Master Kamaloddin Bihzad, a Leading Painter in Herat School

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Abstract

Painting is one of the arts patronized by the Iranian kings to depict their history, culture and power. The outstanding samples of this art may be found in Persepolis, the paintings illustrated on walls of Bishapur palace, and Manichaean works. Although after gaining power by Moslems, the progress of this art was interrupted for a while, but after the revival of the Iranian culture and civilization since the third and fourth centuries, painting art was flourished again. The political stability, the rulers’ power and wealth in the next eras, especially in Timurid era, prepared the ground for flourishing this art in all aspects more than before under the names of artistic schools such as Baghdad school, Tabriz school, and Shiraz school. There is no doubt that Timurid era has been considered as a special period of art flourishing because of the Herat school in Iran which may be called as the Golden Age of the Iranian art and culture. Certainly, Master Kamaloddin Bihzad is among the leading painters of this school in that era. The Herat school began in the ninth century (Lunar Hegira), in Timurid era. Bihzad, under the patronage of art-advocating kings in Timurid era, took initiatives which are considered as innovations not only in Herat school but also in the Iranian art history. In this research paper, it is tried to analyze the Herat school more deeply through a causal glance on the Iranian painting history after Islam, and the role played by Bihzad in the growth and promotion of this art has been examined. Finally, the factors of growth and promotion of this art have been specified.

Keywords: Painting, Herat school, Master Kamaloddin Bihzad, Configuration, Human Picture, Color Combination.
Introduction

The emergence of Islam and its rapid expansion in the neighboring territories, disrupted many political, social, and artistic relations of the defeated countries and brought about a new age in the history of culture and civilization of the Islamic countries. Although the evident opposition raised by some religious jurisprudents against portrait painting, considered as a barrier between human and the invisible presence of God, (Burkhardt p.96), caused the oblivion and isolation of painting art for a relative long period but the Abbasid's gaining power and Turks' influence on the Islamic caliphate, was led to the re-emergence of different artistic schools in Iran. According to the cultural and social situations, any of these schools was emerged with specific features of its own time. The first Iranian painting school after Islam may be known as Baqdad or Abbasid School which was emerged after gaining power by the Abbasid. The historical period began from 133 Lunar Hegira and ended in 165 Lunar Hegira. Among the most important works of this school are the frescos in Neishabour the most important feature of which is its non-colored or monochrome pictures which reminds the paintings and crafts in Sassanid era (Dimand , p.40). When Turks gained power in the Islamic Empire and founded the Turkish Ghaznavid dynasties, the painting was flourished and prevailed. Turkish rulers who were much interested in recording and painting the events and happenings, at first, prepared the ground for painting the walls of the palaces and book pages respectively. The Seljukian school, emerged during the years 590-429 (lunar Hegira) , has special features. The designs and ornaments of this period were painted and colored on the texts. The paintings of the book entitled "Andarznameh" , the romantic long poem of "Vargheh and Golshad" and a pictorial copy of "Shahnameh" known as "Shahnameh Kama" are considered among the most important paintings of Seljukian school in all of which great significance in the style of portraiture, sculpture, depiction of the scenes, and coloration is reflected. They are considered as the most evident communication bonds between pre-Islamic painting school and the post-Islamic schools in Iran (Riazi , p.219- Sharifzadeh, p.63).

Today, this Shahnameh is in Kama Orientalist Institute located in India , therefore, it is called as "Kama Shahnameh"

