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Coffee Houses at Qajar age an Infrastructure for Folk Art Boom

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Abstract

The present research with an emphasis on coffee houses at Qajar age has recognized motives and effect of social and political factors such as conditional event in formation of art traditions in coffee house so as to examine the communication function of coffee house painting at this space. Coffee house at Qajar age has been found as a place for people's gathering which had communicative-cultural function in parallel to people's daily activity. Extensiveness of political and social events and diversity of effective art and cultural activities in these gatherings which have caused acquisition of clients have increased significance of function at this space. Most of the arts including coffee house painting increased in the context of this place. With regard to the research findings, despite related works which have grounded on folk art boom in coffee house painting, it can perceive the controversial effect of this art event in the society focused on this art's intellectual approach to the subjects with transnational themes which had caused people's awakening. The present research intends to detect the factors contributed in formation of coffee house painting with the effective national-religious themes in social events at Qajar age.

Key Words: *coffee house, people's gathering, painting, Qajar age*

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Introduction

Questions of research

1-from social perspective, what factors or features caused the coffee houses turn to effective gatherings at art and culture area at Qajar age?

2-what factors have caused formation of coffee house with effective national-religious themes in social events at Qajar age?

Research method

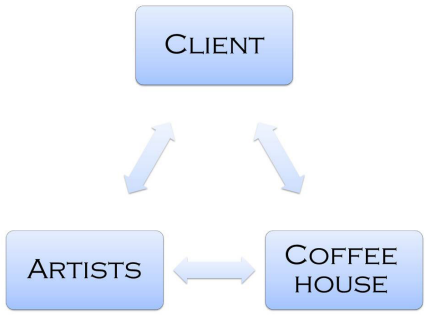
The present research has been conducted via the descriptive-analytical method, in which data have been collected via library, electronic and visual sources. In the present research, analysis of coffee house as the Iranian gathering as the roots for formation of art event of coffee house and effect of all existing art factors in coffee houses in social events at Qajar has been made. With rise of Qajar government and transfer of capital, the process under expansion of coffee houses increased in Tehran. In line with political and social factors affecting the growth of coffee houses, art and cultural function of coffee houses has drawn the people's attention to this place, because this place as the most important people's gathering was developed to a fixed place for Shahnameh khani and performing national-religious plays followed by narration and painting which had been the arts associated to each other. Coffee house painters through depicting the roles of heroes at tales and narrations have played a major role in transition of Iran's myths from ancient and Islamic age to people at their age. What differentiated the coffee houses at this age from next ages lies on effective role of cultural and art traditions at coffee houses especially painting and narration and their influence in social communications. At Qajar age, coffee house painters assumed their mission in transition of their beliefs and traditions and caused transition of this precious cultural heritage to the street people using the communication capabilities of their art. Indeed, at an age when the collective communication means have not been existed like today, the media role of art has been of great importance. In the present research, an attempt has been made to examine communication function of art traditions produced at these places at Qajar age with an emphasis on art traditions of coffee houses as the most effective factor in development of coffee houses as the people's gathering.

Formation of coffee house art movement

With rise of Qajar government and relative stability of political situations inside Iran, new coffee houses emerged gradually in large cities (Nemati, 2013, p. 11), found with modern features in function of coffee houses. At this age, coffee house has become the manifestation of culture and cultural needs of Iranian society which has affected the society. Study on coffee houses at this age as one of the effective people's gathering in line with study on common folk arts at this place causes to recognize the features of this place as the infrastructure for formation of this art which is the inseparable part of this art. Three components including social space of coffee houses, artists and clients are considered as the essential and inseparable components in formation of coffee house painting in coffee house painting boom.

