

The Structure of Thought in Khiali-Negari Painting Based on the Concept of Traditional Art

Abstract

Problem Definition: In the face of the promotion of modern art schools in Iran, Khiali-Negari painting was formed as a continuation of the miniature tradition and its combination with the artistic methods of its time, and attempted to find its method of expression appropriate to popular and religious art. The origin of the identity and originality of these works refer to the inner principle of the artist and is manifested through symbolism and cryptography in a material form. Based on Coomaraswamy's views and the link between his views on the concept of traditional art and the works of this school, it is possible to explain the structure of thought and artistic method in Khiali-Negari painting so that the position and value of Khiali-Negari painting among the schools of art and traditional arts can become more noticeable.

Objective: This article intends to explain the structure of thought school of Khiali-Negari painting based on the definition and function of traditional art based on the Coomaraswamy point of view.

Research Method: The research method in this article is theoretical and based on qualitative analysis and data collection has been performed in the form of desk study and using library resources.

Results: Coomaraswamy sees art as the physical expression of a pre-conceived form that refers to something beyond itself, and this art is always symbolic. In this regard, the traditional artist goes through two areas: one is the area of liberation and the other is the area of worship. Traditional art is understood on the basis of the intuition of exemplary forms based on intuitive reason. In addition, regarding the basis of this concept, the thought, as well as the ultimate goal of the Khiali-Negari painting, is nothing but the expression of truth and the attainment of truth. As a result, it was discovered that the structure of thought and artistic method in the school of Khiali-Negari painting was formed in the shadow of Islamic tradition and spirituality, Shiite beliefs and a theological worldview; moreover, the artist relied on rationality and deep thinking to create the artworks. This is considered a form of worship by the artist. When the theological and Sufi view is an important concern for the Iranian artist, creating a copy of the world of immortal material is considered useless, so he/she depicts a world that is the product of her/his belief and imagination.

Keywords: Traditional Art, Khiali-Negari painting, Thought Structure, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Rationalism.

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Introduction

The structure of thought of each period usually corresponds with the intellectual and philosophical apparatus of that period. What constitutes the structure of thought (artistic method) of imaginative painting (Khiali-Negari painting)- which peaked in the Qajar and Pahlavi eras- must be sought in the physical space of the 10th to 15th centuries AD. One of the important contexts in this era particularly in the Safavid period was the presence of spirituality and Islamic tradition in the form of Sufism and mysticism. In this view, everything in the world is considered a manifestation of the existence of God, and there is only one thing in the world, and that is God; God is present in all the particles of the universe. Javani quotes Mulla Sadra as saying: "Sufis believe that there is only God in the universe and that the only thing that exists is God, and that all the universe and the objects in it, whether inanimate or living, is the manifestation of God. In other words, the objects of the world are like vessels in which, according to their capacity, there is a certain amount of God in each of them" (Javani, 2006, p. 33). When the mystical worldview is considered an important and fundamental issue by the Iranian artist, he does not surrender to the simple matter of copying or simulating the material elements for which annihilation awaits. Consequently, he turns to create a world that he has faith in and is fundamental to his intellectual structure. According to this paper, Khiali-Negari painting is made and crafted by such a world; and based on such thinking, it is formed in the essence of the artist and is pre-conceived in the artist's mind and beholds a physical form. This category is exactly what is neglected in the thoughts and opinions of many scholars and researchers, and in their opinion, this art is simple and free from any thinking. Such an understanding is the main concern of this article in order to emphasize the fundamental place of this art as one of the traditional arts of Iran by expressing the artistic method and structure of thought in tradition-based Khiali-Negari painting. Based on what has been explained, the structure of thought (artistic method) in Khiali-Negari painting will be examined and explained according to the concept of traditional art according to Ananda Kentish Muthu Coomaraswamy, one of the thinkers of the traditionalist movement. He is one of the philosophers who has widely discussed folk art and has studied the field of Iranian art. Since Coomaraswamy's view on the definition and function of art, especially traditional art, is similar to that of Islamic tradition and traditional Iranian art, particularly Khiali-Negari painting, traditionalists count it as the most appropriate approach to the study of fantastic paintings. One of the most important aspects of its resemblance is the design of art based on the divine tradition. Coomaraswamy considers art to be the word of God, as he believes: The word of the essence of transcendence is the same ideals and rules as in art; it is expressed in writing or visually. Therefore, the word of God, beyond words and appearances, carries meanings and concepts, and with such an approach to the art, it can be said that the words and images created by the artist are not exclusively related to our senses, but they also carry various meanings

