

The Manifestation of Female Musicians in the Paintings of Qajar Era

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Abstract: *Iran's painting has undergone great changes during various historical eras, affected by various social, political, religious, economic and cultural factors, kings' tastes and the orders of art-lover clients, and interaction with the Far East and the West. In this paper, we will study the features of the image of female musicians in the Qajar paintings, based on the works remaining from this era. In the paintings before the Qajar era, women often had a mythical position and were depicted in a non-naturalistic design, and were of visual value like the other elements of the picture. But in the late Safavid era and with the onset of Qajar rule, the freedoms created for women at society led to many changes in the paintings of women; one of which was drawing their portraits and ultimately women's activities in that era. Meantime, the desire to experience the modern world encouraged arts such as playing music among women in the community, emerging as the phenomenon of female musicians in the context of the artistic community of that era. Certainly, with the emergence of female musicians, the appearance of these women in the paintings of this period seems certain. In the present study, which is a historical, descriptive and analytical research on the image of female musicians in Qajar paintings, it is attempted to study the characteristics of women images during Qajar era. To this aim, the female musician's images are investigated visually and examined from different aspects such as dressing and cover, veil, action, gesture and figure.*

Keywords: *Female Musicians, Musical Instruments, Qajar Era, Miniature, Painting, History, Portraiture.*

INTRODUCTION

Qajar art refers to the art, architecture, and all the works of art at the time of Qajar Dynasty, which ruled over Iran from around 1160 AH (1781 AD) to 1304 AH (1925 AD). The boom of artistic work in Iran was one of the positive effects of the relative peace in the country during the reign of Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar and his descendants. Historically, with his reign, the turmoil around Iran was rapidly controlled and the arts found the opportunity for flourishing. More specifically, the peace and tranquility of the country and the experienced proximity with West and western art in the Iranian society and art circles began in the middle of the Qajar era. The rule of Fathali Shah and Mohammed Shah were the beginning of an extensive import of European goods to Iran, including paintings and artwork. During the time of Naser al-Din Shah, this import from the West continued, and the king went to several journeys to the western countries. At the same time, foreign tourists also visited Middle Eastern countries to visit and experience what was called the mysterious East, and the cultural ties between the Iranian society and its elites with European countries increased

(Tajbakhsh, 2001). These extended communications led to the exchange of tradition and culture between the two sides of the earth and values such as freedom of women traveled from the West to the East, which is clearly visible in paintings of that period. Before this cultural exchange, it is observed that women were faced with injustice and contempt throughout history, and were continually being kept away from society. According to the European historians and journalists, at the beginning of the Qajar era, women did not have any role in society and could not demonstrate their will and opinion. With the onset of the modernization in Iran, first changes occurred in the appearance of individuals and then in their thoughts and opinions. Women also demanded a better life and presence in the community as men. In the meantime, works of art and painting were also affected by this process of modernization and changes, and the presence of women became more visible in the art works and beautiful and eye-catching works appeared. The beauty of the works created in this period is such that today some contemporary Iranian artists are influenced by the aesthetics of Qajar in the framework of neo-traditionalism. Among them are Monir Shahroudi, Farman Farmian, Shadi Ghadirian, Aydin Aghdashloo, Bahman Jalali, Ahmad Mirzazadeh, Ladan Borujerdi, and Siamak Filizadeh. On the other hand, in the field of painting, the Qajar painting school refers to paintings started in the Zandieh dynasty and lasted until the Qajar era and shortly thereafter. This style has a special status as a coherent style in Iranian painting, which has all the thematic and functional features of a painting school. This school was created by combining the features of traditional Iranian art with elements of European painting. Although there were works close to this method since the Safavid era in Iran, were called "westernization", but it was developed as a definite form during the Zandieh era and later in the Qajar era (Goodarzi, 2005). During this period, the art of painting was more dependent on the court, and the kings and princes were the most important customers of art and the only art supporters. On the other hand, music is one of the arts that the Iranian people have got accustomed to its presence in their everyday lives throughout years, and gradually appropriated it and greatly appreciated the forms that they were fond of. In addition to the ordinary people, this art has always been at the court of the kings of different dynasties in Iran, from pre-Islamic to the early 20th century. The kings and princes of Iran always employed the best musicians and singers, and supported them. In the Qajar court, the kings continued the manner of their predecessors, making music an inseparable part of the royal life, and this art was valued in their court. In this way, music was played not only in official celebrations, but also in their everyday lives, they did not stop it even when they were sleeping, eating and riding. Among the kings whose peace and comfort of life depended on listening to poetry and music, was the founder of the Qajar dynasty, Agha Mohammad Khan, who used to listen to a narrator reading Shahnameh at the time of sleep and, as it was written in Ezdi history, he played Dutar when he was in a good mood (Pakbaz, 1999). There is a similar narrative about Nasir al-Din Shah, that his bedroom had four entries, one of which was open to the musician's room, and he used to listen to the music while he was sleeping. Considering what has been said, the Qajar period should be considered as a turning point in the history of Iranian music, as during this period music reappears like other arts, and finds a special place in the court of Qajar kings like Fath Ali Shah and especially in the court of Nasir al-Din Shah (Dehqan, 2013). In this era, apart from the male musicians, music was also played by women in king's feasts, therefore it can be expected that in the paintings of Qajar period these female musicians are portrayed. Regarding the lack of studies in this regard, the present paper will look at some of the paintings with female musicians from Qajar period.

