

# Identifying the Factors Responsible for the Flourishing of Art and Culture during the Timurid Era in Herat

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## Abstract:

This research paper identifies the effective factors of the flourishing of art in the Timurid era at Herat and its adjoining territories, which was one of the critical periods in the history of Khurasan/Afghanistan. Here the goal is to analyze the factors that led to the growth of art in and around Herat. In this regard, this paper is organized under several titles. Using the descriptive-analytical method here, the process of the development of a particular tradition of art and the role of the Timurid rulers and their patronage to related activities is discussed. Since the role of courtiers- *amirs*, and elders was equally important in this process, their contribution in various fields, especially science, literature, political and social life at Herat city is worth noting. It seems that the artistic and cultural background responsible for the thriving of art in the Timurid period in Khurasan province, especially in Herat city, was in continuation from the not-so-distant past. In this background the factors responsible for the development of Timurid art and crafts are to be investigated. The main question is about the leading factors contributing to the prospering of Timurid art and certain other cultural attainments in this part of the Islamicate. The answers to this and other related questions can be very instrumental in understanding the reasons and the actual scenario behind prospering of the art and its allied subjects during the Timurid period at Herat.

Key words: Timur, Shah Rukh, Baisunghar, art, Islamicate Timurids, Herat.

## Introduction

Herat has been the birth-place as well as the guardian of cultures and the center of spreading the concept of scholarly thoughts during the various phases of history. This region has not only played quite a prominent role in the literary sphere, but has also influenced the people of those countries contiguous to the region. Situated at the crossroads of traditional silk-route and being like a jewel of Ariana soil, located in the western corner of the country, Herat proudly shines in the sky like the morning star in this rich cultural region. Herat is the region with claims of greatness and historical glory, and has earned a name for itself for preserving its beingness with great honor. A new era began in the history of Herat when in 807 A.H. / 1405 CE, Timur's son Shah Rukh (1377-1447 CE) ascended the throne in Herat and the center of the empire moved from Samarkand to this city. And the children and grandchildren of Amir Timur ruled from Herat until 913 AH / 1506 CE. This period of more than a hundred years is called in the history of Afghanistan as the Timurid period with Herat as the center of political and cultural activities. Present article deals with this period focusing especially on the city of Herat. (Naimi, 1398: 1-5).

Although we have a brief overview of the history of Afghan art, it is worth noting that there have always been those throughout history who have provided the necessary conditions and platforms for artists to do their creative work. We call people "supporters of artistic pursuits". In a more correct sense, the word "supporter" or "artist" can be defined as: "a person, device or institution that hires an artist, commissions him to work, and supports his activity." In other words, this group of people provides all the necessary material and spiritual conditions for an artist so that he can pursue his artistic passion in a suitable condition. Of course, it should also be noted that in most cases art education is not a result of mere interest in art, and usually includes political, economic, and social goals, goals that in most cases have a very positive effect on this kind of art education. . (Pakbaz, 1381:199).

According to the context explained above, this question always needed to be addressed, why we always investigate the lives and conditions of artists in our researches, while at the same time little attention is paid to the conditions of such people, artists, masons, craftsmen and other worthy people. The community involved in the artistic and cultural pursuits always remind us of remarkable results. Therefore, in this article, especially the activities of the artists and craftsmen and their patrons of the Timurid period in Herat city

have been taken into consideration. It was due to the political stability and the patronage of the rulers, princes and the ruling classes, many of them of non-Khurasani background, extended to various groups, established a unique identity for the city of Herat under Timur and more specifically under his successors till the early sixteenth century.