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(Coomaraswamy, 1955, p. 33). This research it is attempted to answer the following questions;1. How the concept of traditional art can be explained from the perspective of Coomaraswamy? 2. What is the structure of thought in Khiali-Negari painting based on the concept of traditional art?

Research Method

The research method in this article is theoretical and based on qualitative analysis and data collection has been done in the form of desk study and using library resources.

Research Background

In reviewing the background, and searching the available written sources and evidence, it was concluded that the artistic and intellectual method considered in this research has not been studied in detail. Regarding Khiali Negari Painting, there are a number of books, articles, and dissertations, all of which focus on narrative, review and historical analysis, and some on symbol analysis, which can construct the background. Seif (1990), in the "Coffee-House Painting," has spoken in detail about the generalities and issues of this school of art and the methods used in it for a collection of these works. This book is generally considered an important resource in the knowledge and research of Khiali-Negari painting. Chalipa (2011), in "Study of the impact of national and religious art and literature on Khiali-Negari painting" explains the tendency Khiali-Negari painting artists and how they are influenced by the written and oral Iranian literature considering epic, heroic, as well as religious issues. In general, what has been done in such and similar researches, new words indicating the idea and structure and also the nature of these works have not been expressed, and in examining the contents of other similar works, we have witnessed the same historical narrations and reviews based on the above mentioned sources. So far, little research has been done. In these works, Coomaraswamy's ideas are presented in general, and the most important of these works is the translation of several books into Persian by him -which was very effective in conducting this research- as well as some articles, and the most important of them will be expressed. an article entitled "A Critical Approach to the Perspective of Ananda Coomaraswamy on Beauty and Perfection" (Binaie Motlagh, 2008), examines beauty and perfection and outlines its basic concepts from the perspective of Coomaraswamy. In "Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: Scholar of the Spirit" (Keeble,1999), and "The Interpretation of Symbols" by Safipour in 1999, some of Coomaraswamy's views have been proposed. It is not without merit to refer to the Zekrgou (2009) work "Nature in Oriental Art". In his article, Zekrgou examines some of Coomaraswamy's views on nature in Eastern art and states that nature in Eastern words is related to essence, not appearances. Alipour et al. (2015) in "Differentiation of the meaning of art in traditional and modern attitudes from Coomaraswamy's point of view" examines his opinions and the concept of art from

traditional and modern perspectives and finds that from Coomaraswamy's point of view, the theory of "Art for Art's sake" is part of a larger paradigm of new thinking that completely personalizes the criteria of goodness and beauty and from the heart of which some hedonistic and self-centered moral advice also emerges. But in the traditional view, art is made for a purpose other than itself, and it stimulates the audience's perception and encourages the audience to reflect upon the subject.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundations and framework of this article are based on Coomaraswamy's views on the concept of traditional art and grounded on this variable, the structure of thought and artistic method in Khiali-Negari painting are discussed and explained. Coomaraswamy defines art as "the embodiment of a pre-conceived form in a physical form" (Coomaraswamy, 2014, p. 115). In fact, he considers the artist as having a dual act; one is rational and the other as a service activity. In his view, the foundation of traditional art is based on reason and rationality, deep thinking, and spirituality; he considers traditional art to be transcendental and of divine origin. This art is always symbolic" (Coomaraswamy, 2004, p. 21). According to such thinking, in the Eastern tradition, "art without knowledge is nothing" and the artist is a sage whose creative action is based on reason. His art is the manifestation of a form that is revealed in the mind of the artist and corresponds to the transcendent form or the ideal form. Due to the necessity of art in tradition as a magazine of spiritual forms and its important role in the intellectual development and spiritual ascent of man, any construction based on the intuition of exemplary forms that rely on intuitive reason is art (Dadashi, 2010, 55). In fact, for many traditionalist scholars, especially Ananda Coomaraswamy, tradition is a set of fixed yet fluid principles that have a heavenly, divine, and cosmic origin. Tradition is inherently faceless (formless and colorless), But itself in the face and the transcendent. Accordingly, tradition is a divine truth that is manifested in the past and with several fixed principles and based on the conditions of time and place is flexible and fluid in the present and future. From this point of view, the various manifestations of traditional art are imitations of invisible things that guide us to achieve the same single principle and remind us of our spiritual dignity. "Essentially, the manifestations of traditional art are copies of the intangible and the invisible; Therefore, the comparison and explanation of these arts are so worthy and appropriate that it awakens us with that kind of eternal form. Works of art are a kind of reminder and nurture deep and spiritual thoughts of man" (Coomaraswamy, 2014, p. 15). Therefore, the dignity of the formation of traditional artworks, to achieve spiritual needs, is to help deep thinking and ultimately its adaptation and harmony with that cosmic form. In this regard, the Khiali-Negari painting, based on tradition, beliefs and religious beliefs, and collective culture, as well as the artistic tradition was formed in the late Safavid

