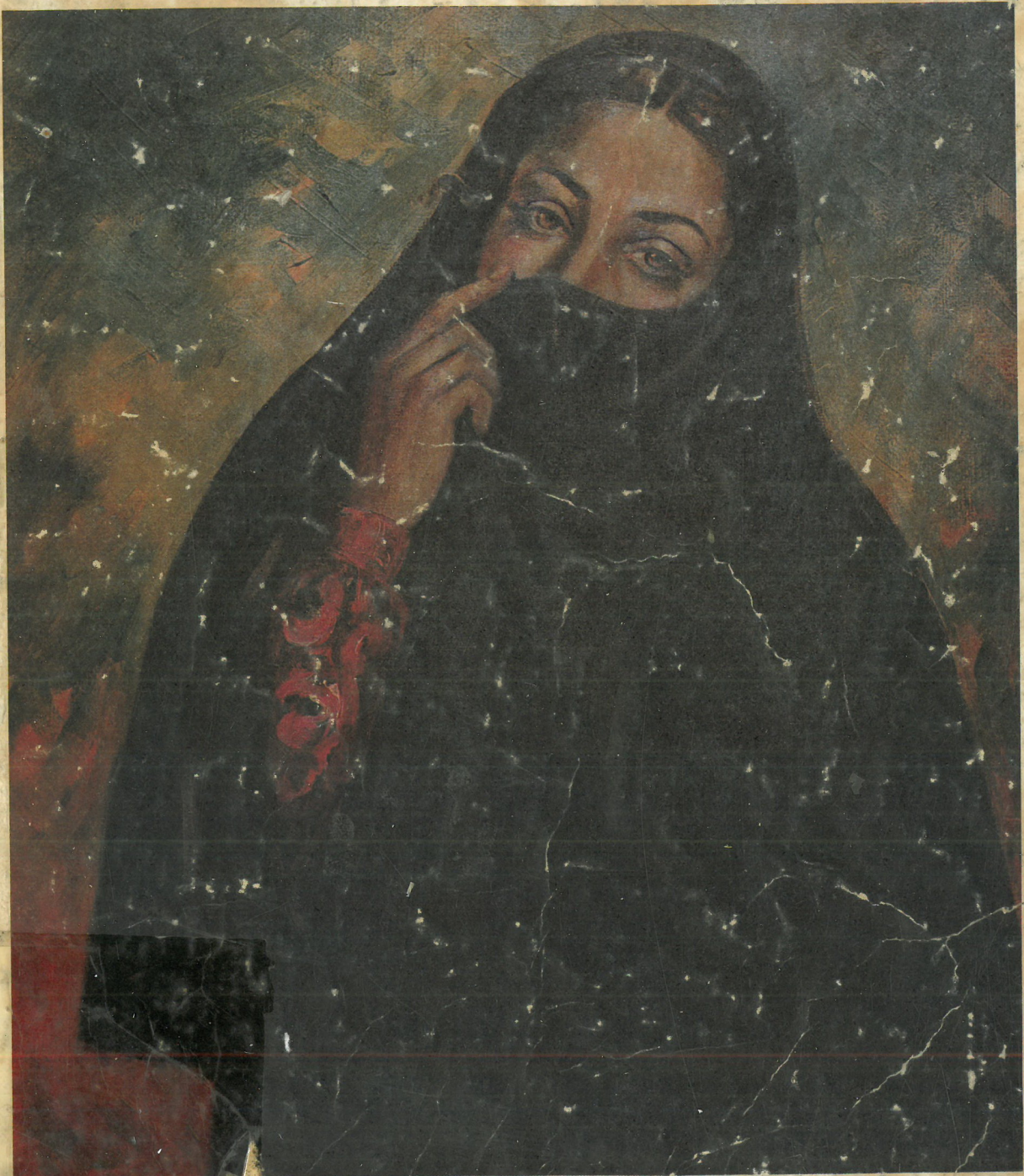


AHMED SAEED

Nagi

AND HIS ART

AN ARTIST WITH A NATIONAL VISION



SAFI SAFDAR



NOT TO BE ISSUED



IDARA SAQAFAT-E-PAKISTAN

AHMED SAEED

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AND HIS ART

(AN ARTIST WITH A NATIONAL VISION)

SAFI SAFDAR

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Ahmed Saeed Nagi and His Art.

by

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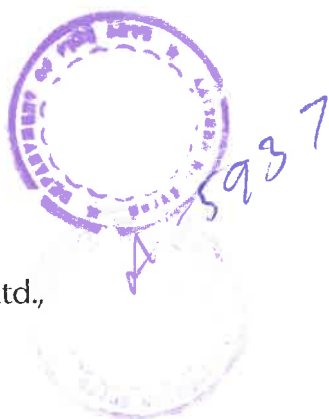
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FOREWORD

The Idara-Saqafat-e-Pakistan feels honoured in producing this book, introducing to the readers both at home and abroad, the works of Nagi, one of our very senior artists.

He is indeed a very significant Pakistani artist whose association with the freedom movement, as a volunteer artist, makes him very respectable. He was called in 1944 to Lahore by Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan to come and work there which he did. This is a singular honour that Nagi proudly enjoys. His interest in painting human figure is something special and one enjoys looking at them; forms full of a human message. Nagi established his studio at Karachi as early as 1948 and it was at this place that a tradition was born. I see Nagi's influence and the continuity of that tradition even today.

Nagi's interest in Pakistan's cultural heritage gave his art a new look in sixties when he made the Harapa and Mohinjodaro motifs the basis for his creative works. Much credit, indeed, goes to Nagi in making the relics of the past popular once again. There is an important historic significance in what Nagi has painted and preserved from Pakistan's rich cultural past.

The publication of this series is indeed the fulfilment of our desire to acknowledge the works of our artists and make it possible for many readers to view them through the best possible reproductions that we have been able to arrange.

It is a matter of satisfaction for me personally that due to the most advanced methods of colour separation available to us these days, our readers will be able to see the results which are nearest to the originals. We hope our efforts will be fruitful.

This book is also a homage to the artist that he rightly deserves and we are privileged to pay.

Dr. Khalid Saeed Butt
Director General,
Idara Saqafat-e-Pakistan



NAGI: AN INTRODUCTION

MUSARAT HUSSAIN ZUBARI

It is difficult to write about an artist and his sensibility. More difficult is to tackle a living artist especially the one like Nagi who does not confine himself to one medium. He has a personality having no fixed ideas moving in measured grooves. Though basically a painter, his interest in things around overflows into interior decoration, urban planning and designing furniture or jewellery for his beautiful models. With all he remains a thematic artist.

Art is a process of communication as well as creation. What T.S. Eliot says about a poet that he should write "not merely for his own generation, but with a feeling that the whole literature has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order, is a principle of aesthetics and not merely of poetic expression."

The technical problem to find expression in a form faces an artist too. He has to have a style, a rhythm and a form. Nagi has in his bones the whole artistic heritage of the Muslim glory, expressed in the form of human figure, calligraphy, and architecture. That's why he does not confine to one medium. The abstract geometrical pattern of a decorative tile in a mosque is as evocative for him as the Mohenjodaro bull. His murals of male dancers are as reflective of his past heritage as the nude dancing girl of the Indus Valley. The folk lore is as much part of him as the design of a tapestry curtain.

Nagi deals with live models and carved stones imparting them his own sense of fulfilment. The artist's feeling and emotion are important but what he makes of his feelings – the pattern – is the real creative piece of art. He loves beauty in all its forms but gives the theme a modern touch of pleasure and pain.

He has not succumbed to the modern tendencies in art. The sense of pleasure attached to the beauty is no longer the accepted medium in Europe and the dictum that a "great painter has to be a painter of the great" is gone. That's why to some young artists, Nagi is an anathema.

But the fact is that the Islamic art eliminated human representation of form altogether and made it geometrically and mathematically abstract. Nagi regards himself like his distant relation Abdur Rahman Chughtai, an heir to that. It was in his ancestor bones and he has

lineally inherited it. His interior decoration motifs in public buildings spreading all over Pakistan – from Swat to Karachi – verify this truth.

He has avoided modern modes of expression in painting borrowed from Europe because the traditions, experiences, impressions and facts of life and environment differ.

The African art, at first labelled primitive, broke upon European art world so suddenly that it led to a complete change of concept. It was asserted that “art often is a thing of not beauty”.

In spite of his proclaimed abhorrence of imitative modern artists of Pakistan and their reciprocal neglect of him, Nagi could not escape the tragedy around him as he is in the late twentieth century. He had earlier experimented with transmitting music ragas to paintings like the Kangra, once he unconsciously, succumbed to modern trend in depicting the ugliness behind the gaiety of unnatural life, the destructiveness of aggression of the youth, the frailty of the proved dictator, the helplessness of the broken man.

He explains his recent escape into broken earthen pots as throw back to his intellectual mystic insight of nothingness in this fleeting, stinking, sinking world. To me he is mirroring earth proclaiming utter unworthiness of useless frames that strut the world. His name is in the Encyclopedia of World Art among oriental modern movements painters.

AUTHORS PREFACE

The following pages record some of the works of the artist Ahmad Saeed Nagi, which are in private and public collections and in his own possession. Nagi has seen the whole span of art activity in Pakistan since 1947. Making a considerable contribution in our art, Nagi narrates how, in 1947, when the entire social life was at a stand still, he started his small studio in Karachi, which, later became the centre of art activity. Nagi has his friends amongst his contemporaries, highly placed people, who saw him once very active.

When I was asked to write on Nagi and his art, I was very happy indeed. I knew Nagi as one who had painted Quaid-e-Azam from life. This, in my opinion, is a very big honour for an artist and of course I immediately accepted this offer. I have heard a lot of speakers who had been, in some way, connected with Quaid-e-Azam, like Mr. Mumtaz Hassan, Nawab Siddique, Mr. A.B.A. Haleem, Mr. G. Alana, Mr. Hashim Raza and others, and I was keen to know what an artist had to say about my leader, Quaid-e-Azam. I have collected some facts in this connection, which readers will like to know. There is a story in the "*Dawn*" through Nagi's own pen and that will throw more light on the subject.

Secondly, Nagi is amongst our senior most artists and is the man who decorated, with his skill and devotion, some very important places of Pakistan.

I have met various people to find what they had to say about this artist. I have a feeling that Nagi does not open up to every one, thus creating prejudiced impressions. Once close to Nagi, you have an opportunity to know a genial man who likes and loves nature, colours, figure, especially female figure and himself. The order could even be reversed. In the course of interviewing him, I liked him for his straightforward statements which could even be called confessions. Some of these confessions pertain to his youth. I have mentioned only some with reservations. Nagi's gregarious nature is very obvious. He feels depressed when alone, and in loneliness Nagi is not at all at his best.

Nagi is at his best when surrounded by jolly good people. He is a jolly good man in his seventies ready to dance and glide and narrate the stories of many of his charming models both in and outside Paris. Though many of his models, in paintings, that I chanced to see,

are not Parisian.

One very remarkable aspect of Nagi's art is the projection of Pakistan's cultural heritage. This has been done on a conscious level. His paintings belonging to pre-independence era are more romantic in their treatment but seen from this angle they become more purposeful after Pakistan became a reality. He is indeed an outstanding portrait painter and his naturalism is of a unique character.

Nagi was, in 1944, invited to work for Pakistan movement in the Muslim League



publicity cell: This gave Nagi a basis to think on national level.

The second very powerful impact that changed Nagi's artistic course was his exposure to French tourist industry, which he very carefully observed. On return to Pakistan he was out to use any motif, be it from Mohenjodaro, Harapa, Hala or Punjab or for that matter from anywhere in Pakistan, for the projection of Pakistan's rich cultural heritage.

Nagi is amongst our very successful artists and it can be easily said that if he had not diversified his artistic activity, he would have excelled in any area of his choice in art in Pakistan.

I have avoided the details relating to the organizations that he worked for, unless the importance of the work warranted it. Nagi has worked as an artist and not as a critic or a historian. I, therefore, expecting him not to give me his opinion on the evolution of our art, asked him questions to trace his own evolution as a successful, and satisfied artist of Pakistan, and I must say that to that end, I was amply rewarded.



BACKGROUND

The pace of development, in all areas of learning during the last fifty years, became very fast. Until recently even in the provincial metropolises in Pakistan though there was seldom a specialization for teachers in the schools, yet "Drawing Master" and "Science Masters" were still specialists. These teachers used to have their own large rooms where the classes were conducted. Some of the Drawing Masters, as the art teachers were known, were exceptionally good. So far as their own basic qualifications were concerned, they were matriculates. These teachers enjoyed tremendous respect for their skill. To school going children, this was the facility available in normal situations. Those who went for further training in art after their schooling enjoyed specialized training facilities in the Mayo School of Art at Lahore, now the National College of Arts. Students come to this Institution from all over the Punjab. In India there had always been a considerable scope for practising art for those who had talent. People also used to take special tuition in this subject from well known artists. These people had their personal methods of teaching art. They could make a "type human figure" with all its beauty and poses. There was a definite stamp of conventional Hindu religious art so far as the poses of these type figures were concerned. Their art was more of a conceptual character and reference to the model was seldom there. There indeed, was a rich tradition of painting figure in Indian Painting like Kangra School, and other traditions which were followed as standards by these artists. This was the conventional art during the early 20th century. There was a very powerful clientele for the works of the known artists who enjoyed the patronage of rich people.

Amongst the Muslims, art was more or less a taboo. It is said that those who will make the image of a living object, will, on the Day of Judgement, be asked to put life in them. It was therefore considered to be a sinful act to draw and paint. The acceptable craftsmanship was confined to certain families who practised arabesques for interiors of the Muslim Religious architecture. These families of the master craftsmen enjoyed a monopoly since the skill was passed on from father to son as a secret trade to earn his living. The Hindu art and Muslim art were distinct in their character and their needs. For years the Muslims and Hindus had been living in India together, but they had practically made strict divisions in all areas of their life. On railway stations there used to be "water for Hindus" and "water for

Muslims", "Roti (Bread) for Muslim", and "Roti for Hindus". In the same way Hindu art and Muslim art had distinct entities of their own and separate purposes.

Later when Principal of Calcutta School of Art, Mr. Havell made his call for the revival of Indian Art, there emerged two distinct schools. One of them made Ajanta and Elora art as their model while the other school followed the images of the Mughal and Persian schools. It was in April, 1928 that Dr. James H. Cousins wrote a beautiful introduction for Chughtai's illustration of Diwan-i-Ghalib. In his learned discourse he wrote:-

"It does not, of course, follow that, because Chughtai is in blood Persian he should therefore paint Persian. Some of the masters of Mughal Art in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were Pucca Hindus, and some of the Indians today who ape a foreign art are not Pucca anything, but in the case of Chughtai it just does follow. His cultural tradition takes fresh birth in him, with a difference but to passing time and personality-he retains the distinctive mood and posture of the Persian tradition."

It was in connection with the same book of Chughtai's illustration that Allama Iqbal wrote on 21 July, 1928:-

"And in so far as the cultural history of Islam is concerned, it is my belief that, with the single exception of architecture, the art of Islam (Music, painting and even poetry) is yet to be born-the art, that is to say, which aims at the human assimilation of divine attributes gives man infinite aspiration. There are, however, indications to show that the young artist of the Punjab is already on the way to feel his responsibility as an artist."

It was against this cultural background for the Indian Muslims that they lived, learnt and consciously made efforts to identify themselves, and it was also against this background that on 2nd February, 1916, Ahmad Saeed Nagi was born in Amratsar.



liberal art teacher who taught him about human figure. Sometime she posed for him pointing to specific muscles of her arms. She attracted him to dance as well. At one stage when there was an opposition from his father for his becoming an artist Nagi told him that he wanted to be a professional dancer. The opposition subdued in due course of time and he continued taking lessons from Miss Backlay.

At the age of 10 Nagi found himself able to draw with ease and satisfaction. Later his practice on floral designing gave him enough skill and as a young boy he made beautiful floral designs which were very much liked by Mantoo, who later became a great short story writer. Mantoo asked Nagi to compile the designs into a book form. After some purposeful work an embroidery book "Nagi Sozankari" was compiled which was published and gave Nagi a considerable income, fame and an easy access to girls schools where he used to go to sell his book. It was around 1932 and it was published at Amritsar.

Nagi was lucky in many respects. He got lot of encouragement from outstanding people like Faiz and Dr. Taseer. Nagi has always found great admirers around him. In 1936 when he was about 18 years his visits to girls colleges gave him female fans. They were also willing to pose for him. During this period Nagi became well known for his portraits. Many of his portraits were much commended. He had a chance of making sculpture under the supervision of Shaikh Ahmed. He chanced to study the various stages of making a bas-relief. Nagi later got an opportunity of working in plaster on the ceiling.

S.G. Thakar Singh was another big influence on Nagi as he very kindly gave him lessons on perspective and behaviour of colour. Nagi kept working hard and enhancing his technical skill. He still remembers his heart throbbing at the idea that one day he would be a great artist. He once told Miss Backlay in childhood that he wanted to be an artist, a diamond merchant and a carpet designer.

In 1939 when he went to Amritsar to join M.A.O. College he was able to find a market with the carpet makers for his border designs. He used to get upto ten rupees for these borders, which he used to complete in one day. Nagi got a job with the Archaeology Department Delhi and during that time he had opportunities to meet important artists and high officials of the Indian British government. Later Nagi worked on a job where he was to paint, in water colour, detailed study of insects. It was to illustrate some research work.

When the war broke out Nagi got a contract to work at the Asian Fresco Bono Museum, Delhi. It provided him with an opportunity to study Fresco technique more closely. Nagi had worked in 1939 at Birla Temple on a large fresco. The interest for the technique was already there in him.

Nagi acquired interest in interior decoration furnishing and illustration. He was one of the most well connected artists and it was with this background and family connections that

Nagi made a strong impact on the Muslim League leaders as well. He was known in the political circles of the Muslim League as his father was an active nationalist.

There was a posters competition organized by the Inter Services Public Relations, in which famous Indian artists were participating. Nagi scored second position in this competition which gave him an all-India reputation.

It was through one of Nagi's uncles, Khurshid Chishti of Anglo Arabic College, that Liaquat Ali Khan invited Nagi to work for Muslim League at Lahore. Nagi made his way to Lahore where he lived at Mian Bashir Ahmad's house. He met a lot of important political figures while he worked for the publicity cell.

For those who had seen the Quaid and his colleagues, working day and night for the creation of Pakistan, it was inevitable that a spirit would permeate in them to work for the country whole-heartedly. Nagi had the good luck to be associated with Muslim League workers of pre-independence era. It was here that he had the singular honour to see Quaid and make his preliminary sketches for the portrait of Quaid. I shall take this opportunity to clear the position of Nagi in the light of what I recorded from him that Quaid was an extremely busy man and thus would have no time to give sittings for his portrait. Nagi was just quick enough to make sketches as Quaid presided, unofficially, the meetings of the Muslim League workers. When complete, Quaid was shown this portrait and he liked it. There is every character of an unfinished portrait as it is just the head that was completed. The portrait has an emotional value for Nagi in his old age. The Quaid's portrait was done in 1944 when Nagi painted portraits of the great Muslim leaders which were painted at Mian Bashir Ahmad's house, "Al-manzar". In the words of Nagi as he wrote in his article in *Dawn* Karachi:-

"The painting was left with others of my paintings in Mian Bashir Ahmad's library, and I heard nothing of it for about fifteen years. In Karachi, some time in the late fifties, Col. Majid Malik, who was then the Principal Information Officer of the Press Information Department in the Ministry of Information, told me that the painting had suddenly surfaced in Karachi. How or why I did not ask. He felt that it should be returned to me as I was the rightful owner. This he arranged. A few years later, I exhibited the painting and received a message through Akram Sheikh, a member of President Ayub's staff, that the Field Marshal wished to make an offer to buy the painting for a sum of Rs. 22,000/-.

I agreed to think this over. Shortly thereafter I was also approached by Air Marshal Nur Khan who wished to purchase the painting to hang it in Air Headquarters. To this offer my reply was that I would wish the painting to be hung in public area and was not

agreeable to it being hung in AHQ. I also did not follow up the President's offer, but kept the painting with me. In 1976 the Executive Committee for the Birth Centenary of Mr. Jinnah, under the Chairmanship of the Federal Minister for Education accepted my painting as the "official portrait" of Mr. Jinnah and ordered 50,000 prints of the painting to be made for sale to Government and Semi-Government organisations. Prior to this, I had been given the job of redecorating the VIP Lounge at Karachi Airport by the then Director General of Civil Aviation, Air Commodore B.K. Dass. Here was an opportunity for my painting to be hung in a perfect area-the VIP Lounge, through which all incoming foreign dignitaries would enter our country. I therefore, included the hanging of the portrait in my scheme for the VIP Lounge and it was accepted gratefully and with appreciation by all concerned."

THE FATHER OF THE NATION

This is the portrait of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah the father of the Nation, that Nagi developed from the sketch he made from life. The face is so richly expressive that one loves to keep looking at it. The sketchy effect on the painting, except for the face, doesn't disturb the eye when you look at it. In fact this portrait of Quaid has a unique position amongst his portraits because it gives you an experience of being in the presence of the great leader, which once the artist himself had.

On the occasion of the Birth Centenary of the Quaid the Government of Pakistan approved the proposal that the portrait may be reproduced by Nagi (the artist) for sale to the Government and Semi-Government organizations at Rs. 50/- per copy.

The original portrait at the VIP Lounge Karachi Air Port, is however missing again and the artist has made an appeal to help find the painting with which he has an emotional attachment.

It was during his stay at Mian Bashir's house at Lahore in 1944 that he received a message *from Amritsar from his father*. On reaching there he was told by his mother that they had decided that he was to get married. He asked with surprise 'when?', and he was told it could be within days. Nagi thought she was not serious nor was he very keen. He was to give his choice for the menu which he jokingly gave. To Nagi's surprise at the Walimah reception his proposed menu was there in total.

It was towards the afternoon that a Hindu girl, a friend of Nagi came into the house saying "Nagi jee, where are you, and on seeing him she insisted that he should paint her

He had opportunity to meet the renowned scholars and attending some fashion shows, jewellery exhibitions and seeing impressive decoration arrangements.

Nagi has always liked to remain in the company of friends. I had a personal experience of knowing about his restlessness when he had to travel to Rawalpindi from Islamabad alone in a hired car. He said, "you see I feel very much disturbed when I have to travel alone, I cannot do it, I start feeling suffocation".

Recently I had a chance to see many decoration arrangements done by Nagi, one in which he used replicas of coins. It was tastefully done with a lot of understanding and skill.

When in 1947, Nagi moved to Karachi he found himself a homeless refugee. It was a chance that he met Abbas Khalil, Secretary, Commerce and incharge for the refugees. He took Nagi to one Dr. Nydo who was a fisheries expert and who finally arranged a job for Nagi in the fisheries department. His job was to make drawings of different types of fish. Nagi enjoyed the company of the fishermen who appeared very different characters. He started making sketches of the fishermen which he used to sell for small amount of money. But these sketches attracted many customers. Dr. Nydo, later, encouraged him to paint the environment. Nagi was later asked to draw through microscope the edible variety of the Marine fish. This job gave him an enjoyable commitment with nature and benefits from its close study. This was much more than he expected. His interest in landscape got full artistic play and he got a chance to prove his worth as a landscape painter. The gallery that he established at Karachi, became an activity centre where lot of Pakistani ladies also used to come. Many functions were organized to which Nagi offered his artistic talent.

Nagi has been deeply aware of the fact that Pakistan expects each man to make his contribution in the area of life he is stationed. Nagi took upon himself the duty to project the cultural heritage of Pakistan through any of his medium and for this purpose he exploited the local materials and resources. In his paintings he started the projection of Pakistan's rural landscape and cultural background. He chose the motif from Harapa, Mohenjodaro Hala, Taxila and anyother place in Pakistan and utilized them to make different objects which could attract tourists and of which our own people could be proud. Nagi claims the introduction of the Mohenjodaro seals in the handicrafts. He believed that pride in the cultura heritage would emerge amongst our nationals seeing the ancient objects getting popular. The indigenous cultural background became a matter of pride and with this zeal Nagi took up the interior decoration of VIP lounges of our airports. He did not restrict his artistic activity to a limited area. He even designed furniture which was put up in these VIP Lounges. On considering his approach on the subject, one gets to know the working of the mind of the artist, and the delicate demarcation that exists between art and crafts manifesting itself in a much more sublime form; more national than simple

commercial. It requires a bold person to make a straight forward statement of his departure from creative area to an apparently commercial scene. Some people get lost in the process and melt away from the pedestal that they had built for themselves through hard work over the years. Nagi is lucky that his departure from the general art made a more effective emergence for him and it is this status that distinguishes him.

NAGI'S MANY MEDIA

Nagi started by making careful studies of flowers, and insects. This minute treatment culminated in his Mughal style miniature paintings on vasli, silk and even on ivory. The technical skill of the artist is, of course, commendable. The variety of media in which he can express himself is quite large. He worked in plaster of paris and decorated many ceilings with intricate designs. To be able to work on a fresco in the Birla Temple, along with many skilful artists and under the supervision of renowned architects, Nagi had equipped himself with the technical know how of the subject. He satisfied people who commissioned him. He produced professionally sound illustrations to match some thesis work first at Delhi and later at Karachi. He also worked on stone engraving and produced some very exciting inlay work. The circular stone table tops with inlay work in mother of pearl, are indeed remarkable pieces. When Nagi was working on frescos he was extracting dyes from different pigments and vegetables. This gave him an excellent experience. The frescos were acquired by Sir Auriel Stein from Central Asia and the Government of British India commissioned Nagi to work for the publication of these designs.

Calligraphic jobs executed by Nagi are purely on monumental works in which the calligraphic writing itself was not done by Nagi himself but the overall design was conceived by him. The execution of stone work was done by him. Such works were done for different Airports for their exterior decoration. Nagi designed Pavillions for the different countries participating in exhibitions in Pakistan and in other countries. This kind of job is based on the design visualized by the artist and the construction work is supervised by the artist himself.

Nagi made an association with some Civil Engineers and contractors who, together with him, were executing his designs. In art the important concept that forms the basis for the entire infrastructure is provided by the artist. This may be interesting to mention that the central figure behind all creative activity during the early, middle and high Renaissance continued to be the artist. The entire architectural monumentation of the Italian tombs and churches were conceived by the outstanding artists and construction thereof supervised by them. Some of the beautiful doors of the churches were prepared by the artists with all the engraving work on them. Large panels were also executed by them. The artist was a

designer, an architect, the engraver, the sculptor and the painter.

If these expressions were to be termed as craft, then my God! they were remarkably great and immensely artistic. I include Botticelli, Chiricco, Michelangelo and others in this. At the same time the whole lot of works Byzantine and even the arts of Assyria and Egypt were not different cases for our studies. Decoration work of different banks, cinemas clubs, hotels and VIP lounges done by Nagi are remarkably executed jobs. What Nagi has maintained in these places is the indigenous atmosphere which identifies them as Pakistani. This indeed is remarkable that whatever Nagi did in these places was by way of projecting the cultural heritage of Pakistan. When he came to Pakistan, he was a lonely man to work for the promotion of arts. The social encyclopedia of Art published during sixties recorded only one artist from Pakistan: A.S. Nagi. There were other Pakistanis artists, too. The appearance of his name in this prestigious book indicates fully well that this artist could not be ignored by the publishers.





RELIEF IN STONE

This is a large stone relief which Nagi has used on the exterior of Islamabad Airport building. The conventional Arabic script has been decoratively treated in a circular flow. The rhythm achieved through the beautiful repetition of the lines create a very charming effect. The line has been taken from Holy Qur'an. Nagi has not indulged in experimentation. On the other hand he has followed the strict discipline of Arabic calligraphy which the master calligraphists evolved over years. This can also be said about his paintings. He learnt things the hard way and not as a result of experimentation. In the conventional methods the results are pre-determined.

KUZA NAMAH

Kuza Namah is an outstanding series of paintings that Nagi completed under a mystic influence. He calls it a spell of mysticism. These are symbolic representations in which earthen jars replace human figures. Nagi ascribes something prophetic to this series; something which found an expression much before the real happening of the events. In Kuza Namah the treatment of the form is more of surrealistic nature even though the peculiar surrealistic fantasy is not there. The poetic expression is quite dominant in all the painting in this series.

