

Saqqa-Khaneh School as Iranian Contemporary Art Movement: Post Colonialism or Orientalism?

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Abstract: *Saqqa-khaneh is an art movement which formed around 1960s in Iran. The question is either Saqqa-khaneh school is a movement which was influenced by Postcolonial view? Or does it intensify Orientalism hegemony? Or it requires the third distinctive approach? The purpose of this article is to challenge the two approaches of Postcolonial and Orientalism in case of studying Saqqa-khaneh school. Descriptive-analytical method was considered. The research's suggestion is not to limit Saqqa-khaneh between the Postcolonial and Orientalism views; by considering Iran's special situation. This article first describes Saqqa-khaneh and then related art movements in Europe and United-States at that time. Said's Orientalism, as the systematic arrival of postcolonial approach and also the translation Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" to Persian actually were after the Saqqa-khaneh movement formation. In fact, Postcolonial theories of Fanon and Said played an important role in the study of contemporary Iranian art; although these theories not only refer to next of Saqqa-khaneh but also these just can be practiced in other societies which had not similar situation comparable to Iran of the 1960s. It seems that considering Saqqa-khaneh as a Postcolonial art movement influenced by Orientalism perspective. Historical studies indicate that Saqqa-khaneh as a Postmodern movement formed exactly when western's ones were born. It had the nationalism purpose too. Furthermore, Iranians, particularly on that period didn't consider themselves as a colonial society as they wanted to protest against it.*

Keywords: *Saqqa-khaneh art school, Postcolonial critic, Orientalism, Sociology, Iran contemporary art.*

1. Introduction

Most experts know Saqqa-khaneh movement from the early 1960s as a contemporary art movement in Iran. At the same time as the formation of Postcolonial view [1] in the 1960s in Europe and America, just in time that in the Third World looking at their own culture was emerging. This school usually coincides with the publication of Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth", Said's "Orientalism" and Ale Ahmad's "Westernization" in Iran.

But we cannot confine Saqqa-khaneh school between postcolonial and Orientalism paradox, regardless of considering the historical and sociological situation of Iran in period of creation of this art. Indeed, it will be laches, that we reconcile other societies sociological conclusions by this approach without scrutiny of Iran historical period. Saqqa-khaneh school in the 1960s, created a fusion of some modern elements and combined them with traditional decor and, of course Iran's religious elements. A brief look at the situation of Iran in 1960s, tells us that society and peoples beliefs were heavily in transition. This liminal state makes investigating it more unmanageable. Thus, it seems that Postcolonial theories of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said have an impact on the classification of the arts in Iran society, while it formed a review of studies that can be

practiced in other societies which had not similar situation comparable to Iran of the 1960s. In other words, in this adaptation, generalizations has no function.

With this introduction, the main question of this article is whether is it possible to consider Saqqa-khaneh school, a movement which is formed with Postcolonial view? Does it intensify Orientalism hegemony? Or it requires the third distinctive approach?



Fig. 1: Charles Hossein Zenderoudi. The Hand. 1959. Ink, natural pigments, gold and silver paint on paper, 26 3/4 x 17 1/2 in, New York University collection, Gray Art Gallery, © ADAGP Charles Hossein Zenderoudi. Source: www.pinterest.com

2. Background to the research and foundations

Postcolonial critic was started in order with Frantz Fanon activities and Edward Said. And today, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha are considered as the most significant critiques in this field. Said's "Orientalism", which has been written in 1978, is a startup for systematic attitudes of Post-colonialism and Orientalism critic.

Orientalism presented by Edward Said is a type of critical reaction and a protest against the depict of east by westerners. In his book he criticized the picture of the East, especially Islamic Middle-East inside the western texts during the history. "Said's work outlines how the cultural knowledge about, and representations of 'the Orient' defined a place of 'otherness'" [2]. You might want to take a moment to think about the stereotypes associated with the word 'Orient' and 'Oriental,' all of which labeled 'the Orient' as a place of mystery and exoticism. Such 'otherness' exists in relation to the familiarity of the Western Anglo-European world; the basis of 'Orientalism,' like the basis of any form of racism or ethnocentrism, is the idea that 'we' are 'selves' who are 'familiar,' and that 'others' are necessarily 'exotic' [Ibid].

