

## COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MEHR SYMBOLS IN PAINTINGS OF SAFAVID ERA WITH PRE-ISLAMIC ERA

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is the examination of the theme of "Mehr" of love as an eternal and permanent concept (one of the fundamental concepts in Iranian rich arts) and to demonstrate the fact that which concepts have been used by Iranian artists in creating their works. Have designers been affected by abstract and ritual concepts in the peak of their artistic activities? Why using these topics has attracted artists' attention more? The research method used in this paper is a descriptive and analytical one. First, it involves the meaning and definition of the word and realm from the point of view of Iranian Sufism particularly Iranian ancient religions (Mehr) and its various aspects have been stated. Then, the impact of these symbols and concepts have been estimated in Iranian paintings in its peak era, Safavid. The results show that pre-Islamic and oldest religious thoughts can be seen in post-Islamic period; designers in various periods, intentionally and unintentionally, have been affected by these old themes. Additionally, the concept of love and Mehr symbols is prevalent in Safavid painting, whether the subject of the painting is love or not. It is interesting that most of symbols and designs are female both in Mehr ritual and in the meaning of love; More than half of the motifs are feminine ones. In this analysis, it is proved that Iranian painting has been deeply affected by religions and ancient themes especially Mehr symbols and ritual; furthermore, the paper shows that the concept of love is a common theme among related painters.

**Keywords:** Mehr and love, painting, Safavid, religion of Mehr.

### Introduction

Whether I forget your love and empty my heart, where I should put this love, where I should take this heart (Hafez)

Mehr has for centuries been present in the closet of muddy houses, in the innermost woven artifacts of nature-based women, among kind whispers of Venuses and maternal lullabies. In ancient Iran, people had developed and nourished this love. This tendency have strengthened by the advent of the Mehr ritual and Mehr-worship and expanded all over the ancient world. As the source and home of this religion, ancient Iran utilized these concepts more than any culture. The trace of this influence can be traced in all arts, especially in Iranian painting that is one of the most salient of Iranian arts. As Mohammad Afrough states in his article "looking for love in Iranian Islamic painting," love adds a transcendental passion to the paintings. According to him, the role of heroines in the paintings is inspiring and significant as it considers woman as the symbol of love not the beloved. Iranian paintings originate from mystic foundations and philosophy of manifestation and love. The rite of Mehr is notable in Iran as the oldest manifestation of love. Also, there is close relationship between love and philosophy of manifestation; Mehr manifestation can be seen as both form and meaning in the works. In painting, form and content are so mixed that separation and examining them in a separate way looks impossible; therefore, concepts of Mehr and love have checked based on form and content. That's why the two concepts are examined in the paper. The research method here is a descriptive one; Mehr is assessed from two vantage points: Mehr in terms of love and Mehr in terms of Mehr rite's symbols. The results demonstrate that more than half of the symbols are female or have a link or hint toward female Goddesses, which probably are related to the position of a woman as the beloved. Those symbols that have not been female are depicted in relation to a female essence. There are also many similarities between narrative and abstract concepts of love and Mehr ritual with the paintings the cause of which can be interpreted as the influence of thought of ancient Iran rites

especially the religion of Mehr and its concept. Love has been one of the most-used themes in the paintings; even in works where love is not the subject, the presence of Mehr and love symbols can clearly be seen. Love has been one of the most important subjects in Iranian thinking and civilization and the subject of many works during various periods: a subject that transfers from the rituals of a nation to the sketches and from them to literature, and from one art medium to another.