Research Method

The present research is descriptive-analytical and data are collected using library references. On the other hand, the data analysis method is qualitative and the statistical society required for analysis includes images selected from paintings and miniatures of the Qajar era, which has a direct inference to female musicians in this period.

Music and Paintings in the Qajar era

The Qajar kings continued their ancestors' attention to music as an element of royal life, and this art was highly valued in their court. Music was not only played at official celebrations and parties, but also in their everyday lives, so when sleeping, eating and riding they would listen to music (Prince of Assad-Dawlah, 1996). In the time of Naser-al-Din Shah Qajar, the fourth person from the Qajar dynasty (from 1264 to 1314 AH), the court music, or the feast music, became very popular. In addition to the music that male musicians played, another type of music was also being developed and spread by women. The female musicians played on some occasions and day that were divided into two categories: ceremonies for religious mourning and rituals, and the celebrations and feasts for commemoration of historical occasions. These groups of musicians usually consisted of several members, each of whom was responsible for a specific instrument. Among the historical documents, in Ezdi History two groups of female musician have been mentioned, each containing about fifty musicians equipped with all kinds of instruments such as Tar, Setar, Kamanche, Santur, drummer, singer, and dancer, and a leader called master. According to the text, the female masters in these two bands were named Master Mina and Master Zohreh, both of whom were considered unique music scholars, according to Ezdi. Master Mina and Master Zohreh studied music with Sohrab Armani Isfahani and Rostam Yahudi Shirazi, respectively and had to teach music to other female musicians after learning (Prince of Assad-Dawlah, 1996).

On the other hand, painting in the Qajar era undergoes a fundamental change. Among the most unusual features and innovations during the Qajar era, we can point out images of women that could not be seen before this period. In a highly traditional society, painting the women with a relatively less coverage than women's typical clothing of that time seems strange in Iranian society. For example, the typical cover of women in the society during the Qajar era was Chador that is contradictory with paintings of that period. In this period, painters such as Mohammad Shirin-Negar, Ismaeel Jalaier and Mehr Ali attempted more to draw women's paintings. Ismaeel Jalaier was an innovative painter and calligrapher of the second half of the thirteenth century (AH), who mostly did portraiture and religious painting. Among his works include the portraiture of Ali, Hasan, Hossein and Qajar women around samovar. There are some combination works of Ismaeel Jalaier in calligraphy, which represent a major development in the traditional Golzar calligraphy and the basis for the modern movement of Iranian calligram and calligraphy. On the other hand, Mohammad Shirin Negar, a painter of the thirteenth century who belongs to the Qajar Royal Portraiture painting school, has painted women mostly, such as dancing women. In addition to these, there are several works of women of Shah's harem that are similar to the works of Mehr'Ali (Museum of Negarestan, Tehran). All these paintings show the social status of women in different periods of the Qajar era (Jafari, 2003; Aghdashloo, 1992).

