
Fundamentals of Humanism in Architecture

Identification

This research analyses the interior aspects of the National Parliament House in Dhaka by comparing the key importance in the response to three chosen scholarly texts. By analyzing three scholarly texts: (1) Architectural culture in the Fifties: Louis Kahn and National Assembly Complex in Dhaka by Sarah Ksiazek, (2) Louis I. Kahn: The Idea of Order by Klaus-Peter Gast and (3) Louis I. Kahn by Robert McCarter. In the first text, Ksiazek explores how the combination of humanism and regionalism that Kahn drew those oppositions together to create monumental architecture as a whole. In the referred text; according to Kahn, humanism in National Parliament House in Dhaka was designed not only with human-centered scale and forms but also embodied perceptual reasons that reflect individuals' spiritual relation "the spirit of commonness". Contrast to humanism, the author interprets that by weaving mosque and regional Moghul architecture with the use of traditional material into the assembly building create monumental assembly building that represents both humanism and regionalism. In the second text, Louis I. Kahn: The Idea of Order, Gast elaborates the importance of programming the hierarchy within the space. Gast examined Kahn's attitude and his fundamentals of architecture in the Parliament building mainly analysing from the principal of ordering in terms of technique and basic geometrical fundamentals applied to the assembly building layout to achieve traditional and geometrical configuration of Mandala with a bit of distortion of original (diagonal and symmetrical) configuration in designing the plan of the building, and the use of simplified archaic symbols, poetic natural lighting that create different atmospheric interior spaces. Thirdly, McCarter explains Kahn's inspiration and ideas and designing process, challenges, and changes of the plan throughout the process due to change in the political movement of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Kahn's inspiration of poetics of human actions reflects in the plan of National Parliament House in Dhaka, and how their spatial planning articulate. Based on the above key identification, the research mainly explores the relations and fundamentals of humanism in architecture applied to the National Parliament Building project.

Comparison

By considering the key points made by writers, it is clear that there are clear relations and evidence that are supporting each other. Ksiazek explains her thoughts on humanism in Kahn's National Parliament House is not just about man-centered scale and forms. It is "assembly of transcendent of nature" - a way of life that concern government institutions "men came to assemble not for personal gain but to touch the spirit of commonness" (Ksiazek, pp.429). Explaining that humanism in the building contains a meaningful interpretation of that individuals assemble in the space has commonness in the spirit of individual democratic idealism for civic responsibility and patriotism. Similarity, those individuals assemble with the spirit for common goods is related to the collective sphere of government institutions while elaborating "the relationship of assembly, mosque and supreme courts and hostels, in their interplay psychologically, is what expresses the nature of government institution" (Ksiazek, pp.429). Besides, the author points out the bodily relationship of the massive scale of the grey concrete building is soften by contrasting the use of materials where the white marble band is tiled every five feet brings comfort reference to the human body.

However, consideration of humanism in terms of human-centered form and scale is obvious through the process of planning layout for the parliament building according to Gast's examination. Applying the principle of distortions, diagonal arrangement and extensions throughout the planning layout is "how Kahn's concept "...that was implemented directly in principle here for the first time as a 'primal figure' and 'a mandala'...." (Gast, pp.100), interpreting the octagonal plan of the assembly building with the simplified modern version of Mandala configuration. The layout planning was started with simple squares and dividing those squares by using the proportion of the Golden Section which is known as the ideal of humanism in Renaissance and the perfect ratio of the divine-human beings. "... Half the length of diagonal is now divided in the proportion of the Golden Section.The shorter section of this division forms the minor Golden Section ..." (Gast, pp.104). Then, the use of the golden section becomes the starting figure of the inner circular hall which is the main assembly hall of the building. Together with the human-centred ratio, the principal of distortions and extensions elaborates imperfect human individual in expressing Kahn's architectural plan.