The wave of conquests flowed from Mongolia to Iran since 616(lunar Hegira year) affected all the political borders of Middle East and created major changes in all fields including painting. In this period, the Iranian, Indian and Mesopotamian elements were blended in the illumination and painting. The Chinese designs were reflected in all arts due to the support made by Mongol rulers and the reputation of Chinese art from ancient times in Iran. At the time of Mongolian tribal chiefs, the Iranian artists illustrated some books. Today, the works belonging to these artists are introduced as Tribal Chiefs' Schools, Mongolian Schools, and Tabriz School in Tribal Chiefs' age. In this era, the painting- patronized by the tribal chief rulers, who did their best in recording and depicting their victories, and the Iranian art-advocating ministers especially Khajeh Rashiddoldin Fazlollah-found its own specific features and gained its own principles in terms of theme and configuration. The established principles in this age flourished in their highest mode in Timurid and Safavid eras. In this era, the Iranian painters became widely familiar with the works and methods of Chinese paintings. Among the most important reasons for expansion of this familiarity is the development of commercial relations by Mongols and removal of the political borders. Among the most
important works of this era are the books entitled "Mounesolahrar", "Shahnameh Damout", "Jameoltavarikh", "Kelileh va Demneh" and "Manafeolheynvan". In all pictures illustrated on these books, the impression of Chinese painting art is completely evident. For example, the natural landscapes have been painted in light colors with Chinese style and human pictures and clothes in dark colors and Iranian style. Also, the method of painting clouds, trees, rocks, dinosaurs, and even some war implements demonstrate evidently the impression of Chinese painting.

When the Mongols attacked Iran, Shiraz was the only territory which could keep its local independence and protect itself from their brutal attacks by obeying the invader's commands. The local rulers in this part of Iran including Atabeks, Injue Dynasty and Mozaffar Dynasty could adequately protect the culture and art of this part of Achaemenid and Sassanid's homeland in order to prevent their culture and art from blending with foreign elements. The artists of that territory could keep the artistic traditions of the ancient Iran and sometimes they inspired other centers. Among the illustrated books in Shiraz school are different Shahnamehs which are kept in the famous museums of the world (Sherato, Kerube, p.22). In these miniatures, the Iranian style is dominant. The artists of Shiraz school reminded the glory of the past eras by focusing on the traditional and historical contents. Therefore, a major part of the painting arts belonging to the eighth century in Shiraz were simple and uniform so that this school may be called as Shiraz local school among the important features of which we may refer to paying attention to the humans and their surroundings (Rabinson, p.18).

It may be said that in the period of Jalaryan dynasty, especially Soltan Ahmad Jalayeri, the achievements of Shiraz, Baqdad and Tabriz schools were combined with each other and formed the valuable works known as Jalayeri school. The most beautiful samples remained from Jalayeri school are found in the famous manuscript belonging to Khajou Kermani (799 lunar Hegira). In this school, there is no trace of Chinese realism and the Iranian thought, taste, and traditions have been demonstrated more vividly. The painter is very interested in displaying the poetical nature and renders an image of the imaginative world.

Among other features of this school are the coordination between picture and story and the allocation of a complete page to a painting.

In brief, in this era, painting has a firm bond with the epic stories and mystical and philosophical thoughts that are more consistent with the Iranian spirit. The Iranian painting is more dependent on calligraphy and less with color. All the Iranian paintings are colored; the Iranian painters cover all the background of painting with color, of course, the brilliant and contrastive colors which bring wonderful harmony. This painting rarely displays a reasonable perception of the life essence and it is basically imaginative and romantic. The Iranian painting never intends to reach realism but it always attempts to manifest its special idealism in the work. Among the best features of the Iranian painting, in most cases, is avoiding debauchery and impudence and focusing on tranquility instead of excitement; because, at first, this art served the kings' courts and palaces to which all Moslems from all classes were allowed to enter. Of course, the interior parts were considered exceptions from this rule and their pictures were different. Among the other features of this art, studied in the following, were their direct relation with Chinese culture and civilization on which the Chinese's influence is evident.
Herat School

The political and cultural background of Herat school returns back to Timurid era (807-780 Lunar Hegira). It seems that, in addition to conquest and collecting wealth and booties, Timur gathered the leading artists, craftsmen, skillful men from different cities by employing an artistic and military policy and sent them accompanied with their families to Samarghand (Nasrollah Imami, p.145). Thus, he created a culture-breeding environment in that territory the result of which was the growth of culture and civilization and a new artistic combination in the works of this era (Soucek, vol 12, pp.609-613). The art and architecture were developed and promoted through financial and human support and optimal occasions were provided in which the artists were respected and supported; this added to the glory of Timurid dynasty. The result of these attempts and supports was the emergence and appearance of the artistic schools of Herat in the era of his son, Shahrokh, and afterwards Soltan Hossein Bayaghra. In Shahorkh's era (850-807 Lunar Hegira), most of the artists who were sent to Mesopotamia by Timur, arrived in Herat. Shahrokh made Herat as the center for science, art, and policy. He, relying on the wealth remained from Timur, constructed schools, monasteries, mausoleum, mosques, cafes, and gardens in Herat (Azhand B. p.19-28). Shahrokh's unique morale has blended the unrestricted patronization of science with the Islamic faith and spirit. On the other hand, his sons, Ologhbeig, Ebrahim Soltan, Baysonghor and Mohammad Joki who mastered in different arts, were famous in art-advocating and science affinity (Gary, Iranian Painting, p.66-73). All these conditions made Iran (in Timurid era) especially the cities of Herat and Shiraz (in Shahrok and his son's era) prone to the emergence of one of the most brilliant artistic periods.

