



The Religious function of Sagha-Nefar Architecture in Mazandaran on the Qajar era

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ABSTRACT

The formation of Sagha-Nefars as places where religious events were held together, with the paintings on their ceilings, date back to the Qajar era. Accordingly, the images were influenced by the developments of this period, including the prevalence of tazieh in Iran. The emergence of Sagha-Nefars as a place to hold religious ceremonies took place in the Qajar era and the illustrations of the ceilings of these structures go back to the same period. This paper focuses on visual forms of tomb photo portraits of Muslim Martyrs embedded within the embodied social practices and material cultures, with specific reference to death and memorial. To this end, the question raised here concerns the relationship between the concepts behind Sagha-Nefar's Martyrs Memorial photo portraits and the visual culture of the people. As this study is qualitative in nature, the present study adopts a descriptive approach to content analysis. We begin by considering the significance of the tomb photo portraits in the shaping of memory and then move on to analyse the relationship between death, martyrdom and reminiscence through religious material culture. The existing different meanings in the images of Muslim Martyrs photo portraits are visual texts, the understanding of which comprises the theoretical arguments for conducting this research. The illustrations are, in effect, visual texts that convey a message to the audience. The key problem under study in this research is the why and how the Photo of the Martyr, their diverse themes, and their relationship with the religious identity of Sagha-Nefars in Mazandaran. Furthermore, the event of the representation of the Martyr as a living body, for instance, memorial sculpture and portraits, is a cultural translation that seeks to render invisible the material reality. In this context, the study's findings suggest that the use of photo portraits of the deceased, along with shrines, sanctuaries and funeral material cultures in Sagha-Nefars, functioned as forms of memory that simultaneously embodied both the individuals and their material representations, including the bodies of the Muslim martyrs.

INTRODUCTION

In the Qajar period, painting was a craft and a business actively pursued by artisans in most major towns in response to a general demand for figurative art. As to the themes depicted, these remained limited to (i) dynastic and epic (Qajar 'family portraits'; battles, hunts; Shahnameh scenes), (ii) sensual (flora, fauna, erotic), and (iii) religious (prophets, imams, 'olama) subjects. These subjects occurred in any type of building, irrespective of its function. The wide use of figurative representation in religious buildings and practice is of great interest. (Floor, 2005: 194)

The present research seeks to explore the themes and concepts underlying the images in Sagha Nefars, which were designed and illustrated in the Qajar era.

Furthermore, as the images were influenced by the events and developments of the time, including the prevalence of Tazieh in Iran, lithography was also applied to produce printed copies of literary works. With folk art and literature being extremely popular in this period, the researcher deemed it imperative to look into the aforesaid developments and their impact on the formation of these images.

Through focusing on the religious and ritual beliefs of the region from previous times to the present day, this paper provides a descriptive review of the artworks. Analyzing the reason for their content and deciphering the meaning of the underlying design of these images, thereby achieving a rational relationship between the meanings from previous to current times. The different symbols in the images of Sagha-Nefars are visual texts, the understanding of which comprises the theoretical arguments for conducting this research. The illustrations are, in effect, visual texts that convey a message to the audience. A word, whether written, visual, linguistic, or in the form of media, primarily creates concepts and exchanges, which serves the purpose of developing and exchanging ideas and views. Nevertheless, language does not suffice when it comes to transferring concepts since humans observe language as a referent and unearth the stages of perception correctly or incorrectly (Barthes, 1970, p. 26). The key problem under study in this research is the why and how of creating these works of art, their diverse themes, and their relationship with the identity of Mazandaran art during the Qajar reign.

Throughout the Qajar Dynasty and specifically during the Constitutional Revolution in Iran, art was changing in terms of form and style, thus becoming more aligned with the new ideals and thoughts of the people. Accordingly, a form of popular art known as teahouse painting and murals together with Naghali or reciting Ferdoassi's Shahnameh and the Tazieh as performed by mainstream populations was being formulated. The painting style of Sagha-Nefars was primarily extracted from folk tales and literature. Reference is also made to the literary works and themes which were illustrated during the Qajar era in Mazandaran, including Ferdoassi's Shahnameh, Ghessass-ol-Anbia (Stories of Prophets), Nezami's Khamseh (Quinary), Ghavami's Ajayebol-Makhlooghat (Outlandish Creatures), and folk tales.