#### Love

There are a lot of discords (among thinkers) on the concept of love. Some definition, consider tools or effects of love and some consider features of ideal lovers and so on. In mystic dictionaries love is defined as follows: love is the extreme desire, and the words "lover" and "beloved" takes their meanings from love; It means an extreme love and friendship; (In Persian) It also is derived from the word "Eshgheh" that is a plant that screws around trees and absorbs their water and makes it pale and shed their leaves and, after a while, withers the trees: By this allegory, love, when culminates, shrinks the forces and declines senses, decreases appetite and intrudes between beloved and people and makes him/her tired of relating to anyone other than the beloved so that he/she becomes sick or mad or dies (Sajadi, 1984: 332). In mystic literature, the concept of affection enters the mystic literature by a woman, and this woman is called as "Rabe'e Adviyeh" who died in 130 Hejri.

#### The Rite of Mehr

First time, the name of Mehr as god of treaty has been carved in an inscription in the Boghazkoy (east of Ankara). In an inscription discovered in Boghazkoy, there is a convention between governments of Mitany and Hipy which backs to 1400 B.C. (Bahar, 2007: 67). Furthermore, in the oldest Indian texts, or the Indian Vedas, the name of Mehr can be seen as Mitreh. In Indian Vedas, Mitreh or Mehr was considered as the king, law-keeper, blessing (the cause of rain) and farmers-keeper (ibid, 67).

In Avesta, the name of Mehr was considered as MehrYasht that is a section of Avesta, where Mehr has considered as true speech, someone who doesn't lie, is against betrayal, and has wide hands. Also in Iran, the name of Mehr is written in the inscription of Ardeshir II from 404 to 395 B.C (ibid, 69).

In Mehr religion, Mehr had been formed as various symbols and each symbol had a special meaning and included human, animal, and plant symbols. "according to Mehr rules, newcomers must have participate in a test of seven stages test to achieve leadership; these seven stages named seven "Mehr stairs" including crow, assigned to Mercury as the symbol of air and wind, the bride or wife as the symbol of water, soldier as the symbol of soil, lion as the symbol of fire, pious as the symbol of moon, the postman of sun assigned to dynamic Mehr, or the morning star, and, finally, the old-man or master which is the upmost position in Mehr hierarchy and represents the mother earth the special sign of whom being ring and cane"(Mablaghi Abadani, 1994: 11, 310,).

The second occurrence after the rise of Maher is killing the cow. By killing the cow by Mehr, the fundamental and primary symbol of this religion emerges in Europe and outside the borders of Iran. It is after the killing of cow that the most surprising events occur: In the body of cow, a useful plant grows that overwhelms the earth. As a result of pouring the blood of cow, the first tree rises on the earth that is a grape. Pearl or fish are some other symbols and designs of Mehr as well. Also, lotus is one of the popular symbols that rises on water. Lotus connects with water from one hand, and with sun on the other.

#### Safavid painting (935 to 1089 H.Gh)

Safavid era is one of the brightest periods of Islamic Iranian art. The achievements of the Harat and Kamal Aldin Behzad School culminate during this era and then, with the rise of Isfahan school, painting becomes free from Ketabat (painting between or in the margins of poems) and becomes independent.

Painters often have chosen and painted special scenes in every story; it is surprising that the selected scenes all involve love themes. Love is an origin that affects all other paintings in addition to love paintings ranging from nature to human paintings. It even affects colors and instills them a state of passionate love. Basically, the artist employs all his skills in painting so that he make these philosophical and mystic sources close to the works. Now, observing details, codes of main elements

of Iranian painting will be mentioned shedding love. The nature of Iranian painting is not a realistic one, but a verse-like one overwhelmed by mystery and meaning; it is an example of ideal beauty of heaven.



Pic 1. First meeting of Gheys and Leyli assigned to Mozaffar Ali, PanjGanj, 928 Hijri, Golestan palace.

Pic 2. Khosro Parviz is listening to Barbod, Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasebi, 889 Hijri.

