

Painting in Pakistan

IJAZ UL HASSAN

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To the memory of my father
Mian Zahur ul Hassan

NOT TO BE REPRODUCED

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Hassan, Ijaz ul

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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	11
PREFACE	13
CHAPTER I: AN HISTORICAL CANVAS Buddhist Painting, Pala Painting, Gujarati Painting, The Mughal School, Punjab – Pahari Painting, Painting during the Sikh Period	17
CHAPTER II: SEARCH FOR IDENTITY Company Bahadur, The Art Schools, New-Bengal Movement, A. R. Chughtai, Fayzee Rahamin, Allah Baksh, Bengal Folk Art, Jamini Roy	33
CHAPTER III: NEW SENSIBILITY Amrita Sher-Gil, Anna Molka, Zubeida Agha, Zainul Abedin, Shakir Ali	45
CHAPTER IV: RE-AWAKENING IN LAHORE Sheikh Ahmed, Lateef Chughtai, B. C. Sanyal, Sateesh Gujral, Ozzir Zuby, A. R. Ijaz, Moyene Najmi, Ali Imam, A. J. Shemza, Ahmed Parvez, Sheikh Safdar	61
CHAPTER V: PURSUIT OF THE REAL Khalid Iqbal, Zulqarnain Haider, Ghulam Rasool	73
CHAPTER VI: FATE OF MAN Sadequain, Murtaza Bashir, Hameedur Rahman	81
CHAPTER VII: MYTHS AND MOTIFS Saifuddin Ahmed, Qamarul Hasan, Qayyum Chowdhry, Rashid Chowdhry	89
CHAPTER VIII: IMAGE OF MAN N. H. Qazi, Colin David, Saeed Akhtar, Bevan Petman, Mansur Aye, Jamil Naqsh, Bashir Mirza, Mansur Rahi, Shahid Sajjad, Rabia Zuberi	93
CHAPTER IX: NEW PERSPECTIVES Aminul Islam, D. Chakraborty, Rumana Saeed, Raheel Akbar Javed, Nighat O'brien, Zubaida Javed, Khalid Mahmud, Ajmal Hussain, Syed Jehangir, A. Razzaque, Lubna Agha	103

CHAPTER X: REALITY RECEDES	113
M. Kibria, Iqbal Jafree, A. Basit, Zahoorel Akhlaque, Rasheed Arshad, Ahmed Khan, Kamil Khan Mumtaz, Ismail Gulgee	
CHAPTER XI: WIND OF CHANGE	121
Hajra Mansur, Salahuddin, K. S. Butt, Bashir Ahmed, Najmi Sura, Laila Shazada, Man- soora Hassan, Nahid Ali, Mehr Afroze, Qudsia Nisar, Wahab Jaffar, Mashkoor Raza, Mussarrat Mirza, M. Kohari, Imran Mir, Shahbaz Khan, Iqbal Hussain, Jameela Masood, Jamal Shah, Akram Dost, Ghulam Mustafa, Ajaz Anwar, Misbahuddin Qazi, Mehboob Ali, Tasneem Shehzad, Athar Jamal, M. A. Ahed, Shahid Jalal, Ghazanfar Ali, Iqbal Ahmed, Kaleem Khan, Rasheed Khan, Nazir Ahmed, Musarrat Hasan, Moham- mad Ali, Nayyara Wajid, Salima Hashmi, A. R. Nagori	
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	145
BIBLIOGRAPHY	149
INDEX	155

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Preface

The brief history of this publication is reflective of the state of art appreciation as well as of publishing in Pakistan. In 1968 when I was teaching at the National College of Arts, Lahore, the then Federal Information Secretary, Mr. Altaf Gauhar, was looking for someone to collect data on contemporary Pakistani painters, and to prepare a photographic record of paintings in private and public collections. When Professor Shakir Ali, the Principal of the NCA, proposed my name, I was excited at the prospect of travelling all over the country, interviewing artists and looking at their works. It took me six months of hectic travel, painstaking research and writing to complete the assignment. On seeing the material, Mr. Gauhar proposed that it be published in a book form. However, shortly after President Ayub Khan's ouster from office, Mr. Gauhar also left the Ministry. I received a polite letter from an officer on special duty informing me that since the Ministry had decided not to proceed any further with publication of the book, I was "free" to use the manuscript on my own "in any manner including its publication in part or in full". However, in spite of repeated requests I was not returned the two sets of colour transparencies, and black and white negatives of the paintings which I had handed over to the Department of Films and Publications.

In April 1975, the newly established National Book Foundation, expressed its willingness to publish my book. Seven years had elapsed since I had produced the first manuscript; naturally this now required to be updated. I soon realised that updating the manuscript really amounted to rewriting most of it all over again; an exercise which took me the good part of a year. With the imposition of Martial Law in 1977 and subsequent changes

in the National Book Foundation, the publication policy was reviewed and it was decided to confine its activities to reprinting the prescribed college textbooks only. The publication of the projected book was not only arbitrarily abandoned but I was also casually informed that the introductory chapter of the revised manuscript, being typed in their office, had been misplaced. Fortunately, I still had my original notes and information doodled here and there on scraps of paper, from which I was able to reconstruct the chapter again. Losing transparencies was a setback enough but losing chapters was more disheartening. A few more publishers like these, I pondered, and I would be without a chapter to publish!

For the present publication, the 1976 manuscript has been revised and once again expanded especially Chapters I and II which provide the historical background, and the earlier part of Chapter IV concerning painting at Lahore before 1974. Chapter XI has been added to include the younger generation of painters who have appeared on the scene while the manuscript was lying on a dusty shelf somewhere. The National Book Foundation had insisted that the section dealing with painters from East Pakistan, which had in 1971 seceded to form Bangladesh, be removed from the proposed publication. The parts concerning painters and painting of that region have been kept as they were, not merely because the territory was part of Pakistan till 1971, but also because many painters from the eastern wing such as Zainul Abedin, Murtaza Bashir, S. Jehangir and others came and worked in the western half for several years. It would have been interesting to trace the later development of painters of that generation from Bangladesh but unfortunately this is presently not possible.