DISCUSSION

Sagha-Nefars in Mazandaran (Structure and Function)

Nefar or Nepar is a supra-structure erected in an entirely open and elevated space in Mazandaran, which is at least one storey above the ground and mounted upon a square or rectangular base and is supported by wooden columns. Nefars are predominantly two-storey structures, with the lower storey being empty at times used to store food or keep livestock. The second floor, which is connected to the first floor through wooden or clay steps or a ladder, is used for resting during hot summer nights and safeguarding farms. The typology comprises khanefar, dashtinefar, and saghanefar (Youssefnia-Pasha, 2006, p. 64). A variant of this structure, which is plain and not decorated, is built on agricultural lands as the structure for looking after the produce. This specific variant is referred to as Sagha Nefar, and the guard or the shoopeh (meaning the one remaining awake at night) sits atop and creates a loud sound by beating a large bowl, thus preventing the entrance of intruding animals (Vafayi, 2002, p. 94).

The paintings have been designed with no chiaroscuro and in simple forms with realistic proportions; the colors of the plank and the image are separate from other images, and almost all of the space in each painting has been allocated to people and their bodies. The elements and themes which cover the ceiling and columns of Sagha-Nefars include the images of the slaying of Imam Hossein on his horse Zoljanah, Ali-Akbar, Zaynab, Shemr, Abolfazl, the battle of Ghassem with Arzagh from the Levant, Imam Hossein alongside the dead body of Ali-

Akbar, Om-Laylee alongside the dead body of Ali-Akbar, the battle of Mosslem with the people of Koofeh (Fig. 4), walking the captives of Karbala and pulling the dead bodies of the martyrs on the ground in the main square of Karbala, Imam Hossein with Ali-Asghar in his arms, Ali-Akbar together with Om-Laylee, Robab, and Ali-Asghar in his cradle (Fig. 6), masks, halos, and angels.

MEANINGS OF SAGHANEFAR

It may well be that the first part of the word – i.e., *sagha* – is derived from the Arabic word used in Farsi, meaning one who sells or gives water. In most *Sagha-Nefar*, a large oval dish is placed with water in it, inviting thirsty individuals to drink water while recalling the third Shiite Imam Hossein and his allies who were denied water in Karbala before being slain and thus express their condemnation of the slayers (which is a religious custom in Iran observed by believers when drinking water). This structure has various other names: *saghnefar*, *saghinefar*, *sakhnefar*, *sakhanefar*, *saghatelar*, and *saghatalar*. Bahrami states that the ancient name of this structure was *nepar* which comprises “*napa*” and “*ar*”; the former is an Avestan word rooted in the Vedic culture coming from the god of waters, which itself is a derivative of Rigveda’s *Apam napat* divinity with *napa* or *napat* meaning water and liquid. A similar word in modern Farsi is *naveh* meaning grandchild. “*Nap*” in *nepar* means water while “*ar*” is the clipped form of *avarandeh* meaning provider (Bahrami, 1992, p. 34).

THE SAGHA-NEFAR: STRUCTURE AND COMPONENTS

The *Sagha-Nefar* is a simple quadrilateral structure mounted upon wooden columns mostly built in two floors with a wooden ladder or staircase in the corner of the structure which would allow access to the upper floor. *Sagha-Nefars* were often erected adjacent to the *Tekieh* or a hall where religious mourning and elegy programs are held. The architectural structure of the *Sagha Nefars* was influenced by the indigenous architecture of northern Iran, particularly the Mazandaran period of building – as written on the wooden ceiling of the structure. It dates back to the Qajar era up to the end of Nasseredin Shah’s rule. Of course, it may well be possible that these buildings could enjoy an older history since the Shiite faith has very old roots in Mazandaran and that these buildings were destroyed by natural factors such as heavy rainfall and subsequently rebuilt. Each floor contained one room and, in high altitudes, were mostly built entirely out of wood with open spaces around them. These structures are erected upon a square and rectangular plan with a step connected to them. The roof design comprises four slopes just like the ones in the *Tekiehs*.

This totally wooden building contains six columns on the ground floor and 12 or 14 columns on the upper floor with its roof covered by ceramic and thatch (fig1). The wood applied in these structures is most often from a particular species of tree which grows in the lowlands of the Caspian Sea coasts. The wood of these trees is heavy, rigid, and somewhat durable. In some *Sagha-Nefars*, however, other materials such as bricks and stones are used for further strengthening or subsequent maintenance and renovation. In many cases, brick or stone façades are also used. The upper floor of *Sagha-Nefars* is where young boys and men aged between puberty and mid-life sit and drink only water and tea; children, women, and older men are denied access. Young people also use the *Sagha-Nefars* in the month of *Moharam* for mourning and commemorating Imam Hossein’s cousin *Abolfazl*, who was brutally slain in Karbala. Women are only allowed on the ground floor during specific religious occasions and festivities to prepare their votive offerings of special meals commemorating *Abolfazl*. Other than those days, a women’s entrance to any part of the *Sagha-Nefar* is considered highly inappropriate (Youssefnia-Pasha, 2006, p. 64).



