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## **The Study of Text and Hypertext Dimensions of the Works of Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi: One of the Renowned Masters of Kerman Carpet Designing**

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### **Abstract**

Artistic cultural honors could be considered as one of the most important components in cultural identity and identifying them could pave the way for cultural development. Recognition of the honors and studying their role and position in ethnical cultures could be also considered as one of the strategies to promote cultural identity. In art and culture of Kerman, Carpet Art or industry has centuries-old history. The most important feature of Kerman Carpet is that it has been able to join cultural and political evolutions properly and represent the epistemological formations and common discourses on culture competently. The Guild System of Kerman Carpet has observed presence of numerous artistic dynasties, which the most indicator artists could be in Shahrokhi Family. Among the artists of Shahrokhi Family, in addition to Mohsen Khan and Hassan Khan, Ahmad Khan has also a special position. This study has tended to use descriptive-analytical method to discuss on some artistic and personality indicators of Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi and answer the main question that what is the role and position of this artist in traditional art of Kerman Carpet? The results obtained from this study could be analysis of some brilliant works of Ahmad Khan. Through analyzing and stylistic investigation of these works and expressing some text and hypertext dimensions of these works, the role and position of this artist is specified. The artist has been considered as a pattern, developer and pioneer due to his personality and artistic traits.

**Keywords:** Text dimensions, Hypertext dimensions, Stylistics, Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi, Kerman Carpet.

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## **Introduction**

Iranian traditional arts have wide range and some of them have lost the ability to resist against evolutions over the time and have been forgotten. One of the most important reasons for forgetting traditional arts could be economic dimensions, along with cultural dimensions, which have made new generations show no trend for continuing these traditions. The traditional arts should try to represent their capabilities with a different attitude and again pave the way for boom and retrieval of these arts with the supports of authorities and scholars. Kerman Carpet could be considered as a diverse type in Iranian Carpets. The field has experienced revolutionary changes and evolutions in design and motifs properly and has been a brilliant domain in intercultural texts.

In late Qajar Era, with the boom of carpet weaving and influence of foreign corporates, many companies were deployed in Kerman and produced carpets. The most important one was East London Company, which its reputation was assigned to Carpet Joint Stock Company in 1935. There are many designs in these companies, which are arts of many designer and painter artists lived in this country about 100 years ago. However, no one has paid attention to protection and maintenance of these designs unfortunately. If this process is continued, they will be destroyed over the time and even no name remains from these designers and artists. One of the renowned designers of Kerman, who has been also active in these companies, is Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi. Ahmad Khan, one of the famous artists of Shahrokhi family, has had his special design and style. In this study, an overview is presented on works of Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi.

The main objective of this study is to determine the role and position of Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi. For this purpose, 7 works of this artist are analyzed. In analysis of these works, two text and hypertext dimensions of works and personality of the artist are discussed, so that a step could be taken in order to protect and for restoration of valuable works of this artist.

## **Literature review**

In field of literature review, no independent book or article was found; although a few studies have discussed about elite artists more and less. The most important work is conducted by Edwards, A. Cecil (1975), who has mentioned name of artists shortly. His book could be considered as an appropriate source for pictures. Sirus Parham (1978) have discussed on some unique aspects of carpet designers of Kerman. MD Jahangard (1996) has taken a special interview with Hussein Khan Shahrokhi (son of Ahmad Khan), which has been used as a document in data analysis section. Juleh (2012) has referred to some elite artists like Ahmad Khan in summarized form. Sh Suresrafil (2002) has introduced designer artists and have

published some valuable pictures of their works; although the author has never analyzed their works. I. Zakariaee Kermani (2013) has conducted a research project and has discussed on role and position of artists of Shahrokhi Family and has been used as the best reference in this field.

### **Kerman Carpet**

Kerman has been always one of the most important centers for carpet production in Iran over the history, so that it could be considered as one of the most important centers for carpet weaving in 10 and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries A.H. The structure of Kerman Carpet has cotton fabric and wool lint and silk is rarely observable in Kerman carpet. The density of Kerman carpet is to 196-400 asymmetric nodes per square inch (Allane and Lee, 1993, p.120). Kerman carpet includes 3 woofs and this style has been common in Safavid Era's carpets and Kerman carpet has preserved this feature properly (EilandIII, Murray Lee, 2003, p. 40).