Social role of coffee houses: creation of social and cultural infrastructures has been mentioned as the feature of coffee houses as one of the public urban areas at this age. Accordingly coffee houses in Iran play a major role in expansion of public culture among various classes. Different group of people who have been being commuted in coffee houses caused people to use situation of various classes and their customs and traditions and even their knowledge and extend their information. at this age, since Iran society is under transition from a traditional society to civil society, growth of public groups at society is inevitable, so that Zoor Khaneh and coffee house as two entities interconnected to each other played a major role in strengthening the religious and national spirit of people after

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Pic 1. Discussing the War in a Paris Café, the Illustrated London News 17 September 1870



Pic 2. Storyteller (meddah) at a coffeehouse in the Ottoman Empire

conventionalizing people's gathering among various groups of people. In this regards, Habres like Walter Benjamin among the members of Frankfort school says that city not just economically has been the center of civil society but it has been in political-cultural contrast with court, caused growth and boom at public literary areas, i.e. an area which their major topic has been the topic over coffee houses and assemblies(Azad Aramaki, 2006, p. 28).

Coffee houses which have been the original social and cultural structures of the Iranians as well as the areas at Islamic world played a major role in creation of various norms. In the meantime, coffee houses had the major role in dissemination of original Iranian-Islamic cultures and generosity and chivalry foundations of various political, social and religious classes in Iran. Further coffee house had the major role in expansion of spiritual mood and religious foundations especially since Safavid age and during great Shah Abbas government. Until the recent decades, narration and rhetoric with heroic virtues of chivalry together with Shiite spirituality arisen from Life of Imam Ali (as) expanded in the coffee houses.

Narration: narratives have been the first group of artists who used the coffee houses to represent their art; they are called as those who performed at public spaces and crowded passages before formation of coffee houses and found coffee house as the suitable and fixed place for narration by development of this place. This appeared as the common program with the most clients who referred to coffee houses since the middle of Qajar age. The quoted contents differed in terms of the clients' understanding from a coffee house to another coffee house (Hagh Talab, 2013, p. 11). With regard to abundant historical documents, effect of common traditions in coffee

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Pic 3. Coffeehouse in London, 17th century



Pic 4. A café in Istanbul, 19th century

houses including Shahnameh Khani, narration and painting on Iranian culture has been in such a way that most of illiterate individuals at that age memorized various verses of various poets. This is a point confessed by most of foreign tourists at that age, expressed that it can find the individuals in the most remote villages at Iran that they have not the knowledge for reading and writing, but they have memorized abundant poems such as Ferdowsi. These cultural traditions emerged at two important fields of narration and painting at coffee houses and both groups of narrators and painters have been among the street people who pursued the support from the people's beliefs and public religious thoughts in their works (Afshari, 2007, p .40).

Painting: coffee house painting refreshes by advent of conditional movement and in line with public thought awakening and excellence of liberate thoughts all of sudden(Mohammad Azam zadeh, 1998, p. 109). Indeed, coffee house painting retrieved its semantic and structural basis when the old and autocratic intellectual system replaced with the democratic thought. Emergence of a painting style from the heat of coffee house indicates this dynamism. Under formation of conditionality event and public awakening of people as well as awareness from the situations going on the government, new conditions took place at the art and culture area; people of Iran who witnessed every day a new influence of Colonialism on one hand and domestic Authoritarian pressures on the other hand extended consciously to historical and mythical hero and/or alive them again. National and religious Epic literature due to social conditions at the age after conditionality and due to spiritual need of street people to these themes has been taken into account, so that coffee house painting moved forward besides the arts such as narration, Taezieh and Pardeh Khani(Chelipa, 2011, p. 75). New wave of modernism arisen from conditional revolution has transformed literature, so that transformation in role has been inevitable (Shayesteh far, 2007, p. 6). These years should be known a period for formation of coffee house painting and the art which was emerged by artists among people who had direct demand for it(Chelipa, 2011, p. 75). This painting style which opens national interests, religious beliefs and spirit of specific culture of middle layers of urban community has been a phenomenon newer than other folk painting forms (Pakbaz, 1999, p. 587).