This delay in publication of this volume, along with related frustrations has had its positive aspects as well. Successive revisions have enabled me to improve and refine the text. It has given me time to research and collect more information, and hold further discussions with painters. During this period I was also able to visit museums, galleries and monuments where I had not been before. For instance, in August 1969 I was able to make a trip to India to see the Buddhist Frescoes of Ajanta, the Buddhist, Hindu and Jain sculptures in the caves and rock-cut temples of Ellora and Ajanta, the Stupa at Sanchi, the temples at Mount Abu, the *Sas Bahu* and *Teli Ka Mandar* at Gwalior, the Rajput Frescoes and miniatures at Udaipur and Jaipur and various other schools of painting and sculpture at the National Museum, Delhi. The National Gallery of Modern Art provided a comprehensive view of Jamini Roy, Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose and particularly, Amrita Sher-Gil. There were also some exquisite, early Chughtais. I have subsequently visited India thrice, in 1982, 1986 and 1988 in order to further acquaint myself with paintings in the various galleries and museums. I was fortunate to have been in Chandigarh in 1982 and visit the exhibition of Sikh paintings at the Chandigarh Museum, organised as part of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's centenary celebrations. The organiser had collected a most comprehensive assembly of miniatures loaned from every possible source. Meeting the artists, particularly those who migrated to India after the creation of Pakistan, was extremely informative. In this regard I recall with great pleasure the moments spent with Krishen Khanna and Sateesh Gujral.

In 1970, a year after my visit to India in 1969, I escorted a delegation of students of the National College of Arts, Lahore, to Afghanistan. The journey from Peshawar to Kabul and then on to Bamayan and Balkh brought back to the present times the great epoch of history when the 'East' and 'West' artistically and culturally intermingled. At that time, Begram, with all the trade routes touching it, must have been the Rome of the ancient world. In the Kabul Museum, the presence of Alexandrian glass, Roman medallions, Chinese brocades and Indian ivories, which had all been excavated at Begram, only reinforced my views. I was particularly excited to find an ivory jewelry box from India. It was exquisitely carved and inset with small panels, each depicting a pair of physically well-endowed ladies employed in toiletry. I assumed that

the box belonged to the 6th or 7th century A.D. but was astonished to find that it belonged to a much earlier period; in fact, if I recall correctly, to 200 A.D. The ivories of the period have not survived in the subcontinent on account of its wet and humid climate.¹ It was also interesting to see the Buddhist frescoes in Afghanistan and to compare them with those at Ajanta. The Murals at Bamayan (500 A.D.) are dominated by Iranian influence.²

While presenting *Painting in Pakistan* to the reader, I have tried to see the subject in the historic continuity and in the context of the various aesthetic, cultural or ideological influences which may have been instrumental in its fruition at different times. The paintings in the northern subcontinent have distinct characteristics and sensibility. To say that Mughal painting was a creation of Muslim painters from Iran and Central Asia would be as absurd as to assert that the Kangra or Guler miniatures were the product of Hindu Rajputs from the Punjab hill state, or that Sikh painting was the work of the Sikhs only. It would be perhaps more accurate to believe that those schools represent the various facets of painting of northern India, with its principal source of inspiration at Lahore. I confess that I have arrived at this conclusion, and am presuming to present it by merely looking at paintings, and not by trying to find the religious and ethnic antecedents of painters who might have painted them. One is aware that while many Muslim intellectuals in their bigotry reject Punjab Pahari paintings because many of those depict Hindu myths and romances, the dogmatic Hindu and chauvinistic elements, because of this very reason, proclaim their proprietary rights over them. The truth is that painting of many of the important Pahari schools, flourished with the support of their rulers but under the powerful influence of the Lahore School, and that the work of these schools is the product of artists of various beliefs and racial and ethnic backgrounds.

While discussing painting I have tried to give principal attention to the work, rather than the artist. The ideas and intentions of an artist may largely influence what the artist creates, but it is through the work alone that we must judge the artist. I confess to being more enthusiastic about the painters whose ideas and work I admire. But at the same time, I have also tried to present accurately the contentions of artists I may not fully agree with, without prejudice to their work. Occasionally, I may be more critical of painters whose work I essentially value than those I do not. Some of my friends, however, feel that I am too

generous in my criticism. I am of the view that at the present stage, when people are not well acquainted with "who is who" in our painting, one of the important tasks of a critic is to inform and familiarize the public with our artists, highlighting the positive features of the work rather than underlining the failings. The weeding and cropping can follow later. Moreover, it is perhaps best at this stage for the critic to truthfully present facts in their proper context and perspective, and allow the readers to draw their own conclusions. It is for this reason that, in spite of the great expense, a fairly large number of paintings are being reproduced in this volume. In the absence of a proper national gallery of Pakistan it is hoped that this volume will serve as one on an ad hoc and interim basis.

I must acknowledge the help extended by Chaudhry Ghafoor of Adarts (Karachi) Ltd., in preparing a fresh set of transparencies at Karachi. I am grateful to artists, private and public collectors, galleries and museums, for allowing me to reproduce in this volume paintings which they have in their collection. I would also like to thank my

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IJAZ UL HASSAN

May, 1990

Notes

1. Three interesting illustrations are produced in Oriental Arts, A Handbook of Styles and Forms, Published by Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1979 (i) An ivory panel depicting scenes in the women's departments, 2nd century, Begram (Afghanistan) Kabul Museum No. 100, page 53, (ii) Reconstruction; back of a seat from Begram. Panels of open-work executed in carved ivory, 2nd century, Kabul Museum No. 96, page 52, (iii) Reconstruction: back of a chair with carved cross-bar from Begram; copper rivets and

panels, ivory framework, 2nd century, Kabul Museum No. 97, page 52.)

2. Kushana Murals around the stupa of Miran near Niya Oasis in the East Turkestan (200 A.D.) remind one of Pompeian Frescoes, whereas the Murals at Dukhtar-i-Noshervan (500 A.D.) are almost pure Sassanian, and the Cave Temple of Tarim Basin at Khotan and Kashgar combine Gandharan with local Iranian and Gupta-Indian Features.