## Mehr Symbols

### Woman:

Woman is important for two points of view as she has always possessed the position of the beloved on the one hand and, most of Mehr symbols are female, on the other, including Anahita, one of the great gods of Mehr. In the picture 1, which shows the first meeting of Majnoun with Leyli, the role of women is seen both as the symbol of Mehr and the beloved. In this work, there are four women; the number four is a symbol of four states of the moon which are the symbol of femininity and woman. Also, four is the number of earth which is again the symbol of woman. "In Mehr and Mazdayi religion, the friends, permanent and close angels (Frozes) of God, are six persons three of whom being male and three others being female" (Oshidari, 2000:38, 45). "Great mother, great goddess, symbols of female are: moon, earth, water... . It is a guide of pure spirituality, allurer, virgin goddess of heaven, wild and impure woman of transcendental reason and extreme foolishness, whatever moon wants, a guard who gives people food and the one who is active. Diamond, egg-like objects, cave, restricted garden, well, door, gate, cup ... whatever that is in relation with water, the arc of moon, the light of the moon that is inflected from the sun and star are all the deliberative signs of a woman" (Cooper, 2007: 182).

In the painting 1, the presence of four women with other elements including cow, goat, etc..., as mentioned above, shows the clear affectivity of Mehr and as two lovers have depicted in first meeting in the above painting, the entrance of Leyli to the stage of love and Mehr rites is done by the guide of a woman who holds her hands whom can be one of the Mehr goddesses.

## **Moon and sun**

In the second painting, named "Khosro Parviz is listening to Barbod," Khosro Parviz's worker prohibits the meeting of Barbad with Shah and the court prohibit him. When Khosro goes to garden, Barbod sits on a tree and plays, and Khosro loves his instrument and looks after him and finally finds him. Here, the king is a symbol of sun, and sun is light and a manifestation that causes knowledge and wisdom. The fire of the sun and light of truth reveals the art of Barbod and the mania and restlessness of the king is the love that attains to truth. One of the Mehr gods is the angel of light and in this painting to reveal the truth, the moon also is considered as a symbol of female and woman and goddess of sky who aids the king. The truth that king loves is a manifestation of love in this painting; while no woman is depicted, its symbols have an important role in achievement and unity. "Moon is an eye of the night as the sun is an eye of the day" (ibid: 182). It is a female symbol that reveals the truth in this narration by its light and exit from beyond the clouds and causes unifying with truth. "Moon , the symbol of which is arc or a young woman mounting on the chariot, represents time, movement, reproduction, multiplication, fertility and vital soul that preserves body and life, both are a goddesses of sky and great mothers of the moon, the symbol of female force or the mother goddess, or the goddess of sky" (Cooper: 2007, 182). In this painting, the intimacy of the king with the goddess is highlighted by the wind of grape around Chenar, in the left corner of the painting. Moon and sun represent divine unity, sacred matrimony of sky and earth, and king and goddess.

## **Light and fire**

"Henry carbon believes that Iranian painting is affected by Manavi painting – guiding insight to beyond the world of sense- that is a stimulator of Mehr and the praise of light boys and the fear of darkness boys and also physical exposure of resurrection and subtlety of a lighted human to depict the freedom of human from limits of darkness" (Carbon, 2000, 125-9).

Before the advent of Zarathustra, Aryan Iranian used to illuminate their beliefs and faith by light and fire. Fireplace used to be called Azarkadeh, Aderyan, Dare Mehr, and Hormozgan" (Oshidari, 2000, 15, 9). About etymology of fire, it can be said, "Azar: fire, Azar is the name of guard god of fire. Fire has great value in all religions. After bring the philosophy and religion of Mazdisna, Zarathustra commanded to keep fireplaces as in Mehr rites before Zarathustra, follower of Mehr had fireplaces" (Safizadeh, 2000, 36, 35).

In mystic interpretations, love looks like fire because it burns the lover out and boils his heart up. In Islamic texts, sometimes light of faith looks like great fire and fire of hell has kept away from it" (Bayar, 2007, 43, 44). Inscriptions and figurations of Mehr show that in special ceremony of sacred cow, two persons by the names of "Kotopats" and "Kots" were standing in two sides of Mehr (Mitra). Kots represents sunrise and Kotopats represents sunset and Mehr, standing in the middle, had been the insinuation of sun of high noon (Samadi, 1988:143).