Fig. 1. Shiyadeh Saghanefar (Babol city- 2008,09,25).

The Sagha Nefar is a simple quadrilateral structure influenced by northern Iran's indigenous architecture. Sagha-Nefars are used in the month of Moharam for mourning and commemorating Imam Hossein's cousin Abolfazl

The overall structure of the Sagha Nefars is in accordance with the following:

- The architectural structure of the Sagha Nefar is influenced by the indigenous architecture of northern Iran and Mazandaran in particular, and the date of their construction goes back to the Qajar era until the end of Nasseredin Shah's reign, as noted on their wooden ceilings.
- Decorated columns are spread around the structure, with the column-heads called koomachesar or sarshir placed in different rows. Furthermore, juncture crossings in the façade and decorative poles are the other structural specifications of these structures.
- Sagha -Nefars are built on top of column bases, which are rooted in the region's architecture.
- There are generally 12 or 14 columns on the upper floor of most Sagha-Nefars and six on the ground floor.
- One of the components decorated in almost all Sagha-Nefars are wooden column heads, which are commonly cut into a form resembling the mouth of a dragon, enabling connections between the horizontal and vertical poles of the structure.
- Sagha-Nefars are used for mourning the martyrdom of Imam Hossein and his allies. (Fig.3).
- These structures are used for votive offerings and prayers at other times.
- Almost all villages have a Sagha-Nefar exclusively for themselves, these have been left intact in certain regions while other villages have restored theirs. A uniform dye is applied over the structure, which puts a colored wash over the images.
- There are numerous images with diverse themes inside these structures and on their wooden ceilings.

THEMES OF THE SAGHA-NEFARS' IMAGES

The themes of the images used in saghatalars could be dichotomized into religious and non-religious images. Religious images comprise the images of the prophets and imams, historical religious events and paintings related to the afterlife and similar concepts. While non-religious images include mythical and epic designs, imaginary and geometrical images and also illustrations of plants and images pertaining to ancient texts such as Ferdoassi's Shahnameh, Kelileh and Demneh, etc. and also images of everyday life and people's livelihoods.

At the same time, calligraphy is observed in many structures of our country, such as altars for prayer imams, façades, and the peripheries of domes, calligraphy is prominently present in Sagha-Nefars. Calligraphy appears near the ceiling of Sagha-Nefars and circles around all the dimensions of the four corners of the structure, at times standing out alone and, at other times, in a mystical background of rhythmic and harmonic paisley. The calligraphies are often depictions of poetry, mainly in the colors of red and black. The calligrapher's name and the calligraphy's year are usually noted.

The paintings lack perspective, just like miniature illustrations. There is a tangible expressiveness in the faces; the artistic hyperbola, which is manifested in particular works, is also observed in the heavenly and diabolical faces.

The faces are portrayed showing an innocence and with circular halos around them. A number of painters who were regarded for depicting the faces of the sacred family of the Prophet would cover their faces with a white mask.

Generally speaking, the design methodology of the images of Sagha-Nefars in terms of the faces and the concepts is according to the following:

- The principal character of the event is ubiquitously portrayed larger than minor characters.
- The best and most significant space in the composition is allocated to the hero of the day.
- The composition of the paintings is straightforward and very simple.
- The painter would use specific visual conventions in portraits to emphasize the character's positive and/or negative aspects.

The attempts of the painter to reconstruct the scenes and display the external and internal specifications of individuals are strongly influenced by his advocacy for the benevolent characters. Thus, failure and belittlement are never traced on their faces.

A number of painters who were regarded for depicting the faces of the sacred family of the Prophet would cover their faces with a white mask, specific visual conventions in portraits of Ali-Assghar in his cradle, masks, halos, and angels.

In illustrating the characters, the painter would seek transparency and simplicity to impact their audience as much as possible and would often write the character's name alongside the image. The painter's patience, precision, verbosity, and perseverance in detailing the images are quite clear. They would more or less resort to techniques to make the image prominent and profound. However, being under the influence of religious conceptualization, the painter paid no attention to the rules and regulations.

Albeit the overwhelming majority of Sagha-Nefar painters had no official (academic) schooling, they knew where and how to use paints. While being cognizant of the elegies appearing in different taziehs, the painters were fully aware of all the historical rumors, tales

and narratives related to the events of Karbala. They thus benefited immensely from the folk culture and popular beliefs of the region in illustrating the images.

