CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Considering the kingdom of the Safavid in Iran and that of the Mughals in India and their close and friendly relations and also the presence of Indian miniature artists in Iran and immigration of some of the enthusiastic painters to India, the greatest artistic exchange in the world, that is; the creation of new styles of miniature occurred. Works that now beautify the walls of world museums.

Insight into the art of miniature, which is the essence and basis of this study, leads to deciphering the strengths and meeting point of this significant and valuable event which is the art of miniature and a window will be opened to the posterity.

1.1.1. Purpose of the Research

As mentioned, the Mughal kings of India (simultaneous with the rise of the Safavid in Iran) ruled the vast land of India and the epitome of the rule of the Safavid coincided with the reign of the Mughals in India.

Nowhere in the world, may two nations be found with such friendly relations able to share their learning.
The first common point which can be mentioned is literature and the art of miniature. Due to the interest and patronage of the kings of the two nations, the greatest treasure of the world was depicted by the miniaturists of the two countries. Therefore, it is necessary to study the commonalities of the miniature during the Safavid and the Mughals of India due to the significance of the issue. Although, I admit that studying the art of India and Iran and comparison and analysis of the miniatures of these two countries requires many years.

Understanding the art and culture of both countries is significant. And the first question that is raised is “how can the art of miniature of these two countries be so similar?” The answers to some of these questions reveal the significance of the same issue which was briefly mentioned.

1.1.2. Scope of the Research

The most important usage of this research is for the students of painting for whom it can be presented as a course and this art can be taught to them. Also, this research can be published and provided to those interested.

1.1.3. Methodology of the Research

Using library method and also using credible journals and visiting authentic museums of Iran and India. In Iran, Reza Abbasi Museum and in Delhi, the
National Museum can serve as important sources and also my analysis of the remaining works and comparing different styles of miniature.

1.1.4. Sources of the Research

Main sources are books and articles of the valid journals which are published exclusively on miniature.

1.1.5. Structure of the Research

The structure of my research consists of six chapters and the first chapter is about the relations of the two countries. As you know, so long as the kings and rulers wish we can establish relations at such a level as the art of miniature was included in and could present itself at the highest level possible. In this chapter the meanings of miniature and workshop techniques have been discussed and also reference has been made to the role of literature in the Safavid era and eventually to immigration of some Iranian poets to India for some reasons.

In the second chapter, the history of miniature in Iran (the ancient era) and post-Islamic miniature have been discussed. And also the history of painting in India and especially the paintings on the walls of Ajanta cave have been mentioned.

The third chapter discusses the role of Iranian and Indian kings and the state of miniature and the common styles in the two countries especially the schools of
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Tabriz, Qazvin and Isfahan during the Safavid era and Jain, Rajasthani and Pahari painting in India.

In the fourth chapter, I have dealt with the peculiar characteristics of miniature such as anatomy of the face, anatomy of the body and clothes, color, perspective, composition, hat, scarf, caves and mountains, geometric, Arabesque and Khotae designs and calligraphy which are among the important pillars of miniature painting which can distinguish miniature painting from European painting. But understanding miniature will only be possible with a deep and esoteric insight because these paintings have their unique characteristics.

In the fifth chapter, I have dealt with the reasons behind the formation of the important Mughal-Indian style which may justly be called the renaissance of miniature and have named influential artists such as Behzad and other painters who have contributed to the formation of this style. It is evident that immigration of Iranian painters and their collaboration with Indian painters has led to the development of this style. Also references have been made to the Timurid period and development of the great schools of Herat and Shiraz. In the sixth chapter, I have Conclusion, Bibliography, Biography and List of Figures.

1.2. RELATIONS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES

Among people and races that have come in touch with the Indian culture and life and have influenced it, Iranians have been the oldest and most constant. In fact,
they have had relations even prior to the advent of the Indo-Aryan civilization because Indo-Aryan tribes and ancient Iranians have been branched from the same roots and have taken different paths. These two nations have been racially linked and their ancient religions and languages also had common grounds. The (Vedic-Indian)\(^*\) religion has much in common with (Zoroastrianism) of Iran. The language of the Vedic-Sanskrit and the language of Avesta have many similarities. These languages have been derived from each other but the ancient Indian and Iranian languages evolved separately from each other. However, they had many etymologies and words in common just as the roots of some words in all Aryan languages are the same. More than anything, their culture and art were influenced by their environment.

It is evident that Iranian art has many contacts with the land, soil and scenery of India and it is probable that continuity of the traditions of Iranian art is due to the same reason. Even in India, Indian and Aryan artistic traditions come into contact. Just like India, Iran had firm cultural foundations which could influence the invaders and often dissolve them into itself.