Female musicians in Qajar paintings

The historical records of the Qajar era show that the growth of traveling European delegations to Iran, the occurrence of various political and social movements such as the tobacco movement and the constitution movement, the growth of the press, schools and the resulting wave of modernization consequently increased the awareness in the society especially among women. For example, it can be said about the usual women's clothing in this age, that during this period, women's dress was somewhat simple and did not differ much from men's costumes. Generally, women wore tight dresses made of cotton and silk fabric, which was open in the front tightened under the throat with a button or ribbon. Like men, they wore loose pants with a fairly loose skirt on it long below the knee and the lower part of pants could be seen. Women pants were loose and striped. They were usually covered in a big black or violet Chador outside the house, wearing Chaghchur on the feet, and a white veil to cover the face with two holes or nets in front of the eyes. The advent of female musician was along the changes in the social coverage of women. As in the photographs of that time, we can see women with scarves and tents, as well as girls without hijab dressed like Europeans. These photos show the evolving society of the Qajar era and represent changes in the cultural and artistic aspects of society. On

the other hand, the increased awareness among the women in society has led to changes in their demands that also involved music and led to the emergence of a phenomenon called modern music among women of the Qajar era. There are several instances in the documents remained. As an example, there is an Iranian oil painting in the Victoria and Albert Museum of England, dating back to nearly two centuries ago and was purchased in the year 1876 from the Qajar court, which depicts a woman playing Tar in the harem of Fath Ali Shah Qajar. However, this is just one example of the paintings left from the Qajar era, and it is believed that the walls of Fath Ali Shah Qajar Palace were usually decorated with similar paintings.

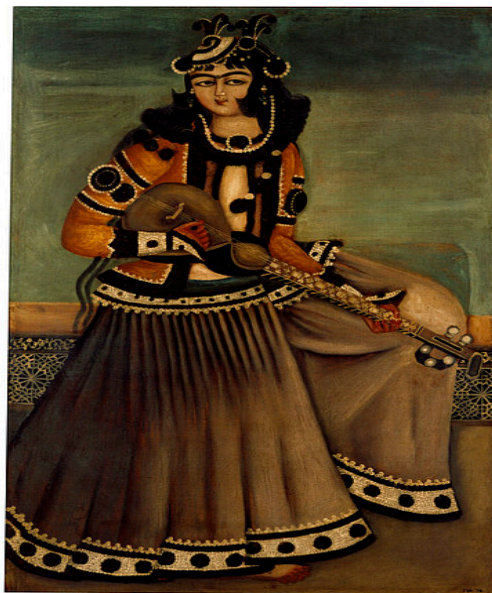


Figure 1. Oil painting from the Persian female musician of the Qajar era, currently at the Victoria and Albert Museum of England.

In the paintings of the Qajar era, the portraiture of the court represent the culmination of combining Iranian and European painting traditions in a refined and magnificent format. In this period, the painting school cultivates the methods of naturalism, abstraction and decoration which are brilliantly matched together. In this school, the human body is important, but due to using idealization, similarity is always sacrificed for the metaphorical beauty covenants and apparent glory and dignity. The female musician image is also an example of this style of painting in the Qajar era. In the paintings of the late Fath Ali Shah and Mohammad Shah, some of these women have been portrayed in such a way that the artistic status and apparent dignity are dominant in the painting. In the catalog, out of 63 images 11 images are illustrating dancers, musicians and court acrobats. Ezdi descriptions of the dress and accessories of women in these images clearly show that the musicians and dancers wore belts and calottes decorated with jewels, original necklaces and earrings, all of which can be seen in the pictures of the catalog (Mo'ayer al-Mamalek, 2011). The following figure depicts a gouache painting belonging to the early decades of the Qajar era, which depicts the dance and play of the harem women with Tar, Def, and Timpany. Today, this Iranian artwork is held at the National Museum of Poland in Warsaw.

Figure 2. Gouache painting of the dance and play of the harem women with Tar, Def, and Timpany at Qajar era.

In most of the paintings of by the female musicians of the Qajar era, the musicians are against a door or window with curtains pulled to the sides. Apparently, these women with an oval face, unibrows, kohled eyes and Henna colored fingers playing a musical instrument. They are all pictured in beautiful clothes, pearls and embellishments carrying traditional musical instruments of that period, such as Tar, Sehtar, Kamanche and Santur (as shown in Fig. 3). Generally speaking, in these paintings, people are introduced through objects and there is no attempt to show their psychological characteristics. Other objects such as carafe and cup, fruit, pot, and in some cases, pets fill the two-dimensional space of the image with a background of natural landscape or Qajar architecture. Figure 4 shows a typical example of such paintings (Pakbaz, 2006). In the following, in order to examine the details of these paintings, clothing, hijab, actions, and, finally, gesture and figures of female musicians in Qajar paintings are examined.