Stressing the importance of the assembly hall, McCarter explains that humanism of what "Khan conceived of architecture as beginning with the room, with each human understood as 'a society of rooms', their spatial relationship articulating their collective institutional purpose." (McCarter, pp.222). This statement aligns with the ideal of humanism expressed in the assembly of transcendent of nature under collective government institution and affects transitions and programming hierarchy of rooms in the assembly building. Since the assembly buildings and mosque are the main buildings of the project from the beginning, Kahn placed them in the center as islands within a lake, showing its importance. The main entrance of the building exits at the north where Presidential esplanade symbolizes as democratic participation public sphere in front of the fortress-like building. The mosque is extended and far enough from the assembly hall with the ablution court in between which acts as a sound barrier. The mosque is placed at the southern part by slanting the mosque to face east "as required and giving it certain independence from the rest of the Assembly Building" (McCarter, pp.262) indicating the Bangladesh which was initially part of East Pakistan gain independence from Pakistan. By centralizing the Assembly hall, the four office blocks are a combination of two squares forming rectangular block as a whole, located in the form of an octagon bracing around the main circulation of hall housing the service components. The ministry's lounge facing to the west and ministry's dining and recreation to the east. Thus, the overall form of the building reflects the traditional Mandala configuration; and each room are independent and self-defined but interlocking with the circular passage around the central assembly hall, proving the ideal of humanism exists as both transcendent nature of assembly and society of rooms.

Evaluation

Firstly, Ksiazek's with ten years of experiences in the teaching of the History and Theory of Architecture at many universities, the structure of her text is well structured with relevant detailed reasoning. Before she analyses Louis Kahn's responses, as reflected in his project, she carefully elaborates the relating contexts and their concerns arising in the fifties by comparing many architects' responses and voices. The author explains the influence in arising concerns in new monumentality, humanism and regionalism architecture in the 50s, and presenting respective architects' point of views and their contradictions then discussed Lou's Khan Responses to those conditions. Based on that, Ksiazek illustrates how Kahn came up with his reflection of humanism and religion theory applied to the monumental building and

articulation for the occupants to encounter sensorial experience. Ksiazek research explores the beginning of the context, where Palladian humanism influence on new humanism and theory of it “clear, man-centered, forms, which asserted a sculptural, symbolic, monumental presence” (Ksiazek, pp.421). Then, interprets Khan’s expanded ideology “assembly is transcendent”. Together with the previous explanations on the theory of new humanism, the concept of Khan’s humanism fundamental become more relatable and architect’s decision becomes more comprehensible and compelling the strong concept which allows spiritual engagement of spaces in the National Parliament House.

Secondly, Gast, the German architect who is living and practicing in India shows a detailed interpretation of the Mandala configuration compared to the other two authors. Since Mandala is originally a spiritual or geometrical configuration in Indian culture, Gast seems more relatable and explains thoroughly. So that, the spatial configuration of the layout which he relates to Principal of Golden Section and distortion of primal traditional Mandala is clarified and simplified step by step explanations and several creative phases through illustrations from the basic square grids to octagonal plan. By comparing with the principal of Mandala diagonal arrangements and symmetry, Gast introduced the four office blocks, symmetrical in terms of form and proportionate to each other, exist diagonally across the centralized assembly. This strong principal applied as the fundamental of the layout planning in the National Parliament Building and Khan’s interpretations of human-centered experience and ideologies become easier to understand. Moreover, the idea of human-centered principle is compelling to me personally since it demonstrates Louis Khan’s profound value of context in humanism.

Thirdly, McCarter, an American architect who is also an author and a professor in many universities analyses architecture as occupants’ experience emphasizing on interior spaces and their interrelations. And, even in the referred text, he expresses Khan’s interrelationship and occupation of interior spaces as ‘inspired composition in the poetics of action’, discussing the importance of hierarchical spatial planning especially for a legislative building like the National Parliament House. In developing. Supporting Kahn’s idea of connection in the government institutions with the grand hall, for example, the tall corridor exits in the main hall which is extremely important since it is where the first impression that the spatial area provides for first time visitor.