Adhering to narrating the events, albeit very important, did not deter the painter from imagination and fantasizing. The sacred faces of Imam Hossein and his allies were always covered, and the remaining characters – foes and friends – all had vivid faces. (Fig.7)

PAINTINGS WITH RELIGIOUS THEMES IN SAGHA-NEFARS

Ever since their emergence, religions have consistently played a positive and influential role in providing humankind with civil and social identity. If it is true that religions play a significant role in building human civilizations, one could argue that religion, as one of the key elements shaping human culture, has played a decisive role. In this sense, religious culture can encourage vitality, development, and the advancement of civilization. Religious identity, like identity itself, which is multi-dimensional is indeed a composite concept comprising different dimensions such as ideological issues, rites and rituals, and historical, social, and cultural matters (Zolfaghari, 2007, pp. 34-35). Portraiture, in its general sense, is common in all religions. Despite the fact that there is not much evidence due to religious restrictions on painting living organisms in the early days of Islam, the art of portraiture became prevalent among Islamic arts after several centuries. This specific art won a more prominent position among popular arts. Theatrical recitations of *Shahnameh* and *Pardeh-Khani* (literally, “reading off the screen/curtain”) were two reasons underlying the growing popularity of this art. Portraiture of the sacred and infallible, such as Imam Ali, Imam Hossein, Abbas, Ali-Akbar, and Ali-Assghar, benefited from the common traditions of the art of painting in this era.

In *Sagha-Nefar* paintings, the spaces are based on a detached division of the two-dimensional space of the image just like Iranian miniatures, since only through this procedure, can one consider each horizon of the two-dimensional space of a miniature as a manifestation of a level of existence and a level of wisdom and cognizance from another viewpoint. Hence, the space is per se the representation of the space of another world which is related to a form of awareness away from ordinary human awareness. With complete adherence to the concept of detached space, The Iranian miniature was able to transform the two-dimensional level of miniature into a representation of the levels of existence and promote the spectator to a superior position from the horizon of their ordinary life and material existence and daily conscience while making them realize a world beyond this physical life, the world which Islamic scholars and Iranians, in particular, have called the world of *khial* or fancifulness (Hosseini, 2003, p. 152). Regarding the concepts of meaning and form or truth and reality, whatever has come into existence in any way or envisaged by the human mind comprises two dimensions. This duality is caused by the existence of pairs of concepts and terms such as the body and the soul, the material and the spiritual, life and afterlife, and the advent and testifying that each of the aspects is associated with the other (Naghizadeh, 2005, p. 66). Some of the religious themes in *Sagha-Nefars* go back to pre-Islamic deities such as Mehr, Anahita, and Tishtar while others deal with Islamic beliefs, imams, and the events of Karbala. In effect, as noted earlier, the Qajar era witnessed the amalgamation of national identity with a return to ancient pre-Islamic trends. Religion alone plays a profound part in establishing the culture and traditions of many countries such that nationality is still considered as a significant factor in those states. The importance of nationality is actually on the rise in many countries and numerous foreign researchers stress the significance of religion in Iranian society. Graham Fuller believes: “If the Zoroastrian faith were considered as a significant agent in establishing national solidarity in pre-Islamic Iran, the Shiite faith played a phenomenal role in engendering national identity and that the Iranian identity has joined an inseparable bondage with the Shiite faith” (Goodarzi, 2005, p. 83). The majority of the commonalities in *Sagha-Nefar* paintings are to do with religious and national

themes; the former are mostly focused on the martyrdom of Imam Hossein and his allies in Karbala while the latter are mainly originating from the epics of Shahnameh from the 10th century AD. The paintings in the Sagha-Nefars just like those of teahouse paintings have been created based on the inevitable need to dramatize and eulogize the national and religious heroes of Iran; indeed, they are reflections of the endeavors of nations to revive and preserve national and religious heroes and be inspired by the scenes of their valiance. Pardeh-khani and Shahnameh reciting are two decisive reasons for the growth of this art mode which falls amongst folk art and grew under the influence of dramatic arts known as naghali or theatrical story narrating and also tazieh (Fig. 8). The conventional mode of painting included portraiture, painting people, and epic murals emerging in the Qajar era. The images are illustrated and painted in a simple and primitive manner with no observance of perspectives. Many of the paintings and literary texts have intertextuality. Iranian miniatures are nothing but intertextual proportions of images or texts. Narratives in paintings are not always but most often founded upon verbal narratives. Hundreds of paintings with a uniform theme of religious and mythical events have been produced throughout history. The ratio of many genres is referred to other texts (Ahmadi, 1992, p. 227). Most paintings in teahouses and Sagha-Nefars are extracted from literary and religious texts. Sagha-Nefars are used for mourning the martyrdom of Imam Hossein and his allies. Portraiture of the sacred and infallible such as Imam Ali, Imam Hossein, Abbas, Ali-Akbar, and Ali-Assghar benefited from the common traditions of the art of painting in its era.

