

The Connection between Wisdom (*Al- hikmah*) and art

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According to Islamic culture, wisdom has profound meaning addressing the esoteric aspect of things and is connected to art. In other words, beside the external aspect, everything consisting of depth and esoteric aspect can be considered as *hikmah*. As a result, holy Quran mentioned that: “whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given great boon.” In religious terminology “wisdom” is synonym to the words like “insight (*Al- basirah*), illumination (*Al- nouraniah*), knowledge (*Al- elm*) and has a narrative sense as well. Moreover, in Islamic culture, we call a person as “sage” (*al- hakim*) that knows the interior truth of universe.

The connection between wisdom and art would be revealed through the interpretation of Islamic art, which considers Islamic art as a symbolic, mysterious and abstract art. In this sense, works of Islamic art are not defined by their appearance and literal aspect, rather the aim of Muslim artists is to show a deep connection with four elements: 1- depth 2- mystery 3- symbol 4- esoteric interpretation. When we consider the depth in meaning or esoteric aspects for a work of art we can see it as something consisting of *hikmah* and mystical aspects. As it is mentioned about holy Quran that it has esoteric aspect and deep meaning; in addition to the apparent literal aspects, each verse of Quran have [hidden] truth and subtleties of wisdom. Thus, it is narrated that in each verse exists "seven or seventy esoteric aspects". Holy Quran is a dominant model of a profound and mystical text descended by God. As a result of Quran's profound and esoteric meaning, it needs to be interpreted.

Those researchers who believe in the theory of "wisdom of Islamic art" think that Islamic art is full of profound and esoteric meanings and the Muslim artist have been trying to represent those meanings. As a result of the mystical and religious bases, and not the Islamic legal prohibitions, Muslim artists have never intend to paint the material world, rather they have been trying to picture the esoteric aspects of things and the metaphysical worlds. So, the researchers study applying the factors like dome, arch, minaret, two dimension miniature, arabesque, and geometric scripts for mystical representation of the supreme reasons which are accepted by Muslim artists.

According to the thoughts of this kind of art researchers, mystery and symbol are the second elements of Islamic art. Whenever something has profound aspects, with no doubts, it consists of mystery. Notifying the mystery, Muslim artists apply symbols in their works of art. And this is the very reason that religious art is full of symbols. In order to reveal their aim in painting the metaphysical world, the Muslim artists use the [mystical] motifs of roundel (*shamseh*), lion, seven paradise (*haftbehesht*), kufic, Bannai and geometric scripts. Likewise, researching into the literature and the mystical poems of Islamic poets reveals that they believe in the existence of a depth and esoteric aspect for the world as well. So, their poems were full of symbols and mysteries to express about the heavenly kingdom and sacred world. Thus, words, letters and literary devices are the tools for explaining the truths which they have seen by divine vision. Nevertheless, sometimes, they themselves do not prefer to use the symbols and see them as obstacles for others to see the truth as Rumi said in his poem: Oh, my Eternal Lord (he is speaking to God) even composing poems or all rhymes and rhythms in poetry make me sick to death (because they are not capable of revealing the truth). (Izad Gashsb, 1999,

49) Or else, he complains about composing poem and using symbols as the only way of expressing about the heavens: Do not guess I'm composing poem willingly, if I were conscious I wouldn't say any words. (Rumi, 1996, 1727no.)

Therefore, the mystical nature of the word affected the artist to benefit from art as a tool and use word, image, script, music etc. to represent the divine world, and meanwhile, they regret that their audiences cannot see the truths directly: if the world of beings were able to speak, she would disclose realities that manifest themselves within it.

The forth element attracting Muslim artists is esoteric interpretation; wherever there is an esoteric aspect and the artist applies symbols to express the mysteries and secrets, naturally we need esoteric interpretation of them. Esoteric interpretation always follows the esoteric aspect. As in holy Quran the firms in knowledge (*Al- Rasekhoon fil e'lm*) are the ones who have the ability of esoteric interpreting. One of the instances of these people is Khidr in the Quran's allegory of Prophet Moses and Khidr. In this story, he was symbolized as a figure possessing great wisdom and is capable of esoteric interpretation of the inward world. Conclusively, accepting the existence of the elements of depth, mystery, secret and symbol we inevitably need the element of esoteric interpretation.

Today, the two methods of semantic and hermeneutic are used for interpreting a work of art; in semantic, one interprets the statement or work of art without paying attention to its context. While in method of hermeneutic, esoteric interpretation or unveiling of the veiled (*Kashf-ul-Mahjoob*), the context is considered, especially when the work of art has esoteric aspects; because

perceiving those circumstances helps us to have a better understanding of that work of art. Accordingly, in the hermeneutic interpretation of a work of art, one should pay attention to the factors like symbol (sign or message), interpreter and the audience. As scholars like Gadamer believe that in order to have an exact understanding of a work of art we should pay attention to its historical background. Also we need interpretation especially in humanities to have a better perception of a work of art, because unlike the natural sciences, the field of humanities is not based on straight experimental evidences.

According to philosophical interpretation of Islamic art, we need to interpret the factors through hermeneutic interpreting a work of art. Those who believe the esoteric aspects in Islamic art hold that we should deal with all religious and intellectual factors assisting us to interpret the works of Islamic art. On one hand, instead of material world, Muslim artists have seen the divine heaven as the original and real world. And on the other, they've never intended to paint the material world which in their view is the inferior world. So understanding the Islamic art requires the exact description of Muslim artists' thoughts, the symbols applied in their works of art, the era or even the government, e.g. Safavid Shia government, in which that work was created. A correct interpretation of these entire contexts interfering in creation of a work of art better as well as interpreting religious and mystical thoughts of Muslims would be influential to understand that work. As no one can neglect the mental bases, backgrounds and presuppositions of Muslim artist to understand the Islamic art. As, interpreting the Byzantium, Roman and Sassanid works of art would never be valid without paying attention to their principle of composition or *context principles*.