Herat school can evidently be divided in two periods: the first period begins from Timurid era and continues to Soltan Hossein Bayaghra era. The most important books illustrated in this period include Majma-al-Tavarikh written by Hafez Abro, Naseri's TabaghaT, Anthologies, Shahnameh, Meraj Nameh, Kelileh Va Demneh, and the Five Tomes of Nezami's Poetical Works. Most of the pictures have features such as narrow framing and depiction of the court's facilities within this space.

The festivals held in courts were firstly reflected in painting illustrated in Herat School which was a symbol and indication of the splendor of Timurid's court in such a way that whoever saw them was fascinated in the beauty and magnificence of the Timurid's court. Although, these paintings are lofty concerning their configuration and coloration but the viewer is not able to communicate with them materially and emotionally. In fact, Timurids use these pictures as tools for being accepted legally by the Iranian people. After gaining political and military power, they, as the newcomers to this territory, realized the necessity of achieving cultural reliability to coordinate with the governmental ideals of the Iranian Moslems and attempted to get it.

The second period of Herat School which may be called as the Golden Age includes 38-year period of Soltan Hossein's tenure in Herat. This is known as a brilliant period in culture and art of Herat in references; after stating a large number of the court's artists and educated persons, they consider this as the reason for flourishing Herat school in his era (Khandmir, vol.4, p.310). In addition to the king, the role of his minister and treasurer, Mir Ali Shir
Navaei, who composed poems like him and respected the poets and artists, in culture and artistic promotion in Herat is significant. (Dooghlät, p.310). The persons active in the field of culture and art were exempted from paying tax because they were supported by these two persons. This caused the artists to be active in constructive affairs and have more activity in field of art and culture(Subtelny, E.M. vol.88, pp.478-505). These patronizations resulted in a significant flourishing in art and literature and through creating new styles prepared the ground for emerging the leading characters such as Kamaloddin Bihzad.

Master Kamaloddin

Although there is no much information about Bihzad's life, he probably has been born in the late years of 860s Lunar Hegira in Herat and has passed away in 942 in Tabriz. During this period, he witnessed the ruling of three dynasties including Timurid, Sheibanid, and Safavid and benefited from the teachings of Masters such as Agha Mirack Heravi, Valiollah and Seyed Ahmad Tabrizi (Rock:Azhand, B, pp.349-359,p.134) and learned different mysteries of painting art in the art-advocating atmosphere of Herat. He displayed his innovative works to which the Herat's great men especially Sultan Hossein Bayaghra were attracted and the king awarded him the title "the Second Mani" and appointed him as the head of Royal Library for a period of 20 years (Ghazvini,vol.2, p.268-70).

There is no information about Bihzad' biography after Sultan Hossein's death and conquest of Herat by Mohammad Khan Sheibani. Seemingly, Uzbek's Khan couldn’t appreciate the standing of masters such as Bihzad, as they are deserved (Ashrafi, p.138). When Shah Esmaeil Safavid captured Herat, most of the artists including Bihzad were sent to Tabriz. Master Bihzad who could attract King's attention was immediately appointed as one the tutors of Safavid Prince, Tahamaseb Mirza , afterwards, as the head of Tabriz library . Finally, after many years of effort and rendering beautiful ever-lasting paintings, Master Kamaloddin passed away in Tabriz in 942 Lunar Hegira.