In the second picture, there is one stove full of fire, two torches in two sides of the king, one lantern in beside and two candles one of which is in the center and in front of the king. Generally, all over this work is full of concept of light and love. The torches and fire that represent the presence of Mithraism. The king in the middle is considered as the sun or the very Mehr in the center of the painting. "The symbol of super dominant equals the creator god and sun equals a representative of sun on the earth" (Cooper, 2007: 220).

These two candles and the king in the center representing the sun remind Mehr and its two angels all of whom have depicted together to clarify the real. Also, the two candles illuminate two angels accompanied by Mehr in two sides of the garden. And candles in the center and the left corner along

with the lantern that grill chicken, all are depicted in front the king- in the center- which represent other concepts in turn.

### **Water**

The biggest fireplaces in ancient Iran are temples of Anahita (the goddess of water) (Safizadeh 2000, 36, 35). In painting 2, one can see a waterway that originates from under cedar and passing through Chenar ends in the bottom of painting and draws attention to grape and chenar in the left corner and makes triangle-shape relation and meaning between sacred trees. The presence of water in this painting alongside fire, soil and wind, which is in orientation of flames of fire and clouds in sky, represent the presence of four essence of nature that are conceived as Mehr symbols. "The relations between tree, stone, mountain and water are three parts of the sacred scene. These three important elements were widely related to great goddess, tree-life, water-life and the sacred column"(James, 1966, 339). The triangle that depicted in the center of a picture links between sacred trees with mountain and rock, while the king is in the middle of this triangle. Sacred scenes in which unity is happening... "Water signifies life. One must pass through water to attain the secret treasure. "Washing with water or fire represents resurrection and attains virtue of permanent blessing and floating in water, is becoming innocent about sin" (Eliadeh, 1995, 100).

### **Angel**

The combination of multiple gods in pre-Islamic religions has turned into quad angels in Islamic world; the symbol of cow (symbol of Anahita) and the lion accompanied with bird of prey either eagle or swift (symbol of Mitra) entered the realm of archangels: the four angels carrying the throne (carriers of throne) that are demonstrated by man, cow, eagle or one legendary loin (Ja'afari 2003: 226).

In this painting, 4 angles are drawn at the back of Majnoun who are the angles of the glory of human that determine the fate of these two lovers. Here, these angels are perhaps related to main characters of the story who send words of their entrance into the realm of love and inform their redemption. Also, they can signify 4 gods of Mehr. "Angels are winged messengers who connect gods with human" (Mall, 1380, 261).

The mood of angel in painting 1 looks more like a face presenting a dish full of pomegranate-a symbol of love- that are brought for these youths; winged messengers between gods and human, messengers of divine love.

### **Crow**

In seven stages of Mehr rite, crow is first stage. In most beliefs, crow has appeared as a sun hero, in the form of God and as the messenger of God or the guide of souls in their last travel in which it has the role of the guidance of souls... It , by the way, is a symbol of loneliness, or more the sign of a deliberative isolation of a person who has decided to live in in the heights. It means passing over a trace and showing the way in which seclusion begins to attain above places (Shovalie and Gerberan: 2006, 585). "Varghan, the legendary crow of Iran, means the messenger of sun and considered as a symbol of existential faculty, speed, powerfulness and one of the manifestations of Varsarghneh" (Bakhtiarimanesh: 2008, 35).

Crow is first stage of believing in Mehr rite which is shown in the painting 1 that is the first meeting between Leyli and Majnoun. It represents the introduction of Majnoun and Leili to the realm of Mehr and love. Also, crow in painting represents loneliness and seclusion who should tolerate that to attain love and his beloved; Eating a pomegranate brings about the love of loneliness and suffering, a deliberative and sublime loneliness.