An Historical Canvas

Although Pakistan is a young country, the cultural history of the region can be traced back to the dawn of civilisation. The region which now constitutes Pakistan has been continuously enriched by new ideas and artistic forms deposited by various streams and currents flowing in from other parts of the world. In the field of plastic arts the Dancing Girl in bronze from Mohenjodaro, the Fasting Buddha in the Lahore Museum and other pieces of sculpture in schist or stucco of the Buddhist period, the splendid miniatures, calligraphy, *naqashi* and the exquisite crafts of the Muslim period, the great tradition of architecture and architectural decoration together weave a unique artistic pattern.

Buddhist Painting

In painting, unfortunately, nothing survives from the pre-Buddhist period. To conjecture about painting of that period by relying on references from ancient texts can be misleading. Only a few fragments of the Buddhist Frescoes were recently discovered in Pakistan. The finest achievements of Buddhist painting are, however, displayed on the walls of Ajanta caves in India.

The main group of Ajanta Frescoes date back from the 2nd century B.C. to about the 6th century A.D. Painting continued till the 8th century A.D., but this was the period of the decline of Ajanta art. Ajanta Frescoes, like all significant arts, are based on a close observation of life and contemporary society, presented in all its variety and similitude. These murals display a knowledge of the appearance of things and a correct perception of the measure of nature. The fleeting moments of life are depicted through a linear rhythm and harmonious style. The fi-

gures are sensuous with rhythm, and expressive of feelings in action. The human figures, though they are types rather than individuals, have been faithfully delineated by means of simple lines; even the highly idealised figures are based on knowledge of form and contain subdued notes of realism. The treatment of figures is simple and there is subtle characterisation and a dramatic expression; the feeling of roundness is conveyed by suggestive modelling and shading. The composition is dynamic and designed to express moods. The colours are not only aesthetically appealing but also expressive of feelings achieved by carefully calculated colour contrasts.

The scenes depicted on the Ajanta walls have a fundamentally religious purpose. The important episodes of Buddha's life and his previous existence, however, are set amid everyday scenes of life which have been sensitively observed by the artists. The minute details of colour and anatomy testify to the artists' intimate knowledge of the human body and of nature. The artists of the Bagh Frescoes and Sigiriya Frescoes (Sri Lanka), executed in the closing years of Ajanta, reveal similar skill and insight in their work. These Frescoes are, however, tightly modelled and heavier in outline, lacking the grace and natural ease which are characteristic of Ajanta.

The decay and weakening of inspiration in the classical art, evident in the few fragments of painting discovered in the caves of Ellora, came when Buddhism had ceased to be a dynamic force, due to its compromise with Brahminism. This shifting of emphasis and the slow movement away from naturalism as a means of expression usually takes place when a society begins to decay and loses its grip on reality. The decline of Buddhism marks the revival of Brahminism and the establishment

of a feudal system. Brahminism had not remained unchanged in the preceding centuries. Some of the Vedic gods had been replaced by new ones with different or additional attributes, calculated to serve the material needs of the emerging new society. One of the "characteristics of Brahminism was a gradual shift in emphasis from ritual alone to the view that a completely personal relationship between God and the devotee was possible. The relationship was one where God could bestow his grace (*prasada*) on the devotee.....the idea of personal devotion or *Bhakhti*, as it was commonly called, was to become the dynamic force of later Hinduism". The change in the economic system and its ideological content demanded art forms which were in consonance with its so-

cial needs.

Brahminism spread the belief that salvation could only be achieved by acts and not by intentions, that the more permanent the acts, the greater would be the reward by the patron God. The patrons of art, therefore, desired that the painter should express himself through a medium that would give a more lasting form to his work. Painting, which had sufficed the simpler ritual needs of the Buddhists, could not satisfy the Brahmin's desire for a concrete embodiment of his chosen god. Hence the emphasis shifted from painting to sculpture and architecture. The result of this was two-fold; on the one hand, it led to the golden period of sculpture, and on the other to the total obscurity of the painter for eight centuries.



1. GUJERATI, *Kalpasutra*, 1510 A.D., opaque water-colour on paper, 11 x 7 cm; Lahore Museum

During the period of the Great Frescoes, painting was also done in a smaller size on wooden panels or cloth. These miniatures or mobile paintings were, however, socially less significant and were not viewed with the same degree of public interest which the Frescoes enjoyed. Unlike the Frescoes these small mobile paintings have all perished due to the hot and humid climatic conditions of the subcontinent. Nothing exists which belongs to the period preceding 8th century A.D., and that which has survived cannot be dated with any reasonable degree of certainty.

Pala Painting

With the decline of Buddhism the fate of Fresco painting was sealed and it was slowly replaced by miniature painting as seen in the Buddhist and Jain illuminated manuscripts of the Pala School (9th–12th century) and the Gujrat School (11th–15th century) respectively. The Pala School Buddhist texts were painted on palm leaves with painting in the centre and text on both sides. The supple charm of the Buddhist goddesses can be seen in leaves of *Pancharaksha-sutra* which have been based on the Ajanta style. The style later spread to Nepal, Tibet and other states in the eastern Himalayas.

The Jain manuscripts were also written on narrow palm leaves. The introduction of paper by the Arabs in the 14th century enlarged the scope of miniature painting but the Jain painters continued to use the long narrow format of the palm leaf. The subtle juxtaposition of colours of Persian manuscripts contained in books brought by the Turks were, however, appreciated by the Jain artists. The flat brick-red and blue areas of colours were consequently imbued with more subtle values. What is striking about the painting of these Schools is their complete lack of observation of life. They represent human figures of fundamental types without the slightest attempt to portray personality. The figures are bound by solid lines and lack grace and elegance. This is particularly true of Jain miniature. The composition is static and the main emphasis of the illumination is the narrative, hence utmost use is made of symbols and images. Foreshortening, shading, depth and complexities of colour, so conspicuous in the Buddhist Frescoes, are totally absent.

Gujerati Painting

The style devised by Jain artists was not confined to religious subjects; artists also tackled profane subjects.