According to available documents about Kerman Carpet Weaving Industries, there is no evident proving existence of carpet weaving before Safavid Era in Kerman. Even Venetian explorer Marco Polo in Ilkhan Era has introduced some industries of Kerman and has said nothing about Kerman carpet (Millione, 1990: 45). Undoubtedly, is he had seen the Kerman carpet and carpet weaving in Kerman, he surely mentioned a name of it. However, this issue could not be a reason to lack of carpet weaving in Kerman in Ilkhan Era and there have been some hand-woven carpets at least in villages around Kerman. This is because; when Kerman was changed into one center for royal carpet weaving in Safavid Era, this success has been never without previous supports, since the investment in carpet production in a region needed supports of weaver skill and carpet weaving experience. Anyway, the oldest references existed from Kerman carpet dates back of Safavid Era. In the book "Tarikh Alam Ara Abbasid" by secretary of Shah Abbas, Kerman carpet is referred. In addition, Sharden has visited Kerman once in 1666 and once again in 1672 and has referred to Kerman Carpet. Also, the historical documents of subcontinent in time of Akbar Shah have referred to Kerman carpet and its export to India several times (Edwards, A. Cecil, 1989: 228).

After Safavid Era, Kerman carpet was again the most important Iranian carpet in Afshar and Zand Era, so that Nader Shah Afshar used to provide many ordered carpets from Kerman (Ciba S, 2005: 90).

Carpet weaving industry had developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century and the products produced at Kerman had been exported to Europe and America to considerable amount. Sir Percy Sykes, who established the first British Council in 1896 in Kerman and lived for a few years at this city, could be proud of his 1000 carpet in late 19th century (Bennet, 2004: 239). After economic

boom of Iran in 1870, foreign investments were done in Iran Carpet Market, especially Kerman, and companies such as OCM, Castelli and Brothers, Atie Broth and Timuyanki had gained authority of Kerman carpet market since late 19th century. After World War I, American carpet market found about Kerman carpet and this decreased weaving carpets with scarf design in Kerman, since these carpets were too delicate for American market. Hence, since that time, Kerman carpet entered to a new domain under title of American carpets with less delicacy and mostly affected by French motifs such as Aboson and Savonry (W Jacobsen Charles, 1973, pp.243-244). After economic crisis of America in 1919, majority of foreign companies left the Iranian carpet market and this has paved the way for establishment of Iran Carpet Company. After World War II, Iran Carpet Company produced some carpets with monochrome background and some bunches of rose flowers (Anquetil Jacques, 2003, p.131).

### **Master Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi**

Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi, son of Abdol Hussein Khan (born in 1882), is one of the celebrities and honors of Shahrokhi family. The elite artist is one of the greatest and skilled carpet designers of Kerman in second generation of great designers of Kerman carpet. He is one the first designers worked in OCM Company and Kerman Carpet Joint Stock Company after that and was the supervisor of painters of this company to the last years of his life (Juleh, 2011: 37). Undoubtedly, Ahmad Khan has had innate skill of Shahrokhi family and the social and cultural conditions of that time have conducted him in such a way that he has been changed into one of the elite artists even in field of Kerman and Iran Carpet designing. Undoubtedly, Ahmad Khan has created countless works in field of Kerman carpet during his artistic life and he may be considered as one of the most active artists of that time. However, an important issue is that a few numbers of works and carpet motifs could be certainly attributed to Ahmad Khan. However, different factors and causes could be considered in this field. First, Ahmad Khan has been a professional carpet designer and his only job and concern has been carpet designation. Hence, he has acted based on the stream and the structure of carpet and his designs have been woven many times along with works of other artists of Kerman carpet. Another issue is that majority of carpet designs and motifs lack signature of artist. Hence, the designer could be identified in many cases just through stylistics of the work (Zakariaee Kermani, 2013: 180).

### **Stylistics of works of Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi**

Among the available evidences of authors, only 7 works are identified, which could be attributed to Ahmad Khan. However, there is no doubt that works of this artist are more than

this. Hence, these 7 works are analyzed in this study. Through stylistic analysis of these works, other works of this elite artist could be also identified.

Figure 1 is the illustration of a carpet design, in foot of which name of artist and the year of creating the work is mentioned (Work of Ahmad Khan, Painter of Kerman, 1923). He has created this elegant work in the age 42.