period and expanded for the benefit of man and to serve a social necessity in society. This art originated not as an art with the traditional artistic values of modern art, but to express the tone of daily life and social spirit. This presence is obvious in the folk culture and artistic tradition of Iran. This art, like the sacred art, goes beyond the artist and is dependent on the absolute divine spirit. An art that is blessed by its divine origin and also blesses the audience. In Imaginary Painting, nature and the figure are forged and captured to show something beyond nature, and a situation is created to reveal a truth.

Traditional art from the perspective of Ananda Coomaraswamy

One of the important topics in Coomaraswamy's thought is the concept of traditional art and its differences from modern art. In his definitions and concepts of fine art and traditional art, he has accepted that art should be a true art and this art has a right to live among human beings, and this is the traditional art that can be a source of joy and perfection for him. Rahmati (2015, p 8) contemplates traditional art: "Traditional art means art that has been developed in the heart of tradition and does not fit with the old and outdated meaning. Tradition is related to an eternal tradition, in which time and place have no place and are constantly in the world, in pursuit and flow. In Coomaraswamy's thought, tradition is an eternal philosophy (or eternal wisdom) and seeks to save present-day man from the maze of ignorance in which the modern world is entangled. Whenever Coomaraswamy speaks of traditional societies or expresses a natural view of art, he means a society whose foundation and end are the basic rules of knowledge and existence rooted in the sacred subject; That is, the transcendent principle that is the only thing and the ultimate standard of truth that exists in all human thoughts and actions. Therefore, the dignity of the formation of works of traditional art, in order to achieve spiritual needs, is to help deep thinking and ultimately adapt and harmonize with such cosmic form. This art, which is based on thought and reflection and is related to truth, not only has a practical character but also does a great service to the proximity of heaven to earth and the embodiment of sensible ideas in the material world and material forms. Coomaraswamy considers art in the original and traditional art to be essentially an act based on reason and consciousness. The artist knows that the beauty of his work is made in the shadow of truth and for human benefit. The highest goal of the artist is to achieve that unique principle that is manifested in various forms. Although the artist is single, he does not have individuality (Coomaraswamy, 2003, pp. 185-188). Based on the thought of Greek philosophers, especially Plato, Coomaraswamy explains rationality in traditional art as well as its relationship to reason and intuitive reason. Thus, in general, Coomaraswamy considers traditional art to be an imitation and mimesis of the artist's inner example and is therefore intertwined with symbolism. In general, by studying the views of Coomaraswamy, the key components in traditional art based on his views can be expressed as follows: an

example of a work of art, reasoning and rational action in an art piece, denying the individuality of the artist and denying oneself, contradicting the end of art for art, introducing the principle of originality and perceiving aesthetics as the mental and spiritual beatitude and focusing on the usefulness and productivity of man from the work of art, symbolism, and cryptography. Thus, in his view, art in its traditional sense does not refer to the chosen category of aesthetic creations that deviate from the usual activities of daily life but is the principle that lies within the artist.