The Most Important Works of Master Kamaloddin Bihzad

Although it is expected that many works to be remained from Master Bihzad because of his long life and courtier's patronization during Timurid and Safavid Dynasties, Sadi's Boostan in Cairo's library is the only work which all researches attribute to Bihzad; the reason for this may be sought in the following cases:

Firstly, although, despite of many other artists, Bihzad won fame during his life and his contemporaries realized his talent very soon, but nobody made any effort to describe and state his style. Consequently, the ground for misusing his fame was prepared in such a way that any good work was attributed to him and his signature was put under them. Also, it should be noticed that the painters of Timurid era including Ghassem Ali have painted works at the same age of Bihzad's whose works may not be as artistic as Bihzad's but they are great achievements. Pupils of Bihzad such as Sheikh Zadeh Khorasani and Agha Mirack Tabrizi were reached nearly the same mastering rank as Bihzad's. It seems that many of the paintings have been designed by the Master Bihzad and his pupils have completed them ( Wilson , p.71).
There is no doubt that the six painted pictures from Sa'di's Boostan kept in Cairo Library are considered among the original and top works of Master Bihzad. The first picture includes the double configuration of Soltan Hossein's banquet held in the garden of the palace. In this picture, many figures have been painted which have occupied almost all of the space with different shapes. The Perfection and equilibrium in configuration and employing the experiences resulted from practicing all methods of painting in this work is wonderful (Gary P.98). Bihzad had configured the structure of his painting in such a way that he could enter new figures in it and create a scene rich of building details which was possible only through employing the geometrical method for detail placement (Vaye , p.223). In this miniature, the ruler is the main champion of the work but the painter's full attention has not been focused on the picture of the ruler because he has used some provisions to bring about equilibrium among the figures. In this work, it seems that Bihzad has rendered the details of their living style in that period; as if he has illustrated a live image about the courtiers' living style in that period before the viewer.

The picture of Shah Dara and Shepherd is related to an anecdote of Sa'di's Boostan about recognizing the friends from enemies. In this picture, Bihzad's special artistic talent has been illustrated by exalting the structure of the old arranged configuration. In this work, humans and animals were animated and the figures had found roles and motions (Pope , p.83). In this painting, the pictures are wonderfully represented realistically. The last traces of inflexibility governed on paintings in Mongol era were put aside which served as a pattern for the paintings in the following eras.

In the pictures illustrated in Mosque paintings, Bihzad manifest his creativity in painting the buildings and establishing considerable symmetry between humans and buildings (Ashrafi , p.98). Among the features of this work is Bihzad's attention to the living style and public customs. All pictures have been painted in such a way that they are relevant with each other. All things have carefully been located in their own place and the configuration has achieved its best natural form. In these miniatures, Bihzad has displayed the real events of the life through painting different figures, thus, he displays a complete tableau of the real life of people in Herat. He, using the colors and their special combination, renders a wonderful work.

Maybe, the most beautiful configuration of Bihzad's works is illustrated in the painting of "Josef's Temptation" extracted from a copy of Boostan kept in Cairo (Blair Bloom, p.150). In this painting, the decorated palace and locked doors have been painted in details. The sense of solitude and captivity of Josef in the trap plotted by Zoleikha has been depicted well. The palace has been illustrated in the same style as the painting in Teimorid's era with baked bricks ornamented with tiles, grids, wooden windows, and carpets (ibid, p.151). This brilliant picture precedes the poem and has also expressed the mystic concepts the same as depicted by the literature and community of that period. In this picture, the architecture has an important role. Indeed, Bihzad has converted the nature and architecture into the human residences and deeds and has allocated a suitable position for any figure (Pakbaz, p.82). Moreover, emphasizing on the connotations embedded in human deeds and relations between objects, he tries to depict his realism in deep concepts (Rahnavard, P.76).

Among the paintings impressed the researchers positively about Bihzad's artistic originality and taste, are the paintings illustrated in two copies of the five tomes of Nezam's poetical
work kept in British museum. In the copy belonging to 864 Hegira, there are the pictures of "tribal battles", and the "Combat between "Bahram and Dragon", "Majnoun in the Desert", and "Majnoun in Kaaba". In the second copy which has been painted for Amir Ali Farsi, one the Sultan Hossein's rulers in Herat, there are the paintings of "Mamoun in Bath", "Construction of Khornogh Palace", "Swimming women", "Alexander's Visit with the pious Man", and "Farhad's Death" which have been attributed to Bihzad. Bihzad's artistic dexterity applied in these works is typically matchless; it indicates the unique talent of this distinctive artist. The beautiful circular and close shot configuration, full of dramatic modes, harmonic coloration, nice landscaping, dynamic scenes full of life, and realism are among the unique features of Bihzad's works.

