolism. This is important as it allows for a better understanding of the religious, philosophical, and scientific concepts behind Islamic art and architecture which goes beyond mere aesthetic appreciation.

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