### **Simorgh and dragon**

In Sohrevardi's view, Simorgh carries wide and deep concepts that he involved them in mystic

epistles. In the story of killing Esfandiar by Rostam, he, by different views, has interpreted two pieces of Gaz as two feathers of Simorgh and has considered Simorgh as a symbol of sun that blinds the eyes of people. "Simorgh is characterized by the fact that if a mirror is in front of Simorgh, every eyes stares into the mirror" (Sohrevardi: 2001, 243).

In painting 1, the role of the fight of Simorgh and dragon on the Leili's tent represents the fight of love and self to attain sublime human stage and unifying that in Leili and Majnoun has begun in first meeting. And after victory of Simorgh and sacrificing self, they attain to divine unity and love. The dragon that scours on Leili's tent, and if we suppose, the camel represents the dragon, in different picture, Majnoun's camel saddled by love and dominated by dragon on the Leili's tent that very point perhaps represents more lover's purity (Gheys) in love. According to Iranian culture, the camel is "an aspect of devil or Mino, dark snake, Drovand, Ezhi-Dehak, Persian snake who chocks the sun God's enemy" (ibid: 332). And in this painting Simorgh considered as a symbol of sun. "Killing dragon means struggle between light and darkness, annihilating evil destructive forces, human dominance on tempting self..." (ibid: 18). After sacrificing self, love appears.

### **Dog**

"The complicated symbol of dog, in first glance, depends on the triple elements: soil, water and moon that have secret and female meanings and in this sense, are a vegetable and sexual, predictive and fundamental, meaning conscious part. First dog's legendary application that is known to the world is guiding souls, it means it accompanies with human. during the night, it is guiding him, in Iran, it is guiding to accompany to be dead to sky or hell. They are mediators between this world and the other world. Generally, dog has contradictory symbols... especially, in Islam, people believe in its loyalty and patience; there is s contradictory sense: gluttony, voracity, madness that often accompanies with black dog" (Garbaran, vol. 3, 543, 2004).

Dog, that is one of the four animals when sacrificing the cow, in painting 1 too has depicted at the bottom of the mountain to see sacrificing the cow of Leyli's self and Majnoun's self and introducing them in love phase. Of course, being a black dog perhaps represents ending this trying by death and also getting mad at the way of beloved. The dog that has raised its neck and color of its face is black and sometimes golden, represents the messenger who swings between heaven and hell, forces, guard of this world and that world, guard of passage... often called the mother goodness "female dog" (Cooper, 2007: 203).

### **Cedar**

In Mehr, cedar is devoted to the sun. In Dehkhoda's dictionary, it is written under the entry of Cedar: the name of one known tree and it has three kinds: one free cedar (because its branches rise straight and free from tilt and linking to branch of other trees, it called to this name, some say: any tree that doesn't produce fruit is free, and because cedar doesn't , it is free). And the other is the straight cedar (that its two branches have raised straight. Because straight means right...). Dr. Mohammad Yahaghi says in legendary Iranian beliefs, attributing freedom character to cedar reminds its connection to Nahidthose in myths, and legend is considered as code of freedom.

In painting 2, beyond the king, straight cedar has depicted were Barbod hides and plays that it signifies principle and truth of trans-shaper sound that signifies Mehr cedars conceived as stages of soul travel, and its sublime.

### **Pomegranate**

Non-death, multiple in unity, permanent stands for fertility, and impregnation. Pomegranate has various meanings; in Islam, Pomegranate is one of the heaven trees" (Cooper, 2007, p 40). Pomegranate in Avesta is called Haznapata... which represents the nature's womb just like mother of "earth," as the carrier of a symbol of the womb, is a female tree. Edvard Carpenter writes : "pomegranate has been accepted as a symbol of female" (ibid: 294). "Pomegranate has been accepted in general shape" (ibid: 294). Because of its dark-green leafs and shape of bud and blossom,

pomegranate always is worshiped. As pomegranate is full of seed, it represents blessing and fertility and is a symbol of Anahita (Ahmadi Dezfuli2007: 25).