**Analysis of the Features of Master Bihzad's Works**

Bihzad abolished Tabriz and Baghdad schools which were prevalent until that time; he created a new style in painting. He distinguished apparently the delicate and special modes of what he observed, aided by skillful designing, he animated the fainted figures found in the former paintings (Monshi Ghomi, Introduction, p.40). He created harmony in all elements of the work's configuration and integrated all parts of a picture through employing geometrical methods, shape combination, and interaction of colors; thus, he achieved a general unity. For example, in the "Sultan Hossein's Banquet", the Master has skillfully calculated the location of any figure in the picture. Perfection and equilibrium in configuration and employing the experiences resulted from practicing all methods of painting in this work are wonderful (Gary p.98). In this work, Bihzad has created a scene rich of the pictures of constructional details. Palace tower, camps, canopies, and in other side of the picture, gate tower and a building at the end of the garden have extended the scope of picture. Such a variety in the details requires an artistic and balanced interaction. Solving this problem is possible merely through applying the geometrical method of details placement which has been entered in the general structure of the work's configuration and figures' array by Bihzad(Vaye, P.223). Master Bihzad has created a revolution in the tradition of the Iranian painting coloration. He is among the first artists who used blue, green, brown, yellow, and brick-red colors extensively. In his beautiful designs, blue and green colors have been used more than other colors. Wide and various surfaces painted with light brown, yellow, and brick-red have been found as the background of his works. It seems that he realized deeply the interaction of the complementary colors and the feature of color expression. He kept a type of balance by using the warm colors such as light orange against the cold ones including blue and green (Ettinghausen, vol.1, PP 1211-1214). The colors and color accumulation have been controlled well in his works (Soucek, vol.4, PP. 114-116).

Among the most important features in Bihzad's works is paying attention to the humans and people of lower classes of the society. It seems that Bihzad's aim in creating the works such as "Mosque in Saadi's Boostan", "Mamoun in Bath", and "Construction of Khornogh Palace" is depicting humans while working and drawing ordinary people's living atmosphere. In all of these pictures, all attention is not merely focused on Shah but the people from the lower classes of their society are also present(ref. Imami, pp.145-167 and Shirazi, pp.27-29). The important point is that in Bihzad's works, humans are not emotionless and inactive figures but they are full of motion and activity; even when they have been illustrated in rest and tranquility, their modes are natural either(Ettinghausen.Ibid). Bihzad has depicted acuity in
visualization of the people's working and living spaces. Among these pictures are the workers, whom are employed on a certain task, are constructing a palace, the negro hod-carrier who is preparing a royal banquet, the bath-keeper who is hanging the bathing-cloth on the clothes line, the slave who is standing while taking a towel in his hand to dry his master's foot. All of these pictures, in addition to depicting the life of ordinary people contain a type of realism so that the appearance of their characters shows their internal states.

Traces of a mystical and spiritual expression in Bihzad's works are perceptible. Depiction of the scenes of the mystical books such as "The five Tomes of Nezami's Poetical Work", "Boostan", "Attar's Mantegholtair", indicates Master Bihzad's interest in these texts. Seemingly, association with characters such as Jami and Amir Alishir Navaei who were conversant with mysticism and Sufism affected deeply the works of the artists of that period. (Azhand, p.354, Aryan, P.27). In the Metropolitan museum, there is a one-sheet painting on which dervishes are in dancing mode. Bihzad has created a kind of naturalistic dynamism and strong spiritual feeling in this painting. He has illustrated mystical ascendance through painting the dance of four Sufis in the middle of configuration. It is evident that Bihzad has closely watched the Sufis dancing in Herat in order to paint these pictures. (Dimand,p.60). But in all of these paintings, Bihzad does not sacrifice spiritual perception of the theme for describing the ordinary events. Emphasizing on the connotation embedded in human deed, and relation of objects, he tries to combine his realism with deep concepts. It is, especially, more evident in the pictures related to moral and mystical texts. For example, in the picture of "Joseph and Zuleika Look", the helical stairs and locked doors and windows, implicitly indicates the difficulty of Joseph releasing from Zuleika's temptation.