Role of client in growth of art in coffee houses

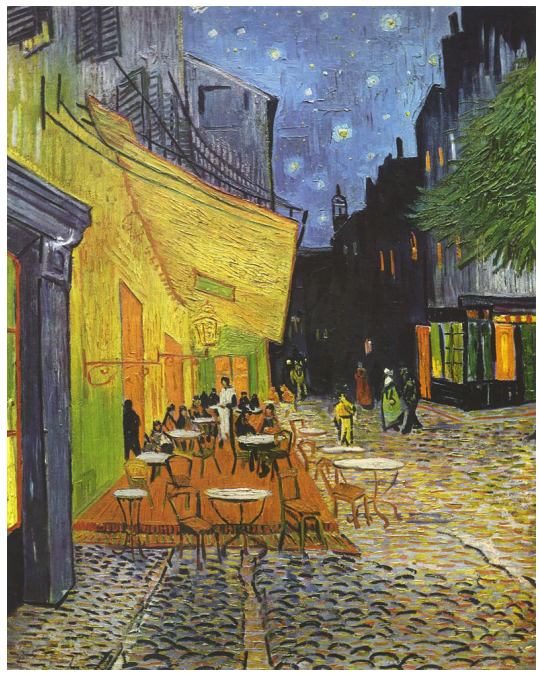
Expansion of political problems at urban community at Qajar age led to growth in exchange of notions and political and economic thoughts in community and this raised a motive for various social classes and groups so as to refer to their specific gathering for their collective meetings, caused not just get aware of their situation but also the news at neighborhood, city and government. Azad Aramaki in this book, quoted from Jürgen Habermas, says: there is the possibility for free contact at

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gathering because presence of individuals is without imposing group's do's and don'ts, and the formal presence of rules and traditions is less likely available and what governs here is the rules focused on interaction and communication. People have come to exchange their ideas with each other in a free area out of daily mimics about their public interests (ibid, p. 27). However the mentioned issues have converted the coffee houses as a public place to a social phenomenon, if we look at it from a more comprehensive angle and attribute it to the common art and cultural issues at coffee houses, we will perceive that people's tendency to common painting and performance traditions has given existence and concept to the coffee house at this age in parallel to political problems which are the manifestations of culture and needs of community at Qajar age. Indeed, prevalence of folk arts with national and religious topics at this place has caused acquisition of advocates of these artists who have been the people at the community that a series of religious national beliefs and willingness have lied in their culture (Bolokbashi, 1995, pp. 11-13). Therefore, in the interpretation from coffee houses as an effective social basis, it should say that metaphor of Iranian man, Iranian family, Iranian government and Iranian religion is not comprehensible without Iranian community's understanding which is independent at all mentioned elements in public area (Azad Aramaki, 2006, p.180).

Effect of developments at coffee houses on coffee house painting

Due to coincidence of prevalence of coffee house traditions especially painting with cultural and social problems at Qajar age, emergence of this art was found with a new readability. At the ages when the coffee house painting enabled to depict the most ideal space interested for people at the day after conditionality revolution by selection of the epic sections from national and religious themes, the coffee house was found to meet the old mission in harmony with street people's wishes (Chelipa, 2011, p. 75).



▲ Pic 5. Cafe Terrace at Night, September 1888, by Vincent van Gogh.

From sociological perspective at this period, the issues below have been always taken into account: resolve the contrast between modernity and tradition, expand new concepts from tradition and new and scientific impression from modernity and Iranizing the modernity (Azad Aramaki, 2006, p.42). In general, the critical space prevails at coffee houses as the social gathering, i.e. the space governing the gathering's discourse is the space of critique and the critiques to gathering are almost current anti-traditions in community and contraries to intellectual events. The individuals in gathering criticize the formal part of the modern community. Using the daily literature at the social and political area, they strive to break tradition and put the principles accepted by people and the systematic modern spaces under question (Azad Aramaki, 2006, p.29). In this regards, coffee house painting different from the modern painting of Kamal al Molk School has not just turned to the sub-set of Iranian traditional painting but has challenged it from instrumental, structural and technical perspectives; on the