Figure 1: carpet design with the signature of Ahmad Khan, painter of Kerman in 1923  
(Suresrafil, 2006: 324)

Carpet design is one fourth and its motif is sprayed design. In visual terms, this work is among labor-intensive works with compacted motifs. The colors and highlights are balanced. The dark blue background of this carpet and its light motifs has made the designs to show themselves in a contrast and seem as high relief. Combination of the elements in the design is also desirable; although the spiral motifs have gone out of traditional Iranian systematic design. In other words, system of this carpet design has not followed a system relied on original spiral, but also the elements and details show a partial spiral and this could make this work picture powerful painting aspects and go away from dominant traditional structures. This artistic aspect could be observed in form of flower bunched properly. The bunch of Shah Abbasid Flowers maintained Iranian carpets and have changed conventional structures. Arabesque margins have also found different position in composition of this work. Although deformation of common systems in this carpet could show the liberal spirits of the artist, it should be noted that violation of structures has no facilitated the work for the artist, but also has increased the

challenges for the artist. One of these challenges is coordinating the whole design. Traditional structures have been changed into a certain pattern over the history because of numerous trials and errors. Hence, artist who uses them is not significantly involved in concerns of harmony and composition, since the patterns have gifted the harmony to the artist easily; although modernist artist should harmonize each design separately. Therefore, deconstruction should not be considered as an equivalent to facility in designation, but also it is hard to do and could be taken only by the elite artists and skilled people. The special and innovative aspects of this carpet design could be presence of common elements of carpet and Cashmere Scarves of Kerman. Types of bush and bush-shaped forms and the bustling space of carpet full of motifs could show the relationship of the artist with the cashmere period of Kerman and transferring it to the age of Baharistan or Sabzikar. The system of margins of this carpet design is not relied on structures to high extent and the limits and borders have been violated in some cases.

Another examples of designs of Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi have been observed in a Carpet Joint Stock Company and 3 works have signature and 3 other works have been attributed to Ahmad Khan, since this is clear from the style of works that he has designed them.



Figure 2: sprayed (Afshan) carpet design, signature of Ahmad khan Shahrokhi (Kerman Karpet Joint Stock Co)



This carpet design has been designed based on the structure of Iranian carpet in frame of Afshan Designs. The visual features of this carpet include high compaction and density of the carpet. In other words, this work is a labor-intensive design with high beat and is absolutely based on structural system of Kerman carpet. This is a carpet with high density and high motifs and a hallowed background could be observed in it.

The density of carpet, along with common element in cashmere scarves (cashmere bushes) have made this work be close to carpets of cashmere age. In other words, the interartistic aspect of this carpet is powerful.

The bush elements of the background and margins have naturalist aspect. Some bush elements are similar to Amaranth flowers that are existed in nature of Kerman and are also highlighted in scarves. The design full of motifs in background and in margins could be observed. Types of spirals and elements are compacted densely; although the density is distributed in whole work in balanced form and this could be taken just by a creative and informed artist. In addition to type of design, color of the design is also balanced. The background color is red and the margins are ultramarine and the color of motifs in the context includes colors with spiral and balance like the design of carpet.



Figure 4: bergamot quater design with signature of Ahmad Khan (Kerman Karpet Joint Stock Co)



Figure 3: directed afshan design with signature of Ahmad Khan (Kerman Karpet Joint Stock Co)

The works in figures 3 and 4 have shown Afshan Designs with the signature of Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi in Joint Stock Company of Kerman carpet. The designs have some features referred in the work. This type of design has no position at the current age in Iran carpet market; although it was a trend in Kerman carpet by that time and Ahmad Khan could meet the trend properly with his ability in designing carpet. Therefore, these designs could be considered as examples of consistency of the artist with artistic stream of his time and trends of artistic community. The trend was entered from value system of cashmere scarves to the Iranian Cultural Domain. In addition to bush motifs, the tiny flowers of the background should not be neglected, which have almost filled the whole carpet background and shine as pearls on the courtier jewelries. These works could show the creativity, innovation, interartistic relations, designation power, composition and considering needs and economic trends properly.

Figure 3 also shows a carpet design and Edwards Cecil has published it in his book "Iranian Carpet" and has attributed it to Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi. The contrasts and black and white colors show the balance in color composition. The design and motif of this carpet is affected by scarf motifs like previous designs and some motifs like Amaranthine bush and Cypress motifs are clear in this work. The direction of elements in this design is upward. Hence, if there are altar arcs in upper part of this carpet, it could be considered as an altar carpet. Central element in the carpet reminds cypress tree, which is detectable in epical beliefs of people of Kerman and in nature of Kerman.