Since considering the whole circumstances of a work of art in a hermeneutic approach, help us to have an exact understanding of that work of art. Based on this approach, Muslim artists does not tend to Naturalistic art- whether it is because of prohibition of drawing the image of human and animal in Islam or the common mystical and spiritual ritual of the time – this would make them more eager to paint the metaphysical world, therefore, they'd prefer to draw the metaphysical and abstract art as well as two dimension In miniatures. Muslim artists wouldn't like to draw the three dimensional material world, but the two dimension magical realm. Also their intention to draw arabesque shows their belief to monotheistic and absolute unity of God rather than ascribing partner to God or idol worshipping.

The connection between symbol and meaning

The literal meaning of symbol is sign, code and secret. As an expression symbol means the act or art of using signs and the principles of applying mysteries or cods to explain an idea or remind an event.

However, some researchers do not think “sign” as an exact meaning for symbol, though in pictorial arts these two words are used interchangeable. Symbolism is a literal style in which thoughts, images or descriptions are signified by symbol. For example, in Persian literature the tree of cedar is applied as the symbol of a tall person or rose as the symbol of a bright face or moon as a symbol of a beautiful person. Some researchers consider the gods or goddess of ancient culture as symbol of God’s power and greatness, natural forces or important historical events. It is necessary to mention that in the late 19th century a literal movement entitled symbolism was founded and a group of poets at that time was trying to

explain the inherent and systematic analogies between human mind and objects of outer world, so they considered symbols for the objects and elaborate human's thoughts and feelings by them. Charles Baudelaire was one of the pioneers in symbolic movement in literature. He was one of the followers of "art for art's sake" theory and through this new approach he founded new styles and affected the world of literature by his poetic work of "flowers of evil". He resembled the world to a jungle full of symbols and signs. A world in which People can not recognize the hidden truth and this is the poet who is capable of perceiving it through her potentials and interpreting the symbols. (Poornamdarian, 1996, 267-270)

According to the rhetoricians, sign, mystery or symbol is as the same as using vehicle and the intention of tenor. For instance, in Persian literature, the term "cage" is applied as the natural world. And in this characteristic, symbol has similarities with metaphor. However, the distinction between metaphor and symbol is that symbol signifies several meanings for vehicle, every meaning that comes to the mind of the readers, while metaphor signifies only a single meaning. For example showing a dome in a movie signifies both Islamic civilization and Muslim ritual architecture i.e. mosques or an Islamic city. Indeed, dome is the symbol of all above. But when a courage person is called as lion metaphorically (in Persian literature), here the concept of the symbol of "lion" is limited in a wild animal living in jungle and all the other meanings of that word wouldn't be signified. Furthermore, in metaphor applying a word in other senses needs a clear paired subject which signifies them. In contrast, symbol is perceived in its own sense and being acquainted with Islamic culture, would need no paired subject. (Shamisa, 1992, 189) Thus, it is held that the artists and scholars extract

symbols or signs from the cultural backgrounds which they are applied in. therefore, in order to know the signs one should know the culture in which the sign is created in.

In discussing literature, however, symbol is applied to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies a meaning or concept beyond it for spectators. First, symbols are “conventional” or “public”: e.g. “the scale” is a term that signifies justice, pigeon is the symbol of peace, cross is the symbol of Jesus, and dome and *Ka'bah* are the symbols of Islamic civilization. Second, many poets use “private” or “personal” symbols often they do so by exploiting widely shared association between an object or event and a particular concept, and this shows their creativity. It is clear that, to understand private symbols, the audience should be acquainted with the artist’s language. For example Rumi applied the symbol of “sun” to signify Shams Tabrizi in his poems. So, symbols would be only perceived by understanding metaphysical principles, sacred knowledge and through the semiotics and literature of nations in which the symbols remains sensible. Surveying the nations' literature and comparing issue, one can reveal the common spirit of signs in nations consisting inward unity. (Coomaraswamy, 1977, 330)

Symbols make transmission of meaning easier; the hardness and complexity of a concept is simply understood by using a symbol. So, works of art like movies apply symbols to transfer meanings to the audiences' mind, rather than showing the communicate meanings by themselves which cost the producers a lot. (Schuon, 1963, 180) For example, in *Apocalypto* movie, in order to show the contrast of two eras, Mel Gibson displayed first a time of bloodshed and violence for some

primitive tribes and for the rest of the movie; he tried to picture the tribes' challenges. And, finally at the end of the movie he applied a symbol to signify peace and the end of that time of bloodshed and violence and the fights between primitive tribes. In the last scene, he displayed a boat carrying a cross to indicate the peace dominating the world. In fact, in order to show the two sides of contrast, the whole time of his movie was dedicated to the one side of violence and viciousness, but only the last scene was specified to the other side which is peace. The cross within the boat was a qualified symbol against all those opposing concepts of violence and viciousness and the movie finished by this very scene.

In conclusion, Symbols have significant status in art; they are known as one of the best tools for transferring concepts in works of art. As the technique of applying symbols is one of the skills of representing creativity of the artists.

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