
Transtextual Study of Four Paintings of the Contemporary Artist, Aydin Aghdashloo*

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Abstract

Gérard Genette named any relationship between one text and other texts “Transtextuality” and divided it into five categories; including intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality. We have conducted a case study of four paintings of the Iranian contemporary painter, Aydin Aghdashloo by using the theory of “transtextuality”. These four artworks belong to “the Orientals” series and they depict the Qajar king, Fath Ali Shah. The completion of subject matter and data used in this essay is extracted from library, record and thesis materials and the conduction of the theme is comparative and analytical. The aim of the essay is to evaluate the reasons, which made the theory of “transtextuality” an appropriate critical method for artworks of Aghdashloo. The other aim is to study the five categories of “transtextual” relationship in these four paintings, by focusing on “hypertextuality”. The findings show that the artworks of Aghdashloo are a perfect example of transtextual relations.

Keywords: transtextuality, hypertextuality, Gérard Genette, Aydin Aghdashloo, the Qajar king, Fath Ali shah

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Introduction

The concept of intertextuality has played an important role in the development of Postmodernism. Every text is rich in quotes, which has turned writing into rewriting. “Books always speak of other books and every story tells a story that has already been told” (Eco, 1983: 20).

Intertextuality is a common term in literary and linguistic theories, which is related to open structuralism and post-structuralism. The term was first coined and used by Julia Kristeva in the mid-1960s. According to this theory, the meaning of a text is shaped by other texts. This theory is based on the premise that no text is a closed context, nor is it independent and alone. Were it so, they would become incomprehensible (Frow, 2005: 48).

In order to complete and make alterations to Kristeva’s theory of Intertextuality, other theorists entered the field. Gérard Genette was one of these theorists who elaborated on the studies of Kristeva and Roland Barthes. He tried to systematically analyze any relationship a text might have with other texts. Therefore he coined the term “transtextuality”, which was more complete and more accurate compared with other theorists. He divided “transtextuality” into five categories, which differed from each other based on their type of relation with the text. In this essay, we used the five categories of transtextuality to study Four paintings of Aghdashloo which depict the Qajar King¹, Fath Ali Shah². The essay focuses on one of these five categories in detail and that is hypertextuality. Due to its importance, we

are going to explain it before we mention the questions. According to Gérard Genette, “hypertextuality refers to any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary” (Genette, 1997:5).

In this essay, we will answer the following questions: What makes transtextuality an appropriate critical method for Aghdashloo’s mentioned paintings? How do the four paintings fit into the five categories of Genette? What form of relation exists between Aghdashloo’s paintings and the hypertexts, according to Genette’s hypertextuality? In order to be able to answer the questions of the essay, at first we explain transtextuality and its different parts, then we mention examples of the artist’s paintings to analyze data in a qualitative method. The next part of the essay is dedicated to hypertextuality, on which Gérard Genette has presented a comprehensive detailed research. In this section of the study, the contexts of Aghdashloo (hypertexts) and the paintings of Qajar painters (hypotexts) will be analyzed. The features and their similarities and differences will be examined by comparing the two periods and the two different styles.

The most important reference to cite is Genette’s “Palimpsests: literature in the second degree“. In this book he describes hypertextuality and divides all forms of hypertextuality into two categories, transformation and imitation. Then he goes on to explain each one of them in detail. Another important reference is Graham Allen’s book “intertextuality”.

Allen's book outlines the history and the use of Intertextuality clearly in detail and also mentions the theorists who have shaped Intertextuality and those who came after Kristeva and have altered her ideas. The most vital reference in studying the paintings of Aghdashloo was "Aydin Aghdashloo: selected paintings". This book displays a selection of his artworks. Aghdashloo's official website also has been used during the study.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Since its inception by the poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in 1960s, the theory of intertextuality has been transformed many times by other theorists. One of the theorists in the realm of Intertextuality is Gérard Genette. He described transtextuality as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed with other texts" (Genette, 1997: 1).

He subdivided the term transtextuality into five more specific categories; including intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality, which we explain in the following sentences:

1. "Intertextuality: It is the actual presence of a text in another text" (Allen, 2001:146).