Figure 5: Afshan carpet design affected by scarf element with signature of Ahmad Khan  
(Edwards, 1975: 260)



Figures 6 and 7 are examples of designs of Carpet Joint Stock Co and could be attributed to Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi in terms of stylistics. The motifs used in this carpet are completely in consistence with style of Kerman carpet, especially stylistic changes after the cashmere age and especially the Sabzikar age. Moreover, structure of a traditional carpet shows the bergamot quater properly. The designs have special spiral motifs and high beat similar to other works of Ahmad Khan and the artist has tried to make audiences look around on the carpet using these spirals. Type of crowded motifs is felt in these designs, which is different from types of attitude of today human. This trend for crowded designation may happen because of the silence of the living time of the artist. By that time, crowd and sound of appearance of the modern age could not make the artist to take isolation, but also need to think about things could make them take isolation. Maybe this is the factor causing sharp beats of works of Ahmad Khan.



	
<p>Figure 7: Afshan carpet design style of Ahmad Khan (Kerman carpet joint stock Co)</p>	<p>Figure 6: Afshan carpet design style of Ahmad Khan (Kerman carpet joint stock Co)</p>

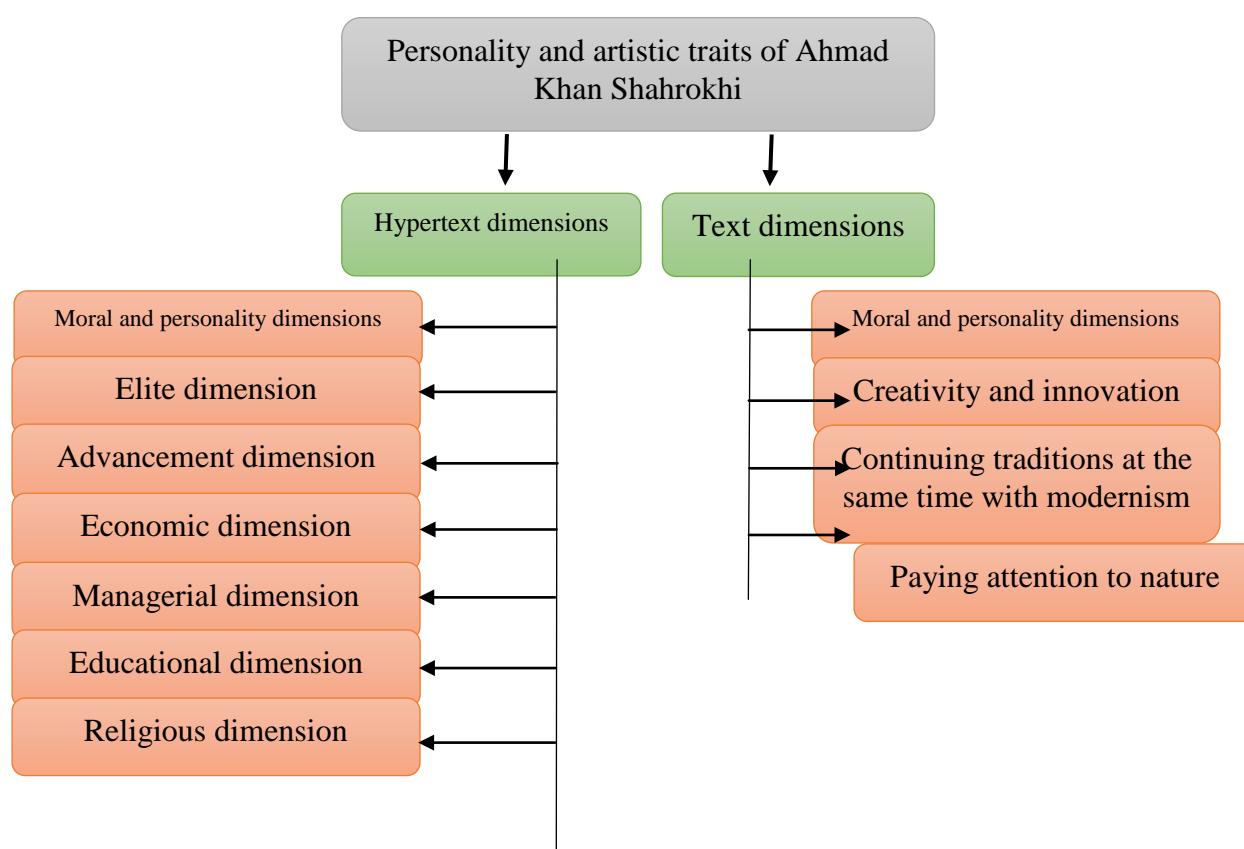
Figure 7: Afshan carpet design style of Ahmad Khan (Kerman carpet joint stock Co)