Arabs, who invaded Iran in the seventh century, soon surrendered to the cultural influence of Iran and instead of their simple nomadic lifestyle, adopted the luxurious ways of the Iranian culture.

\(^*\) The word “Veda” comes from “vid” which means to know. “Veda” means knowledge and wisdom.
Persian language like Persian language in Europe, in vast territories in Asia, became the language of the scholars and the elite. Iranian art and culture spread from Constantinople in the west to the eastern lands.

This Iranian influence continued in India and during the dominance and rule of Afghans and Mughals it was the official and court language of India.

All modern Indian languages are full of Persian words. In the past, India has produced several prominent and excellent poets in Persian language, and even today there are many distinguished scholars and researchers among Indians.

Apparently, the ancient civilization of the Indus valley has had contacts with its contemporary civilizations in Iran and Mesopotamia.

Conspicuous similarities are seen among plans, designs and cities of that time. Also there are certain evidences that reasons that indicate contacts between Iran and India during the pre-Achaemenian era.

The name of India has been mentioned in the sacred book of Avesta in which there are descriptions of north India because Iran and the northern areas of India had interests in each other since ancient times and even prior to the Achaemenian dynasty.

When Cyrus the Great came to power more contacts were made. Cyrus probably reached the borderlines of Iran and India and probably as far as Kabul and Baluchistan.
Certainly, since the seventh century B.C. up until centuries later, Iran and India have had commercial relations.

Since sixth century B.C., due to the campaigns of Cyrus and Darius, direct contacts between Iran and India increased. Following the victory of Alexander, Iran was ruled by the Greek for several centuries. During this period contacts between Iran and India continued and it is said that the buildings at the time of Ashuka were under the influence of the architecture of Persepolis. Greco-Buddhist arts which developed in the northwest of India and Afghanistan were influenced by Iran.

In the Gupta Empire in India in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. in which artistic activities especially flourished, communication with Iran still continued.

In the north of India, merchants and passengers traveled via land routes and south of India communicated with other countries via sea. Based on the remaining documents, one of the empires of southern India exchanged ambassadors with the Sasanid kings.

Conquests of the Turks, Afghans and Mughals in India led to increasing development of India’s contact with central and western Asia. In the fifteenth century A.D., around the same time that renaissance was beginning in Europe, in the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara also a period of artistic renaissance flourished in the Timurid era which was strongly influenced by Iran.
“Although Timur was cruel and coldhearted, he was a patron of art and letters and loved to read the poems of Hafiz and Nezami. He and his successors were among the greatest patrons of artisans, artists, scholars and men of letters.

It has been recounted in history that Timur-e Lang decided to gather as many masters and artisans as possible in Samarkand, his capital, and use them; therefore he gathered hundreds of painters, portraitists and artists from Bagdad and Tabriz and other parts of his territory.\(^1\)

Babar himself was one of the Timurid princes and he left such an artistic environment and came to throne in Delhi. This happened at the beginning of the sixteenth century when also in Iran a period of artistic revival began at the time of the Safavid. This period is known as the golden age of the Iranian art. Humayun, Babar’s son, took refuge in Iran and with the help of one of the Safavid kings he was able to return to India.

The Mughal kings of India had the closest ties with Iran and there were always Iranian scholars, poets and artists who, seeking fame and wealth, came to the majestic court of the great Mughal kings.

In India a new school of architecture developed and flourished which was a mixture of Indian thought and Iranian inspirations. The cities of Delhi and Agra were embellished with the beautiful and harmonious buildings of this school.

\(^1\) Zaki Mohammad Hassan, History of Painting in Iran, translated by Abolghasem Sahab, Tehran, Sahab Geographical Institute, 1993, p. 68
Taj Mahal is the most well-known building of this school of architecture which Rene Grosse, the French scholar, described it as “spirit of Iran which has manifested in an Indian body”. There are not many people who have had such close ties and have been as close in origins throughout history as Iranians and Indians.\(^2\)

Among arts, miniature which has its roots in the ancient civilization of both countries is of particular historical significance. Taking its course throughout history, this art form underwent numerous changes and in the Timurid era with the advent of the school of Herat, began to flourish.

With the rise of the Safavid and the interest of the Safavid kings in this art and reign of Babar, the founder of the Gurkani dynasty in India, the grounds were prepared for the growth and evolution of miniature. At first this art reaches its culmination but in the middle of the period it deteriorated and eventually, being influenced by the European painting, it declined.