Religious themes in Sagha-Nefars comprise images related to the mourning rituals of Karbala, popular religious beliefs regarding the afterlife, the rewards and punishments for good and evil deeds, angels, portraits of imams and the sacred infallible, Koranic stories, and religious sayings. A number of the images on the mourning of Karbala.

Generally speaking, the images of Sagha-Nefars with religious themes include:

- General religious themes of Karbala mourning rituals, beliefs of the public, Koranic stories, and the portraits of imams and prophets.
- In the Sagha-Nefar paintings, the images of the sacred, the infallible, and the clergy bear similarities with Iran's epic and mythical figures; this issue in turn is one of the features of folk art.
- Belief in the afterlife is vivid in many images.
- The other themes observed in these structures are about the rewards for the good and punishments for the evil. The angels with scrolls of good deeds and Satan with the scrolls of evil deeds represent reward and punishment, respectively.
- Heaven and Hell are discernible in Sagha-Nefar paintings through the depiction of punishing sinners and rewarding the good-doers.
- Religious beliefs and opinions play a major role in creating the images of Sagha-Nefars. A part of these beliefs are linked with the religious beliefs of the afterlife, punishment and reward, assessing good and evil deeds, and angels.
- Sagha-Nefars are structures related to water and many of the images and symbols illustrated in them are directly and indirectly displaying water and irrigation. There is an image in Sagha-Nefars called Malek Baran or the angel of rain (fig 14) – a creature with a human head and innumerable hands – which can be considered as the symbol of water.
- Koranic tales such as the ascent of Prophet Mohammad and the court of King Solomon are seen in most Sagha-Nefars.
- In tazieh, seeking shelter with Imam Hossein from the fear of a lion and the lion's bowing to the Imam has highlighted the role of this beast thus paving the ground for the introduction of the images of lions in Sagha-Nefars.

THE INCIDENT OF KARBALA AND ASHURA PAINTINGS

Religious painting is one of the most important genres in Persian pictorial traditions, and it is especially present in illustrated manuscripts and lithographed books. Although painting was practiced in Arab lands during the early years of Islam, figural imagery and especially religious sentiment as expressed in pictorial form flourished in Persian lands especially from the Safavid period onward. By the Qajar period (1785-1925), pious stories and religious painting became very popular, as evidenced by the many materials that have survived. (Gruber and Colby, 2010: 252)

The design methodology of images in Sagha-Nefars is among the rarest visual illustrations in Iran's historical-religious places. They have been created in an imaginary yet naturalistic and realistic, such as the image of Imam Hossein with the white halo and his blurred face behind a white mask, robustly riding his horse (Fig. 2). A roaring lion is by his side attacking the enemy. The lion is of course symbolic. There are angels flying around the Imam safeguarding him. His sword is sheathed, and he is calmly atop his horse as if he is readily embracing martyrdom.

Martyrdom of the allies of Imam Hossein

Sagha-Nefars are used for mourning the martyrdom of Imam Hossein and his allies. The images in Sagha-Nefars are naturalistic and realistic, such as the image of Imam Hossein with the white halo and his blurred face behind a white mask riding his horse robustly. In Karbala and during Ashoora, Imam Hossein's horse Zoljenah also played a significant role particularly the scene of the horse coming back from Karbala after the Imam's martyrdom which is one of the heartbreaking scenes of the event referred to in the literature and elegies on Imam Hossein.



Fig. 2 - Imam Hossein alongside Ali-Asghar (kebriakola shaghanefar - 2009,07,15)



Fig. 3 - the martyrdom of the allies of Imam Hossein. (kebriakola shaghanefar- 2009,07,15)



Fig. 4 - Imam Hossein in battle (Navaie saghanefar- 2009,11, 8)

The image of Imam Hossein with the white halo and his blurred face behind a white mask riding his horse Zoljanah robustly has been created in an imaginary yet naturalistic and realistic manner.

Another name for Sagha-Nefars is Abolfazli which again demonstrates the emphasis on water as Abolfazl was the one who lost his life trying to bring water for Imam Hossein in Karbala (Fig. 5). Young people also use -Sagha-Nefars in the month of Moharam for mourning and commemorating Imam Hossein's cousin Abolfazl who was brutally slain in Karbala.



Fig. 5- Abolfazl, while giving a bowl of water to Imam Hossein's allies (kebriakola Sagha-Nefar- - 2009,07,15).



Fig. 6- Ali-Assghar's cradle (kebriakola Shagha-nefar- 2009,07,15)



Fig. 7 - Imam Hossein and his allies (Hendo kola Sagha-Nefar- 2009,05, 15).