This paper aims at identifying the factors responsible for the growth of art during the Timurid era in Herat, especially in the sphere of bookmaking, miniature paintings, gilding, calligraphy, painting, architecture, and the transformation of the city of Herat into one of the most important cities of Khurasan and turning it into a great center of civilization in Khurasan and Central Asia during the one-century rule of Shah Rukh (1377-1447 CE), Sultan Abu Saeed Mirza (1451-1469 CE) and Sultan Hossein Baiqara (1469-1506 CE), this city became the center of convergence of scientists and artists. Such many activities brought prosperity and fame to this place. Artistic and cultural activities in the city of Herat and its adjoining region in modern Afghanistan or Great Khurasan, kindled its fame, reputation and greatness that spread throughout the Islamicate at that time. Based on this, the key issue of the current research is to identify the factors that caused the growth and flourishing of art in the Timurid era which had been a turning point in the history of a region that forms a part of modern Afghanistan

### **Role of Timur and Timurid princes in the process of burgeoning various arts:**

The period of Timurid rule in Afghanistan was considered to be the era of cultivating the art of painting, illustration, decoration, gilding, calligraphy, and all aspects of book making. The art of painting has been popular among the people of Mavar al-Nahr (Transoxiana) since the distant past, especially in the Greater Khurasan, and after the introduction of Islam in these areas, they used their artistic talents in decorating and gilding Islamic religious books, especially the Holy Quran, and painting various buildings like mosques and tombs. In this way, in the entire Islamic world, they set certain markers that had no equal in the history of human art.

From the evidence of Central Asian works and documents, it appears that the principles of the Timurid art school were transferred from the court of the past kings to their court. During the period of Timur, art of painting was also popular, as we can see that after the seven-years campaigns and the conquest of the Ottoman Empire, Timur had organized his grand celebration and victory assembly under a huge canopy, decorated with gold and jewels. Celebrations were also held within a span of two miles around Samarqand, and historians elaborately describe the decoration and appearance of colorful tents erected there in an amazing tone.

Although most of the Timurid princes and *amirs* respected the artists and tried to keep alive the art, sometimes there were dangers to the artistic groups and their work. For example, when Amir Timur returned to his capital, Samarqand, in 807 AH (1404 / 1405 CE) and observed that the porch of the school was built higher than the porch of the Grand Mosque, he was enraged by this architectural defect, and both of its architects- Khwaja Dawood and Muhammad Jalad were executed. Also, according to the author *Majamaul Fasihi*, when he was angry with the behavior of his son Miran Shah, Maulana Shamsuddin Mohammad Kakhki, who was the only one among those who excelled in the art of composing poetry and prose; and others like Ustad Qutbuddin Nayi, Habib Oudi, and Abdul Momen Govindeh, who were like Pythagoras of the age and known for their accomplishments, were blamed for encouraging Amirzadeh Miran Shah to go astray from the path of obedience, and they all were executed. Hence, even the life of the great scholars and scientists was not spared if the rulers got enraged.

During the rule of Shah Rukh, Sultan Abu Saeed and Sultan Hussain Baiqara that spread over a period of a century, the city of Herat was turned into a beautiful place and it became the center of gathering of scientists and artists, and this city became the best place for the prosperity and prospering of various arts such as book-making, miniatures, calligraphy, and gilding, etc. The greatness and importance of the city of Herat in the land of Khurasan, its scientific and literary output, its political and social ethos in the history of Afghanistan or Greater Khurasan brought immense fame to it. Its reputation brightened up and its greatness became proverbial throughout the world at that time, especially during the Timurid era. City of Herat attracted the attention of a large number of scientists and scholars. Many works had been written about the political events with due focus on the literary and social developments. and their Works like Jughrafia-i Hafiz Abru on geographical features of the region were also produced here. (Mirjafari, 1395: 114).

Illustrated manuscripts of the Herat school, both in terms of beautifully calligraphed historical accounts and in terms of artistic arrangement, i.e., images, gilding, paintings and embellishment, had many admirers and appreciators in that era, and were brought or sent as gifts to all directions. Among other things, it has been mentioned that during the time of Sultan Hussain Baiqara, an ambassador was sent to Iraq, named Mir Alishir Nawai, including Nafais Tohfa, and Qazi Isa Sadr. A Diwan of Maulana Jami was sent from Herat to be presented to the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512 CE). As a result of the cultivation of artistic traits among the Timurid princes, the art of calligraphy and writing progressed a lot as is evident from the work of Maulana Shah Mahmud Nishapuri (1486 - 1564/65 CE), an expert calligrapher in *nastaliq* who copied the manuscript of famous sufi-poet Maulana Jami. One poet Manshi Ajuba Dehr, on Sunday 12th of Rabi al-Awwal 824 (1421 CE) wrote one hundred and twenty ten-line rhetorical letters in good *nastaliq* style in the presence of the public from morning to evening.