Nagi's contact with Faiz, Dr. Taseer, Hafeez Jalundhri, Pitras Bokhari and others, created in him a mannerism which developed into a personal style. Nagi, a romantic in his style and content is extremely sensitive to a strange phenomenon for which he has got no explanation as to how some kind of relationship could establish between the shadow, if a visual experience could be termed as a shadow, and the occurrence of an event. Nagi claims that he has experienced at a number of occasions a kind of transformation that took place within himself and he started speaking out facts about certain persons, whom he had met for the first time. He felt that he could tell them about the events which were yet to follow.

Mr. Musarat Hussain Zubari confirmed that some Darwesh used to visit Nagi in his Karachi house. Nagi must be right in saying that through touch he can know the personality of a stranger. This is a Godly gift for him.

Nagi liked a Buddhist girl once who induced him to make a study of Buddhism. He did it. To master rhythm, he studied dance and mudras. It was indeed a remarkable achievement for him to have studied dance, both oriental and western and practice both. Dr. Afzal Iqbal, a close friend of the artist, in his essay on Nagi, describes Nagi as a great dancer. Ahmad Daood, who was once a silent spectator, describes a dance in which Nagi, Mr. Afzal Iqbal and a lady participated. "It was a wonderful dance" he says. Nagi, now in his seventies, is still strong when it comes to working on hard jobs involving stone, wood or other construction jobs. He is not old at all if it requires him to appreciate beauty of form and demands him to be up on the easel. He disappoints neither the connoisseur nor the models. He has skill to



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This is a large stone relief which Nagi has used on the exterior of Islamabad Airport building. The conventional Arabic script has been decoratively treated in a circular flow. The rhythm achieved through the beautiful repetition of the lines create a very charming effect. The line has been taken from Holy Qur'an. Nagi has not indulged in experimentation. On the other hand he has followed the strict discipline of Arabic calligraphy which the master calligraphists evolved over years. This can also be said about his paintings. He learnt things the hard way and not as a result of experimentation. In the conventional methods the results are pre-determined.

Kuza Namah is an outstanding series influenced by Sufi mysticism. He calls it a spell of mystic earthen jars replace human figures. It is something which found an expression in Kuza Namah the treatment of the form peculiar surrealistic fantasy is not there in painting in this series.

Nagi's contact with Faiz, Dr. Taseer gave him a mannerism which developed in his content is extremely sensitive to a explanation as to how some kind of real visual experience could be termed as he claims that he has experienced at a new place within himself and he started speaking for the first time. He felt that he could follow.

Mr. Musarat Hussain Zubari confirms that Nagi lived in his Karachi house. Nagi must be right in saying that he is of a stranger. This is a Godly gift for him.

Nagi liked a Buddhist girl once who told him that to master rhythm, he studied dance and for him to have studied dance, both originate from a close friend of the artist, in his essay Daood, who was once a silent spectator and a lady participated. "It was a wonder how strong when it comes to working on his jobs. He is not old at all if it requires him to be up on the easel. He disappoints nei-

Nagi seems to have established excellent relationships in his life. During his early days at Amritsar he enjoyed the company of Dr. Taseer (who was his teacher also) Faiz, Sufi Talib, senior to him by many years, yet he gave him necessary help. Another well known person to have given him encouragement was Dr. Taseer.

When he started a gallery in Karachi he almost everyone who came to him were learned people, poets, writers painters and high officials and diplomats. In the words of Mr. Musarat Hussain Zubari and ex-Chairman RCD, "Mr. Nagi has many sided personality. He is a loving and loveable person".

Ghulam Rasool, a well known Pakistani artist painter, talks on the different aspects of the evolution of Pakistani art. He imparts valuable information on the subject.

Dr. Afzal Iqbal, in his essay about Nagi writes:- "A Silver-Haired painter with a golden heart, Nagi is a Creator in oil, water-colour, pastels, murals, he is an urban planner. His prestigious work in VIP rooms has brought him fame; his designs in furniture, jewelry, as an innovator. He deals both with live models and both an impulse of life vibrant with desire, long his nudes were a craze in the country. They were diplomats who swarmed his studio-dirty, dingy visitors of sorts-politicians, poets, painters, bureaucrats, hangers-on, sycophants. And Nagi has a great deal suffered me for thirty years.

He is indeed a master of wide sweep-landscapes.

barren hills and verdant fields, flowing rivers and still lakes, haunted huts and haunting portraits, concealing with their garments what they reveal with their eyes. In every portrait of Nagi the accent is on the eyes. With one piercing glance he sees through a *myriad* of desires and articulates them with rare power and beauty.

Nagi is an exquisite dancer. He whirls like a dervesh and he is a votary of music. Both these qualities are amply reflected in the rhythm and symphony of his colours. Both in his life and in his art Nagi is an aesthete par excellence. He loves beauty in all its forms—in nature, in the captivating eyes of a woman, in her sensuous body and in her sensitive soul. Even broken pots of clay speak to him in all their agony and anguish.

I have seen Nagi's visitors book at his gallery which records the impressions of many important visitors. Some of the pages of this book have been included for the interest of the readers.

As was mentioned before, this Artist has created a place for himself, which is very high and he has earned it after years of devoted work.

نہاں جی
انہی لگا دے سوا۔ کچھ کہیں نہیں ہیں دیکھتا — !
محبوب بھی دیکھتا ذرا اہل نظر۔ میں کون ہوں ؟

صفیہ مونس
۱۲/۱۲/۵۵

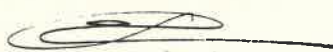
مرے دل کا تنہا پیپر
کبھی اپنی تکرار کا ہمہ گائے، ممکن نہیں
کبھی اپنی ہی گونج بن جائے، ممکن نہیں

وہی دل کا تنہا پیپر
کہ جس نے دیا آپ روشن کیا
کہ راتوں کی سیریں اُچھٹنے لگیں
وہ خود کو الٹ کر لپٹ رہے پر کتنے لگیں!

سہیل

کراچی ۱۸ مارچ
۱۹۷۱

Isang malaking kapalaran ko
na sa Darachi ay makatagpo ko
ang isang tunay na lalaki
ng sining.



It is indeed a very rare privilege
to meet a real gentleman in art.
Someday, I hope, when you come
to the Philippines, you will find
welcome arms from the ART ASSOCIATION
OF THE PHILIPPINES.



VICE PRESIDENT
ART ASSOCIATION
OF THE
PHILIPPINES

PABLO J. VICTORIA
ART ASSOCIATION OF
THE PHILIPPINES
NATIONAL MUSEUM
MANILA
PHILIPPINES

OCT. 3, 1957

نیاگی جیب کجھت میں پڑیہ تیریک

نطق رنگوں کو دیا ہے ترے

تیری تصویر زماں رکھتی ہے
فیقر کا رنگ بیا رکھتی ہے

ہم سخن رہتا ہے مجھ سے اکثر

تیرے احسان کی رنگیں لہریں
کتبِ دوستی کی طوٹ لہریں

تیرے لہو کی لہریں ہر سچے کو

اپنے گالوں کا گس ہوتا ہے
وہی معصوم سماں ہوتا ہے

تیرے لہرے میں مجھے ملتی ہیں

اپنے نواہوں کی جواں لہریں

اپنے شروں کی جس لہریں

نیاگہ جیبِ حالب

کراچی ۱۷ جولائی ۱۹۵۷ء

۷۷
حق

تمہارا تیرا نظر دل کے بار ہوئے رہا - قول نے دم ہی نہ مارا انتشار ہو کے رہا
تمہاری سوزن منزل گاہوں نے کی وہ بے گری - کہ رخت مہتری را مار مار ہو کے رہا
کسی کے دم پہ ملزار ہر دو شام ملا - کہ جسکے صدقہ وہ شب زندہ دار ہو کے رہا
قسم ہے انکی عطا کی کہ بچے بچے خوش - ہر اختیار را اختیار ہو کے رہا
اگر چہ حسن کی حیرت سے ملی نہ ملی
مگر وہ عشق کا آئینہ دار ہو کے رہا

فقر حیرت وارث
25.6.57.

حسن تری آنکھیں حسین تر آنکھوں
پیر، ڈوب جائے کوئی چاہتا ہے

رسول بخش ۲۳ - ۶۲
3454

Mayi
— Portrayer of the Human Soul
with his Portraits of Longing
— yearning and desire.

The world needs these pictures Mayi —
never — never stop

Camille Mayi. New York — Paris — Tanaka
and "Miracle in Lahore"
November 30/58.

I do not have adequate words to
express our appreciation of the honor
to view Mr Nagis works - he is undied
an artist - and our sincere thanks

Mr and Mrs J. F. Corry

San Mateo California USA

March 25 1963

One Sunday morning spent at Mr Nagis Studio. Seen most
of his paintings. There are no proper words coming off me, to express
my admiration for this work done by Mr. Nagis. Is something
magnificent, gifted work. This morning will be one of my best-
reminders of my life. I would wish to express my appreciation
and admiration for Mr. Nagis and his work.

Basil L. Loxis

Athens - Greece

March 25. 1963

I have had the privilege of seeing Mr. Nagi's work; his versatility & competence were revealed at first glance; the resplendent quality of his colour, clear draftsmanship -- composition are outstanding features: I liked most the painting entitled "Red Pascal" -- among his figure paintings which is indeed a gem; his symbolic paintings with a message appealed greatly both in treatment & theme. Mr. Nagi has something important to say in his Camerons & his work deserves wider appreciation & circulation in Pakistan & outside. In my post as the Hon. Secretary of the Ceylon Society of Arts & as a member of the Ceylon Arts Council's Panel in Painting & Sculpture I shall be very happy to give him every possible assistance to organize a one-man show of his work in Ceylon.

With best wishes & kindest regards,
Sincerely,

A. G. M. S. S. S.

41, Old Quarry Rd.
N. C. S. S. S.
Ceylon.

29/1/58

ترے میکن کسی سے ہوش میں لائے نہیں جاتے
لنگا ہر سب میں دیتے ہیں مگر پائے نہیں جاتے

برادر عزیز "ناگی" صاحب

کی نذر

فقیر عیدت وادش

محنتی

23. X. 58.

حیدرنگی

شے یہ لکھی استماع و ثناء میں یہ بھاری
یہ سادہ ورق جس سخن نے لکھی ہے
شے یہ لکھی اس گیت کا پرچم سرافراز
جو آمد و مرگ کے مٹاؤں میں نکلوں
شے یہ لکھی اس دل کی کوئی رگ نہیں چھو جائے
جو سب پر رہے کی مانند زلوں

۶ زرداری ۶۷

August 6/1967

カラチに着いてはじめて会ったアーティストがナギ氏であつたとは、
 余のカラチ訪問の印象を大変気持ちのよいものにした。
 ナギ氏は大変立派な人物と格付けと詩人的感覚をもつた
 一流の芸術家であるからでした。同氏の作品をみせてもらつて
 私はナギ氏が「偉大なカラリスト」であると思ひました。
 日本で一度の鑑賞を聞くことになつたと思ひます。

植村 鷹 4代 T. Nemura

To Nagi -

one of the great artists of the world

we great respect for an admirable & fine

love u. Hiroko

Joy Adams

To Mr. Nagi -
 With many thanks for
 your friendship -

Cecily Adams
 20 Sept 1969

NAGI'S MANY MODELS, MANY MOODS

The artistic career of Nagi is spread over a period of not less than 50 years. During this time he must have painted lots of canvases but this book can only present a few of his works. In the following pages, we will have opportunity to see the representative works of the Artist. When I say Nagi's many Models, I understand fully well that the paintings included have been completed with reference to some models but there is a lot of additional work involved in the completion.

Nagi's earliest model girls were his fans. Many of his later models were girls who wanted to marry him. He in his youth was very popular. He is still popular indeed.

The expression, the structure and the mood of the sitter, according to Nagi, are of great importance when you are making a portrait. There are several portraits which have earned Nagi his fame and have given Nagi his due position.

When he was in Delhi, Nagi used to do interior decoration under the guidance of a lady who was sent by Maharaja Patiyala. He took many commission jobs here and there including those with the Civil Aviation Department.

He has an unsatiable interest in painting figure, especially of the finer sex, and it is in this speciality of subject that he excells.

In Lahore during his career with Muslim League, Nagi painted a good deal of portraits of the Muslim leaders including that of the Quaid. These portraits were exhibited and Quaid-e-Azam very much commended the work.

At Karachi the portraits of the fishermen and faqirs were done by him which were exhibited both in Pakistan and abroad.

In his portraiture he highlighted the rural atmosphere. In some of these, the manner of Ustad Allah Bakhsh is rather predominant. When we talk of Nagi's speciality in painting, he himself is very proud of painting eyes and water.

Most of his paintings were finished in the studio, from the sketches. Credit must be given to the artist for his 'photographic memory'. He says "I use my memory to record different effect, which I can reproduce without any difficulty and without losing any details".

He painted different Ragas in the style of the Akeel school. The Hindus always gave patronage to one who could paint and sing their subjects. Nagi did not survive as a painter of Hindu subjects, his palette was rich enough to embody subjects which could attract lot of customers.

SNAKE CHARMER

Nagi was busy doing paintings on indigenous themes, and our rich folk literature was full of romantic stories, which appealed to him most.

To illustrate these stories the artist selected his characters from people in the street.

In this "Snake Charmer" the man who posed for him was a fisher-man whom Nagi explained the story that he had in mind and the man not only liked the story but also acted it well as he posed. The beautiful costume design is illustrative of the rich folk motifs of Pakistan.

Nagi takes special interest to display such motifs. We can mark his keen interest by studying this painting. The girl has a peculiar glass work on her shirt. The beautiful colour scheme adds to the beauty of the painting.



RAVI BRIDGE

This is a very impressive painting of Nagi which he completed in Lahore.

The perspective lines of the bridge help in creating distance and giving this composition a remarkable depth. On the closer bank of the river the warm colours and the detailed treatment also contribute to separate the horizon line which brings the third dimensional effect very successfully. The clouds also have a role in the composition. Nagi has a special talent to paint water which is very well displayed in this painting.



KALASH WOMAN

This is one of Nagi's very well publicised paintings. Flowers are an integral part of Nagi's female portraits, as is the case in this painting also.

This is a very faithful rendering of a subject from Pakistan's northern area, which has a great tourist attraction.



