

# Applying the Place of Islamic Mysticism and Zen Buddhist Ideology in Sohrab Sepehri's Paintings

## **Abstract**

Painting and poetry, as two arts that are closely related to one's thoughts and interests, are a reflection of common religious beliefs and associated symbols. Painting and poetry are both rooted from the same source and foundation and correspond to the thoughts and ideas of the author. Sohrab Sepehri, a contemporary poet and painter, has a special style that distinguishes his works from others. The issue that can be raised is how to reflect the cultural beliefs and mystical thoughts in Sohrab Sepehri's paintings. This research uses a descriptive method and content analysis to analyze the style of Sohrab Sepehri's paintings. The findings of the research indicate that Sepehri has used mystical ideas such as Islamic mysticism and Zen Buddhism in his paintings and his works are influenced by Zen behavior. Most mystical artists, including Sepehri, have paid much attention to nature, which is one of the obvious manifestations of the creation of the universe.; in this sense, Sepehri sees and feels God next to the tall pine tree in the middle of the night. Sepehri's works also have artistic and semantic themes of worldview of mysticism, including Islamic mysticism. In general, it can be said that mystical ideas and Zen Buddhist behavior have been very influential in the composition and drawing of Sepehri paintings. Also, the existence of mystical and Zen symbols of Buddhism, such as mountains, trees, etc. in Sepehri's paintings expresses Sepehri's naturalism, which is one of the mystical ideas and principles of Zen Buddhism.

## **Research aims:**

1. The study of the influence of Zen thought and Islamic mysticism on the composition of Sohrab Sepehri's paintings.
2. A study of the symbolic aspects of the elements of nature in Sohrab Sepehri's paintings according to Zen Buddhism and Islamic mysticism.

## **Research questions:**

1. What effect did Zen Buddhism and Islamic mysticism have on the composition of Sohrab Sepehri's paintings?
2. According to Zen thought, what are the symbolic aspects of the elements of nature in Sepehri's paintings?

**Keywords:** Islamic mysticism, Zen Buddhism, painting, Sohrab Sepehri

## Introduction

Sohrab Sepehri was a renowned Iranian poet and painter who was born in 1929 in Kashan. He is one of the prominent poets of the contemporary period in Iran. Sepehri is known as an educated and sublime human being who has crystallized in his paintings and poems. His painting and poetry are meticulously related and very close to each other. For this purpose, it appears compulsory to review the life and works of this artist who has mastered both arts. In his paintings, Sepehri avoids complexity and turns to simplicity. He also conveys his discovery, intuition and enlightenment to the viewer of his works with the help of symbols and in diverse means. Sepehri has continuously used symbolic expression in the selection of elements of his paintings to instill his feelings and thoughts, so it appears that in Sohrab Sepehri's works, including his poems and paintings, teachings of the Zen Buddhist school is evident. One of the basic and thought-provoking features of Sepehri's paintings is the continuity and accompaniment with his poems. Countless of these works are among the pictorial masterpieces not only of Iran, but also of the world. The unique insight and similar mentality of the artists of these works has caused an internal connection and inherent harmony of Iranian literature and painting since we encounter an artist who has worked in both painting and poetry and has created valuable works; moreover, he is considered an artist who is experienced in both painting and poetry. Islamic mystics see and feel God in each of His creatures. Most mystical artists, including Sepehri, considered nature as one of the obvious manifestations of the creation of the universe. Most of the obtainable studies and documents accomplished are to study and critique the influence of Sepehri's thoughts on his poetry and the influence of Zen Buddhism in his paintings.

The background of the present study indicates that an independent work with this title has not been written so far, but several studies have examined Zen in the poems of Sepehrab Sepehri. Vakili (2000) in his article examined the "The influence of Zen religion on Sepehri's thought and works". In his study, he sought to study and analyze the differences and similarities between traditional Eastern mysticism and Sohrab Sepehri's mysticism. According to Vakili, Sepehri's paintings are close to Indian and Japanese art and the symbols of Eastern mysticism, including Zen and Buddhism, appear in his works (Vakili, 2000). In another article, Zafaranloo and Jafari (2004) examined the mystical view or mystical attitude in Sohrab Sepehri's poems. They concluded that Sepehri's ability in poetry, his poetic power in describing nature, the elements and objects around him, is undeniable and unbelievable. According to the study of his poems from the first to the last poem, it can be seen that Sepehri's mystical insight is more obvious in his later poems (Zafaranloo, Jafari, 2004). Zamani Darani (2019) in his book entitled *The Voice of Zen Foot* with an approach to the works of Sohrab Sepehri, has analyzed and examined the Zen ideas of Sepehri Buddhism. The author takes a comparative look at Sepehri's influence on Zen Buddhist ideas and finally analyzes the traces of these ideas in Sepehri's works. Khairullah (2015) in his book has scrutinized and analyzed Eastern mysticism in the thought of Sohrab Sepehri. He has stated that Sepehri is a new poet who has mixed the world of his mind, thought and poetry with mystical thinking. Sepehri and his unique poetry express his discovery, intuition and enlightenment to his audience (Khairullah, 2016). Kharghani (2016) in his research has analyzed the relationship between Sohrab Sepehri's visual works and Islamic mysticism and Zen aesthetic insight. In this research, while expressing some aspects of Sohrab's life and collecting the opinions of some critics and artists, his personality and various aspects of his art are examined to observe the effects of Sepehri from the ideas of Islamic mysticism and other philosophical schools of thought such as Zen. He concludes that Buddhism is accepted and the connection between his paintings, drawing thoughts and analyzing his works is evident. Kharghani's findings show that Sohrab has used mysticism in most of his works (Kharghani, 2016). The present study examines the place and reflection of mystical and Zen Buddhist ideas in Sepehri's paintings. The present research has been done with a content analysis and descriptive approach. The contents of this research were collected based on the library method to clarify the existing hidden angles about the influence of Sepehrab Sepehri's paintings on mysticism.

## Conclusion

Sohrab Sepehri's paintings similar to his poems, have a specific pattern and intellectual framework derived from the mystical ideas of the Far East and Zen Buddhism. In his paintings, special attention is paid to nature. Sepehri with a clear mind is only fascinated with the current time. The concepts of Zen Buddhism, including its weekly conduct, represent a completely new element in Sepehri's descriptions of nature. In the present study, the results showed that there were approximately seven principles and behaviors of Zen in Sepehri's paintings. On the other hand, in most of Sepehri's paintings, symbolic aspects of nature such as tree, mountain, water, stone and fish, etc. have been used. It also shows Sepehri's naturalism, which is one of the ideas and principles of Zen Buddhism; implements his ideas in the form of paintings by being influenced and imitating the Zen religion and teachings. Sepehri has been able to consider the concerns and desires of contemporary man who are caught in their social and political problems. It is also the themes of mysticism and Sufism in Sepehri's paintings that have distinguished his works. Some mystical subjects (roots) such as the unity of intuition, the unity of the soul with the world, sensual loneliness, love and its contraction with the intellect (wisdom), naturalism, sensual optimism, mystical death friendship and contradiction in paintings and Sepehri's works are quite obvious. In Sepehri's paintings, the aesthetic dimension can be clearly seen. The principles of aesthetics are derived from ontology and epistemology in combination with local traditions. Due to its pervasive nature, it has affected all aspects of Japanese life and even has profound effects on the art of Japanese architecture. Zen focuses on inner peace and physical comfort. In Sepehri's paintings, like other Buddhist Zen, Zen has extensively considered inner life in the outer world and vice versa.

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