

“*Kharja*” the lung of the traditional house – the case of Makkah

Abstract:

Kharja- sing, and Kharjat- plural, is an Arabic term means “outside”.

In the Hijazi traditional houses and the Makkan in particular, it is the outdoor open area that enveloped with two to three outdoor walls and has no ceiling. The walls have special treatments for the openings and windows if they were. It has been described as an open space that situated well above the ground level in the form of open to sky terrace. These open terraces, which positioned at different levels display a roof scape, are surrounded by high periphery walls to ensure the privacy of the indoors.

The kharja cannot be called terrace or balcony, simply because the kharja is walled from all sides, three are detached and one is attached to the body of the house and to one of the rooms in particular. Whereas; the terrace has a small wall (a parapet). It is not a balcony, because the balcony is roofed and has a parapet wall as enclosure. The kharja is open to the sky but not roofed, it also has high walls or screens from the three other sides. It seems/acts like the lung of the house

Kharja has long served as the lung of the house; it served for sleeping, dining and generally living area by family members in summer seasons. The living room in the house enjoys a greater importance with/in relation to the kharja than any of the other outer elements. Women and family members are entertained at night. Formal daytime gatherings of women and their neighbours may also take place in the kharja.

If it is fashion, nowadays that courtyards are being adopted in contemporary houses as an element from the past, why the kharja can not be adopted the same way. Especially in Makkah as the vertical extend is still dominated the current architecture. This paper focuses upon the importance of the kharja within the house, and the role of it in relation to the family activities: daily, occasionally. It also stresses what family loses with the loss of kharja, and what makes Makkah different than the rest cities in the Hijaz region? Future vision of the kharja, and its modern version is another platform worth discussion and indepth studies.

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