This critique asks about the western discourses in term of ethnocentric perceptions and world view in case of "other" culture and argues about their perspective about the power relationship and colonial influence on these cultures. Postcolonial Criticism critiques about cultural evaluation structure which classified cultures from high to low. We can analysis this critique from the viewpoint of colonized cultures as Western objects or represented issues and also from the viewpoint of colonized cultures as artfunctionality based on their own criteria [3]. It is clear that in analyzing the Saqqa-khaneh school as an art movement in Iran, the second point of view is useful for us. This analysis should consider Iranian artists and the production of works of art in that period, such as those involved in the production of indigenous arts and finally should ask whether these productions and their manufactures accept western critique about the east and do repetition or not.

In another way, such as Said said, among the vast illustrations of European artists, east is a symbol of dictation in front of the enlightened, the decline against civilization, passion and emotion against reason and logic [4]. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the East does not refer to a geographic East and we cannot order Iran as East just only because of its geographic location. East, based on what Said defined, is a concept that could include countries in Latin America and even Cuba. From this point of view, there is an inquiry which should be asked about whether Iran in the late 1960s may be regarded as a part of the East vs. West or we should consider Iran like a piece of the West is just placed in the East geographical map.

Postcolonial critics emphasize that colonized cultures must be understood from the perspective of their own artistic functionality. They study how indigenous art that formed before the arrival of colonialism is conquered by colonial and how people in colonial countries have reacted to this. From this perspective, they show how foreign objects which have looted by the adventurers and passed across the seas by businessmen, constitute an integral part of the culture of Western antiquary study [3]. We must show our review whether the works of art that have been created by Saqqa-khaneh school and has been shown in Western markets, can be ordered as Western antiques or they can be considered a specific art school. In fact, in the study the Western viewpoint to this work is so important that is not comparable with their belief about other products of the other culture. We should carefully distinguish the viewpoint of Western into vast artwork belongs to before Saqqa-Khaneh and their special consideration to this school.

The aim this research for discussing about Post-colonial critic in case of Saqqa-khaneh school is, according to some past researches such as Keshmirshakan's [5,1]. Whether this school is a movement against the discourse which considers east as an unchanging and without synthesis? Or as Pakbaz [6] and Afsharmohajer [7] said this is a school which is made by some intellectual, artists and financiers who had an Orientalist viewpoint about the people and art of their own country? It is so probable that study of Saqqa-khaneh school in bipolar of post-colonial and Orientalism worldview, would itself influence of dominant Post-colonial critic's view. Some critics as John Foran [8] studied Iranian art out of this bipolar view. It is possible that Saqqa-khaneh school in the mainstream of Persian art of that time was something probable which was not a reaction again East or West or center and margin. Through this view even considering this school to Postcolonial discourse is something influenced by Orientalism view; the perspective which could not study an art school, according to its own situation. A view which for distinguishing center and another has no way, neither a discourse which emphasizes on this distance.

3. Methodology

This research, choose phenomenological view and deconstructive approach to available structures. At first defined Post-colonial critic and then review the history of sake-khaneh and its current movement will study through descriptive-analytical approach. Finally, we want to answer this question: Is it authentic to use Orientalism/Post-colonial view of studying Saqqa-khaneh; or we should consider more concise sociological and historical information for better understanding of Saqqa-Khaneh's backgrounds and appropriate theory for criticizing it.

4. Saqqa-khaneh and its background

Saqqa-Khaneh is the most important painting school in Iran because of its broadness and fame. Its painters, although use their current manner of the time; but apply the traditional subjects and motives. Each of these painters has their own distinctive manner which is completely different from others. Hence all of them are

common in reference to the subjects and symbols of the traditional Iranian art and lifestyle [9]. The Saqqa-khaneh's artist defined an art style which had specifically identified without repeating common and well-known subjects or using the traditional old painting; but using the huge treasure of ornamental and vernacular art and Persian calligraphy.



Fig. 2: Parviz Tanavoli. Poet and Cage. 1966. Glazed earthenware on Plexiglas base, 25 5/8 x 17 3/4 x 17 3/4 in.

Source: www.christies.com

The name of the 'Saqqa-khaneh' where is the symbol of a set of beliefs and practices which has a solid kinship with contemporary past years of Iran. It is inspired the vision of a society which has not exchanged by the tremendous power. The ornaments of Saqqa-khaneh are the nostalgia of a lifestyle which suddenly confronted to the necessities of the new shocking world [9]. This name was firstly used by Karim Emami, for describing the works of artists who used the elements of local, religious and belongs to votive and Shia Islam art. For declaring this name, he mentioned the friendly and religious atmosphere of "Tekieh" and "Hosseinieh". He particularly means the works which were exhibited in the third biennial of Tehran in 1962. The atmosphere which inspiring familiarity and friendliness of Saqqa-khaneh's of neighborhood in the corner of the alley [10].

