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THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY ART OF  
IRAN

The review of social, political and cultural events show that great social accidents influence on women roles negatively or positively and make their fixed roles to move; also women were influence more positively. The events influence on women movements in Iran. Some changes such as modernism positively or negatively since two centuries ago until now and starting of knowledge exchanges and thought worldly, constitutionalists and reduction of dictatorship in various political, social, familiarity, training layers; recent social and cultural changes in Islamic revolution of Iran affect on women role by preparing best beds for their changes as identity period, and modern characteristics of modernism.

Art has been known the presentation of thought and human opinions since human birth and during the history; the characteristics and its capacity continues until now and received to more various diamonds. Today, art under the variety and majority includes previous characteristics of art and also finds newer abilities. Before appearance of lines; as first tries of chronological changes in human paintings, were the best tools of establish, transferring of concepts and human messages in their paintings and carvings. Among art and historical works which appeared before the presentation of music, play and modern fields of art, visual art known as imaginary art has special position. These kinds of art in the history contain applied and connected aspects with daily lives as important tool to establish and present concepts and human believes. Besides the abilities of narrative characteristics of imaginary works, analysis of them moves more than their real narration and present deeper information and data by using methods of their creators. Most part of our information about past time, civilization and known cultures of references and understandings of art works have been left from past periods. Visual art in our Iran include vast historical views. The first available works of it have been known as cave pictures belonged to ten thousand years ago. The history gives validity and reliability to our works. The art has been known as clear mirror of social, political and cultural arts in their periods- as mentioned- most of our information and basically our findings are results of our past. "Social role of woman and her position in our culture" are parts which could be received to them by studying painting work and figure. Woman figure

have been seen in various shapes and positions; contemporary art of Iran contained various ideological and political aspects, so it is natural that Iranian women position in painting work changes. The role of women could be studied from various kinds of views.

**Artistic view:** Contrastive view in art makes struggle between genders that caused money making, validity, artistic acceptance with humanistic spirit and struggle as more hidden and basically in art world. So, woman should pay high cost of intelligence and creativity for entering to the scope and pays her identity and validity to save her position. Art world also change other scopes of creativities to enter to men world. The women who present their own creativities in the world, and change to power of active people in the group, or discard some believes by accepting double pressures or become soon oldness by presenting the compulsory pressures. Because art becomes an instrument in the present materialism culture! Contrastive view insists on the role of woman as satisfied appearance, and use the pressure in artistic scope to make the view more moralistic points of view to insist on limited law or at least accept artistic virtue according to materialistic culture. In the view, woman should be as a tool in artist's hand. The acceptance of her weakness to men; she also accept her obliged contempt to make her face according to her drawing artistic face and understand lower position in artistic creativity, does not tell anything about thoughtful movements to present clearer in visual art.

**Scientific and philosophical View:** In presentation of scientific philosophical view in societies which believe their own thought and science, the role of contrastive view is harder than traditional societies, a tool for feeling the woman, grow her violence in social environment, but all efforts cause family. In the society, men feel women as champions in their positions; in their ignorance women take their positions. So, sense of respect and compassion change to insecurity and harsh competition for men as they respect to women to keep their distances to women<sup>1</sup>.

**Presentation of woman in artistic works:** Most of the time, women were the main subject of artistic works; also today they create art themselves. Women were imagined as mother, woman idols<sup>2</sup>, wives and daughters of the kings from past until now; sometimes she has been known as goddess in Iran or all over the world, their figures have been seen on the some applied tools in civilized regions of Iran such as Ilam and Khuzestan. The role of women in

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<sup>1</sup> Behzad Pour, Fatemeh. Study of the role of woman in art, Culture and Art magazine, Cinema criticism, N 11, 1997, p 23

<sup>2</sup> Gensen. 1980. Art History, translated by Parviz Marzban. Tehran: Islamic Revolution publication, 2000, p 55

imaginary art of Iran is clear; because artistic women passed historical changes during the years<sup>3</sup>.