In intertextuality, part of one text appears in the second text. This kind of Intertextuality is divided into three parts:

Explicit and literal form: the explicit presence of elements of a text in another text, such as quotations.

Non-explicit or hidden form: to borrow a text without citing the references that indeed is plagiarism.

Implicit Intertextuality: in this kind of

Intertextuality, neither the reference is cited explicitly like the first part nor is it hidden like the second part (Namvar motlagh, 2008:136). In this type of Intertextuality, the relationship between two texts will be revealed but it might need more attention and focus. Allusions are the main form of implicit Intertextuality.

The Qajar King Fath Ali Shah is explicitly identified by the royal seal and his name in the four paintings of Aghdashloo, as shown in Table 1; which is an explicit example of type "i".

Different headwears allude to the dates and periods before and after the enthronement of Fath Ali Shah. Also in table1, fig.4, there is an implicit intertextual reference to the following poem:

We are all mortals and immortality is yours only

The high and holy kingdom is yours only

This poem is familiar to Iranian readers, since this famous Nizami Ganjavi's³ line appeared in his book called "Khamsah". Ann Jefferson, professor of French literature, has coined the term "sister-text". The term "sister-text" describes the relation between one text and other texts within the same corpus of any given author (Jefferson, 1990:110-11). The term is very suitable for not only these four artworks of Aghdashloo's "Orientals" cycle, which show a close relation with each other but also in a lot of his artworks like "falling calligraphy" in Table 2, fig. 5 and "flowers" in fig. 6. In these two paintings even the same poem of Nizami Ganjavi has been repeated.

2. Paratextuality: Gérard Genette named the elements that accompany the main text

and are able to change or influence the reader's perception "paratextuality". It can be divided into 2 general categories: epitext and peritext.

Epitext: all elements that are outside of the text; such as interviews, advertisements, reviews, private letters and other authorial and editorial discussions.

Peritext: all elements which are within the text; such as titles, subtitles, prefaces and notes (Allen, 2001:150).

For example, The title of Aghdashloo's "Orientals" cycle, as pretext directs the perception of the reader. The word "Orientals" reminds the reader of the philosophical, cultural and geographical features of the East. It evokes the binary opposition of oriental and occidental, which the painter has a cycle by the name of "Occidental". Also the title of these four paintings, Fath Ali Shah, conveys information about this historical character to the spectators. The themes of "death", "destruction" and "evanescence" are visible in most of Aghdashloo's paintings. Aghdashloo has also mentioned this in his interviews that the idea of destruction and annihilation has been with him since his youth. This is khayyamic⁴ mindset and it should come as no surprise since Khayyam is his favorite poet, whose poems are ever present in Aghdashloo's artworks. These kinds of interviews are examples of epitext, which can guide the perception of the spectator and make the meaning of artwork clearer.

3. Metatextuality: Genette gives a brief explanation of metatextuality, as he has done for intertextuality. He says: "it is the relationship most often labeled commentary, it unites a given text to

another of which it speaks without necessarily citing, in fact sometimes even without naming it" (Genette, 1997:4).

In metatextuality, hypertexts can deny, explain or approve the hypotexts. The best form of this relation is a review or criticism. The present essay itself functions as a paratext for artworks of Aghdashloo and according to the critical explanation and interpretational qualities can also be considered a metatext for those artworks. On the other hand, if we take into account Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, which says that any text is in communication with its previous and following texts, we understand that Aghdashloo's paintings of Fath Ali Shah are paratexts for Qajar paintings and their critical and interpretational features, which denied and rejected the Qajar painters, make them metatexts for them.

4. Architextuality: The most implicit and abstract of all transtextual relations is architextuality. "It links texts by genres: thus, it is only explicit when the name of genre is incorporated in the title or subtitle of the text" (Nadal, 1994:3).