The Tradition of Khiali-Negari Painting

Since Safavid times, spirituality in political systems and religious and social ideas has been doubled by Sufism and mysticism, and many rulers, thinkers, and artists in government have been Sufis and mystics. Thus, such an attitude was seen in the works of art of this period, both courtly and traditional and folk. From that time on, Shiism became the official religion in Iran, and some religious practices flourished for religious times and mourning; Especially from the second half of the Safavid rule, religious public opinion spread throughout Iran, and the reflections of this change can be seen in the performance of Taziyeh in Muharram and other religious ceremonies on the other significant days of the year. The performance of Taziyeh caused the imagery on the screens expressing the events to be opened along with the play that was being performed these days. In a short period, religious paintings of this kind, sometimes by holding ritual ceremonies and performing Taziyeh, in addition to appearing on the screens of narrators and art canvases, on the walls of shrines, and religious places (Husseiniyahs, Takiyehs, etc.) was also transferred. The narrators used to organize an event to create a passionate atmosphere and express the virtues of the heroes and interpret the human teachings that existed, for example, in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh or the religious and Ashura scenes. And in this regard, the desire to become a hero or at the same time be a comrade of a hero sat on the hearts like a heavy shadow. These people were immersed in their traditional atmosphere and unaware of the modern world. This caused painters to draw and fantasize about the heroes and myths on the canvas and play a complementary role for the narrator to influence and accompany the audience. In this artistic method, the painter placed all the heroic wonders and national epics in the institution of design and color blended with an Iranian color and scent. The instructive and educational spirit was prevalent in this type of paintings and its purpose was considered to be to influence the audience as well as to transmit religious knowledge. In this school of art, the artist does not copy and imitate the forms present in the perceptible world, but rather reveals its basic rules. This art is the basis of sacred science, the achievement of which is based solely on the tools that tradition provides to the artist to make it possible. "So, whenever we face the peak of creativity and perfection of Islamic art, there is undoubtedly the flow of thought and spirituality that governs the Islamic tradition" (Javani, 2006, p. 35). Khiali-Negari painting is a product of the reflection of people's

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social and cultural life and the artist's inner knowledge of religion and beliefs and how it is expressed as a medium, and simple, faithful and honest artists have created such works. Pakbaz (Pakbaz, 2000, p. 201) writes about this school of art: "at the beginning of the Constitutional Movement and by relying on folk and religious traditions and combining it with the naturalistic methods common at that time, Khiali-Negari painting was formed by self-instructed painters and reached its peak in the Pahlavi era. Many scholars and researchers link the history of popular religious painting in Iran to the Safavid era and along with the spread of Shiism in Iran". Over the past few centuries, various styles of painting have evolved from popular culture - parallel to formal and courtly art; however, Khiali-Negari painting is a dissimilar and newer approach. "These works reflect the aspirations and interests, religious beliefs and spirit of the culture that dominate the middle layers of urban society and are more recent than other traditional folk painting methods (such as curtain painting, murals of holy shrines, etc.). Most of the subjects of these works have been the stories of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and Nezami's Khamsa, the events of Karbala, Quranic stories, and folk tales. Painters illustrated such subjects based on what they heard from narrators, Taziyeh chanter, Praisers, and threnodies and it was in the minds of the people" (Pakbaz, 2000, p. 201). By contemplating Iranian painting and its basic components, factors such as the negation of the artist's individuality, the presence of fantasy and imagination and its different view of the world, exemplary forms and reaching meaning, etc., have continued this artistic tradition and have been manifested in a new way in fantasy paintings. These components emphasize this continuity based on the concept and definitions of traditionalist thinkers of traditional arts. In the Islamic tradition and worldview, as well as the view of the traditionalists, both the purpose of human life and its enjoyment is considered beyond material and worldly pleasures and describes the artist's mission is creating an artwork related to the spiritual and intellectual dimension of man. Nonetheless, what is important and gives it a traditional and purposeful direction based on this way of thinking, is the sacred nature and truth of the work through which the artist has revealed in a worldly framework using the materials of the time. These paintings narrated a new account of what was taking shape, the intellectual structure of which was based on a combination of mystical and enlightenment ideas.