Figure 3: A female musician's dress, and a one-sided curtain in the background

Figure 4. Insignificant objects such as carafe, glass, pot, cat beside the female musician in Qajar era

4.1. The women's clothing depicted in most of the Qajar paintings is the new form of clothes in Qajar era. In the paintings remained from that time, the female musicians have fit toppings and tight coats with short horned skirts called Shaliteh. In some images, the women wore loose pants under the skirts, which in some cases are added long or short socks which indicate that this type of clothing had been popular among female musicians. The sleeves of their dresses have a lot of creases, which are similar to the cloth of other women at Qajar era, however the coats were more a masculine clothing, which is somehow indicative of their desire for more social participation and being considered at the same place and status of the men. In Figure 5, which represents a banquet with the presence of female musicians in the Qajar era, some instances of clothing of these women are provided.

Figure 5. Female musicians' clothes in a Qajar feast

Veil of female musicians in Qajar paintings

Considering that the art of playing music was more common among the intellectuals and Westerners of the Qajar era, the female musicians in most of the painted pictures are portrayed without any veil, even if the

head is covered, a part of hair is displayed. In some cases, the head cover of female musicians is composed of decorative flowers or crowns, in which the hair is made, and some hair strings are adorned around the face. However among the examined cases, there are also a limited number of works, in which women wore chador and play a musical instrument in female gatherings. This kind of painting can indicate the presence of female musicians among ordinary and non-royal people, and be a sign of social development in terms of musical art in this period. Pictures 6 to 7 depict the conventional clothing explained in this section.

Figure 6: A portraiture of female musician with flower crown on head in Qajar era

Figure 7. Female musicians with conventional veil in a women's feast in Qajar era

The actions of female musicians in Qajar paintings

The female musicians depicted in Qajar drawings are usually working with a musical instrument and are 'active' in addition to paying attention to their surroundings. They also look outside the frame of the painting in some cases. Some women are dancing in these paintings, which illustrate the usual customs of the courts and ordinary people. By examining more precisely the illustrated female musicians, it can be seen some

musical instruments has been dominant in that era, including Tar, Sehtar, Kamanche, Def and Santur. In the following, there are instances showing these musical instruments used by female musicians.

Figure 8. Qajar female musician playing Def

Figure 9. Qajar female musician playing Sehtar

Figure 10. Qajar female musician playing Tonbak

Figure 11. A part of a painting from the Qajar period, women playing Santur

Gestures and figures of female musicians in Qajar paintings

Female musicians in Qajar paintings are the main subjects of portraiture and are usually in roofed spaces, which are depicted with interior decorations such as chairs, tables, beautiful curtains, and furniture that seem Western. In these paintings, in addition to musical instruments, the cup is also one of the most common elements, pointing at drinking by the court women and musicians. In general, in these pictures, most women are in two positions: 1. playing a musical instrument; or 2. dancing, usually with a lot of jewels posing complete face. In some cases, musicians are seen in groups that mostly represent a royal feast in which some women are playing music and others are dancing (Figures 12 and 13).

Figure 12. A woman dancing in a feast in Qajar court

Figure 13. Women's feast and the presence of female musicians in Qajar era

Conclusion

Relations with the West during the Qajar era nurtured distinctive cultural and artistic relations in Iranian society. Music was one of the phenomena that was welcomed by the Qajar court and music education grew under the support of the court and even won a position among some women. In the present study, we examined the representation of music between female musicians and the image of these women depicted in Qajar paintings. A review of several paintings on female musicians during the Qajar era showed that most of

these musicians are depicted with similar features such as an oval face, unibrows, kohed eyes and Henna colored fingers that are playing a musical instrument. Besides, other factors such as the veil of female musicians were studied, as most of these women were painted with western clothing and without a head covering. However, there are some other paintings that show music influences even among women wearing veils and chador. Therefore, one can consider the artistic scene depicted in the paintings as an indication of movement towards artistic and cultural maturity of the women of Qajar era, when the art flourished.

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