Presentation of woman in artistic works in various periods of Iranian history as other elements follow the below rule: re-showing of drawing of every natural, humanistic and imaginary elements in the works are the same with views, social understanding and artists. Totally, visual elements are used in paintings and drawings, would be divided in two groups: some elements only have decorative or visual characteristics and do not include any concept or thought. The characteristic is driven that the group of elements are free of every truth or contrary and contain materialistic meaning.

Another part of elements used in imaginary arts contain more meaning than themselves and in fact or naturally include meanings and positions and scopes to receive to views, human judgments and their meanings or used as symbol and have contrary concept. Changes of elements of first group are evaluated for stylistic and place in various drawing of schools. But, second group of elements follow humanistic thought and belief and to receive to the source of changes, the social thought and believes changes should have been studied. Woman figure in drawing works is a part of it and includes concepts as visual element. So, it is naturally that artist's point of view to present woman in their works is changing process. According to it, studying the position of women in artistic works makes them known but they have to understand the most of cultural elements. Although women play important role in Iranian art movement, they have to receive to their internal freedom; human would be able to be success when he make himself free from all internal limitations<sup>4</sup>.

According to the mentioned materials, during various periods of Iranian historical art, woman as other elements fellow the main rule: drawing of every natural element as imaginary or humanistic works reflect understanding of artists of the present elements<sup>5</sup>. Study and analysis of presentation and position of woman in artistic works not only help us to know artists' view but also present most of cultural and elements of the society.

### **Main differences of contemporary art with previous times:**

**Independent of sovereignty:** Iranian drawing and painting have been presented under the control of governments and developed according to the tastes of kings during various historical periods. Controlling of artistic works stopped at the end of Ghajar dynasty. In that time, establishing relationships with European countries improved art in out of kings' powers. Also, their influences

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<sup>3</sup> Rahnavard, Zahra. Position of woman in imaginary art of contemporary time in Iran, scientific-search magazine, (Humanistic science, "social studies of women psychology"), 2006, N 10, p 128

<sup>4</sup> Rahnavard, Zahra. Position of woman in imaginary art of contemporary time in Iran, scientific-search magazine, (Humanistic science, "social studies of women psychology"), 2006, N 10, p 124

<sup>6</sup> Zangi, Behnam. "the position of woman and Shiite in Iran", ladies magazine, 2005, p 116

were felt unclearly until the Islamic Revolution in Iran; the main reasons were known as the poor strength of the government and high dependency to western countries. After Islamic revolution, art develop completely among all parts of the society<sup>6</sup>.

**Subject changes:** Following new believes made painting development. So, the development of artists responsibilities made social, evolutional and religion subjects with new aspects more useful; subjects which were ignored or less paid attention previously.

**Changes in presentation of artistic works:** Iranian painting found different meanings after new social events, which made various beds for presentation of artistic works. In that time wall painting as result of social aspect had important position; besides mentioned painting some other works such as caricatures and graphics developed as much as other works<sup>7</sup>.

**Return to old pictorial traditions:** national and Islamic aspect of the society made artists to paid more attention to pictorial heritage of Islamic Iranian art. Although returning to Islamic Iranian arts was too fast, made revival of some forgotten or ignored works such as the way of painting which is known as the most important part of a painting; so, Iranian artists used design in flowing way to present nature and world. Their way to painting was completely the same as their thoughts and presenting of pictures. In this way, they see all things better and more beautiful and worship them and receive to high position of their spirits. Form of our traditional painting is tangible and presents elements and shapes clearly; attracts spectators to endless and beautiful concept<sup>8</sup>.

**The influence of religious view on imaginary art changes:** Iranians have lived with their religious believes for many years. Iranians were known as pioneer of worshipping God, Islam made the best bed for people to worship holy religion. The presence of religious believes has been seen in most of artistic works, during the history God has been presented in all works of various dynasties.