SAEEN AKHTAR

This is the portrait of Saeen Akhtar who was a famous folk singer of Pakistan. Nagi has, even in this portrait, displayed his love to highlight the indigenous design, handicraft and local dress.



A STONE PANEL

Nagi is very sensitive to the grains and colours of the stone. He believes that the stones live and their beauty lies in the variety of colour texture that nature decorates them with. The choice of the green stone for this panel also reflects the suitability to the subject. The green decorative leaves display a rhythm that makes one forget it is on stone.



A BANK INTERIOR

This is a wall decoration by using coins replicas. The decoration was done for a bank at Karachi. The replicas were carefully prepared by Nagi himself. It will be interesting to mention that this artist has been designing jewellery as well.



A BUDHIST GIRL

When Nagi painted this portrait his frequent questions to the sitter about Buddhism finally inspired him to make a comparative study of religions. It was through this lady that Nagi acquired an interest to study Buddhism.

This is a remarkable study of the expression that prevails on the face of the lady. The colours are naturalistic and Nagi's interest in design again finds a meaningful expression in the treatment of the necklace. The beauty of the head dress, the beads, and the stones on the pendant create a charming effect and highlight the personality of the model.



A LADY WITH A BIRD

Against a flowery background, the artist has presented a very interesting composition. The flow of the line created by the left arm continues with the light colour of the bird and the turning of the beak passes the interest again to the face. The sitter, a simple village girl with peculiar ear rings, sits in a corner of the house garden, with her small pet bird taken out of the cage. Nagi stages, this rather romantic theme, against a flowery background covering a village brick wall. His ladies grace his composition with flowers.



A LADY WITH A BIRD

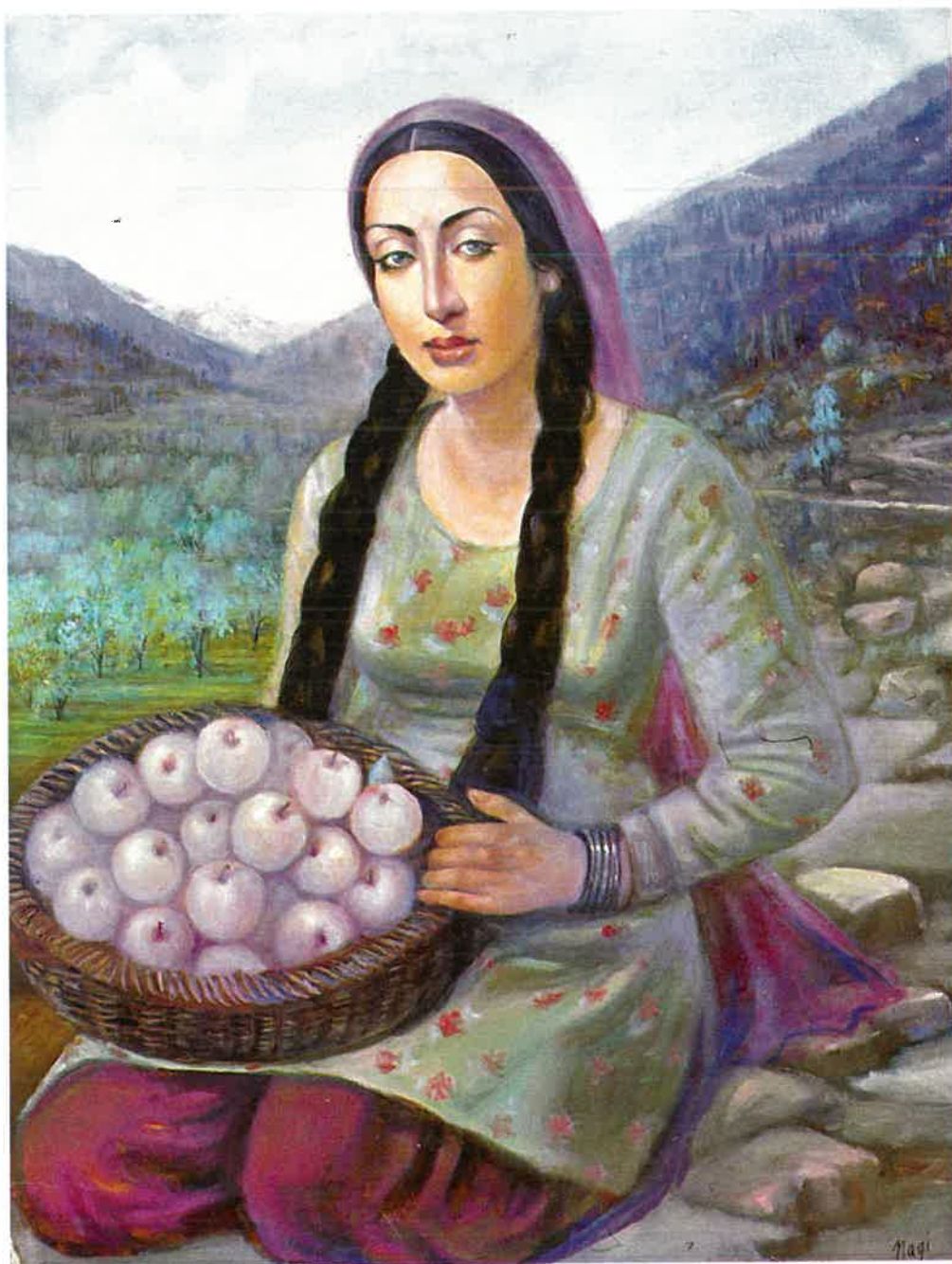
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THE ARTIST'S WIFE

This is a painting of Nagi's wife which decorates his bed room in his Karachi house. She died some years ago.

This is indeed a very remarkable painting with its compositional value and its expression.



A WOMAN AT HARVEST

This painting takes us to the very fields where the village folk are busy in reaping the harvest. This girl is one of the busy people in the fields. The golden fields become more meaningful when there is a feminine participation giving a rich and glorious touch of life.

The fact is that Nagi's concept of beauty is incomplete without the participation of the finer sex.



BALUCHISTAN LANDSCAPE

This is a beautiful representation of the rugged landscape of Baluchistan where the folk life means a lot more different than we know. The beauty of nature does not become less attractive even in this dry landscape where the two little huts give the artist a new theme to depict. "The companions of loneliness."



SUNSET AT MURREE

This is an interesting composition that Nagi completed at Murree. The beauty of skyscape against a rich section of trees and the house tops brings to focus Nagi's rich range of palette. He is at times a poet of nature at service to depict her charm. Nagi is a very powerful observer of nature.



A LADY'S PORTRAIT

Nagi's studies of female sitters mostly concentrate on their eyes. He himself is very conscious about his special talent to paint eyes. This very charming portrait has been composed so well that your eye is directed to the face each time you try to look around at the portrait.



LADY WITH FLOWERS

One of Nagi's most beautiful portraits. Nagi's models, especially ladies, appear with flowers and fruit. This gives him a chance to display a variety of colours. The facial expression goes well with the atmosphere of the subject.

Nagi believes that simplicity is charm by itself. His models look very innocent and simple.



COTTON PICKERS

Painted at Karachi in 1964. This is a mural 6x20 ft. commissioned by the Ministry of Commerce for the Trade International fairs held in various parts of the world. This painting depicts the crop of silver fiber in vibratory expression showing richness of colours.