This resulted in the emergence of the Gujarati School. It also played a part in the origins of Rajput miniature painting. The artists who were familiar with the technique of Jain painting continued to be patronised by rich Hindu merchants from the 14th to 16th centuries. They were commissioned to illustrate Hindu classics and religious texts in the Jain style. These manuscripts are sometimes referred to as the *Kulahdar* group because in the paintings the men wear turbans with *Kulah* which is an obvious Muslim influence. The women, however, are content to wear *saris* and *bodices*. These paintings have a more varied colour scheme and employ a bigger format in which episodes and events are depicted vertically in a multiple setting. These paintings, unlike the Pala and Jain illuminations, are not static but impregnated with movement. They depict life and movement with an aesthetic exuberance which sets them aside from the formula which the Buddhist and Jain illuminators had evolved. The *Kulahdar* group of manuscripts are also important historically because they provided a local base on which Mughal painting could develop its distinctive features.

The Mughal School

A new chapter of painting begins with Zaheeruddin Babur's victory over Ibrahim Lodhi at Panipat in the spring of 1526. Babur's victory paved the way towards the unification of several scattered and warring feudal states under a single powerful empire which is recognised for its development in social, economic and cultural spheres. Babur who was a great connoisseur of culture, literature and the arts had developed his social, philosophical and aesthetic outlook under the influence of some of the greatest thinkers of Central Asia. *Baburnama* is a "recognised model of Uzbek classical literature and an outstanding masterpiece of the Uzbek literary language."¹ Babur became instrumental in introducing to the subcontinent the best traditions of Timurid, Safavid and Central Asian Schools, which helped to re-establish the classical standards which had slowly declined in the preceding eight centuries.

The Herat School of Painting was founded by the great Kamaliddin Bihzad. The 16th century saw the emergence of a number of Schools in the central Asian cities which contained and developed the tradition of Bihzad's School, adding to it of course their local elements and flavour. The painting of those Schools is mostly worldly and truthful in contrast to the religious content of minia-



2. GUJERATI, *Mullah Dawood*, Luran Chanda Illustration, 16th Cent. A.D., opaque water-colour on paper, 22.5 x 15 cm; Lahore Museum

tures which were being painted, prior to Babur's arrival in India. The Safavid School under Shah Tahmasp (1524–76), a contemporary and a distant relative of Babur, had in fact developed a courtly style of great aesthetic refinement. The greatest Persian manuscript of mid-15th century, close in date to the beginning of Mughal painting, is the *Haft Aurang* (Seven Thrones) of poet Jami. What Babur encountered across the Hindukush was totally different in conception, in colour and in sensibility. Unlike the central Asian and Persian artists, the practising Buddhist, Jain and Hindu artists were more attuned to folk sensibility and modes of visualising life, nature, and mythology. There was also another important difference. The Jain painter enjoyed greater personal freedom. He was usually commissioned by rich businessmen wishing to make a gift to a temple, for instance a *Bhagvata Purana*, hence he was relatively free to create and express the way he liked. The *Vasanta Vilas* (Beauty of Spring), a scroll representing a Hindu text in Jain style, is rendered in flat areas of glowing colours. It depicts powerful angular forms in a composition which is compartmentalised. *Vasanta Vilas* represent an impassioned world which is dramatically different from the delicate and overtly refined Persian painting of the *Haft Aurang*. One is not surprised that Babur found painting in the sub-continent crude. In his memoirs, Babur comments, "in handicrafts and work there is no form or symmetry, method or quality".²

Humayun, who succeeded Babur, very soon lost his empire to Sher Shah Suri and was thus forced to take refuge in the court of Shah Tahmasp in 1542 before setting up his own court at Kabul in 1545. Humayun had actually established a workshop of painters before his retreat from India. His interest in natural history was close to that of his father. M. C. Beach draws attention to an accident described by Jauhar, an attendant of Humayun, in his memoirs *Tezkereh al Vakiat*. On his exit from India the Emperor's entourage stopped to set up camp; Jauhar writes, "The king undressed and ordered his clothes to be washed, and in the meanwhile he wore his dressing gown; while thus sitting, a beautiful bird flew into the tent, the doors of which were immediately closed and the bird caught; his majesty then took a pair of scissors and cut some of the feathers off the animal; he then sent for a painter and had a picture taken of the bird, and afterwards ordered it be released".³

During his stay in Iran, Humayun spent some years in

Kazvin and Tabriz. While in Tabriz Humayun was able to acquaint himself with the work of the well-known pupils of Bihzad. On his return to India in 1550 Humayun brought with him from Tabriz, Mir Sayyid Ali and Khawaja Abdus Samad of Shiraz whom he had befriended at the court of Shah Tahmasp. Mir Sayyid Ali Tabrezi, a pupil of Bihzad, introduced into Indian miniature painting the traditions of the Herat School of the Timurid period, while Abdus Samad Shirazi brought with him the traditions of Persian miniature painting. These two painters headed the new school of miniature painting which Humayun had established at the imperial library. Their first assignment was to illustrate *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza* which was to consist of twelve volumes of a hundred folios, each folio was to be provided with an illustration.

M. C. Beach observes that if one had to identify a single important factor responsible for the development of Mughal miniature painting, it was the rulers' interest in books. The Mughals placed a great value on books because they considered them as evidence of wealth, intelligence, and power. Akbar at his death left about 24,000 books. Sheikh Faizi at his death left 4,600 volumes which were transferred to the king's library.⁴

The royal library had a group of artists who copied, bound, and embellished the texts. *Tarikh-e-Akbari* tells us that 100 men worked for Akbar on the great *Hamzanama*. These 100 men besides being painters, calligraphers, guilders were apprentices as well. In the earlier period an illustration was executed by several hands. One concluded the design, the other filled in the colours, a third rendered important personages and yet another drew animals or birds. By the turn of the 16th century, this system of division of work became rare which mostly accounts for the higher quality of the latter *Akbarnamas*. When the Mughal rule became firmly established by the end of the 16th century, the need to develop a library as a symbol of power and wealth became less important, leading to a much smaller output of manuscripts. But whatever little which was now produced was of much finer quality. According to Beach, political stability and wealth also enabled the artist to have access to better art material which enabled the painter to have more control and express more delicate and subtle effects. Abul Fazal records "Much progress was made in the commodities required by painter.....mixtures of colour has especially improved. The picture thus received a hitherto unknown finish"⁵

From the view of paintings Akbar's reign (1556–1605) can be divided at least into two distinct periods. The first period when he was young, inquisitive and had a great appetite for learning, is expressive of Akbar's desire to challenge accepted religious and artistic beliefs with new concepts and ideas. This period of experimentation came to its culmination during a *qamarage* (Hunt) near Bhera in Punjab when, according to Abul Fazal, Akbar had a mystical experience which apparently revealed to him the "glory of unity", finally leading to the establishment of his *Din-e-Ilahi* in 1584. During this period his painter, Daswanth, was important to him because he shared with Akbar his sense of the irrational and the fantastic. Daswanth committed suicide in 1584 and with his death, and the establishment of *Din-e-Ilahi* Akbar's own attitude to life became less impetuous and subjective, taking on a quieter and more rational vein.