At the beginning of the tenth century Hijri, Iran and India had common borders. Iranian civilization was well-known among the Muslim Asians of that time and its cultural borders where much beyond its political borders. One of the means of cultural influence was trafficking between the two countries. There were many mutual links between the two countries and their people enjoyed cultural, scientific and commercial exchanges.

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Ancient civilizations of Iran and India which had been derived from the same origins underwent various periods of mutual impact. Throughout history, Iran and India have had close cultural relationships. Babar Empire which is also called Gurkani or Indian Mughals must be considered the era of these cultural relationships.

Simultaneously with the brilliant rule of the Safavid in Iran, Mughal kings reigned in India and the ultimate power of the Safavid coincided with the powerful period of the reign of Mughals.

These two great powers had close ties. With no other external power did Indian Mughals establish constant and deep relations.

Mughals of India and Iran usually had peaceful relationships and no major military attacks ever occurred against the other one. Only Qandahar was constantly the subject of dispute and was repeatedly exchanged between the two countries.

The close ties of the courts of Iran and India led to the increasing interest of Mughal kings of India in the Iranian mysticism, literature and miniature.

It is noteworthy that throughout history the people of Iran and India had constant communication with each other even before the Aryan tribes entered the vast plateau of Iran and the huge land of India.
Ancient remnants discovered in excavations of Mohenjo Daro in the Indus valley and Harappa in the northwest of Punjab and Saurashtra province indicate that around 2500 B.C. a rather advanced civilization existed in that region. And although the beginning and ending of this civilization is not clear, but most probably it has existed up until 1500 B.C.

Discoveries in India are similar to those excavated by archeological teams in the Iranian plateau and the valley of Tigris and Euphrates rivers and indicate that the inhabitants of India and Iran had close ties and constant communication prior to the entrance of the Aryan tribes. Among the discovered works, two types of patterned earthenware from the ancient civilizations of Iran and India are seen one of which was designed on a red and the other on a yellow background.

In some of the ancient cities of Iran and India, both types and in some other cities only one type has been found.

Excavations on the “Silk Kashan” hills, 300 miles to the south of Tehran, in around 1930 show that the ancient city of Kashan has been the place of friction and contact between the two ancient civilizations of Iran and India.³

1.3. ROYAL CALENDAR OF THE INDIAN KINGS WHO WERE CONTEMPORARIES OF THE SAFAVID KINGS

1.3.1. Kings of India

Babar: 1526-1530 A.D. / 932-937 H.Q.
Humayun: 1530-1556 A.D. / 937-964 H.Q.
Akbar: 1556-1605 A.D / 964-1014 H.Q.
Shah Salim (Jahangir): 1605-1628 A.D. / 1014-1038 H.Q.
Khoram Mirza (Shah Jahan): 1628-1657 A.D. / 1038-1068 H.Q.
Orangzib: 1657-1707 A.D. / 1068-1118 H.Q.

1.3.2. Safavid Kings

Shah Esmail I: 1502 A.D. / 907 H.Q.
Shah Tahmaseb I: 1524 A.D. / 930 H.Q.
Shah Esmail II: 1576 A.D. / 984 H.G.
Mohammad Khodabandeh: 1577 A.D. / 985 H.Q.
Shah Abbas I: 1587 A.D. / 996 H.Q.
Shah Safi: 1629 A.D. / 1038 H.Q.
Shah Abbas II: 1642 A.D. / 1052 H.Q.
Shah Soleyman: 1667 A.D. / 1077 H.Q.
Shah Sultan Hossein: 1694 A.D. / 1105 H.Q.
Shah Tahmaseb II: 1722 A.D. / 1135 H.Q.
Shah Abbas III: 1731 A.D. / 1144 H.Q.
1.4. A LOOK AT VOCABULARY AND MEANINGS OF MINIATURE

The word “miniature” which was first used by European tourists and later by nineteenth century orientalists is now, unfortunately, common everywhere even in Iran. Perhaps, this choice of word has been made in order to differentiate between the original Iranian miniature and the painting influenced by the west.

But why “miniature”? What does this word mean? To answer this question, we must take a look at dictionaries and ideas of the researchers and art experts. Eventually we come across various ideas. Some dictionaries define it as: a small picture in which intricacy has been used. In some other it has been defined as: a kind of painting unique to the east in which the rules of perspective and anatomy are not considered. This definition refers to small pictures unique to the east but even in the west we see such pictures which are also called miniature.

Europeans generally use the term “miniature” to refer to small portraits which were painted with water color on ivory in the 18th and 19th century.

Some consider “miniature” a French word which has been coined by combining the words “minimum” and “natural” and means “natural and small”.