The presentation of Islam helped Iranians who lived in the main center of civilization to develop their abilities by the use of religious believes in their works; then, it was called Islamic-Art. Reflection of Iranian religious thoughts would be seen in their literary, architecture, imaginary and crafts works easily<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Tajvidi, Akbar. Look at painting art in Iran, publication and edition of Islamic guidance ministry, 1996, p 5

<sup>7</sup> Zangi, Behnam. Shiite thoughts and its influence on woman's position in contemporary art of Iran, Shiite magazine, 2005, N 5, p 110

<sup>8</sup> Morayez, Morteza. About origin of our traditional painting, Art and Culture magazine, Kalak, 1990, N 9, p 158

<sup>9</sup> Pakbaz, Iranian painting from past until now, Tehran, Zarrin & Simin, 2004, p 185

**Categorization of topics related to woman in painting:** As mentioned, meaningful elements in imaginary arts as paintings, painting curtains and books drawing change according to various rules and social traditions. Islamic revolution is central point of all changes. Many changes of ceremonies and anti-values, had formal aspect and destroy the base of false thought belonging. So, the woman position was main topic as evolutionary slogans. Woman as man enter to society, in the presentation of religious believes. Clear picture of the presence and measurement would be observed in previous periods of paintings after revolution. Artist view and his reason in presenting of woman in painting works, divide into some groups:

**Independent works of subject:** Although Iranian painting in one or two century was used in drawing books; some materials are used to draw scenes and daily topics without paying attention to special stories. In the works, women are not main matters and according to Iranian culture, their veil and limitations and their drawings would be seen at the windows or hills or curtain in front of audiences' views. Women usually have been drawn in far roles in fewer positions and some parts of their bodies have been hidden behind the wall or similar elements.

**Works of dependant story and special subjects:** In the works and especially when woman presentation is not avoidable, presentation of woman is clearer and attracts more attention. Subject of the works from Koran stories or fictions or folks mainly include romantic subjects and there is no role except her lovely position and she only plays romantic roles. Analysis of the phenomenon in visual works, clear the formal position in our Iranian culture.

### **Happiness works**

Main positions of the work were used in palace by princes. Main subjects of the group include happiness parties in various forms and especially in the late periods as Ghajar as great part of painting work to draw women and girls reflect aesthetic tastes of current literature. Many of the works present dance and happiness parties in palace which reflect identity and position of social category. Women pictures in the works in previous period usually contain accepted cover, but since Ghajar dynasty from now as drawing great curtains; veil fades as a cultural or religious tradition. Since that time, new form of painting includes realistic materials, also we would be able to search woman presentation in new subject and often contain social concept.

**Romantic subject:** This part of work has main part of the subjects have been seen in all periods. Some curtains, show romantic stories and some other ones draw lover and love without presenting a story or special subject.

**Drawing of personal mono face painting:** The works usually contain neutral subjects and only drawing a famous or common personality. In the drawing curtains, usually there is no much difference between men and women



and almost have been drawn in the same positions or feelings. Even in newer periods as Ghajar and late of Safavia-mentioned- picture of mono one of woman or man follow many values of aesthetics. For instance, with thin waist or thick eyebrows used both for males and females. Sexual characteristics and paying attention to them in the drawings and figures are not too important.

**Influenced works of political, cultural and artistic changes:** Changes of imaginary works happened in Iran, include gradual and natural movements; it means that artistic works developed gradually during the time. Also, its development sometimes suffered some unusual speed which had influenced by other countries<sup>10</sup>.

After revolution, painters paid more attention to traditional arts and revival of paintings. Revolution artists in order to present meanings and concepts according to their opinions paid attention to their old experiences. Some of them studies countries which had experienced new revolution, others looked at traditional paintings and some of them study experienced methods in west art history and used classicalism effects in modern Iranian paintings<sup>11</sup>.