The earliest manuscript of Akbar's period is the *Hamzanama* which depicts the life of Hazrat Amir Hamza, uncle of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. It is a great adventure story of 360 tales with kidnappings, magical journeys, dragons and giants which must have greatly appealed to Akbar, like it still does to the young today. The manuscript is of cloth in big folio size i.e. 68 x 52 cm. which finds precedence in local village painting and temple hangings. While the Persian painter was interested in graceful poses, poetic movements and fine detail, the *Hamzanama* paintings portray people with physical substance and are expressive of character and action. These paintings, while retaining some of the decorative elements, are boldly designed. The composition is more open and less formal. Unlike the *Haft Aurang* one is required to leisurely discover their aesthetic content and meaning. These miniatures lay considerable emphasis on the painters' narrative skill in presenting an event or depicting an episode.

In the later period, Akbar abandoned his pre-occupation with the legendary and the fantastic and became interested in the more real and credible. The more concrete aspect of life which could be investigated into and verified. This explains his interest in history. He encouraged the writing of memoirs and, according to Badaoni had a translation bureau established at Fatehpur Sikri. For instance in 1582 *Tarikh-e-Alfi* (*History of a Thousand*) was commissioned and the same year, *Mahabharata* was translated into Persian as *Razmnama*, which was followed by a translation of the *Ramayana*. It is also impor-

tant to note that, with the exception of *Hamzanama*, the early works are usually less than a full page. By 1580 folios became larger in size and illustration usually full page and often without passages intruding into them. In the second volume of the *Akbarnama* (1604) most illustrations are in fact double page extending across both halves of the open book.⁶

Interest in history naturally stimulated Akbar's interest in historical personages which led to his interest in portraiture. Abul Fazal writes; "His Majesty himself sat for his likeness, and also ordered to have the likeness taken of all the grandees of the realm. An immense album was thus formed; those that have passed away have received a new life, and those who are still alive have immortality promised them".

By the time of Akbar, Mughal painting had established itself as a vital tradition. It had achieved freedom of expression, a deeper sense of space and volume. The natural elements were depicted with truth to their colour and form.



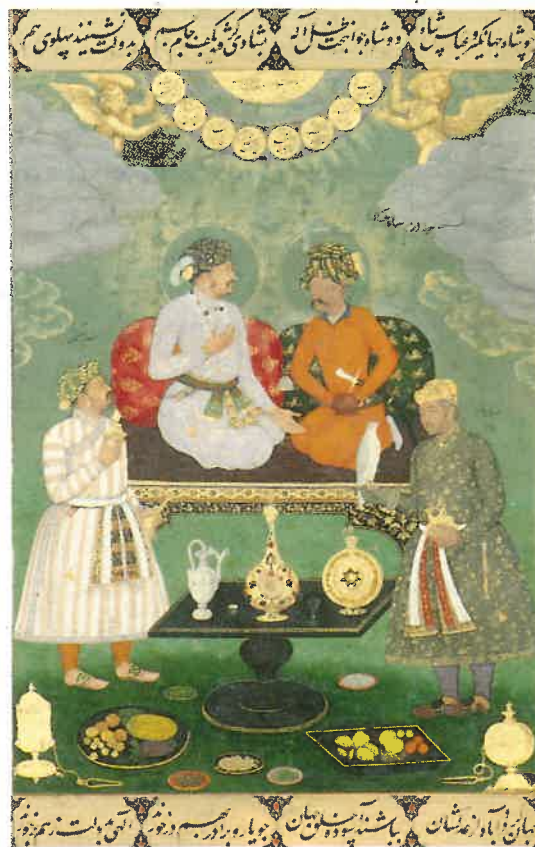
3. MUGHAL, *Jehangir Preferring a Sufi to Kings*, by Bichitr, c. 1615–18, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

The growing naturalism, which was based on precise observation, gained further fillip during the reign of emperor Jehangir (1605–1627). Jehangir had, even more than Akbar, a deep scientific interest in the appearance and character of the natural world. The general level of observation in *Jehangirnama* is far more acute than *Akbarnama*. Jehangir's interest in people is reflected in the psychological portraits he commissioned. Jehangir had several portraits made of himself which are extraordinarily perceptive and reveal his frailties, humanity and splendour. It may be mentioned that before 1615 the emperors were mostly portrayed presiding in court, participating in an event or supervising the implementation of some important task. After 1615, however, one finds the emperor isolated from any narrative context and presented against symbols expressive of their power and wealth.

The miniatures of Jehangir's period are sumptuously mounted with great skill and care. Usually arabesque, or floral and bird motifs are employed for decorating of figurative works. Some of the most interesting portraits of nobles and artisans are rendered in the figurative borders which usually frame calligraphic panels.

Jehangir was succeeded by Shahjehan (1627–58) and the naturalistic trend continued. Shahjehan, however, lacked Akbar's and Jehangir's eclecticism and unquenching thirst for knowledge. He was more interested in display of imperial splendour and found architecture more suitable for the purpose. However, painting during his period reached its highest academic standards and can be truly called impeccable. Immaculate portraits were rendered without technical blemish during his reign. The portrait of Abdur Rahim Khan-e-Khanan by Hasham can be cited as an example of the style he preferred. As one can see, many of these portraits are also highly perceptive but they somehow lack the depth and insight which the artist demonstrated in the period of Jehangir.

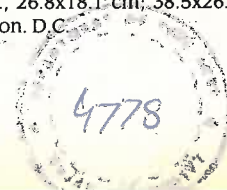
According to M. S. Randhawa, Shahjehani painting, "achieved a new delicacy and romantic flavour". He draws attention to Shahjehan's taste for comely, well-formed women" whose portraits were painted for the delight of the Emperor and his nobles. Mr. Randhawa, approving Bernier's admiration for the softness and delicacy of paintings of this period, concludes by saying "The Mongol barbarism had been finally shed, and the warm sensuousness of India became its dominant characteristic".⁷ It is amazing how some scholars would disagree



4. MUGHAL, *Jehangir Entertains Shah Abbas*; c. 1618, Borders attributed to Mohammad Sadiq, A.D. 1746-47, 25x18.3 cm; 47.9x33 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



5. MUGHAL, *Equestrian Portrait of Shah Jehan*, inscribed to Govardhan, early 19th Cent., 26.8x18.1 cm, 38.5x26.2 cm. Free Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



even on fundamentals. First, the Mughals were Timurids and not Mongols; and the Timurid period, in spite of its complicated historic and social contradictions, generated a high level of development in all spheres of human knowledge possible under developed feudalism. Secondly, it is generally agreed that Shahjehan's period is the water-shed from where onwards the artist slowly ceases to rely on the objective reality of the subject, and that his line and colour assume an independent character. His work now depends on a set traditional method which can hardly be regarded as expressive of "the warm sensuousness of India". Shahjehan's successor, Aurangzeb, not remembered for his great patronage of the arts, is sometimes unduly denigrated, because the Royal Atelier continued to function throughout his reign. During his reign many court painters also began to seek private commissions from nobles and courtiers. This trend naturally gained strength when Aurangzeb became involved in his military campaign in Deccan, which commenced in 1681 and lasted for 26 years until his death.

The painting of the Safavid School pursues a courtly style which is delicate and decorative but with no shading and perspective. The picture is flat, divided into segments of pure colour often wrought with geometric designs or with intricate patterns and motifs culled from nature; sometimes objects, especially flowers, are selected and enlarged beyond natural proportions, and the painter seems to revel in playing up their colour and shapes. The Persian miniatures transport one to a magic world of their own, where rocks are pink, mauve or turquoise and where animals, birds and flowers adopt any colour which may help to enhance the beauty of the painting. The *Hamzanama* miniatures follow the same conventions. The decorative elements remain, but the composition tends to become more open and less formal; colours also lose their "impeccable taste". But, what is significant is that some of the elements, especially animals and trees, are treated with a growing awareness of their natural forms and characteristics. From now on Mughal painting becomes increasingly naturalistic in conception and execution. This becomes clearly evident at the time of Akbar, when chronicles such as *Babarnama* and *Akbarnama*, including the fabulous adventures of the heroes of romance were illustrated. The treatment of the subject continues to be two-dimensional but natural elements are treated with greater realism than before. The foliage, in spite of being flat in form, represents the various species. Rocks

are no longer cloud-like after the manner established by the Chinese and Persian conventions. The traditional interlaced hatching, meant to represent water, is replaced by a more naturalistic rendering. The treatment of figures betrays an interest in personality. The figures are not merely grouped together but seen fully conscious of each other's presence. There is a general feeling that life has been freshly observed.

Mughal painting was a court art, produced in a congenial atmosphere and under enlightened patronage of the emperor; hence it was bound to be conditioned by the emperor's aesthetic taste, temperament, philosophical outlook and the character of his court, particularly since the emperor took a day to day interest in its development.

Abul Fazal in the chapter on 'the art of writing and painting' in his *Ain-i-Akbari* writes, "the works of all painters were weekly laid before His Majesty by the Darogha and the clerks, he then confers rewards according to the excellence of the workmanship or increases the monthly salaries". Most of the Mughal emperors were not only intellectually inquisitive, but were also perceptive observers of people and nature. This ability to scrutinise and detect things minutely seems to have been a characteristic trait of most of the Mughal emperors. E. M. Forster in his review of Babur's memoirs, also draws attention to this particular facet and states: "He (Babur) had loved details all his life".⁸ Babur's memoirs are littered with images, a galaxy of characters and incidents that are intimately observed and candidly described with wit, clarity and incredible detachment.

This flair for close observation and eye for detail were partly due to Babur's keen love of nature. He is supposed to have introduced a few hundred varieties of flowers, especially roses, into the subcontinent. One also finds from his memoirs that he had collected several species of parrots but which to his chagrin, he could not classify because the locals failed to give him reliable information on them. There were few things in nature that escaped the candid inquisitiveness of the Mughals. Painting of birds, insects and flowers was given special attention, reaching its zenith at the time of Jehangir. The birds in early paintings, unlike the practice in later years, are not drawn from life, but are the result of careful observation, revealing a deep interest and insight into various forms of bird life. Monohor, Mani, Hussain, Kanaha, were reputed painters of birds in the court of Akbar. Mansur, who was younger but the greatest of them all, worked in the later part of



6. MUGHAL, *Darashikoh*, by Ghulam Ba-Akhlis Abul Majpas, 18th Century, Lahore Museum

Akbar's reign. Jehangir was personally very keen to record objects of natural beauty and rarity in his memoirs, which prompted him to commission artists to make faithful likenesses of them. Superb character studies of birds imbued with their specific spirit, natural postures, and placed in their natural setting have been executed. Studies of birds as ornithological specimens, a popular practice with Jehangir, dates back to the reign of Akbar.

The Mughals were not "bigoted followers of the law" who were hostile to painting. Emmy Wellesz⁹ draws our attention to a statement which is attributed to Akbar by Abul Fazal in *Ain-e-Akbari*: "there are many that hate paintings; but such men I dislike. It appears to me as if a painter had quite a peculiar means of recognising God: for a painter in sketching anything that has life, and in designing its limbs, one after the other, must come to feel that he cannot bestow individually upon his work, and is thus forced to think of God: the Giver of life, and will thus increase in knowledge". One tends to agree with Wellesz that Akbar's "warmest interest in painting depended on the painter's capacity to create the illusion of reality". Akbar believed in objectivity and maintained that the painter's aims should be "to reproduce as faithfully as humanly possible, God's creation and his creatures". This of course pertains to Akbar's later period and not when he was young, or when he was, for a short period, inspired by metaphysical fervour.