Although the important breeding ground of all these arts, both during the reign of Shah Rukh and during the reign of his successors was the city of Herat, but the cities of Samarqand, Bukhara, Balkh, Mashhad, Qazvin, Isfahan and Shiraz were also among the great and glorious centers of this artistic renaissance of the Timurid period. Influence of this renaissance had reached even to small towns. The cities that in some way served as the palaces of Timur's successors in the cities of Samarqand and Herat and their contemporary rulers such as the Khans of Mawara-un Nahr and the Turkmens of Agh Qyunlu, and then the Timurids of India, were greatly influenced by the literary and artistic traditions that evolved in Herat in the fifteenth century. Rulers of these places and even their nobles had cordial relations with the Ottomans and exchanged gifts in the form of valuable artifacts and illustrated manuscripts. However, although these arts were considered the common heritage of all the people of these lands, in fact, it was Herat that was the center of these arts that illuminated the world of fine arts in spaces around the city of Herat or the province of Khurasan. (Habibi, 1355: 31-37)

Not only the kings and princes of Timurid house encouraged various forms of art and artists, but also a number of nobles of the court followed in their footsteps. These artists used to produce the works of art as was desired by them. Interestingly, many of them like Mirza Baisunghar were skilled and masters in some branches of art itself. Among others, Maulana Sharifuddin Abdul Qahir Samarqandi, brother of the author of *Tahir al-Saadin*, was considered one of the famous people of Shahrukh's court in Herat. (Abdul Razzaq, 1353: 36)

### **The connection of Herat school of art with other centers of cultural and artistic activities:**

Herat school of art that signifies the concept of 'Timurid Renaissance', had its sway on cultural life in other centers of creative output as well, such as those located in vast span of Mawra un-Nahr, and Persian lands, especially Shiraz and Tabriz. Though the empire of Timur did not remain unified after him, but the connections between its cultural centers remained alive. The successors of Timur, who were brought up in the environment of the tradition of science and art, nurtured and encouraged artists in their territories beyond the limits of Nile, Khurasan, Iraq, etc. (Hosseini, 1395: 117-118). This artistic renaissance was considered the common heritage of all the people of these lands, but the tradition was also extended to Turkistan and the Ottoman Empire, and continued as a legacy in Safavid Iran. Art of calligraphy reached its pinnacle as the legacy of 30 Timurid art styles became a hallmark as standard art styles which certainly revolutionized the world of fine arts.

### **The role of kings and courtiers in the growth of the art of book-making and book-designing:**

Process of illustration of books was an extremely complicated art form. Equally important was the matter of book binding. Durability was to be ensured in both the contexts. The most important factor that caused the flourishing of the art of bookmaking and book-layout during the Timurid era of Herat was due to the role of kings and courtiers and their attention to this form of art. Most of the kings and princes of the Timurid empire were lovers of books and maintained their royal and personal libraries. Among them rulers like Shahrukh (son of Timur), Sultan Hussain Baiqara and Valg Beik played a crucial role in this field. Each of them, in turn, made great efforts for the development and advancement of the said art. With his cooperation and instructions, countless artists were always engaged in writing and copying books. Books of religious nature were decorated with geometrical and floral designs, while books on secular subjects like history, poetry, science and philosophy, were illustrated in a variety of ways. Highly skilled scribes arranged

precious covers for these manuscripts, and through this art, they inspired innumerable people and aspiring artists who created masterpieces that each had its own global value. (Safa, 1366: 12-4).