For the first time in historical painting, woman has gun or presents with her fist and struggle with cruelty. Women cover has changed and in painting works, she is with veil. New personality based on evolutionary thoughts; limited women in Iranian drawings changes to free, active with rights and social responsibilities. Women in the works participate in all social activities: from strike against cruelty to defend against cruel attack. Painters would be able to present women in war and show their presentation and generosity. After first years of revolution and end of war, presentation of woman in the same works are accompany with high positions. Iranian woman free from prejudice limitations and become as a main element of society. Presentation of woman in painting in the period, contain almost complete meaning and message. Women role in receiving to thoughts and evolutionary aims and shaping national defenses in unwanted war reflect clearly in painting works. Women in painting work able to grow; they also are in subjects more than war or revolution and present soft and kind behavior. Artistic works in the historical period, in cinema, literature and imaginary arts are talkative pictures of formed position and messengers of changes play important roles in society. Women are subject of some materials as martyrdom, holy war, insistence; praying and other subjects also added to thoughts of painter artist and make more deep and various works. In the painting works related to artistic flow, women are known as more development and sociable in paintings and they do not have unusual or unexpected faces in works

<sup>10</sup> Tajvidi, Akbar. Look at painting art in Iran, publication: Islamic guidance ministry, 1996. p33

<sup>11</sup> Ghehvari, Morteza. Analysis of painting work, Tehran, Ataei publication, first edition, 2002. p 72

which present the role of sex more than humanities. Women pictures include veil-Hijab<sup>12</sup>.

One of the main characteristics of imaginary art after Islamic revolution of Iran was relationship between audiences and political, social and cultural matters which unfortunately lost its value by the lack of deep attention. Although absence of proper attention of them made them disappear or used as slogans by improper young artists, their attentions made all people to be in the one large group<sup>13</sup>.

Anyway, comparison of women in paintings in the past and present show that women position in Iranian painting have been changed so, researches, symbols, color styles, and drawing of personal mono face and influenced works of social-political and cultural works women have been changed. Art world need women and their thought, as presentation of women spiritually make calmness, and compensate many weaknesses or reduce by her presence. Women have deep romantic feeling which impose stronger scopes for painters. So, women take equal role and art development, as result of its cost. It imposes the presentation of woman in art creative scopes and new ones. It makes development. Then, art can include understanding and high development of views to society: basic growth of it in correct presentation of world and human in the world.



**Romantic works- Ghajar dynasty  
Master Hossein**



**Yusuf and Zoleikha- Hossein Behrad  
Ghajar Dynasty**

<sup>12</sup> Razavi, Seyed Ahmad. "Effects of contemporary art of Iran", contemporary art, N 2, Tehran, 1993, p 45

<sup>13</sup> Keihan Newspaper, N 19799, 2010, literacy and art, p 10



Mono figure (face)  
Master Mahmood Farshchian



Mono figure (face)  
Ghajar Dynasty



Happiness painting- Ghajar Dynasty



Kaveh Chelipa- contemporary Iranian artist



Իրանի հասարակական, քաղաքական և մշակութային զարգացումների պատմական ուսումնասիրությունը մատնանշում է այն փաստը, որ սոցիալական մեծ իրադարձությունները դրական և բացասական տարբեր ազդեցություններ են թողել կանանց դերի վրա: Այդ գործընթացի արդյունքում բազմաթիվ փոփոխություններ են տեղի ունեցել, ինչպես օրինակ մոդեռնիզմի մուտքը իր ցանկալի և անցանկալի կողմերով, գիտելիքի և մտքի փոխանակումն ամբողջ աշխարհի մասշտաբով, Սահմանադրական շարժումը, բռնապետական մոտեցումների նվազումը սոցիալ-քաղաքական և ընտանեկան-դաստիարակչական տարբեր շերտերում, սոցիալ-մշակութային հայացքների փոփոխությունն Իսլամական հեղափոխության արդյունքում, ինքնության վերականգնման փուլը, գլոբալիզացիայի նոր առանձնահատկությունները: Այս զարգացումներից յուրաքանչյուրը յուրովի է ազդել կնոջ դերի փոփոխության վրա: