

## Retrieving the Concepts of Persian Garden in the Content of Contemporary Iranian Painting

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### Abstract

Contemporary paintings are abundantly brought up with combination of various images of Iranian Gardens in order to describe identity and culture of Iran, because these paintings have important role in retrieving and recognizing Iranian identity, culture and history, and also have a very long-lasting record, because of which there exists a need for studying. Contemporary paintings, all inherited from Iranian Garden design, embed presentation of plans, animals and architecture, as matters of identity and culture of our country, can help to make better recognition and revival of past culture and older Iranian identity. Gardens have had very important place since old days in Iranian culture and civilization and have been counted as one of the fundamental concepts of social, cultural and natural discourse of this land. Still presented in Iranian literature, architecture and painting in different forms, in a way that these days' painters pay special attention to outcome concepts of Iranian Gardens. The main purpose of this work is recognizing and retrieving the concepts of Iranian garden in content of contemporary Iranian painting. At the time being, study conclusions show that it is possible to retrieve the concepts of the Iranian garden by means of analyzing and demonstrating the content of landscape drawing drawn by contemporary painters, especially construction type, rhythm, symmetry, and coloring used in these works.

**Keywords:** Garden; Iranian Garden Pattern; Contemporary Painting

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## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary period, begun in the 1941 and continuing to the present day, it has been commonly used in the book illustrations. These paintings contain places that represent Iranian Islamic art and the scenes occurring in nature. During contemporary period, lots of painters work in different genres of whom some choose to use nature as a means of expressing their work. (Mobini and Firuzbakht 2016: 22). Each of these painters looks at a common subject from a specific angle and personal point of view, and this common theme is actually Iranian garden, because all these painters come from Iranian culture and belong to common periods. Although under the influence of different atmosphere, there appears variety of effects. They reveal in their works four main elements: namely water, wind, soil, and fire which are abundant in the nature. Among these all, Iranian garden is an architectural combination of the use of raw materials and plants, so it is a living work that due to these elements represent the culture of each tribe and the climatic condition of its native region.

## 2. Problem Statement

The combination of raw materials and plants in the Iranian garden shows dominance of rereading, rethinking and recognizing this phenomenon. In Iranian view, garden is in fact the arranged nature based on humanistic abstract thought and is a metaphor for Heaven, constructed by means of quad elements, all of which are devoting oneself to nature and realizing the signs and symbols of God and cause the human psyche to rejoice (Jahandar 2013: 35). The design of the Iranian garden, while being united in general lines, geometry and executive materials, has a unique spatial diversity. The garden flaunts with spatial diversity by defining independent spaces by limiting, adjusting the distance from view, using geometric shapes, planting design, different composition of plant types, spatial function of water, utilization of materials and the like.

Main and Sub-axes, plots, types of ponds and built spaces show an order and unity in the whole garden and the same combination and unity between the elements can be seen in the contemporary paintings (Jangi, 2018: 32). Therefore, in the research project of the present study, the concepts of Iranian garden in contemporary paintings and its role of retrieval and recognition of the identity and culture of the country are studied, so that his contemporary painting is selected and analyzed with the themes of Iranian garden. Also, its weaknesses and strengths are examined in order to exploit the Iranian garden and its related concepts along with understanding the Iranian culture and identity in the audience's view.

## 3. Concept of the Iranian Garden

Iranian garden as one of the most important achievements of Iranian civilization in the world, is a reflection of the Iranian worldview. For many years, many Iranian and foreign researchers have been looking for a pattern or archetype for the Iranian garden. For a long time, the “Chaharbagh” pattern was introduced as the pattern of the Iranian garden of the world; A geometric pattern that, relying on the four-part worldview of ancient books, is following its adaptation to the pattern and worldview of the Iranians and of course the Promised Paradise, especially in the Islamic era, and justifies the constructive idea of dividing the Paradise into four parts, then introduces it as the archetype for Iranian garden.

Expanding studies and spatial adaptation between these model and various examples of Iranian gardens, the “Chaharbagh” model was doubted as an archetype for all Iranian gardens.

Recent studies by Iranian researchers generally show that beyond the quadruple division, the Iranian garden is a pivotal garden in which an axis as the main axis plays a fundamental role in shaping the geometry of the Iranian garden. Therefore, the use of patterns and concepts of the Iranian garden in modern Iranian paintings can be a reminder of our country's culture and identity.

The architectural concept of the garden is a reflection of the sense of place or “locality” because it is considered to frame the overall image of the universe in its specific space garden. This concept, which is the cultivator of order and harmony, can reach the senses through numbers, geometry, color and matter, while at the same time it conducts the view of reason to the essence, and to the esoteric realm hidden in a positive atmosphere. The garden as a manifestation of the centralist form of the great world or macrocosm, or the appearance and the yard as a manifestation of the centralist form of the small world or the interior, are aspects of place that are mutually complementary (Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 2001: 68). Garden has an important place and status in Iranian culture and civilization and has been considered as one of the basic concepts of social, cultural and natural issues of this land, which is still present in various forms in Iranian literature, architecture and urban planning (Bani Massoud, 2011: 21).

Many Iranians had a special interest in building gardens and orchards in yards and around buildings, from long ago. They called the gardens “pairiya daēsa” meaning around fort or dēs (building) and the person who built the building was called Dēsā (builder) (Pirnia 1994: 4). Schultz also mentions the garden as a cultural landscape: in the “cultural landscape”, natural forces are tamed and domesticated and living reality emerges as a regular process in which man participates. The human imagination of campus has in fact always been an enclosed garden. In the garden, known elements of nature come together: fruit trees, flowers and tamed water. In this way, even water can be “made”, that is, precisely defined as part of a cultural landscape or seen in a fountain. In the cultural perspective, man builds the earth and reveals its potential structure as a meaningful whole. A cultural landscape is based on “farming” and “cultivating” and includes certain places, ways and territories that determine human understanding of the natural environment (Schultz, 2002: 8).



**Fig 1** Carpet with garden design, 12th century BC, Kurdistan

#### 4. Iranian Painting

Iranian painting is commonly used in book illustrations, especially anecdotal poems, which contain stories that take place in space.

Hence, the painting of scenes from those stories also contains images of the place of the artifact, namely the city and architecture. Iranian painting has sometimes been referred to as miniature, according to European tourists and nineteenth-century orientalists, which is not the correct term, because Iranian painting is not limited to making miniature images, but also includes large murals and arrays. In addition, the difference between Iranian painting and miniatures of medieval Europe is so great that they cannot be given the same name (Zamani et al., 2009: 8.) Iranian painting has long been without mere imitation of nature, that is, without using the spaces of three dimensions, real colors, textures, shapes, as well as natural light and shadows, try to create ideal spaces, just what the painter had in mind.

Therefore, except in periods of influence from Western traditions, no sign of naturalism can be found in Iranian painting. Instead, abstract painting, symbolism and decoration were common from the earliest times in the visual arts of this land. The aesthetic foundations of Iranian painting were formed based on this abstract perception of the world (Pakbaz, 2010: 8.) A fixed and unchangeable member of the evolution of painting is an element that cannot be ignored and removed and it is a space that comes from the artist's mind, it is formed, cooked and then materialized in different forms in the canvas (Zamani et al., 2009: 9). A look at contemporary Iranian painting during the decades after World War II, shows that Iranian painting has witnessed a significant change and transformation. The period when the Iranian artist, “Kamal-ol-Molk”, willingly left the traditional position (the ancient tradition of miniature and the tradition of naturalism), and tried to compensate his backwardness from the developments of Western art and open a window to its wide and tempting horizon. The effort, with all its ups and downs, has been going on for more than half a century. The emergence of new and contemporary Iranian painting dates back to the early 20s. When the establishment of the first Iranian School of Art was the beginning of a formal and serious trend of Iranian visual arts towards new findings of Western painting or the beginning of opening a window to the world arena.

Of course, the attention of Iranian art and artists to Western art had an older history. Familiarity of Persian art with European art was several hundred years old. During the Safavid period, the first acquaintances with European classical art began. It was during this period, around 1021-22, that Mohammad Zaman traveled to Rome as the first Iranian painter to learn the art of oil painting. Then, around 1025, he returned to Iran and caused a change in Iranian painting. Although this initial acquaintance with Western art was not very widespread in the first period and for some reason, including the persistence of traditions, novelty and different manifestations of this art could not attract the mystic and ascetic artist, but as we will see, this acquaintance created grounds for fundamental changes in the future of Iranian painting. Familiarity with the basic principles and tools of Western painting in this period, opened new windows on Iranian artists and basically caused his view of nature to be overturned and in other words caused the allegorical space of Iranian art to be turned upside down and forgotten. Until the transformation of the world of the Iranian artist, he never tried to put a mirror in front of nature. In his traditional style of painting (miniature), the Iranian artist was able to reduce the three-dimensional and embodied world of phenomena to a two-dimensional image by using special techniques (Kari Welsh, 1991: 53).

By simplifying elements and objects, using bright and flat colors, avoiding Penumbra and perspective, not emphasizing the differences in textures, and avoiding anything that makes his image look like objective nature, he drew the gardens of Iranian thought and gave them the

horizon of normal life of material existence to conduct to a world beyond this world, with proper time, place, colors and shapes (Shaygan, 1986: 116.) The space that appears in miniature is just a quality that rather wants to be imaginary, that is, a space in which images are free of matter and its properties (Nasr, 1993: 77).

Familiarity with oil painting and attention to tangible nature, made this imaginary but real world of the Iranian artist collapse and basically changed his view of nature and existence. Continuation of the effects of western painting in the Afshari, Zandi and Qajar periods, led to the emergence of a style in Iranian painting that reached its peak during the reign of the Qajar dynasty and especially during the reign of Fath Ali Shah and later became known as the “Qajar school”.

In these stylized and idealized works, although new elements of Western painting had infiltrated the painters’ work, they were “mostly separate and irrelevant elements, such as new types of clothing fabrics or new technical methods such as the use of oil and color (Emami 1975: 32). And yet, the basic image of Iranian painters of their work remained somewhat intact. Thus, the Qajar painters, like the Zand and Safavid painters, almost continued the ancient ways and customs, and the heroes of the ancient legends, with their dignified and calm faces and with the hands, seemingly fighting against their long-lasting foes in a vast plain, full of the mysteries that were repeatedly depicted between the world of myth and the real world. However, the works of this period can be considered by many as one of the most brilliant periods of the manifestation of the art of painting in Iran. Because while the form, materials and materials are fresh, the Iranian spirit is still manifested in the two-dimensional space of these works. In the late nineteenth century, Iranian artists turned their attention to the West to the extent that following the worldview and work style of European artists was a condition of artistic prestige and value. The advent of Kamal-ol-Molk, the semi-legendary figure of Iranian painting, who paid deep attention to the European classical style, caused a complete change in the whole perspective of Iranian painting. Kamal-ol-Molk, who also traveled to Europe around 1893 and studied and copied the works of classical painters there for a few years, became the founder of the classical-naturalist style in the Iranian painting realm, and the one who is still influential after more than half a century after his death. Kamal al-Mulk, with a handful of what he had learned from Western masters and great post-Renaissance artists in European museums, replaced old traditions with new ones. Imaginary, subjective and idealistic painting gave way to objective and precise painting. Perspective with all its tricks, penumbra, for the lighting of colors and photographic construction, etc. appeared in paintings.

When photography was still a new and emerging phenomenon that amazed the viewer, a competition began between painting with a camera, especially in capturing the smallest details, and it was of course a wonder. Thus, Kamal al-Mulk - and later his disciples and followers - evoked the image of the painter in the public mind that “the painter is a photographer holding a pen; The idea that has remained stable to this day. For example, in the painting biennials of Tehran in 1970, 1972 and 1974, we saw the works of his young followers. Iranian painting became close to naturalism and resembled photography at a time when modern European painters had surpassed Impressionism, crushing forms and denying all conventions of the art of painting. In this regard, Kamal al-Mulk traveled to Europe at a time when there was a change in the European societies, especially France, in the field of visual arts, but he did not show interest in them. He was, above all, influenced by naturalism and the art of naturalization in Western classical art. He turned to museum painting, academic and classical painting. Or, in the opinion of some, in fact, he completed his previous knowledge in this field. Kamal al-Mulk had disregarded even realism after the French Revolution. He had returned after he absorbed detail illustration, objective atmosphere, narrative portraiture, and, of course, the basics of Western painting From the Renaissance tradition and his

style set the new perspective of Qajar painting. It was along with this change that the conflict between Iranian identity and traditional visual heritage, on the one hand, and global visual experiences, on the other, was shaped. After returning from Europe, Kamal-ol-Molk established a school, at which he trained students who continued his thought and way, and kept the Iranian visual arts under their influence until the second decade after World War II. So that, for example, the late Ali Mohammad Heydarian (1991), one of Kamal al-Molk's students, was in charge of painting and vice chancellor of the Faculty of Fine Arts, at University of Tehran, until 1966, when he retired. The slogan and practice of the followers of Kamal al-Mulk, and what they have left to this day, was that painting means “imitation” of the beauties of nature (Momayez, 1987: 600) and in a sense, imitation of the appearance of nature.

Thus, Iranian painting came close to naturalism at a time when it became like a photograph and European nouveau artists opened the new frontiers of anti-academic art. Impressionism was evolving and painters were looking to break down forms, so by the time Kamal al-Mulk's students passed on their information to a new generation of students, the Cubist era was more or less over. However, due to the influence of Kamal al-Mulk and his students, a new generation familiar with the basics of Western painting grew up, and in front of them, traditional painting was delayed for a while and the Iranian human view became more and more forgotten. The Second International War brought about many changes in Iran. The Allied occupation of Iran and its aftermath left society “Americanized”. The government pursued an apparent economic modernization with a celebration of “ancient Iran” and nationalist ideologies. In terms of political and social issues, a new phase began. Many books from the works of Western contemporaries were translated into Persian and the atmosphere for discussion about them was fascinating among intellectuals. The tendency of so-called Iranian intellectuals to discover the intellectual, cultural and social products of the West was more evident than ever from the second decade of the twentieth century onwards.

The enthusiasm of Iranian intellectuals for the West and its various phenomena had increased. They believed that “old and worn-out Iran should accept a new and young civilization” (Siasi, 1987: 511). They believed that “Iran should become a westernized outwardly, physically and spiritually”. After the Second World War, the acceptance of Western civilization was raised again. At this time, Iran's communication routes with the West took on a new shape and expanded. New people were going abroad to study, and new information about the evolution of contemporary art in the West was appearing in Tehran's cultural and press circles. Sokhan magazine gathered a group of writers who paid special attention to the West

The year 1940 was the death of Kamal al-Molk and, in other words, the beginning of the extinction of the “School of Kamal al-Molk” and the beginning of the new developments in contemporary Iranian painting. This year, thanks to the efforts of Andre Godard, the Faculty of Fine Arts of Tehran was established and new grounds arose to get acquainted with the new developments of Western art.

Although the college was still more or less a field of naturalistic painting for Kamal al-Mulk's students, the closure of French professors allowed young painters to become acquainted with other forms of Western painting - and perhaps most importantly, Impressionism. With the establishment of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran and the gradual acquaintance of enthusiastic Iranian youth with new perspectives on Western painting, photograph-like painting begun to decline; A journey that lasted almost thirty years without a break and led contemporary Iranian painting to lack photographic and naturalistic painting, and the curtains of paintings from people's view. Some of the first students of this school who had gone to Europe to continue their art education returned to Iran with the result of their familiarity with the new schools of painting and

sculpture. It was in this condition that the conflict between the old and the new, between the followers of Kamal al-Molk and the modernists, appeared, which was naturally based on the new demands of the Iranian art community, so that gradually the novices conquered the realm of contemporary Iranian art. Young artists, eager and fascinated by the discovery of new artistic phenomena and compensation for their so-called "backwardness" to attain the modern Western art, tried to compensate for this backwardness as quickly as possible (Emami, 1975: 33). Twentieth decade, was assumed as a period of getting ready. It was a period of emergence of the first results of the first step of this process, although at first it showed itself very slow and conservative. When in 1325, the "Exhibition of Fine Arts of Iran" - which is the first major exhibition of contemporary Iranian visual artists - was organized in Tehran, in contrast to the works of traditionalist miniature painters (and the works of Kamal al-Molk and his students and followers that were displayed in this exhibition), the works presented by young modern painters such as Hossein Kazemi, Mehdi Vishkaei, Jalil Ziapour and Javad Hamidi were exhibited which seemed new, but not as new as the modern art that was prevalent in Europe. In Reza Jorjani's words, a critic of Sokhan magazine, who wrote a note on the exhibition: "The exhibition tries to follow the path Europeans have beaten 150 years ago". In this exhibition, in addition to traditional and classical works, quasi-Impressionist works were considered as works of "modern European style", whose painters believed that "an artist's painting should not be blindly imitated just like a photograph taken by a photographer from nature and should be different ". Thus, the modernity of the Iranian painter in the twenties was the avoidance of the photographic recording of nature. What Bozorg Alavi emphasized in his note on the exhibition reveals the extent of the concept of modernity of contemporary Iranian painters in the mid-1930s: "What we call modern painting today is what we saw in Europe 60-70 years ago. It has been common in the name of Impressionism" (Goodarzi, 2008: 59).