It is often asserted that Mughal painting became realistic when it came in contact with European art through the Christian missionaries and envoys to the Mughal's court. While there is truth in this the point is often overstated.¹⁰ The specimens of European art mostly in the form of woodcuts and book illustrations supported the trend towards greater realism but certainly did not cause it. The Mughal painting, as we have seen, had begun to show shades of modelling, perspective and characterisation before it came in contact with European painting in the late 16th century. The conventional vertical arrangement, where elements are placed one on top of the other to show depth, had been replaced by a horizontal arrangement where elements are placed one behind the other. The sky, instead of being formally golden or flat azure blue, had begun to convey effectively the feeling for depth and light. The decorative and calligraphic character of line, with its graceful curves had been replaced by careful drawing and an inclination to reveal character.

It must, moreover, be taken into account that while most of the copies or adaptations from European paintings were made at the time of Akbar and Jehangir, there are very few paintings of this period which show European influence dominating the artist's sensibility or vision. It was only after Shahjehan, when the Mughal School began to decline, that European influence became appreciably strong; this is evident from Lucknow and Sikh paintings and the ivory miniatures of Delhi and Murshedabad.

The real forces that brought the shift towards naturalism in Mughal painting lay within the society itself, more specifically in the socio political milieu of the Mughal state and government. However, while listing the various other influences on Mughal painting, the close realism of indigenous sculpture, particularly animal sculpture, and the habit of viewing objects in the round cannot be glossed over. In fact a realistic approach in rendering the human figure can be traced as far back as 2500 B.C. in the subcontinent.¹¹

With the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the stage was set for the decline of the Mughal Empire. By the time of Mohammad Shah's reign in 1719, Mughal painting and cultural ethos had become thoroughly decadent. Painting expressed the life of the ruler and his nobles who loved the pleasures of life. The artists delighted in painting music parties, moon-lit revelries, reclining women, concubines being ushered into bedchambers, and love scenes. M. S. Randhawa¹² draws our attention to Thevenot, the French traveller, who visited Agra and Delhi in 1666 and saw paintings of Koka-Shastra. Thevenot remarks, "the artists of Agra painted lascivious pictures which few civil Europeans would buy". The cultural life of the main centres was further destroyed by the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1738 which forced the artist to leave Delhi and Lahore and migrate to Oudh, Hyderabad Deccan, Rajasthan and the Punjab hill states. At Fyzabad and Lucknow a genre of painting developed which expressed delight in gardens and palaces. Erotic paintings were also done in the decadent tradition of Agra.

Punjab Pahari Painting

Nadir Shah's invasion of 1738 was greatly instrumental in establishing the Kangra School and in bringing the rather primitive character of Pahari Painting closer to the mainstream style. It was during this period that Manak and Nainsukh, the sons of Seu, who were trained in the