In painting 1, meeting of Gheys, the dish that is full of pomegranate, is proposed to Gheys that signifies the love in first meeting. The man in front of Gheys from Leyli's caravan, calls Gheys to eat a pomegranate, the dish in which red pomegranate of love exists. An angel who has dish of pomegranate beyond Gheys, welcomed Leyli and watches, divine love from gods and God provided them, and two other angels are welcoming and showing this reception, depicted after the angel who holds the pomegranate. As if they guide to accept and honor this divine gift. The angel, who holds the empty dish watches Majnoun and the angel beyond Majnoun by looking at Leyli's face and gesture toward Majnoun, call him to accept this love and two angels in center looking at Leyli that signify love concepts from view of Mehr; pomegranate is a symbol of Mehr and fertility.

### **Grape**

In Mehr's Mehravehs, one of the signs is grape. In ancient Iran, grape had hung in king's dorm. Grape often accompanies with chinar. Therefore, some know grape as a symbol of his wife and permanence of dominance that king's blood passed from one race to another. "In Iranian myths, grape is a symbol of blood, principal force of life (Yahaghi, 107: 1990).

In painting 2, in left corner, grape that winded around the tree signifies king and queen. King, Chinar and grape shows passing his blood to another generation, that are entwined. As grape is a symbol of blood and life force and against death, and perhaps signifies king's reason, in the story of this painting, it signifies the king for finding principle of truth. Grape, that in Islam has the Islamic concept, depicted at the top of king's head.

### **Willow**

"Weeping willow is a symbol of mourning, a love devoid of happiness, and burial. Willow shows humility, power in weakness, spring and female nature. Green willow conceived as a symbol of non-dead, permanence, life force and multiplication force" (Cooper, 75, 1996). Willow in painting 1, designed on the mountain, and willow that itself is a symbol of sacred goodness; still watching charm of love in these two youths, perhaps signifies sad ending and death of two lovers. The young person lives under charge of love and results in death, but the death that gives life, permanence that happens in love.

### **Lotus**

In ancient narrations, lotus has considered as a place for keeping Zaratostra's seed of throne, which is kept in water. So, lotus has close relation with Mehr (Dadvar and Mansouri, 106: 2006). Willow is the very eight leafs, twelve leafs or Shah Abbasi flower, and is one of the principle stories of Mehr, depicted as figure on the tent and saddle and... designed next to Islamic signs. This flower is a symbol of Anahita and Mitra, on which Mehr born. In painting 1, it represents the manifestation of love between two humans, and, in painting 2, it represents the manifestation of truth. Also, flower's link with pomegranate blossom signifies the manifestation of love in painting 1, meeting Gheys.

### **Cow**

Between cow pictures, cow ceremony in Mehr can be mentioned; in Takht-e-Jamshid in which lion is a symbol of Mehr is fighting with cow (Dadvar and Mansouri, 67: 2006), cow has two features: naturally, bull represents male essence and natal for of sun and is sacred for gods.... But it also is a symbol of wet nature force. As it is the origin and goodness of the moon. Also cow in painting 1, represents female force and moon blessing and rainy clouds that signify God's grace and awarding and portion of love that provided for these two youths.

### **Lion**

Lion is one of the Mehr symbols that have a relation with Mehr and Mitraism and conceived as sun, fire, permanence, and as a guard in this religion. First, it is considered as Mehr symbol (Khodi, 97,

2006). In painting 1, lion can be seen on Leyli's tent. Symbols of Mehr and Mitra, the gods who are female, and Mehr, that represents sun and is a guard in Mehr, here booms. Wolves can be seen on the tent as if they play the role of the guard. Lion's fight, brightness and light with evil forces and darkness, "wolf represents earth, evil and swallower and predatory" (ibid, p 308). In some paintings, lion's fight with cow is a symbol of death that carries a person from one stage to another stage and signifies death of self and birth of life.