Some words, for example novel, poem or story may appear on the cover of the books, which usually doesn't happen according to Gerard Genette. This is either due to the fact that it is obvious or is a refusal to classify the text. One should know that the genres are not supposed to be declared. However the genres are only one aspect of architexts. Words like "verse", "prose" or "narrative" etc. are not normally declared. One even might believe that expressing the generic status of the text is not the responsibility of the text, but it is the readers' and critics'

duty (Genette, 1997:4). Paintings do not identify themselves explicitly as paintings or usually do not declare their styles. It is due to one or both of the reasons already mentioned above. Aghdashloo also believes that the responsibility of determining the generic status of his artworks should better lie with his spectators or critics. Some works exhibit mixtures or combinations of different styles and genres, as we see in the Aghdashloo's artworks, which combines painting, poetry and calligraphy. We can also find different styles in these four paintings of Aghdashloo. As the style of hypotexts of these four paintings belong to Qajar School of royal figurative painting, these paintings of Aghdashloo (hypertexts) relate to this style indirectly. We can also say that due to the historical context in the paintings of Fath Ali Shah, these paintings are related to historical paintings. Also the different points of view in these paintings (hypertext) represent different styles and different periods which are the hallmarks of postmodernism.

since all the hypotexts of these four paintings of Aghdashloo are related to royal figurative painting, it is necessary to know more about this painting school, before we elaborate on the hypertextual relations.

Royal Figurative Painting

Iranian artists, throughout most of their history didn't use perspective and the real shapes of objects in their artworks. It was only under the influence of western style of painting that these issues entered the Iranian paintings. Cultural relations of Iran with the West began during the

Safavid times. This cultural and artistic relation led to the formation of the school of royal figurative painting. This school began in the Zand⁵ era and reached its peak, by using the Zand cultural heritage, during Fath Ali Shah's reign (1797 – 1834 AD/ 1212 – 1250 AH). Despite western influences, there were many Iranian elements visible in these paintings. Ancient Iranian painting traditions such as idealism, preferring fantasy to reality still alive in them (Soudavar, 2001:14). Everybody is depicted in an established formula, with little regard for their real appearance. In this school, men are shown with long beards, a small waist, and a piercing gaze; people from any age or status in their real life appear young and attractive (Pakbaz, 1999:148). Due this tradition in the painting, Fath Ali Shah was never as an old person.

Since Qajar dynasty lacked legitimacy, art was used for political purposes and propaganda. The image of the monarch was utilized to centralize authority under the crown and help foster political relations with foreign embassies. That is why, in this period all attention of artists concentrated on the art of painting and portraiture (Diba, 1998:15). Due to the fact that the main aim of this type of painting was to impress the spectator, the artist exaggerated the grandeur and the glory of the king. Because of the similarities and the use of fixed formulas in different portraits of Fath Ali Shah, and to avoid wordy explanations about each portrait we will only analyze the hypotext of the first painting of Aghdashloo of Fath Ali Shah in this essay, We chose the hypotext of the first painting since Abdollah Khan

Naghashbashi is a well – documented painter in this era.

The hypotext of the first painting (Table 3, Fig. 1) is painted by Abdollah Khan Naghashbashi (Table 3, Fig. 7). Abdollah Khan (years active: 1810- 1850 AD/ 1225 -1266 AH) was the chief painter and architect in the courts of Fath Ali Shah until the enthronement of Nasser al-din Shah (Pakbaz, 2005:153). Since any hypotext is based on texts before it, Abdollah Khan’s artworks were also based on the works of painters before his period or those of his contemporaries. For example, one of the first painters of Qajar period is Mirza Baba, who painted a large painting of Fath Ali Shah in 1799 AD/1213 AH. Most portraits of Fath Ali Shah are of a later date than this. The painter did not use warm or red colors, which are to be used in the later paintings of Fath Ali Shah. What’s more, the Shah lacked the arrogant posture and the many pieces of jewelry he would later have in the other paintings (Falk, 1972:25) (Table 4, Fig. 8).

Some alterations in the style of painting were introduced by Mehr Ali, another famous painter of that period. He depicted the king with his eyes staring directly at the spectator, with more dilated whites of the eyes, darker and fuller beard and more striking eyebrows, using a brighter palette, more dramatic contrasts among colors, specially red and warm colors (Raby, 1999:11). Mehr Ali’s style became the model for later painters of the Qajar period, which we also see in Aghdashloo’s paintings of Fath Ali Shah. Also the hypotexts of Abdollah Khan can be traced back to paintings made of former kings,

Karim Khan⁶, ruling from 1751 to 1779, (Table 4, Fig. 9) and the Afsharid Nader Shah⁷, from 1736 to 1747, (Table 4, Fig. 10), since they are all painted in the same way though much simpler compared with the lavishness of the paintings of Fath Ali Shah.