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other hand, it cuts any attribution which has targeted in turning it to the modern painting area(Modaresi, 2008, p. 25); Indeed, coffee house painting has been under influence of its origin which is the coffee houses at Qajar age; it can say that coffee house painting which is the product of this place is not just an art remained of the developments at modern art but is a modern event at Iran's art in a real meaning. In coffee house painting addressed to traditional themes, not just tradition has not made a sense but also prevailed in coffee houses and heart of people whose blood has intertwined with religion in terms of selection of revolutionary and tragic themes, people's revolutionary goals have been grounded. The ideological outlook is that one in which various dimensions of coffee house painting has not revealed as required(ibid, p. 23), i.e. these artists with intellectual concerns more than political concerns entered to the public area. Indeed, influence of these forces in community is slow but remaining. Such influence has caused those who intend to control social movements have no information on how the gathering work out at the early stages, because in terms of cultural nature of gathering, long-term changes can be witnessed after taking place and they cannot be witnessed when they are taking place(Azad Aramaki, 2006, p. 170). He has said about our misunderstanding from the development factors like coffee house painting that our assumption has lied on this fact that what has occurred in Iran are all due to the effort by government and officials, proposed that since the people of Iran have enjoyed less knowledge and literacy, they have been assumed a barrier to the growth and development(Azad Aramaki, 2006, p. 177), and also it has lied on this fact that the mentality governing the coffee house painting has been in such a way that it has led to omission of it in academic discourses. Throughout the history of Iranian art, just the rulers had the competence to enjoy the art, thus the art has been being developed based on tastes of this group and naturally the people lacked this right. But what passed in the coffee houses has been the art which was formed in parallel to the official art in court, that is, a process in painting not taking loan from European tradition. Under coffee house painting, the art enabled to appear among people and exclude from Monopoly of the aristocratic classes. In other words, under this process, the painting art after decades excluded from the courts, palaces and precious books and provided for people (Chelipa, 2011, p. 75). The concepts used by coffee house painters at this place have been basically the critical concepts which try to criticize the ruling system using the national and religious tales. Indeed, this has been a common issue among advocates of coffee houses proposed by the artists to acquire people in their works. The main language in social gathering is the social and literary criticism and literature. People with reference to everyday life and enjoying the sense of the sign, proverbs, irony and emphasis on the tradition of criticism that is a literary nature has started a new challenge and try to propose the new movements. Here it can know the critics inside the constructive gathering for critical thinking and next intellectual movements (Azad Aramaki, 2006, p. 177). As mentioned, in the coffee house painting, using religious events(Ashura) and the epic stories of Shahnameh, that function is accomplished which can be named with gesture system which propose the concepts hidden in underlying themes of literature, mythology and religious traditions aiming at stimulating the people's mind against the governing conditions and using the visual and verbal elements. Throughout history, we witness samples of use of painting to stimulate the people in the society and there are historical reports in this context as: at Safavid age, the canvass has been being used to agitate warlike spirit of Shia in the direction of the corps (Kabir, 2006, p. 224). The relationship between content of coffee houses and the individuals in it who seek to understand domi-