## Personality and artistic dimensions of Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi

Personality and artistic dimensions of Ahmad Khan could be analyzed from two text and hypertext aspects. The foundations of personality traits of this artist are explained in short.

### Text dimensions of works of Ahmad Khan

Identification of text works of Ahmad Khan could be done based on his works. However, it should be mentioned that these cases are not only his personality traits, but also they could be considered as a part of the most important artistic and personality traits of him.



### Aesthetics dimension

Aesthetics and beauty has been always one of the main features of works attributed to Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi. Such beauty could be investigated from different attitudes in works attributed to Ahmad Khan. Ahmad Khan has shown perfection of reality of God in frame of balanced forms like a traditional eastern artist. Although works of this artist are too dense and full of motifs, they have been always balanced and harmonized. On the other hand, it should be noted that recreation of beauty in deserted or crowded designs is harder than conventional works and the art of Ahmad Khan could create a balanced space from a crowded design full of motifs.

In terms of western formalism, works of Ahmad Khan have been nice and unique. Defamiliarization and exceeding conventional processes, along with preservation of indicator artistic traditions, could be observed in works of Ahmad Khan. The attitude of Ahmad Khan in field of carpet is a kind of aesthetic attitude and he has been able to transfer this sense of Aesthetics to the audiences through creation of balanced and harmonized forms.

### **Creativity and innovation**

Ahmad Khan, alongside with the den artists, could create some evolutions in Kerman carpet, which was not experienced by history of Kerman carpet till that time. Innovation and creativity in a traditional art with economic and commercial dimensions could be a clear and undeniable issue. If the Kerman carpet was a prospered and dynamic art in age of Shahrokhi family artists, the reason has been creativity and innovation of artists of that time. Ahmad Khan used also to show new and innovated aspects in each carpet design, similar to the den artists and had the ability to meet needs of domestic and foreign tastes easily through designing different carpets. Same artistic nature of Ahmad Khan could make an elite character of him among domestic and international companies.

### **Continuing traditions at the same time with modernism**

Ahmad Khan could be considered as a leader and pioneer of Cashmere age transfer to Baharestan or Sabzikar Movement. He could create a balanced and harmonized combination in the age of designation of Kerman carpet (Cashmere and Baharestan ages). The beginning of artistic life of Ahmad Khan was in same time with Cashmere Age and his artistic maturity was at the same time with Sabzikar Age. He could participate in this evolution of Kerman carpet properly and show the attachment of the two ages with his intelligence. Therefore, Ahmad Khan could be introduced as a modernist person and this could be observed in majority of works remained from him.

### **Paying attention to the nature**

Nature has been always a teacher for artists and this rule has been manifested about the artists living in special natural environments. In facing the natural environment, two approaches could be considered. The first approach is paying attention to the local nature and the second approach is considering the nature of others. In first approach, the artist uses the elements existed in surrounding nature as visual elements inside artistic works; although in the latter approach, the artist pays attention to those elements that lack of them could be felt at the natural environment. Ahmad Khan has paid special attention to local and others' nature in his works; it means that he has used the natural elements of Kerman like flowers and plants of the

city as motifs and has also created such a space that was absent in semi-desert nature of the City of Kerman. In other words, Ahmad Khan has considered at the same time both beauty and gaps caused by desert in his works.

### **Hypertext dimensions in works of Ahmad Khan**

In this section, some dimensions of artistic and cultural personality of Ahmad Khan are referred, which are not observed in text of his works, but also hypertext dimensions could be found out using his works. However, it should be mentioned that these cases have not only referred to his personality traits, but also other dimensions could be found through referring to these cases and they could be investigated in relation with cultural and artistic personality of this great artist.