Since Sagha-Nefars are structures where mourning services are held for Imam Hossein and his martyred allies, the images illustrated there have a function beyond mere decoration and serve a religious purpose.



Fig. 8 - Yazid holding the spear with Imam Hossein's head on top of it (Navaie Sagha-Nefar 2009,11, 8)

PORTRAITS OF IMAMS AND THE SACRED

In Sagha-Nefar paintings, the images of the sacred, the infallible, and the clerics bear similarities with Iran's epic and mythical figures; this in its own right is one of the features of folk art. In addition to portraits, Sagha-Nefars are filled with paintings of the true owner of the structures, Abolfazl, and they are even nicknamed as Abolfazli (fig. 9).



Fig. 9- Abolfazl and the dervish (Navaie saghanefar- - 2009,11, 8)

People also use Sagha-Nefars in the month of Moharam for mourning and commemorating Imam Hossein's cousin Abolfazl who was brutally slain in Karbala. Sagha-Nefars are filled with paintings of the true owner of the structures – Abolfazl – and they are even nicknamed as Abolfazli Abolfazl, while giving a bowl of water to Imam Hossein's allies.

In these samples, the imams are represented in larger paintings compared to others with halo rings around their heads. Sheikh Eshragh expounds upon divine blessing or charisma, which are among the most fundamental components of his philosophies (particularly regarding the “illuminating human”) and details his philosophy of illumination. The light which has embraced the creations of Ahoora Mazda with a halo is the same light emitted from Heaven. This halo is the most pivotal indicator of the sacred and the infallible in portraits, on the one hand, and abstract geometric images, on the other. This could be the very first example of the presence of the illuminating human and his halo in Iranian painting; yet, the manifestation of the luminous halo was not specific to the sacred as it also appears in illustrations with abstract geometric designs (Bolkhari-Ghahi, 2005, p. 480). One observes repeatedly the halo around the imams and the infallible in Sagha-Nefars. A Lion is the symbol of Imam Ali, which he was given as a gift during the Prophet's ascent. In Tazieh, seeking shelter with Imam Hossein from the fear of a lion and the lion's bowing to the Imam has highlighted the role of this beast, thus paving the ground for the introduction of the images of lions in Sagha-Nefars.

Imam Ali with Imam Hassan and Imam Hossein, Imam Ali in battle are in Sagha-Nefar paintings. In these samples, the imams are represented in larger paintings compared to others with rings of halo around their heads. (Fig.10)



Fig. 10 - Imam Ali with Imam Hassan and Imam Hossein (Kardgar Sagha-Nefar- 2009 ,10,18)

ANGELS

In the Qajar era, the angels were illustrated in different styles, but a naturalistic style was common in almost all the images. A realistic atmosphere influenced by European art and 19th-century social improvements altered the most important characteristic of Iranian art: the imaginary world. (Lari, 2011: 252)

A number of these images with religious themes comprise illustrations of angels. These superhuman figures included the angel of the Islamic dress code, the angel owning land, the angel of rain, the angel of compassion, the angel of punishment, Esrafil, the angel of the trumpet, the angel with the scales of justice, the angel of the city of Lut, etc. The identity of

these images is often revealed with their names and titles alongside them. Another extended scope of religious images comprises an array of angels, the images of the ghosts which are rewarded or punished after death with their deeds weighed by the scales, the tormentuous fire of hell and the angels of punishment which are blackened and dark. At the same time, there are also images of heavenly blessings such as flowers, plants, and trees overwhelmed by diverse blossoms and fruit, the Kossar Pond and the Salsabila Fountain, which are reminiscent of the eternal memory of heaven. All these images contain messages and reflect the powerful dominion of rites and rituals on society. Generally, rites and rituals have played a significant role in the foundation of Iranian culture, civilization, and art in both ancient Iran with its Zoroastrian and Mazda faith as well as Islamic Iran.

PROPHET MOHAMMAD AND BORAGH

In the works of Iranian mystic poets, there are tales of the lives of certain celestial figures; naturally, it was very commonplace to have entirely religious figures illustrated in paintings, including Prophet Mohammad himself, as one such selection. The evident and overt case for representing celestial figures would be accentuated when the painter had no option but to resort to illustrating books such as Ghesassolanbia. (Fig. 11)



Fig. 11 - Prophet Mohammad atop his horse Boragh (Navaie Sagha-Nefar- 2009,11, 8).
Koranic tales such as the ascent of Prophet Mohammad and the court of King Solomon
are seen in most Sagha-Nefars.