The Structure of Thought and Artistic Method in Khiali-Negari Painting based on the Concept of Traditional Art

The social and political situation and spirit of the time, as well as what is in the artist's institution, which is nothing but the spirit of freedom, love, and knowledge, are examined and explained based on the concept of traditional art from Coomaraswamy's point of view and relying on Islamic worldview and thought regarding the structure of thought in Khiali-Negeri paintings. Sharifzadeh believes that "based on the miniature traditions of the time, these works and their artists

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were able to create a new style in Qajar miniatures without being influenced by Western art. Painters and artists did not create works just for the sake of fame and livelihood, but created valuable works based on their minds, feelings, and hearts. Using the power of love, artists stepped into the mysterious realm of color, design, and role". (1992, p. 74). At the beginning of the Qajar kingdom, with the spread of the Khiali-Negari painting, the epic spirit had no place in these paintings and with the advent of the Constitutional Revolution, it gradually appeared in these works. Thus, freedom-loving painters were able to draw Iranian epic themes to inspire the people. Painters such as "Hossein Ghollar Aghasi" illustrated the themes of Shahnameh in such an original way that while observing the principles of traditional Iranian painting and course with the least impact of Western painting, to illustrate the heroism of Iranian heroic myths, such as Rostam with Iranian depiction. Fantasy painters embodied the national, epic, and religious mentality of the people. These painters were trained empirically (mastery learning) and since the goal was to influence the audience and played a guiding and educational role, they did not care about volume and only at times to a small extent and they profited from it. The characters were portrayed as if they were taken from their minds without the presence of a living model; it was as if these characters were seen in the fantasy world and then embodied in a form on the canvas. Thus, their paintings were far from any adaptation reality. In their images, they followed certain principles derived from religious or epic texts. These painters worked when they were able to enter the story with sincerity of heart and reconstruct it in their imaginary world, and according to the signs and intuitions that are sometimes taken from the other world, they go through the path and then to paint. Khiali-Negari painters identified with the narrative of the work and were present in the story moment by moment. In a work by Mohammad Mudaber - one of the fantasy painters - entitled "The departure of Muslim Ibn Aqeel to Kufa", we see the artist (Mudabar) accompanying Muslim step by step on his way to Kufa. Modaber little by little go through the path of love. The manifestation of the divine truth of religion is demonstrated in all the work and behavior of the artist (Alipour, 2018, p. 62). (See Figure 1)

Now, by contemplating of Khiali-Negari paintings based on the concept and function of traditional art and in addition to the political and social issues of the time, it can be said that what exists in these works among icons and elements, has a meaning and concept beyond the form and leads the audience towards the truth and the real world. Everything tries to reveal a religious presence and brings the audience as well as the artist closer to understanding the mystical and sacred truth. A work of art is a platform for expressing the truth. An artist is considered a mystic to be discovered and a world emerges in his mind. This meaning also applies to religious, epic, and festive subjects. According to Coomaraswamy, our problem is dealing with the structure of thought and the artistic method of Khiali-Negari painting, in which the artist plays a fundamental role since the activity that is done

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in the path of creating the work and also finding the main patterns, is formed in two stages. The first is done by reason and the second is what it finds in the field of liberation into a tangible valley. "The artist imagines the 'example' of the object to which his will is directed, in an imitable form. He must reveal what he imagines and transfer it to himself and be only his potential. "Painter without arrogance in the heart" creates transcendental works" (Alipour, 2018, p.59). Therefore, one of the most fundamental factors in shaping the structure of thought in fantastic paintings is the artist and his cognition. With such a view, in the relationship between the artist, the audience, and the artwork, the artist has a fundamental role and is the performer of intellectual, physical, and service activity in the work. In Khiali-Negari paintings, the artist perishes in the process of creating the work. I.e., unless the artist perishes in the work, his art will not emerge and the higher art will not emerge. That is, it must be annihilated for the work to emerge (See Figure 2).



Figure 1. The scene of Muslim Ibn Aqeel's departure from Medina to Kufa, by Mohammad Mudaber, 253 × 204 cm
Source: Alipour, 2018, p. 62.



Figure 2. The event of Ashoura, by Hassan Ismailzadeh, Source: Chalipa, 2011.