Looking directly at the spectator in paintings, which gave the character formality and authority, didn’t exist until 17th century AD/11th AH, its introduction into Iranian art was due to the cultural relations with the Europeans during the Safavid dynasty⁸, along with the humanistic tendencies of the western artistic traditions (Jafari jalali, 2003:85). This direct gaze may also suggest that the king is alert and all-seeing. Aghdashloo tried to add new themes to his paintings; such as death and destruction; themes which were naturally absent in the Qajar period paintings of the king. He, therefore, wisely chose the king whose portraits were the most magnificent.

5. Hypertextuality: the relation between a text “hypotext” and the following text “hypertext” is called hypertextuality (Žindžiuvienė, 2003:148). The hypertext can transform, modify, elaborate or extend the previous text. According to Genette, this relation can not become a commentary-like one. So this feature separates it from metatextuality. that the relationship among texts often labled commentary. A distinction can be made between Genette’s hypertextuality and Kristeva’s intertextuality, as the former believed that the author uses the hypotexts intentionally and the latter considered the use of previous texts an unconscious act. One can easily detect the conscious and

intentional use of hypotexts in the artworks of Aghdashloo. As Dariush Shaygan noted in the introduction to “Aydin Aghdashloo: selected paintings”: “Nothing in his art is left to chance” (2012: 7)

In fact with this method, hypotext is challenged by hypertext. So each work of art combines at least two simultaneous voices, the voice of hypotexts and the voice of hypertexts. It reminds us of the theories of polyphony and dialogism of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who defined parody as double-voiced, since parodic texts are based on the previous texts (Bakhtin, 1984:185). Although according to Bakhtin’s theory, real polyphony is the co-existence of all voices on an equal footing, so all voices can be heard and no one voice dominates the others. Existence of different voices can create a dialog as an antidote to monologism. Aghdashloo has based his paintings on the works of Qajar painters, so according to Bakhtin, it has two voices But it seems far from a real polyphony. As polyphony does not mean the previous authoritative voice must be suppressed or subsumed by the new voice. One can see how Aghdashloo has suppressed the former voice by replacing Qajar motive and value system with his own. We will discuss this replacement in detail in hypertextuality section.

The study of hypertextual relations in four paintings of Aghdashloo

According to Gérard Genette, hypertextual relation are divided into two categories, imitation and transformation.

(1) Imitation: the intention of the author is to preserve the first text, hypotext, in a

new situation. It is one kind of indirect transformation (Namvar motlagh, 2008: 129).

(2) Transformation: the second text, hypertext, is created by making changes to the first text directly (ibid).

Artworks, discussed in this essay, all are related to the second part, which is transformation. All four paintings of Aghdashloo are simple and direct transformation of the earlier forms. By transforming the paintings minimally, he has recreated the paintings of Qajar painters in different perspectives.

Man has long discovered that he cannot always create new forms and he must be content to invest old forms with new meanings. The merit of hypertextuality lies in the fact that it constantly launches old works into new circuits of meaning and the past is not reduced to commemoration (Genette, 1997: 398).

To change the hypotexts and create the hypertexts, there are some ways which will be discussed in the following part.

- 1) Quantitative transformation:
 - i) Reduction
 - ii) Augmentation

One way to change the text is to change the size of the hypotext without changing its content. “If we abridge or shorten the hypotext, we will call it reduction and if we extend the hypotext, we will call it augmentation” (Arab Yousef Abadi et al. 2013: 133). Aghdashloo has recreated new texts through reducing and extending the hypotext. This is seen in the above-mentioned paintings. By adding a piece of paper and adding the word “expired” on his works, by tearing off parts of the hypotext, by painting a cross “X”, he has

managed to change the hypotexts.

Through these simple and direct means, he succeeded in creating new and different meanings. This reminds us of another kind of changes, that is “pragmatic transformation”.