SUN FLOWERS

Painted at Karachi in 1964. This is a mural 6 x 20 ft. commissioned by the Ministry of Commerce, for their Trade Corporation Industrial Fairs held in various parts of the world. It was organised by Mr. Nagi the artist on behalf of the Ministry. This picture depicts the crop of Sun flower in all their splendour. A golden harvest, a typical scene from the Northern area and Punjab.



KHADDA MARKET

This is an interesting composition in which the stroke is rather different. Nagi's stroke is peculiar due to his own nature. This composition is done under the influence of the impressionists whose works he had seen extensively during his stay in Paris. The combination of dark and light areas has been very skillfully done.



PEN AND INK DRAWINGS

Nagi's drawings have been striking for their simplicity and proportions. In his early days the interest he took in making studies of insects and flowers gave Nagi a patience which helped him to continue interest in pen and ink drawing. In these and the following drawings re-produced in this book, Nagi has displayed his skill as a very skilful illustrator. These studies, at the same time, project Nagi's interest in depicting simple people from our villages.









CONCLUSION

God has not deprived any soul of opportunities to prove its worth during the corporeal life. It is not the fate of all to utilize fully the time and opportunities in a befitting manner. But those who do, there is an eternal life for them. The best measure of success lies deep in the self and if the personal satisfaction be an acceptable basis, then Nagi is indeed very happy from every single work that he took up. He feels very happy and satisfied on his successful career as an artist. He feels one must make others happy through one's work and he also feels that he has made others so.

The remarkable thing about this artist is that he has not said, even once, that he paints to please himself. This phrase is very common with the majority of our artists. This, one analysis, shows that others have not looked at Nagi's art with disapproval and displeasure but otherwise. They have participated with him in enjoying what he painted. If we enjoy what refers to God's creation, in fact we praise Him. The artist becomes an instrument in reminding man about the glory of God.

Nagi, as I wrote before, is in his seventies. The connotation of many of his concepts as well as precepts is different from many of our own due to several reasons. But looking at man and nature through Nagi's experience is lively, soothing and comfortable for a while. This study was an effort to open up a window for the readers for a refreshing breeze in which Nagi has enjoyed more than half a century of his artistic career.

As after reading a book written by an author giving us his experiences of his sixty years of his life, we add those sixty years to our own life, so do we add to our own experience the charming world of Nagi through his art. After all what he has recorded through colour is his statement on his perception of the world of God Almighty, which is beautiful.

Nagi may have many more shades of his personality and his art than those described in this book.

PRE-INDEPENDENCE

Born at Amritsar (India) on 2nd February, 1916. Studied at Amritsar, Lahore, Delhi
Commissioned by the Government of British India to prepare design.

Decorated a number of important places including Darbar Hall, (Viceroy House New Delhi and Birla Temple).

Specially deputed by Late Nawab-Zada Liaquat Ali Khan, to work in Muslim League Publicity Cell under Bashir Ahmad Hamayun from 1944 to 1947.

Painted the first portrait of Quaid-e-Azam.

Worked with Professor Edmen Huzzi, Ecole Nationale, Superieure de-Beaux, Arts Paris, Fresco Painting and designing.

LIST OF JOBS CARRIED OUT AFTER INDEPENDENCE

1. Selected during the Islamic Conference Exhibition by Iran, Egypt, and all Islamic States to decorate and set-up their Pavilion.
2. Worked as decorators in the May Fair Exhibition, Paris, and also worked for French Architect M. Posihion for International Industrial Fair in Pakistan.
3. Worked as decorater for the Ministry of Commerce of the United States of America in the International Industrial Fair of Pakistan held in Karachi, Iran, India and the Chinese Pavilion which was very much appreciated by the famous Architects and designers of the world.
4. Worked for the Ministry of Commerce, Government of Pakistan and decorated the Stalls in the International Exhibition held in Karachi. The two Stalls- "Export Pavilion" and the "Tourist Bureau" received Gold Medal being of the best Stalls of the Fair.
5. Deputed by the Government of Pakistan for organising, setting-up and decorating their pavilion in the second International Fair Tehran which was highly appreciated.
6. Designed, decorated and furnished PIA Sales offices in Dacca, Lahore and Karachi. Also went to Rome and London to decorate their offices.
7. Worked for the State Bank of Pakistan, and furnished their new Building and Library.
8. Worked for the Oil & Gas Corporation. Decorated their offices and bungalows.
9. Decorated Hotel Intercontinental (Chandni Lounge) Karachi, and Flashman Hotel

(new building), Rawalpindi.

10. Decorated VIP Lounge at Karachi Airport.
11. Decorated and furnished Chaklala Airport and Terminal Building of Peshawar, Quetta and Swat.
12. Decorated and designed Tourist Counters all over Pakistan.
13. Designed and decorated Civil Aviation Building Library and Auditorium.
14. Designed the Museum for State Bank of Pakistan.
15. Designed *Ban-e-Pakistan*, Lahore near Wagha Border which has been approved by the Government.
16. Designed and decorated Paradise Cinema, Nishat Cinema and Naz Cinema in 1949.
17. Decorated and furnished Governor House, Quetta, Ziarat and Sind. The work was highly appreciated by Princess Ashraf Pehlwi.
18. Designed decorated and furnished the Governor House and the Assembly Building Karachi.
19. Designed and manufactured prefabricated pavilion for Trading Corporation of Pakistan for exhibition in Czecho-Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Zegrib. Also made furniture for Zegrib Fair of Pakistani cultural heritage.
20. Designed and furnished VIP Lounge at Karachi, Saido Sharif, Swat, Quetta, Peshawar and Hyderabad which was highly appreciated, by the President of Pakistan.

MURALS

21. Made Mural 6' x 100' at the height of 40 feet parapit wall facing the Apron side with white marble onyx and black stone calligraphy (Quranic Ayat), bass relief, at Saidoo Sharif.
22. Made Quranic Mural at Peshawar 80' x 14' in black stone with Quranic Ayat Superimposed bass relief white marble which was highly appreciated and made a land mark in Pakistan.
23. Made circular Disc calligraphy of 12 feet dia of red stone superimposed with white marble on both sides of Islamabad Airport Wings at a height of 60 feet.
24. Won first prize of Rs. 10,000/- for concept of Baluchistan Assembly Bldg and first prize in KDA competition for designing and face lifting of Karachi city.



SAFI SAFDAR (MOHAMMAD SAFDAR)

Born in Julunder, East Punjab, studied at Central Model School, Lahore and later took his M.A. Fine Arts degree through Government College, Lahore, in 1963. He joined Lawrence College Murree as a Lecturer and later was a Resident Director, Pakistan National Centre Islamabad until 1974. He joined the Zambian Civil Service in 1974 on a training assignment which also involved Curriculum Development for Specialist Art Teachers and Graphic Artists. He also taught Cultural History. In 1979, he joined Kaduna Polytechnic as a Lecturer to teach at the Department of Architecture.

Safdar has been writing on Art and allied subjects since his University days and has held several one man shows both in Pakistan and abroad. He has done Mural, Portraiture Landscape and Calligraphic paintings.

He is an author of a book of Punjabi verse "Sukay Pattar" and Several Articles on Art of Pakistan. He is writing for various periodicals and national dailies.

Art & Design

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