### **Star**

Literature and deep analyses in ancient religions show that many people used to worship Zohreh or "Nahid." This star used to be called Ishtar in Sumer, Ashur, and Babylon; Athens in Greece, Baal in Phoenicia Canaan, in Baal Sowis, and Anahita in Iran. It has been a god and sacred and has religious value. Anahita or "Nahid" represents sacred water. It is a powerful, beautiful, stylish, with prominent tits and golden shoes and belt, wearing hedge and golden clothes, with golden earring, and crown on her head with hundred jewels and golden pendant at her neck. "Nahid is the star of Zohre and is a metaphor of a mature girl" (Moghaddam: 29, 2001) that perhaps both concepts signify Leyli. In painting 1, star is depicted on the Leyli's tent. It is a six-leaf star that is a complete number and a symbol of unity of paradox and bisexual being that showed by two crossover triangles. The one with upward top means male, fire, sky and the other, with downward top means female, waters, and earth. Six means love, healthy, chance and fate (Cooper, 2007, 290). These six leafs star also signify the love and unity of female and male genders of earth and sky and attaining pantheism. Tent in subtle and genus's link unify lover, and beloved and star involves Majnoun's hand and Leyli's hand. In painting 2, stars as appearances of brightness involve the unity of paradox. Sky full of stars, six leafs star watches love, beauty, link between sky and earth and the symbol of light. As in Mehr and Mitraism, stars are parallel to Mitra's eyes, star in Mehr is "Mehr's (Mitra's) eye that can observe everything" (ibid: 194). "Stars are symbols of queens of sky, who have crowns of stars. Generally, star is a symbol of Ishtar or Venus as they are morning and evening stars" (ibid, 290).

### **Conclusion**

Examined paintings have been created after the spread of religion. But despite this temporal discordance, the effect of this religion is seen between narrative and abstract concepts. According to the evidences, it can be said that the art of painting is deeply affected in meaning and form by the common thought of ancient Iranian religions, particularly Mehr. Also one can assert that the concepts of Mehr and love have been most-used themes in Safavid painting where one can see clearly the presence of symbols of Mehr and love even in works that don't contain love subjects. In this research, four kinds of symbols are definitively examined: human, vegetable, animal, and geometrical signs along with love narrative themes. Here, we signify a summary of findings: Among human symbols, the woman who is considered as the beloved, is depicted in various forms, designed in the abstract and narrative form in Mehr and sometimes in love (beloved) situations. In the examined paintings, the situation of the beloved and the symbol of Mehr signify that half of symbols are female or have linked with female gods; water, Shah Abbasi flower (eight leafs flower), lion, star etc. are all female. In Iranian literature and culture, Cedar has always signified the sweetheart's stature and is a metaphor of the beloved. Also grape and Islamic designs, pomegranate and... all are female symbols and some other that is not female are depicted in relation with the female essence, such as snake and dragon, which service the female gods as guardians.

Among animal signs, lion, cow, Simorgh and dragon are the frequent signs that are prevalent not only in Safavid era's paintings but also in paintings of all periods before and after it; lion and cow are the basic parts of Mehr.

Plant signs have also been changing manifests and in everywhere have a color and an effect. Just like Shah Abbasi flower, that is the very lotus flower, it is the home of Mehr and depicted as geometrical flower-like sign of eight and twelve leafs flowers that have intensity among vegetables.



Among trees, design of cedar and willow and pomegranate depicted the same and frequent on the mountains and garden of heaven. Pomegranate on the tree or in the dish that in paintings in which guests welcomed showed love presence in everywhere.

This research shows that the concept of love has been one of the important subjects in Iranian artists thought and used widely in various periods, involving love concept multiplies appealing in art. World view based on Mehr, has linked the Iranian art dimension with permanent supernatural world and knows the light concept as source and maker of love principle and has depicted an ideal world.

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