2) Pragmatic Transformation:

Contrary to the changes in the last category, the changes here are to contents and meanings. Many events and themes of the original text will change (Genette, 1997: 309).

It is an aspect of semantic transformation that can be divided into different categories, including transmotivation and transvaluation. In all artworks of Aghdashloo of Fathali Shah, transmotivation and transvaluation can be seen clearly. Transmotivation is one of the main processes of semantic transformation. It has three parts: motivation, demotivation and their combination, transmotivation.

a) Transmotivation

Motivation: it is the positive aspect of these three parts. The author of hypertext introduces a motive to the hypotext which the hypotext lacks.

Demotivation: it is the negative aspect of the three. The author of hypertext will suppress or remove the original motive of the hypotext.

Transmotivation: the author replaces the original motive with a new motive (Rahimi, 2012: 87).

There is transmotivation in all four paintings of Aghdashloo. The motivation of hypotexts, as mentioned before, was political, regime propaganda and giving the Qajar dynasty legitimacy. The Qajar painters wanted to show the royal glory and the immortality of him and

his kingdom. Aghdashloo removed and suppressed these motives and substituted them with new ones. Contemporary artists think differently from their counterparts in the past, since they have experienced different historical events, such as monarchy, the constitutional revolution, and other national and international revolutions. In this vein, Aghdashloo gave his personal motivations to the paintings according to social and cultural context of his own time. He added new motives such decadence and fall instead of glory and supremacy, death instead of mortality, republicanism and democracy instead of monarchy, etc.

b) Transvaluation

i) Revaluation: the character of a text will be changed by way of pragmatic or psychological transformation (Genette, 1997:341).

ii) Devaluation: “the inverse thematic move is that of devaluation, the most brutal instance maybe Fieldings’ *Shamela* (1741), which is a refutation of Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740)” (ibid,352).

iii) Transvaluation: it is the combination of the two parts and it happens to the same characters.

Transvaluation can be seen in these paintings, as there is a complete reversal of a system of values. The main character of paintings “Fathali Shah” has lost his grandeur and glory, his uniqueness and his indisputable heroism. By displaying death, destruction and disloyalty of life, Fath ali Shah was converted into a man like others, who had to leave everything behind and face death.

The main themes of most artworks of Aghdashloo are mortality and destruction,

an issue that has preoccupied the minds of people since the dawn of life. The dominant ideas behind the artworks of Aghdashloo are mostly based on Khayyam and his way of thinking. This relation becomes obvious when one reads some poetry of Khayyam on some of his paintings. Even when other poets are chosen over Khayyam, the mindset is still very much in line with that of Khayyam. Aghdashloo is a rational person like Khayyam. Although he has a vivid imagination, it does not drive him towards an unrealistic idealism. Such attention to reality has made the duality of life and death his central theme. Aghdashloo reproduces the hypotexts carefully and in contrast to such intricate beauty and glory of the earlier artworks, he then proceeds to disfigure them by creating oppositions in form or by introducing semantic oppositions.

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Conclusion

One of the noticeable theories in the twentieth century is the theory of Intertextuality. It discusses the interrelationship between texts. French theorist, Gérard Genette, took Julia Kristeva's theory of Intertextuality and changed it systematically and called his theory Transtextuality. He divided transtextuality into five categories, including intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality.

Genette believed in studying the conscious and intentional relations between texts. This makes Genette's Transtextuality different from Kristeva's Intertextuality. Recreating paintings from past artworks in an intentional

and conscious way is what makes the artworks of Aghdashloo good examples of transtextual relations.

As we discussed above, all five categories of transtextual relations are applicable to the paintings of Aghdashloo. In these four paintings, Aghdashloo reproduced the earlier paintings belonging to the school of royal figurative painting of the Qajar court. Through these, not only has he conveyed a memory and the visual tradition of the past to the next generation, but he has also placed his identity and his desired meanings in his artworks, using minimal transformation, transmotivation and transvaluation.

Using new theories in the study of artworks can lead to a deeper analysis and understanding. Theories like transtextuality can help us understand contemporary artworks better, but not just that. They can also shed light on the social, historical, cultural backgrounds of the artworks.