AZRAEL AND ANGEL OF DEATH

The presence of the Angel of Death alongside the sick, the Angel of Death holding soil (Fig.12), the questioning of the dead by two special angels on the first night after interment, and the pond of water in Heaven (Kossar) are among the scenes which have been painted. The presence of the Angel of Death alongside the sick, the Angel of Death holding soil, and the questioning of the dead by two special angels on the first night after interment are among the scenes which have been painted. Superhuman figures included the angel Azrael known as the angel of death. The meaning of his name is "The Helper of God". The presence of the Angel of Death alongside the sick, the Angel of Death also holding soil. (Fig. 13)



Fig. 12- Imam Ali alongside the dead (kebriakola shaghanefar- - 2009,07,15).



Fig. 13 - the angel Azrael (kebriakola shaghanefar- - 2009,07,15).

THE ANGEL OF RAIN

Sagha-Nefars are structures related to water; many of the images and symbols illustrated in them, directly and indirectly, display water and irrigation. There is an image in Sagha-Nefars called Malek Baran or the angel of rain, a creature with a human head and innumerable hands, which can be considered the symbol of water. (Fig. 14)



Fig. 14 - The angel of rain (Ramenet saghanefar- - 2009,02, 25)

CONCLUSION

The prime purpose of erecting Sagha-Nefars is to host and accommodate mourning services for Imam Hossein and his allies and included tazieh performances, which reached its artistic climax during the reign of Nasseredin Shah. Tazieh held a prominent stance as a religious-ritualistic drama in the early days of the Qajar Dynasty. The 19th century was a period of traditional drama, and these performances achieved perfection in tazieh and maintained their existence in the court of the Qajar monarchs, especially Nasseredin Shah, through the support of the public at large. Drama with spoken words was apparently on the rise in Iran during Nasseredin Shah's reign with professional Shabikhans emerging. Indubitably, what the king observed in European theaters during his trips affected the work progress in the new trend of Tazieh and Shabikhani.

To this end, the existing images in Sagha-Nefars are regarded as a visual text, and the traces of the impact of tazieh texts are detected; at the same time, the thoughts and beliefs governing the society during the Qajar era would be revealed. Many images are pertinent to the portraits of the Qajar kings and the military men of the time.

Saghanefar paintings have been directly adopted from teahouse paintings, and as discussed earlier, the latter became commonplace in the Qajar era. This style of painting has its roots in popular Iranian painting, which emerged around the time of Westernization in the Safavid Dynasty but entered the painting environment of Iran as a serious wave during the last years of the Qajar reign. Amidst all this, the prime factor behind the emergence of epic and religious paintings was the ever-increasing promotion of Naghali and Shahnameh Khani in the teahouses which were mushrooming in number. Teahouses were frequented by all walks of life even those remaining from the nobles and aristocrats. In these teahouses, the hearts of most city dwellers were alive and beating in those days. Naghals were reciting the stories of Shahnameh for the customers. At the same time, the stories were inspiring the painters who were there most of the 24 hours recited and would paint religious and epic images on the walls of the teahouses.

The method of painting images in Sagha-Nefars is among the rarest methods in Iran's historical religious buildings, which was a combination of fantasy, naturalism, and realism, such as the image of Imam Hossein seated powerfully on his white horse in the midst of a battlefield with a white mask over his face and a halo around his head. A lion is roaring by his side and attacking the enemy. The lion was symbolic. There were angels around the Imam guarding him. The Imam's sword was sheathed as he sat on the saddle with composure as if embracing martyrdom.

The paintings are free from chiaroscuro and very simple in design, illustrated with subjective proportions; the colors are plain, and each image is distinct. The background is wooden, and most of the frames are allocated to human forms.

The existing religious images in Sagha-Nefars are all pertinent to Karbala and the imams and, of course, focused on Islamic themes. However, literary and mythical images are traceable in ancient literature and folk tales, which have been transferred orally from previous generations. Hence, these images could go back to pre-Islamic Iran.

The paintings lack perspective, just like miniature illustrations. There is tangible expressiveness in the faces; the artistic hyperbole which is manifest in certain works is also observed in the heavenly and diabolical faces.

The faces are portrayed in an innocent manner together with circular halos around them. A number of painters who were highly regarded for depicting the faces of the sacred family of the Prophet would cover their faces with a white mask.

Since Sagha-Nefars are structures where mourning services are held for Imam Hossein and his martyred allies, the images illustrated there have a function beyond mere decoration and serve a religious purpose. From a sociological standpoint, tazieh adopts its own specific form and structure with respect to the social, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of every region in Iran. The impact of the art of Shabih Khani and tazieh enjoys a unique stance in the region due to the social structure and fabric and the rites and rituals of the community together with local and indigenous customs and traditions. especially considering a part of the realm of the institution of religion – which is among the divine-social institutions – is clearly observable in Sagha-Nefars and their images. Sagha-Nefars were built in cities as a forum where the masses could conglomerate for national and religious morale boosting. The space in Sagha-Nefars was consistently overwhelmed by profound religious beliefs the heroic and epic behaviors of mythical, national, and religious heroes and the valiant men of the country. Furthermore, a review of the images of these structures demonstrates that many of the myths, rooted in the beliefs of the people of the region have been painted in the Sagha-Nefars.