Among the features of the Iranian painting before Timurid era was its impression from Chinese painting which returned back to the ancient time so that some researches attribute it to Sassanid era and believe that Mani brought painting from China to Iran (Sakisian b, vol.76, pp.144-146). However, this relation found wider dimensions (Jackson, pp.881-884) in Mongul era. The Iranian artists gradually tried to imitate some Chinese painting forms and elements and reflect them in their work in that era (Mohammad Hassan, 50-70). The main elements of this imitation were as follow: nature visualization, landscaping, drawing intermingled clouds, mythical animals, the mountains with conic and cut summits, drawing amours in Mongolian and Chinese style and even painting frames with long length and short width. But, gradually, by reducing of Mongolian's influence on Iran especially at the time of Ale Jalayer, the Iranian painting style was emerged once with its own exclusive features again and the use of Chinese painting features in creating pictures was no longer considered as vital. Only flowers, bushes, and the designs favored in that era were extracted from that style. But, in Timurid era, we witness the growth of Chinese's influence on painting once again the important reasons of which were the development of commercial relations with China and the import of the Chinese artistic goods to Iran. But, in the second period of Herat School, the influence of Chinese art was gradually harnessed; the Iranian artists changed it by their mental visualizations and visual findings and made it compatible with the Iranian painting so that the optimal order was achieved in the golden era of Herat school by the efforts made by the artists of that period especially Bihzad and the Iranian painting found its outstanding identity.
Conclusion

In this research, without describing their historical features, it is tried to study different artistic schools briefly from the conquest of Iran by Arabic Moslems until Timurid era. Then, by assessing the Herat school and its features as well as introducing Master Kamaloddin Bihzad, who is undoubtedly among the important agents of the growth and promotion of Herat School, we explain and interpret the leading works of the Master. It is also tried to answer what factors caused to change Herat school into a suitable pattern in the Iranian painting history and bring about the golden era of the Iranian painting, what is the reasons of Herat school's influence on the schools of the following periods especially, Bokhara and Isfahan schools. To answer these questions, in this research we found that, firstly, the patronage made by the court and kings (from Timur to Shah Esmaeil Safavid) had played an important role in this regard.

Timur's massive wealth obtained from the occupation and plunder of the captured territories provided a fortified economical foundation for his art-advocating successors such as Shahrokh, Bysonghor and Sultan Hossein Bayghara. These kings who, themselves, were famous artists patronized other artists in all periods of their ruling so that an optimal ground was provided for the growth and flourishing of different artistic schools, therefore, the great poets such as Jami, Navaei and artistic calligrapher such as Sultanali Mashhadi and a dexterous painter called Kamaloddin Bihzad were emerged. Secondly, Kamalddin's matchless style, itself, played an important role in this regard. Despite of the former painters, Master Bihzad, focused his attention on the real world. He could distinguish clearly the detailed and special modes of what he saw, so, in all his paintings, the animals, plants, rocks and mountains had their specific features. In most of his paintings, we face with space allocation, abundance of objects, and variety of active people which never intermingled and results in disorder. Sometimes, these paintings have been imitated by other painters. Bihzad's art is human-oriented. He illustrated the real modes and appropriate proportion in the human body by the lines around the figures and displayed a type of realism in living and working through depicting the life of common people. He created a revolution in coloration tradition and tried to omit the traces of Chinese painting from the Iranian art. Thus, the human picture in his paintings gets away from Chinese form and gets close to the Iranian state. In the Iranian history, we has few painters with such innovation whose influence impressed the Iranian painting for about 80 years. So, the Herat school was flourished to its peak throughout the Near East and Middle East. The works and thoughts of artists followed this school were so favored by people which were modeled as a culture and thought and affected the workshops of the Sheibani's rulers (In Bokhara) and Safavid's kings (in Tabriz).
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