Along with the arts related to book-making and book-illustration in the Timurid period, mention of the art of book-binding would not be out of context. It again, was promoted in this very ancient city, i.e., Herat during the rule of Timur and his successors subsequently. Mirza Baisunghar called Ustad Qawamuddin, a famous craftsman and a scholar from Tabriz to Herat city. In the art of book-binding, he used all kinds of skills; and among other trades, he acquired expertise in the art of book-making and book-binding, in which his contribution was original. In gilded binding, the cover and the back was coated with gold. Of special mention is the contribution of Mevlana/ Agha Mirek Esfahani (1520-1576 CE), who made depictions having gardens, flowers and bushes, desert, in *simorgh* shape words and beautiful birds, and it is called the famous Mirki style. (Ghabar, 1384: 13-14)

Cloud art paper was used to decorate the margins and sometimes the text of books, and types of illumination such as middle, dust, eye shadow, head shadow were used on the pages of exquisite books, and the art of photography and gilding was considered a part of the traditional art of bookmaking in the Timurid era, by means of which lines and motifs were cut from paper and pasted on desired papers or pieces. Such works were done with a special tool and with full precision and artistry. During the Timurid period, there were many forms of art of writing, gilding, calligraphy, illustrated works on poetry, albums of painting, and artistic binding, etc., and these artists and scribes, painters, joiners, poets, illustrators of volumes were in themselves an institution and founders of distinct schools of art and crafts after their distinct style known as *mazhabs*, or schools. (Ahmed, 1352: 157).

During the Timurid period at Herat and central Asia, the industry of binding and leatherwork was also taken into consideration and the mentioned art flourished like other fine arts, and this art, which had excellent designs, was used with the utmost precision. Good examples of binding and cover making from the Timurid period, with the dates of 841 and 850 (roughly sixteenth century CE), are available in the library of the Istanbul Metropolitan Museum in Istanbul. (Mirjafari, 1395: 119).

### **Establishment of the Library at Herat and its role in the development of the art of painting and growth of scientific studies:**

At the beginning of the Timurid period the pace of the production of works on science and technology and paintings was slow. It was due to the internal strife and external wars that caused destruction and plunder on a massive scale. During the period of relative stability and security, activities of scholars, craftsmen and artists multiplied. Even the period of instability was not devoid of the presence of celebrated painters, scientists, literati and the craftsmen. All these branches of knowledge continued to flourish. The reason for this progress and development of the art of painting and otherwise, can be found in the extent of support and Timurid sultans and princes extended to the scholars and artists of the erstwhile regimes. (Yarshater, 1334: 25).

The famous 'Herat School' was established in the 8th and 9th century of Hijri (15th to the 16th century CE) and it can be considered as the continuation of the former Mongolian or Ilkhanid school. However, it attained new heights and perfection in terms of styles and techniques. Among the schools of painting that developed in this period, the Herat School is the most important of all the schools of that period. Timur himself established the largest centers of painting and craft production centers in the city of Samarqand, which had been the capital since 771 AH (1370 CE), as he made his best efforts to settle and expand the city. Gradually he gathered and brought the most famous artists, scholars and craftsmen from Khurasan (including Afghanistan), Persia, India and Turkish lands in the form of war prisoners to make them work in Samarqand and other cities of his empire. (Naimi, 1398: 7-8).

As has been mentioned, Timur's son Shahrugh Mirza was considered one of the great supporters of the art of painting. After settling at Herat as making this city as his capital, he hired many artists to copy and illustrate the books for his famous library. Khalil Naqqash can be specially mentioned as one of the most renowned persons of his time. At that time, he was rather considered as one of the Wonders of the Age. Baisunghar Mirza, Shahrugh's son, also established a library and school of calligraphy where new techniques were developed in this field. Many artists, including painters, were working in this school,

among whom we can mention Amir Shahi Sabzevari and Ghiyasuddin. Ghiyasuddin was part of a political delegation that was sent to China by Shah Rukh. Amicable and strong relationship between the court of Herat under Shahrukh and his successors and the Chinese Ming Dynasty, made the art of Chinese paintings leave a strong influence at the artistic production under the aegis of Herat rulers. Among these effects is the form of decoration of book covers in the traditional way of Chinese characters.

At first, painters of the Timurid court were mostly engaged in illustrating the Shahnameh, but later, the subjects that attracted their attention the most were love poems and mystical subjects favored by the famous poets of Great Khurasan, including Nizami and Sa'adi. Under the Herat School a new and fresh style was invented to make paintings along with the text of poems of the renowned poets in a way that was approximate to the meaning of their lyrical and romantic subject. In this style, human figures were drawn in the form of small delicate images, and its backdrop was completely Khurasani, with special decorative motifs such as long horizon and spongy mountains. The creation of this style in painting, which had developed gradually under the foreign influence and became specific to Khurasan, owed its existence to the Herat School of painting.

It can be pointed out that during the reign of Shahrukh Mirza, painting went through the stage of adapting and embracing foreign techniques and reached its final stage, when it was not possible to differentiate what it had borrowed from others and what was original and its own; it really became inseparable. The most important feature of the traditional technique and style in terms of decorations can be seen in the faces and shapes drawn at the end of the 8th century of Hijri (fifteenth century CE). In the next century, these are identified as the excellent features of Herat School and became the assay-mark of Herat School of painting. The most important features of the mentioned school were the beautiful landscapes depicting flowers and meadows with flower-beds in spring, sponge shaped mountains and hills, with a use of bright colors that never wavered from one color to another, ensuring their intensity of perfection and independence in style.

In addition, the painters of this period managed to take into account the standards acceptable and reasonable in terms of proportion between living beings and buildings or in the backdrop of other landscapes. In particular, the Herat School's illustrations were very similar to each other in terms of style, and almost all the canvases show mountains at certain distances, along with the greenery that covers the ground, a long horizon, with a combination of stunning colors. The golden age of miniature making began in the Timurid era and Herat attracted crowds of artists and scholars hereafter. Now in many museums of the world there are unique works from the Timurid period- works that are unique in terms of beauty, color scheme and precision in details. (Frayar, 1328: 53)

In the sources of the Timurid era, prominent painters such as Sayyadi Ahmad Naqqash, Khwaja Ali Musavvir, Maulana Amir Khalil, Khwaja Ghiyasuddin, Darvish Mohammad Khurasani, Amir Ruhullah known as Mirak Naqqash, Ustad Qasim Ali Shiregh Gosha and Maulana Haji Mohammad, etc., and their style of painting is discussed extensively. However, it is for certain that the greatest painter of the Timurid era, and in the entire Islamicate, was Kamaluddin Behzad, who was born in 854 (c. 1455-1536 CE) in Herat city. He was orphaned at a young age. Another great man of the time and a teacher Mirak Naqqash, who was the librarian of Sultan Hussain Baiqara, took care of him. Many artists of the time benefited from the company of Mirak. Mirak Naqqash's personal care and lessons on the art of sketching along with Behzad's natural talent, blessed the budding painter in creating a niche for himself. No doubt it was the environment of Herat city that contributed immensely to the blossoming of his talent as an artist and facilitating his journey towards a point where he had no rival of him. (Amir Ahmad, 1352: 133-134). Apart from Sultan Hussain Baiqara (the ruler of Herat) Kamaluddin Behzad also enjoyed the support and patronage of one of the greatest scholars of the time Amir Ali Shir Navai who had great influence over the ruler and the people of the city. With his miniatures and paintings, Behzad would keep Sultan Hussain Baiqara in a cheerful mood. The reason has been explained by one of the *amirs* of that period, named Amir Baba Mahmud, who had a strange and unusual face, who has narrated that the teacher Kamaluddin Behzad depicted his face in different situations and thus made the king happy and smiling. (Wasfi, 1351: 145- 146).

Amir Ali Shir Navai was also very fond of Ustad Kamaluddin Behzad. It is said that Ustad Behzad brought an illustrated book to Amir Ali Shir Navai's *majlis*, depicting various trees and handsome chickens on its branches, and on all sides flowing streams and wonderful *zingari* flowers. It also portrayed the face of Marughob Mir (Ali Shir Navai) as if leaning on a cane and placing rich layers in front of him. Mir Ali Shir Navai was amused after watching that wonderful picture and asked the audience to give their opinion about

it. One of them said: I wanted to reach out and pick a flower and put it on my bed. Then I thought that the chickens should not fly from the trees. Each of them said something, and Amir Ali Shir Navai said- 'I was feeling like presenting gold plates to the audience'. In fact Amir Ali Shir Navai was so impressed by the grace and beauty of the image that he gifted a horse with a saddle, bridle and appropriate clothes to Master Kamaluddin Behzad (Mirjafari, 1395: 122-123).

In addition to it, Timurid prince Babur, who ultimately became the king of Hindustan, was also very surprised by the elegance and artistic work of Ustad Kamaluddin Behzad and was compelled to say about him the following words:

'Ustad Kamaluddin Behzad is the greatest and most famous painter. It has become its own art. Master Behzad is skilled in painting and knowing the properties and combinations of colors and in changing different emotional states, and especially in drawing the shapes of buildings and natural landscapes, his work has reached the limit of miracles. In his pictures, there is peace and good taste, innovation and skill, and in its composition and decoration and the coherence of colors, master Kamaluddin Behzad has revealed the perfection of Timurid paintings'. According to some critics, in Behzad's pictures a large amount of the element of divine love and the position of clergy and holiness can be seen, and the reason may be that the tradition of sufism had reached its peak during Behzad's life in the entire Islamicate, especially Central Asia, Khurasan and Hindustan. (Khalili, 1320: 111-113).

However, after the extinction of the Timurid dynasty, Ustad Kamaluddin Behzad worked for the Shibani Khan Uzbek until 916 Hijri (1510 CE), when the city of Herat was captured by Shah Ismail I. After that he stayed in this city and remained engaged in painting and drawing for sometime. lastly, Safavid king took him to Tabriz where he continued with his passion for paintings and gained fame in and around Iran. He was appointed as the head of the royal library where he contributed in his best possible manner and brought immense fame for the Safavid court to the extent that no painting in Islamic history could compete with his talent no one could reach his position and dignity he enjoyed. (Mirjafari, 1395: 123).

Also, in the period of Baisunghar Mirza (1397-1433 CE), son of Shah Rukh, the city of Herat witnessed the growth and flourishing of various forms of art. Because Baisunghar Mirza had a great interest in science and literature and himself had mastered all the techniques of fine arts, including poetry, music, painting, and architecture, with his support various arts grew and prospered in this city. He is considered one of the greatest bibliophiles in the world. He provided a vast device for copying, arranging and enlarging books. More than forty prominent calligraphers and painters, under the leadership of Maulana Jafar Tabrizi, worked continuously in his library. Maulana Jafar was obliged to regularly report the work of the library and its books to Sultan Baisunghar Mirza. Baisunghar spent a lot of capital in this direction and the books that were written and edited during his time and under his supervision had no parallel in terms of elegance. The most important literary and artistic work of his is the arrangement of Ferdowsi's *Shah Nameh* and the introduction which was written with reference to the *Shah Nameh* and is known as Baisunghar's introduction (Yarshater, 1334: 52).

Dost Muhammad, the librarian of the Timurid era, has provided noteworthy information about the art of illustration and other related arts of that period, as well as the attention of the Timurids, especially that of Baisunghar Mirza towards the artists. He wrote about one of the painters named Maulana Khalil Mosavvir and called him as Kamaluddin Behzad Sani (the second Kamaluddin Behzad). Like Master Behzad, he was a great and skilled master in painting, and Dost Muhammad called him the only artist of his time who excelled in the art of painting. (Mirjafari, 1395: 124-125).

However, there is no doubt that the golden age of the art of painting in Khurasan (in modern Afghanistan) begins from the time of the Timurids of Herat, i.e. during the period of Shahrukh, Baisunghar, Ibrahim Sultan and his sons, and Iskandar bin Omar Sheikh, etc., because it is during this period that the paintings of Herat adopted the techniques and technical styles popular in the eastern region of the Islamic world in the field of painting. Techniques of China were adopted, that left a powerful impact on the Herat School of art. (Naimi, 1398: 8-9).

Among other important and fundamental issues that had an important impact on the development of paintings, illustrations and art of writing in Khurasan/Afghanistan was the establishment of a library and a technical and industrial association that Shah Rukh established in Herat. His son Baisunghar established another library and association at the same time which almost had the form of an academy of crafts or a conservatory of fine arts. Baisunghar had gathered at this association the masters expert in the art of gilding in painting, illustration, book-binding and book-making from various parts of Khurasan, Iran and Central Asia. Some of them voluntarily joined from several other centers. Some industries from Tabriz, Samarkand and Shiraz were also moved to Herat. (Naimi, 1398: 8-9).

In short, Khurasani or Afghan tradition of painting touched the utmost heights of perfection during the Timurid period. With the fall of the art-loving Timurid dynasty in the early 10th century AH (early sixteenth century CE), Uzbek raids across the river Oxus, and the series of bloodshed in the form of wars initiated by the Persian Safavids, the great tradition of book writing, painting, and other forms of fine arts and crafts, diminished. However, the great tradition found a new lease of life in other cities of Afghanistan, Iran and Hindustan in the subsequent centuries. Many of the disciples of great painters of Herat School relocated themselves in the new spaces where they found patronage and kept the tradition alive. (ibid., 9-11).

### **Cultural interaction between Herat and China and its role in the development of fine arts and paintings:**

Two ancient civilizations located in Khurasan/Afghanistan and China have had cultural relations for a long time. The works obtained from the city of Turfan in eastern Turkestan and China, suggest that among the various ethnic groups, Uyghurs were influenced by the culture of north Afghanistan and vice-versa. In the post-Islamic period too, this process continued. During the Mongol era, these interactions increased in terms of integration of the territories from China to Afghanistan into the Mongol Empire. Great Khan's tribe and his successors, whom the Chinese call Yuan, were influenced by Chinese culture when they settled in that country. In Khurasan (including Afghanistan) too, Ilkhans adopted Khurasani culture and abandoned their nomadic life-style. These two Mongolian families established a broad connection between Iran, Khurasan/Afghanistan and China, that facilitated a favorable ground for creation of cultural interactions, especially in the fields of painting and pottery. (Ghabar, 1388: 92-93). Ilhanids were replaced by Timur in these regions. At the end of his life, Amir Timur Lang wished to conquer China, but his death did not allow him pursue his dream. According to Clavijo's report, despite the unfriendly relations between Iran and China during Timur's time, commercial relations between the two countries were very strong. Herat greatly benefitted from this interaction. (Ahmad Ibn Arabshah, 1369: 182-188).

The Ming dynasty in China and the Timurid dynasty in Khurasan were both new dynasties that succeeded in overthrowing the Mongols in their respective territories. Somehow, in the new conditions too, cultural and commercial interactions continued to prosper. Especially during the reign of Timur's son Shah Rukh and after him during the reign of his successor Mirza Baisunghar, these relations became stronger and they exchanged ambassadors and envoys to each other's courts and it is strongly believed that they presented their artistic masterpieces to each other as gifts. Evidence of details of exchange of embassies and list of gifts is contained in Central Asian, Persian and Chinese sources. Influence on style and manufacturing techniques is fully evident in Herat School's products, especially in the manner of cover-making, which was used by the Chinese artists to decorate the Chinese mythical figures. Cultural and political relations of Khurasan rulers with China became warmer and stronger specially from 1419 CE and onward when a delegation composed of the representatives of Shah Rukh and other Timurid princes sent under Shad Khwaja, who acted as Shah Rukh's representative to the court of the Ming court located in Peking. The most important delegation of ambassadors was sent to China in 832 Hijri (1428-1429 CE). In this trip, with Shad Khawaja around 200 people were commissioned to travel to China from the court of Mirza Shah Rukh and by Mirza Baisunghar. Among these notable figures were Sultan Ahmad and Ghiyasuddin Naqqash along with 150 other people. Khwaja gladly prepared a comprehensive description from the first day to the last of the trip, which is very detailed and charming, and includes the layout of the roads, the Great Wall of China, Buddhist temples, the receptions and formal parties of the court, all kinds of musical instruments. (Mirjafari, 1395:239-240).

The study of this report, which is mentioned in Abdur Razzaq's account, suggests that Shah Rukh felt was seriously inclined towards knowing about the Chinese society and the economic and cultural capabilities of this country in that era and perhaps wanted to understand what type of interactions between the two countries was possible. Returning embassies from China strengthened this belief. In the works of many contemporary historians and poets of this period, the accomplishments of China have been commonly discussed. Hence, the influence of various fields of arts popular in China, such as painting, pottery and porcelain making, can be clearly seen in products of Khurasan. It should be mentioned that the Khurasanians were not just imitators, they changed the nature of their products and used the artistic and cultural techniques of other nations according to their taste and requirement.