Integration of myths or, in simpler terms, mixing elements of different myths with the popular culture to create and develop images which the public likes is a method employed by painters of Sagha-Nefars. This integration is often inseparable from recreating the myths, and one of the significant issues is that ancient myths have been combined with Islamic myths and archetypes. One of the most pivotal mythic integrations used frequently in Sagha-Nefars is the character of Rostam and his heroic feats, according to Shahnameh.

Many literary themes have been illustrated, including mythic, lyrical poetry, heroic, and folk stories, all of which have archetypes and myths that bear considerable stances. These literary texts which pertain to popular culture but also fall within the domain of anthropology and sociology. All oral texts – be they within popular culture or ethnologic texts – are, in one way or another, dependent upon divine literature. Deciphering the mysteries and secrets behind epic stories, which constitute the mysterious adventures of the hero and battles with dragons or an abysmal fall to hell or a death which is followed by a miraculous resurrection, are all examples of archetypal contexts vividly observable in the themes underlying the images in the Sagha-Nefars.

Following the analysis of the literary themes illustrated in Sagha Nefars, the noteworthy point is that many of the themes are related to the texts narrated in taziehs and Shabih Khanis and compatible with the trends of the masses. Ultimately, the images of Sagha-Nefars can be regarded as being congruous with the Qajar era's religion, literature, and popular culture. These images originate from the texts of tazieh, teahouse paintings, and the lithographed books of the Qajar years and constitute the archetypes and myths underlying the beliefs of the region's people.

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السياق الوظيفي الديني لعمارة السقايات في مازندران إبان العصر القاجاري

الملخص

قامت منشآت "سقانفار" (أي أحواض السقيا أو السقايات) التي تعود إلى العصر القاجاري في بعض الفترات بوظائف دينية خاصة الجنائزية منها. ومن نتائج ذلك التوظيف وجود لوحات مرسومة على أسقف السقايات. حيث عكست تصاوير تلك اللوحات أحداث وتطورات تلك الفترة المعنية باستخدامها في الأغراض الجنائزية، ومنها انتشار التعزية في بلاد إيران. وتعود الرسوم الموجودة على أسقف هذه السقايات إلى نفس عصر المباني وهو العصر القاجاري. وتركز هذه الورقة البحثية على البعد البصري في دراسة رسوم شهداء المسلمين الموجودة ضمن سياق الممارسات الاجتماعية والمادية، مع إشارة خاصة إلى الموت وقدسيتها. ومن ثم فإن الدراسة تطرح سؤالاً بغرض فهم العلاقة بين المعاني الكامنة وراء صور شهداء السقايات ودلالاتها التي يستقبلها الناس في سياق الثقافة البصرية. وحيث أن هذه الدراسة ذات طبيعة نوعية، فإنها تعتمد على منهج وصفي وتحليلي معاً لمحتوى الرسوم محل الدراسة. فتبدأ الدراسة بتوضيح أهمية صور الشهداء في تشكيل الذاكرة، ثم تعرج إلى تحليل العلاقة بين الموت، والشهادة، والخلود من خلال الثقافة الدينية والمادية. ومن مرتكزات البحث توضيح المعاني المختلفة الموجودة في صور شهداء المسلمين في سياق بصري كرسائل يراد توصيلها. حيث يمكن ترجمة الرسوم في الواقع إلى نصوص في شكل صور بصرية تحمل رسالة إلى الرائي. ويناقش البحث في هذا الإطار أسباب وكيفية ظهور صور الشهداء، وموضوعاتها المتنوعة، ولاقتها بالهوية الدينية للسقايات في مازندران. كذلك يفسر حدث تمثيل الشهيد كجسد حي، وربطها بالتمثيل التذكارية والصور، كونها تعبيراً ثقافياً يأتي في إطار تجاهل الواقع المادي. في هذا السياق، تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أن استخدام صور الشهداء، جنباً إلى جنب مع الأضرحة، المقدرات، والثقافة المادية الجنائزية في السقايات، شكلت صوراً تعكس مخزون الذاكرة تجاهها، وتتسق في الوقت نفسه وثقافة الأفراد وتمثيلاتهم المادية، بما في ذلك أجساد شهداء المسلمين.

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صور الشهداء؛ السقايات؛
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