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Endnotes

1. Qajar dynasty: A royal family of Turkic origin which ruled Persia (Iran) from 1785 to 1925.
2. Fath Ali Shah: The second Qajar Shah of Persia.
3. Nizami Ganjavi: He was a 12th century Persian poet.
4. Omar Khayyam: He was an 11th and 12th Persian mathematician, astronomer,

philosopher, and a very famous poet.

5. Zand dynasty: An Iranian dynasty that ruled Iran in the 18th century.

6. Karim Khan Zand: The founder of the Zand Dynasty, ruling from 1751 to 1779.

7. Nader Shah Afshar: He ruled as Shah of Persia in the 18th century.

8. Safavid dynasty: One of the most significant ruling dynasties of Persia. The Safavids ruled from 1501 to 1722.

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Table 1. Four Paintings of Aydin Aghdashloo.

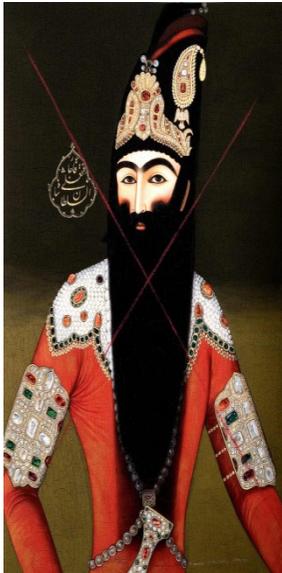
			
<p>FIG 1. Fath Ali shah qajar, Aydin aghdashloo. source: www.aghdashloo.com</p>	<p>FIG 2. Fath Ali shah qajar, Aydin aghdashloo. source: www.aghdashloo.com</p>	<p>FIG 3. Fath Ali shah qajar, Aydin aghdashloo. source: www.aghdashloo.com</p>	<p>FIG 4. Fath Ali shah qajar, Aydin aghdashloo. source: www.aghdashloo.com</p>

Table 2. Intertextual relationships

	
<p>FIG 5. Falling calligraphy/3, Aydin Aghdashloo. source: Shaygan, 1391:63</p>	<p>FIG.6. Flowers, Aydin Aghdashloo. source: Shaygan, 1391:137</p>

Table3.Comparison of Hypertext to Hypotext in Paintings of Aydin Aghdashloo.

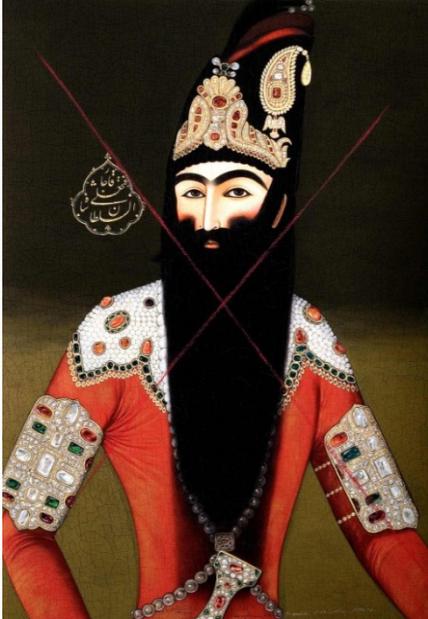
	
<p>FIG 1.Fath Ali Shah Qajar Aydin Aghdashloo, Source: www.aghdashloo.com</p>	<p>FIG.7 Fath Ali Shah Qajar, Abdollah Khan Naghashbashi, 19th Century Oil on Canvas. Source: Jalali-Jafari,2003:17</p>

Table 4. Possible Hypotexts for Painting of Abdollah Khan Naghashbashi

		
<p>FIG 8. Fath Ali Shah Seated,Mirza Baba,18th Century, Oil on Canvas. Source: Diba, 1998:180</p>	<p>FIG 9.Karim Khan Zand, anonymous painter,18th Cen- tury. Source: Raby,1999:11</p>	<p>FIG 10. Nader Shah Af- shar, Muhammad Reza Hindi,18TH Century, Oil on Canvas. Source: Diba, 1998:139</p>