It must be explained here that such Iranian and Indian paintings are not only small paintings in the books but also include large murals on the walls of some palaces.
Some believed that the root of this word is the Latin word “minimum” means, “tiny style of painting”. The origin of this word is derived from book illustration in which red lead was the dominant color.

In the book of Story of Civilization by Will Durant, there is a definition of miniature: “The word miniature is derived from the word “minium” which Romans imported from Spain and its color was light purple which had a favorable result in book gilding.”

Regarding the word “miniature”, Dr. Tajvidi, the Iranian author, states: “This word has been derived from “minium” which means a special red color, because initially in the west, books were illustrated by a color which was a mixture of vermilion and minium.”

1.5. ON INTRICACY IN MINIATURE

Attention to intricacy and concentration while creating a work of art are issues which have not been sufficiently studied so far.

With a little contemplation it is realized that an artist who concentrates all his inner power to create a masterpiece whose dimensions do not exceed several centimeters and puts all worries out of his mind while designing accurately and painting delicately and replaces tranquility will be really open to receiving inner inspirations. Masters of this art sometimes have to hold their breath in order to be able to paint a margin and continue working in this condition. It is
obvious how much dedication there is in the works of such artists and how much enthusiasm and selflessness is required to create a genuine work in this manner.

When we compare the personality of such artists with the aims of contemporary painters who, without any effort, expect to reach fame and eminence in a short while and study the contrast between these two ways then we may find out the reason behind superficiality of most of contemporary works of art.

An artist who, for several years, performs tasks such as grinding pigments, inlay and bead work on paper, etc. with humility and religious devotion (artists considered it mandatory to undertake these preparations) and all day works on a piece for hours with much accuracy and concentration and creates exquisite designs, he gradually attains a kind of self-purification which is peculiar to accomplished artists.

Since the slightest movement of the artist’s hand in this condition is subject to his thought and the least involuntary move can destroy his work, this kind of painting can be as effective in the sublimation of the artist’s soul as mortifications prescribed for gaining self-control.

Passage of time does not matter to the creators of delicate artistic works. At times it takes years to create an excellent piece of miniature and the artist never senses the passage of this time. To these artists, the irreversible continuous time
divided into hours and minutes, which is the result of a mechanical measurement, does not matter. Instead, time is regarded as a qualitative and internal phenomenon and the artist deals with moments in time whose worth is measured not by their quantity but their quality.

From the outset of Islam, Iranians paid much attention to intricacy and delicacy in artistic works especially in the field of gilding and cover making and book illustration and more than ever intricacy and technical perfection were taken into consideration. In some of the headings and the page of the list of the Quran verses, colors and elegant designs are seen as if their creator has had heavenly beauties in mind.

1.6. MATERIAL, PRACTICAL METHODS AND WORKSHOP TECHNIQUES

Perhaps the most important duty of the court painters has been to paint albums and manuscripts and illustrating and gilding them in a luxurious manner. The material used has been expensive and the designs have required hard and onerous work.

Painting albums of the Mughal empire followed the same old style of the Timurids and Turkmen as well as the techniques of their contemporaries, that is; the Safavid and Ottomans. In these albums paintings and designs and

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4 Akbar Tajvidi, A Look at the Art of Iranian Painting, Tehran, Ministry of Islamic Art and Culture Publication, pp. 61, 62.
samples of the eminent calligrapher’s work along with masterpieces and other remarkable works are seen and these pages had to be reconstructed and their margins were decorated with excellent gildings and then bound them in the finest leather or varnished covers and kept them in the workshop.

Except for “Hamzenameh” which was prepared for Akbar Shah in the first years of his reign and also several album pages in large sizes which have been created on linen, other examples of Mughal miniature have been made on paper. In the Safavid era we come across works which have not been created on paper and have been painted in large sizes on the walls of castles and palaces such as “Chehel Sotun” in Isfahan (Figure 1).

New Indian papers, which were originally manufactured in Kashmir, are still admired for their thickness and fineness. Early papers were not of high quality and at least up until 1600 A.D. the required paper for the manuscripts had to be imported from Iran or Italy. Before being handed over to the calligraphist or the scribe, these papers were measured and polished so as to become impenetrable against ink or other colored material. Then in the Mughal era, scribes wrote poems and texts in “nastaliq” on these papers. “Nastaliq is one of Iranian calligraphic styles which cannot be written fast but rather considerable attention is required while writing so that the text will be written correctly. The used ink was usually black which was mixed with Arabic gum and sometimes with gold powder.”
Figure 1: Two lovers; Mural on Chehelsotun Palace, Esfahan
After writing the book, it was handed to the gilders and they gilded the margins with gold powder. Then it was given to the miniaturists and after drawing a portrait or human figure, they began to paint.