### **Moral dimension**

Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi had high position in the artistic community of Kerman and this feature can make an artist pride and self-preference; although Ahmad Khan has always considered moral virtues in his behaviors. Among the evidences remained from him, nothing is observed other than this. Appearance of moral virtues in personality of this artist has been claimed many times by the survivors of Shahrokhi family. This special dimension of artists of traditional world should be considered as a pattern for the contemporary artists and the artists should be responsible against the society, family and working scope and they should show moral virtues in all dimensions.

### **Elite dimensions**

Elite and experts are highlighted at the society soon, since they have some talents to make them highlighted among their colleagues. An elite person could cope with the conditions easily and could be considered as a special person among others. Elite people have high capabilities in field of their job and profession, so that they have the ability to take measures that others are unable to take them. For example, Ahmad Khan had a hand in combining traditional motifs of Iran and foreign countries properly and skillfully, so that his works have both Iranian and Kerman identity and are at the same time different with other artistic works of that time.

### **Advancement**

As it was mentioned before, advancement is one of the main features of a first-degree and elite artist. Artist should try to be pioneer in field of special art compared to others. Pioneer artist can move in front line and can also make streams as a leader. In artistic fields, Ahmad Khan has been undoubtedly a pioneer artist. There is no doubt that the skills and innovations



could be the main artistic features of a pioneer artist and the works of Ahmad Khan can show the artistic features.

### **Economic dimension**

The carpet art, especially Kerman carpet, has had powerful economic dimension in age of artists such as Ahmad Khan. In other words, economic dimension of an artist could attract artists of that time and the carpet art could create considerable economic attractions for the artists of Kerman in late Qajar Era and early Pahlavi Era.

### **Managerial dimension**

The generation of Ahmad Khan had a very good position in field of carpet, since the trade of Kerman carpet was good by that time. Domestic and international carpet companies used to export thousands of Kerman carpets to different countries of the world annually. When the East Carpet Company began its activity in Kerman, Ahmad Khan and his two sons were employed there. Ahmad Khan had high position because of his powerful design and management and he was responsible for management of company in addition to design carpets.

### **Educational dimension**

Artists of traditional arts always train and educate young forces over the time and through learning artistic knowledge. Similar to other artists, Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi trained several students in his lifetime and the most famous students may be his two sons, Hassan Khan II and Hussein Khan Shahrokhi. This approach of training artists was common in Shahrokhi Family, so that sons used to continue the works of their fathers.

### **Religious dimension**

Religious dimension is existed basically in hidden layers of Iranian arts; although they are appeared sometimes in some works. In the works attributed to Ahmad Khan Shahrokhi, no case has directly referred to religion; although as it was mentioned, through entering to hidden layers of these works, some signs of religious dimensions of this elite artist could be observed.

## Conclusion

Designer artists of Kerman carpet have formed a golden age in history of art of Kerman. This field has lost its brilliance in Kerman carpet system. Hence, the memory of these artists is being removed from minds of new generation of art, it is necessary to take effort to recognize the artists of this region of Iran to make young generation follow the way of these artists with more motivation.

In this study, among the carpet designers of Kerman, because of limitations of this study and elite works of Ahmad Khan, his works are analyzed. He has been one of the artists of OCM Company and Kerman carpet Joint Stock Co. In this study, style of works of Ahmad Khan is investigated and some personality, artistic, social, religious and educational dimensions of this artist is studied to investigate the role and position of this artist in Iranian art. The study has resulted in analysis of some indicator works of this artist and through analyzing some works of him, some artistic and personality indicators of the artists are extracted.

In each age, there are many artists who create traditional designs with some contents of taste of composition and carpet design; although a few artists could create new design and structure that is accepted by the artistic community. Another important issue in relation with modernist attitude of Ahmad Khan in carpet design is preservation of his relation with the traditions. Although he has passed traditional structures in carpet design, he has preserved his relationship with traditions properly.

In this study, dimensions such as aesthetics, creativity and innovation, continuing traditions at the same time with modernism and paying attention to nature are considered as text dimensions of works of Ahmad Khan and some dimensions as moral and personality dimensions, elite, advancement, economic, management and educational and religious dimensions are considered as hypertext dimensions.

It is hope that some relevant studies are conducted in this field and the cultural community pays special attention to this issue, so that the declining stream is changed into an improving stream with sharp slope. The history of Kerman has encompassed many families and dynasties forming art of this country; although no name is remained from them because of lack of documentation of their works. Therefore, studying the artistic families and documentation of their works could make the name of cultural and artistic honors of Iran survive along with their works.

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