Coomaraswamy believes that the principle in the traditional arts is fixed and unified. "The duty of art is to call a person to the principle and to provide everything so that we know that this soil is not our home, it is a passage" (Hemmati, 2007, p. 155). The imaginary face of the artist is intertwined with seeing and the reflection of the beloved's face becomes visible to him and all that the artist creates in this position is the representation and allegory of the face of beauty and for this important thing, Abrahamic endeavor demands to achieve it by condemning his existence. Khiali-Negari painting is the real face itself, the truth itself is beyond the face of the work. These works, by presenting themselves, bring to the fore the divine truths of religion and faith. "Imagination is considered our capital," says Bloukifar, quoting Hossein Qollar Aghasi, one of the pioneers of Khiali-Negari painting. We have to be so careful that we can draw any narrative on the canvas even without having color and smell". (1984, p. 98) For this reason, sometimes the text of the story was changed so that it could convey more meaning and concept

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to the audience. For example, we can refer to the story of Joseph (A.S.) in which, although his brothers throw him into a well in a desert without water and grass, the imaginer shows him in a green place since he believes that thanks to the blessed step of Joseph (A.S.), the whole desert will turn into a green plain. Thus, the structure of thought in Khiali-Negari painting is based on the concept of traditional art and forms in the direction of the highest divine goals and the attainment of that true essence. The artifact is a vehicle for expressing truth and finding a way to enter the familiar world. The artist perishes in the process of forming the work, and this category is nothing but love for God, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) Mohammad, and the pure Imams, desire, and remembrance. The materials of the work and what is used in the form of material in the creation of the work to express its thirst and excitation are the inner principle of the artist. The knowledge and rules developed in these works have a superhuman and cosmic origin, and in this art, the artist is the bearer and mediator of mercy that has been received from the world of meaning.

Conclusion

According to Coomaraswamy's definition of traditional art, traditional art is considered to be the manifestation of the divine form that descends on the artist's mind; In other words, art that has a superhuman origin and is independent of the human psyche and is embodied in a material form by the artist. This art is an example of imitation that fits inside the artist and is therefore characterized by allegory, cryptography, and symbolism. For this purpose, he experiences two realms: one is the realm of liberation and the other is the realm of appropriation and servitude. This type of art is in contradiction with modern art and its exemplary forms are based on reason and rational activity. The structure of thought and artistic method in the school of Khiali-Negari painting is based on the concept of traditional art, in the shadow of Islamic and mystical tradition and spirituality, relying on rationality and deep thinking by the artist, and this factor is a kind of worship for the artist. When the mystical attitude is considered important by the Iranian artist and virtuoso, the direct imitation of nature is obsolete in his view and it attempts to create a world that governs his intellectual structure. Khiali-Negari painting was created by uneducated, simple, and honest artists. The strong presence of Islam and the conversion of people to the Shiite religion, the influence of Western art and culture (through interaction with them), the lack of attention of the court art of the time to religious themes and taking on this task on the flow of Khiali-Negari painting and the increasing presence of narrators and Shahnameh readers in public spaces have influenced the development and continuity of this art. These works were drawn for educational, propaganda, and guidance purposes for the audience in an atmosphere with a traditional attitude, religious and Islamic thought was at the forefront and heroism always gave new life to the works. Since

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Iranian and religious heroes are always have been in the heart and soul of the nation. Their tools were simple but in allegorical and cryptic language.

Therefore, the intellectual structure and artistic method that is formed under the holy tradition and religion of Islam and the Shiite religion in all aspects of life certainly finds a religious and sacred identity. Even if its subject is not religious. This attitude has dominated all the ideas present in the land of Iran since the Qajar period and based on this thinking, it builds its structure on all matters, whether political, social, etc.

Appendix

1. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1947-1877) is a well-known contemporary theorist of Eastern and Western art. According to his in-depth theological and religious studies in the East and West, significant works with a traditional approach - based on the views of thinkers of the time and context - on the theoretical foundations of Eastern art in general and pre-modern Christian art in particular philosophy Medieval account of traditional Christian art and its comparison with modern art. He has always been a defender of the traditional view of the East and has studied the various aspects of this art analytically and deeply (Alipour, 2018, p. 63).

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