The color they selected included soda ash for yellow, cinnamon for red, cupper salt for green, lazuli stone for dark blue and sometime saffron for red or used an insect called “lakh” to produce red color.

In drawing during the Mughal period, portrait was very important and in some versions which had been drawn outside the Mughal empire, especially manuscripts which came to India from Bokhara, many of the portraits were redrawn according to the desire of the king. It can be said that Mughal painters (16th and 17th century) were very skillful in copying which at times made it difficult to distinguish between the copy and the original. And this skill in copying was so much that Jahangir Shah boasted of it. In the 18th and 19th century, British residents of India tried to acquire this skill because Indian artists copied very well.

1.7. A BRIEF REFERENCE TO THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN PROMOTION OF MINIATURE DURING THE SAFAVID ERA

During the reign of Shah Esmail I, Turkish language was used in the Safavid court and even after Shah Esamil I and transference of the Safavid capital from Tabriz to Qazvin and Isfahan Turkish was spoken in the Safavid court. The
king usually spoke Turkish because since childhood the Safavid princes were brought up by a Qezelbash commander who was the superintendent and since they socialized with the Qezelbash from an early age, they adapted Turkish language.

Also during their reign, since they were mostly in touch with this class, they had to speak Turkish. But the language of composition and literature since the beginning of the Safavid dynasty in Tabriz and other cities of Iran was Persian. Letters, orders, official correspondence and contracts were all written in Persian and rarely did Safavid kings write any letters in Turkish even to Ottoman kings.

Since Persian language became the means of communication with neighboring countries namely India and the Ottomans, it was used in their courts more than ever. At the court of the Timurid kings of India, Persian was the official and common language and all correspondence and orders were in Persian. Besides, most Mughal princes wrote poetry in Persian and supported Iranian poets.

Ottomans at their court wrote many of the orders and letters in Persian and in their letters to the Safavid court expressed their main idea in the form of a Persian poem.

Using Persian language in the Indian and Ottoman courts was one of the reasons behind the introduction of miniature which was associated with Persian
language and poetry into these countries and it influence on painting in these states.

Safavid kings love poetry and literature and many of them wrote poems in Persian. Shah Abbas I also honored the poets and respected their precious works. He kept poetry collections of great poets in his library which had been written by calligraphists and decorated with beautiful Iranian miniatures. He encouraged some people to write biographies of the poets as well as a selection of their poems.

In spite of all the patronage for the poets, India was the haven of the poets because Timurid kings held conferences and it was no wonder that anybody who wrote poetry dreamt of traveling to India and seeking his fortune. Thus, Iranian Safavid poets also traveled to India to seek richer cultural and economic support and there they created the Indian style. And miniature which was structurally very similar to Persian poetry advanced along with poetry and literature. Generally, it can be said that miniaturists had close ties with literature and a miniaturist usually selected his subject matter from epic poems. The stories he depicted had roots in the ancient mythologies.

Miniature scenes often come from epic stories and relate the fights of the heroes. Like the stories from Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh or moral tales adapted from “kelileh o demneh”, Nezami’s “Khamseh”, Sadi’s “Gulistan” and Nezami’s “Sharafnameh”.
1.8. IMMIGRATION OF IRANIAN POETS AND MINIATURISTS TO OTHER COUNTRIES

Although the Safavid kinds showed much interest in miniature, poetry and literature, but sometimes due to some reasons artists were offended and eventually immigrated. Immigration of Iranian poets and miniaturists to India and Ottoman Empire took place during the reign of the first Safavid kings especially in the second half of the rule of Shah Tahmasb.

A constant current of Iranians’ immigration to India existed during the reign of the Gurkani kings in India and many Iranians left Iran at various stages of the rule of this dynasty and went to India.

Severe religious prejudice of Shah Tahmasb in the latter half of his reign and his indifference and extreme bias as compared to the liberal environment of India which was pure from religious prejudice and also favorable social conditions and ideal patronage of the Gurkani court or Mughal Kings of India who were in possession of a great wealth led to the immigration of poets and artists to India.

Several distinguished Iranian poets especially Naziri Neishaburi, Orfi Shirazi, Anis Shamloo, Shakibi Isfahani and Zohoori left Iran for India.

Iranian miniature which had declined during that period was strengthened with the immigration of the miniaturists and patronage of the Mughal kings of India and could have a major impact on Indian painting and formed the “Indo-Iranian” or “Mughal-Indian” school of miniature.