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nation of authoritarian rule indicates a major role displayed by the coffee house painters in their paintings in the best way(Modaresi, 2008, p. 24). Indeed, common keywords between national and religious heroes and their courage in the right way with the rise of governments and despotic and tyrannical governments in the post-constitutional age was welcomed by the people became a reason for the coffee house painting approach to these issues and depiction of the major message of these tales by the coffee house painters (Chelipa, 2011, p. 75). From the theme-oriented perspective in this painting, however at the first stage the religious, epic and mythical themes might seem reactionary, considering the sign language assists us to perceive to which extent selection of such comprehensive epic-revolutionary themes has awakened people at autocratic age (Modaresi, 2008, p. 24). Coffee house painting both in content and structure succeeded to pull the issues such as tyranny and colonialism into criticism. The most tangible causes of coffee house painters in criticism to colonialism lie on this fact that they had not a good insight to the alien art, insisted on the standards of their painting; on the other hand, chivalrous ethics govern his spirit and paintings that prevented blindly following of alien art in their works. However, from social perspective, how to select and propose the issues of society by the artists and the concerns by people at this period have rooted in the culture of Iranian society, because the gatherings from the long lost past in Iran had the religious essence because two entities of family and religion built the civil space for the Iranian (Azad Aramaki, 2006, p. 57). The effort made in the coffee house painting in the representation of scene and performance of internal characteristics of humans has been always under his bias from good forces. With this moral and ideological motivation, specific agreements are compiled on how to draw clad and select color (Dastjerdi, 2013, p. 10). In general, it can say that the aim of coffee house painting has been directness, simplicity of expression and influence on client (Pakbaz, 1999, p. 224).

The reasons for cultural stagnation at coffee houses

From sociological perspective, underdevelopment of urban spaces before advent of coffee house painting followed by massive development of collective mass media among people which has been the product of the advancement in technology and change in social needs caused change in cultural function of coffee house, and this change has not moved to growth, evolution and consistency. As a result, cultural function approached this place to decline, because ups and downs in the community caused decline in function of coffee houses by arrival of television and radio to aristocratic houses and the houses of the middle classes (Forghani, 2008, p. 5). Increasing extension of trappings of modernity such as cinemas not just caused closing the coffee houses and changing the job of coffee shoppers but also coffee house traditions such as narration, rhetoric, and coffee house painting were annihilated, formed as a place for drink tea and coffee and have a rest (Hagh talab, 2013, p. 11). However, one of the causes affected decline in cultural function of coffee houses has been the official control on them, i.e. official control implies organizing and the power of individual, collective and governmental monitoring on how the gatherings work, because official arrival to this place provides the unequal conditions in relationships and avoids the presence of supervisor or takes side of a situation which causes formation of free discussion (Azad Aramaki, 2006, p. 57). If any coffee house has been the gathering for a group of workers such as painters, builders and such ones in which they had gathering at the Qajar age, at the first and second Pahlavi age and Islamic Republic of Iran, official monitoring on coffee houses has been on the agenda of governments; the major effort at these three ages has been

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systemizing the gatherings through approving laws and regulations, because control on these communities enabled to avoid collapse of governments. As a result, official and legal type of coffee houses formed next to natural gatherings (Azad Aramaki, 2006, p. 66).

Conclusion

Coffee house at Qajar age have been the manifestations of culture and needs of the community that not just has affected it but has been influenced of it. Exchange of thoughts and notions at the area of political and economic issues has been found as the major factor in expansion of coffee houses which caused development of these places in large cities, but separate from political issues, what caused development of coffee houses has been the cultural and communication function of coffee houses. A function which has not been just targeted in spending leisure time but creates a context for growth of Iranian-Islamic cultural traditions with proposing visual and verbal elements within the religious narrations and mythological literature themes, aiming at criticizing the conditions governing the day problems of the community after the constitutional revolution. Accordingly the common critical space in coffee houses overlooked how to select themes of artists. Using the ironic themes and daily literature at the folk art area, they strive to stimulate and awaken people's thoughts and put official function of government under question. Significance of influence of their function in the conditions with lack of mass media instruments as existed in today's world kept increasing. Under these conditions, the coffee house artists with an emphasis on their art narrated religious thoughts and notions. However in study on factors affecting decline in coffee house, considering the officials' views in function of coffee houses by setting official rules and regulations on it and on the other hand changing the life towards modernization and development of technological elements such as television, radio and so forth at the daily culture of people caused rise of not suitable conditions at the area of coffee house painting art and other cultural traditions inside the coffee houses, whereby this fold art was undergone decline at Pahlavi age by change of coffee house relations.

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