Karim Emami described the beginning of Saqqa-khaneh by referencing to Parviz Tanavoli: "one day Around the 1861 Hossein Zenderoudi and I went to Abdul Al-Azim Shrine and there we noticed in some primed pictures which were for sale. At that time, we were searching for some special Iranian raw materials for using in our works; and those realities were so appropriate in our opinion. We bought some of them and brought home. We liked their simple forms, repetitive motives and bright shining colors. Zenderoudi made the first works of Saqqa-khaneh by inspiration of those pictures" [11]. Thus Saqqa-khaneh school was organized in art University, Kaboodstudio and Art Hall of Iran are the most important.

Referring to Neo-Traditional exhibition in December and January of 2014, the aim of the artists of this school was combining visual forms of popular culture and religious traditions-national art with modern methods for reaching the national definition. The Saqqa-khaneh artists for defining an identity for contemporary art of Iran; searched in local and historical artistic and cultural heritage of Iran and through this way they used the artistic manners of past and current movement of that time.

Iranian artist a long before the Pahlavi regime and its modernization policies, were familiar with modern conceptual elements and even somehow they had used. It is obvious that in the thirties and forties in the midst of modernization while there where conflict between modernity and the traditionalists, while the common school in international arenas was Pop art and it was passing and closed its expiration, was a suitable time and space that Iranian innovative artists founded a new school. Although we must say that this new doctrine emerged from the past experience and perhaps had earlier roots such as Hoshang Pezeshknya and Jalil Ziapour that seeks to Western

modernist and repeated them. But this case cannot under question the authority of this school, and we can invalidate the whole atmosphere of that time by the single sociological claim.

In this context and also the situation of Iran in the world order which went to be semi-marginalized according to John Foran, categorizing Iran and its artworks in world markets as "other" is not reasonable. Foran says: We cannot find any other country which has influenced as Iran by USA. Among European countries, Western Germany for business with Iran advance from Britain and Britain became the fourth commercial side of Iran [8].

In the 1960s in Europe and USA, Pop or popular art and postmodern was so common. Tanavoli says: "Pop artists were a new group in any aspects, that with their paintings and attitudes hyped up every day. They used slangs and supplied them as the same way as existed in reality; they mixed up complex theories of the previous painters; had no specific new doctrine or claim but was so famous in the art world. Everything has before been the flaw in their opinion was good. Copying was not flawed. They choose as original well-known adds of comic strips and did not believe in the previous modifying [...] we felt a new era in art has started. That simplicity and sweet comedy were substituted to complicating abstract art. We found them the same as we wanted and preferred [12].

In addition to Pop art, we can see the influence of Op art movement in Zendehtroudi's last works. Leterism specially the works of Antoni Tàpies has also an unavoidable effect on Saqqa-khaneh. We cannot forget the effect of Marc Chagall, who was so important for the art society of Iran that time.

5. Conclusion

Saqqa-khaneh school is the first school, which opened a way for Persian contemporary art to enter to the universal art communities. Shaigan says: Our art is going to find its position in the world; some special thing is going to happen. In the past, art means just Western one. In 1950 when I went to Europe, around 60 years ago, Eastern art had just Orientalist and ancient civilization meaning. It was something which just exhibited in the museums; the only art which produced and sold as an art was Western one. But today, you can see, some people like Tanavolisell his works in London... Today, even young Iranian artists fond their real position. So the centerline of the West has not existed now. The margin entered. The quarrel between center and margins has finished in art. These happening are so new [13]. Saqqa-khaneh is a strong, firm and creative school in reality [9]. Saqqa-khaneh school started with a critical view through West? The Persian contemporary artists since this period refund their self-confidence and courage and introduced Iranian contemporary art to the world.

Important book of Edward Said by the name of "Orientalism" as the official start of forming of Post-colonialism movement, was published in 1978 which concurrent with 1357 in Solar calendar. Nevertheless, important book of Frantz Fanon published in 1961 in French, and entered to Iran by Ali Shariat translation which returned to past Iran's revolution. Thus, it is impossible which would have effect on Saqqa-khaneh. Even we consider that Fanon's book would be available for Saqqa-khaneh's artists that time, it is not a book which could be effected on Saqqa-khaneh art. It is obviously a book which discussed about race, which is not matter for Iranian artists.

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