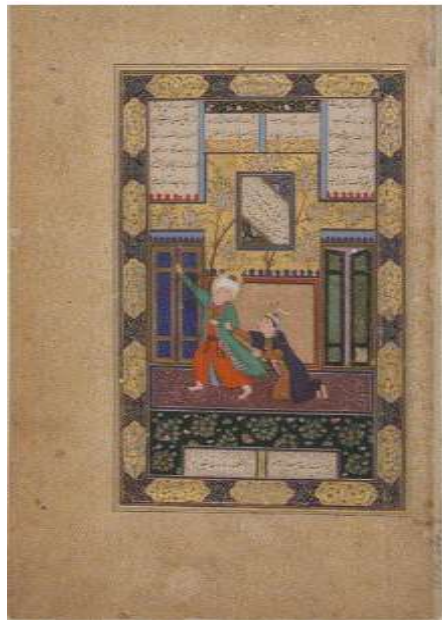
## 5. Presence of Nature and Garden

The presence of simplified or with exaggerated twists and turns and symbolic image of nature and its elements in the background in Iranian painting and miniature mixed with literary, poetry, religious, mythological, and memorial, alike themes has a long history. In fact, the function of the original Iranian painting is to give a glimpse of that pleasant garden in a world without which the reflections will be nothing more than delusions (Burkhart, 1997: 175).

Iranian painting is also realist in the traditional sense of the word, meaning that sensory appearances for it are strongly a reflection of the true nature of objects. It means that everything in it is made of extremely delicate and rich essence, and there, every tree and flower is unique in its kind (Shahcheraghi and Asalami, 2010: 46) so that the animals and plants of the miniature scenes are not just imitations of nature. Rather, it is an attempt to embody that heavenly nature and that primitive creation and nature, the very Ferdows Brin and the world of the kingdom, which at this moment is also active in the world of imagination or the world of allegory. In the same way, the color of each mountain, cloud or sky is unique and different from natural colors, this unity and uniqueness refers to the realm of the kingdom (Burkhart, 1997: 48).



**Fig 2** Mehdi Hosseini



**Fig 3** Joseph and Zulaikha, Bukhara, circa 1525 to 1535

## 6. Conclusion

All divine religions consider man to be a creature expelled from paradise and have promised him (the promised paradise). Belief in heaven after death has been present in other religious beliefs as well, including the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians and Hindus, and from the Chinese and Japanese point of view, the human soul after death and during the difficult stages, he returns to earth in a new form or reaches eternal peace and happiness in a paradise that is completely similar to the earth. In ancient Iran, the beliefs of the religion (Mazdisani) about heaven is quite clear that it has three *srāy* (house) that from the third house it reaches the glorious court of Ahura and the throne of the Almighty. Since the highest level of paradise is the Garden of Eden that God has planted himself, to be his abode, it seems that the Islamic worldview, borrows this image, as an allegorical image.

According to Henry Carbone, this celestial body was chosen in order to establish man's relationship with the supreme world, which has become ideal and has become an eternal paradise.

Also, the garden is the model of the first place at the end of the physical world (property) and the world of the soul (world of the kingdom). In other words, the garden is an intermediate world that can be called the world of imagination. It is a the Lote Tree of the Boundary shows the boundary, and is kind of fence and separates this world from the chaos of the world. Now it can be said that the idea of the promised paradise that has been created in the minds of Iranians from previous periods is a picture of the most beautiful and pleasant gardens. The Iranians also refer to the roof of paradise by referring to different gardens. The word paradise is Ferdows, which has the meaning of garden and paradise together. Poets enjoy comparing the earthly gardens and the heavenly paradise, which are promised in the Qur'an, and consider the highest type of garden to be the Eram, which is mentioned decorated with columns. Therefore, Iranians give their mental image of paradise, which will be given to them as a reward for good deeds in this way. A symbol like the paradise of Kowsar, which consists of trees, flowers and streams, in the form of a garden with flowing water and beautiful flowers and trees that they can rested in their shade, and all enclosed in a wall that prevents the entrance of hellish people to it has manifested as mentioned. Gardens are the greatest joy and happiness for the inhabitants of dry and barren lands where a particle of greenery is a gift. That is why the Qur'an, in order to convey the concept of pleasure and happiness, constantly refers to the Garden of Eden many times and promises that: (on that day, the pious will be in the gardens and by the springs).

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