Interestingly, due to this interaction a new style emerged in the Khurasan in the sphere of decorative styles in paintings which later became known as the Chinese style, although it was not the same as the Chinese style, but largely influenced by the Chinese art. This influence was much stronger and clear in the Buddhist paintings of Khurasan centuries ago. It again became visible in a special way during the Timurid era.

One of the important members of this delegation was Khwaja Ghayasuddin Naqqash Herati who acted as the representative of Baisunghar Mirza, Shahrukh's son, who keenly observed all the sights along the route and made a guess of the possibilities of advantages of this journey towards the Chinese court. He prepared his account in the form of a travelogue. The other members of this embassy were Tajuddin Badakhshi, a local *amir* of Badakhshan, and one Jatun, the representative of Sultan Ahmed Mirza, and one Erdovan, and many others. It is natural for a keen painter like Ghayasuddin who stayed in the Chinese imperial court for five months, that nothing was to be ignored especially in the context of paintings made by the Chinese painters. This delegation arrived in the Chinese capital Peking from Herat city in 822 lunar year (1419-1420 CE). Among the gifts that this delegation presented to the emperor was a black horse that the emperor liked and rode himself. Unfortunately, the horse went haywire and the emperor fell off. Surprisingly, he was quite impressed with the breed of the horse and its might, and enquired about the qualities and privileges of this gallant horse. Shah Rukh's representative immediately replied that because this horse was for Amir Timur, Shah Rukh wanted it to stay in the emperor's stable. During their stay, the delegation carefully studied the objects in the court. They also carefully observed the weapons used by the Chinese army, like *nakhch*, *durbash*, *zhubin*, *hariyeh*, *khesht-polad*, *tabrizin*, spears, and swords, etc. Their report on musical instruments is also worth noting. *Dahl*, *damame*, cymbals, flutes, reeds and bells were generally placed in the room on pieces of tapestry. Decoration of the chambers with items such as *atlas* pillows and sleeping bags, chairs, braziers, fire pits, cauldrons, knives and spoons, was also listed by these emissaries. (Ghabar, 1389: 280).

**Conclusion:** Amir Timur's invasion and attack on Khurasan/Afghanistan caused the destruction of many of the beautiful cities similarly as that had happened during the Mongol period. During his campaigns, Timur tried to shift the learned people and craftsmen, especially to his capital at Samarqand, which he was trying to turn into a dream city. Therefore, by transferring artists, architects, and craftsmen from different cities of Khurasan (Afghanistan, Iran, India) to the new capital, he turned Samarqand into a grand and world-class city. Timur's successors from Shah Rukh's period onwards adopted the same policy at Herat. Somehow, they avoided war and bloodshed, for this reason from the very beginning of Shah Rukh's coming to power, Timurid princes tried to compensate for the destruction caused by Timur's attacks. They rebuilt the cities and villages that were destroyed earlier. They attained economic prosperity, along with establishing peace and order. Shah Rukh was granted his appanage in the territory in Khurasan with its capital at Herat. After taking his seat at Herat he turned it into a prosperous city and a safe abode for scholars and artists. This is not only true in the case of Herat but also in other cities of his kingdom, including Samarqand and Shiraz. His fondness for various forms of art, made him extend his patronage to the scholars and artists which continued for a long time even after him. Shah Rukh and his successors tried to settle such people in the cities of their state in order to create a conducive environment along with economic support to pursue their cultural activities. For this reason, economy of the countries under the rule of Shah Rukh made a big headway in most of these sectors, such as trade and agriculture, which ultimately led to an increase in the level of general well-being of its people and led to the growth in the scientific, cultural and artistic achievements within his territories. This became possible because of political stability in the Timurid state.



Along with the Timurid princes, their nobles- *amirs*, and many courtiers and members of the royal household had a deep interest in the activities related to art, hence, supported many famous artists of the time. Women of the royal family also initiated many building projects which were constructed with the support of Timur, Shah Rukh and others in various cities like Samarqand, Herat and Mashhad.

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