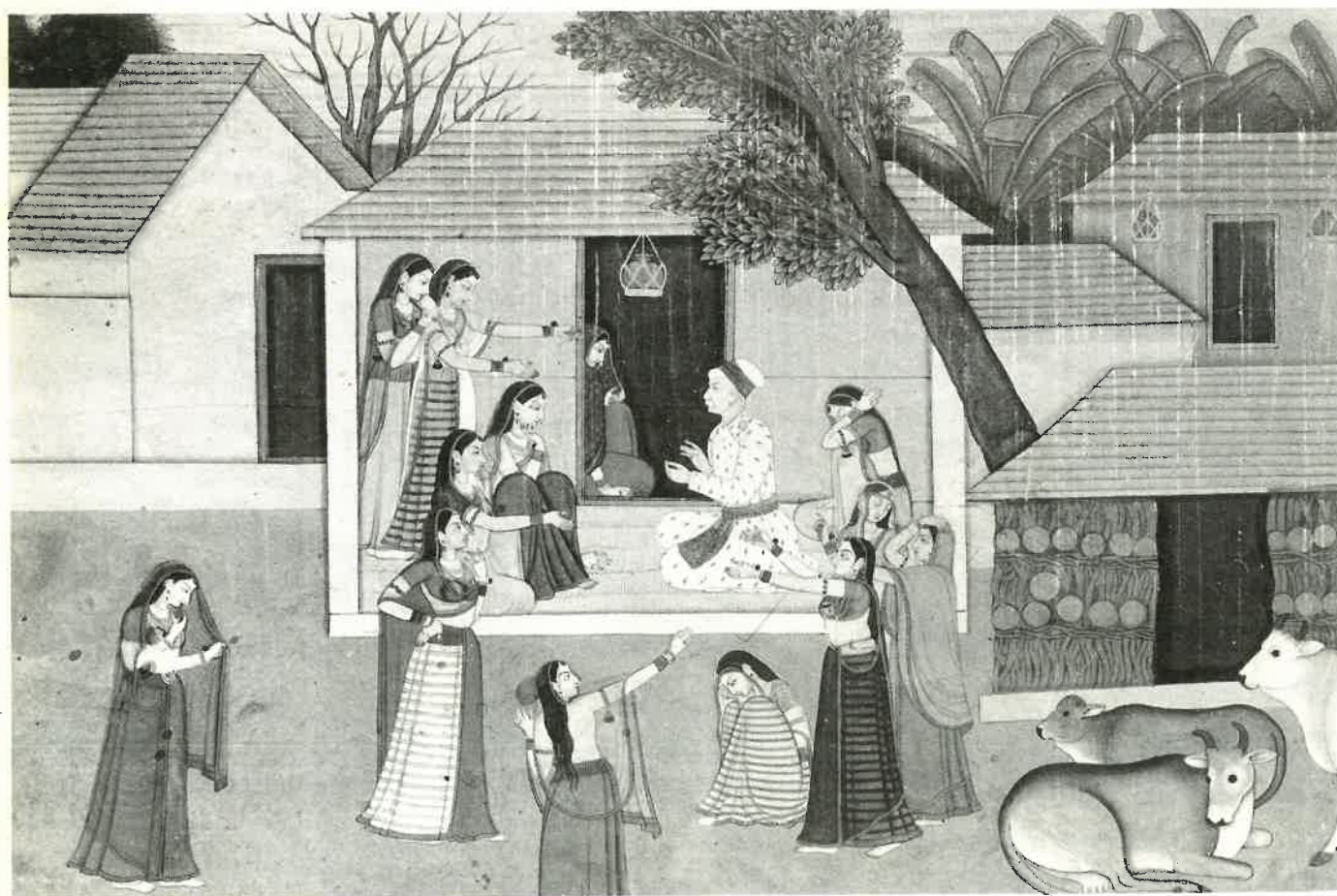


7. PROVINCIAL MUGHAL, *A Love Scene*, c. 1760–1770, opaque water-colour on paper, 20 x 25 cm, Lahore Museum

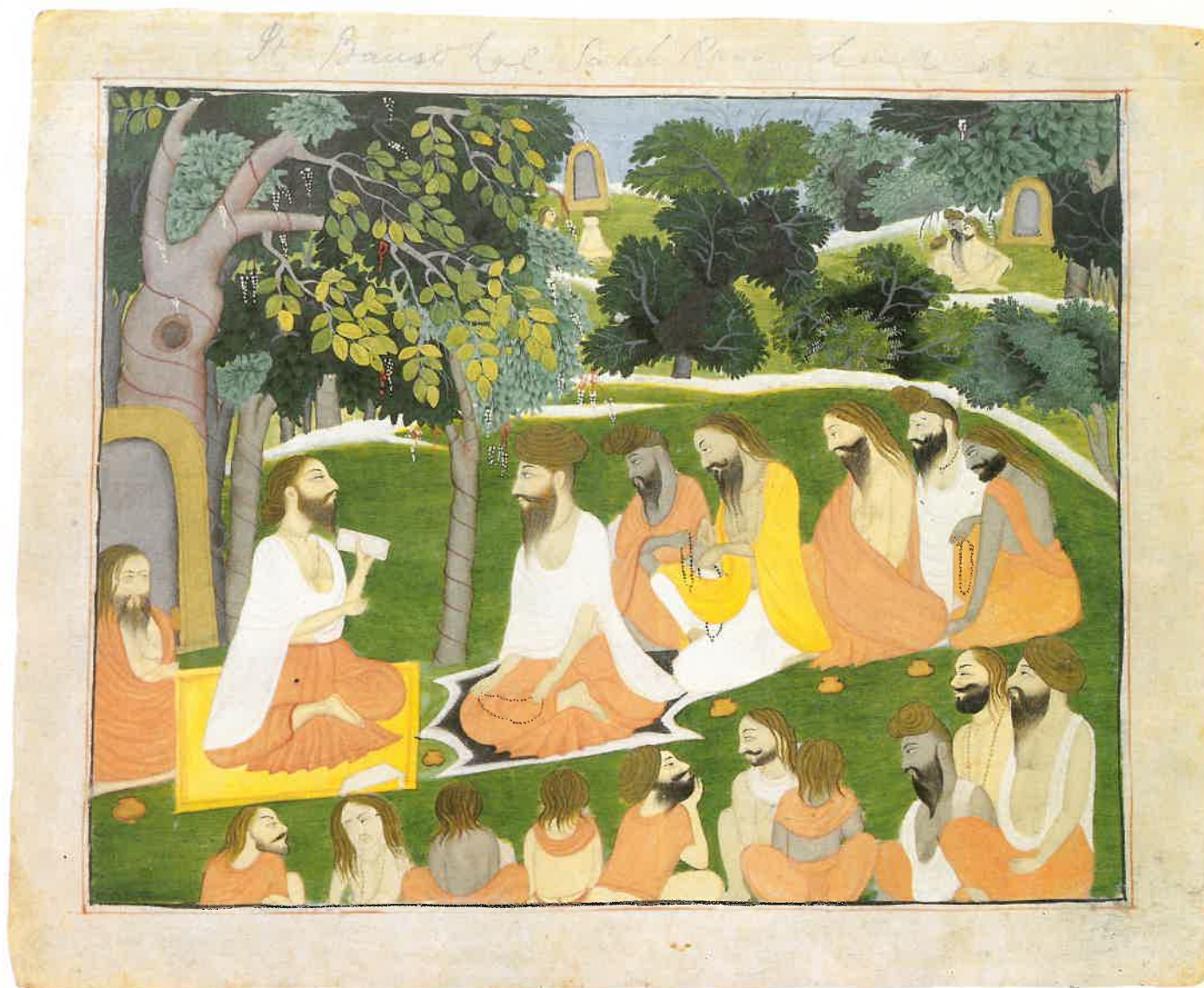
Mughal style, migrated from Lahore to the Punjab Hill States. It is considered likely that painter Manak and his son, Kushala, and Gaudhu, son of Nainsukh worked under the patronage of Sansar Chand who had established his rule over the neighbouring states by capturing the strategically important Kangra Fort in 1786. It was in the court of Sansar Chand that the father and son executed the famous series of paintings of the *Gita Govinda*, the *Satsaiya* and the *Baramasa*, while Purku, another well-known painter, illustrated the *Bhagavata-Purana*.

The main source of inspiration for Kangra painting was the Vaishnav cult of Hinduism, the love of Radha and Krishna. The Punjab Pahari paintings express the passionate love of Radha and Krishna conceived as the symbol of all union. The Kangra artists, however, depict the incidents from Krishna's life against the background of their native land. The Punjab Pahari painting draws heavily from the technique and conventions of the Mughal School. One tends to agree with A. R. Chughtai when he asserts in his *Lahore Ka Dabistan-e-Musavari*, that the paintings of *Gita Govinda*, *Rasa Manjri*, *Rukamni*, *Nal Dameti* and *Naika* are mostly the work of Lahore and Delhi artists who, in order to paint religious subjects, merely

change the Mughal princes and princesses into Radha, Krishna, Ram Lakchman, and Shiva Parbati. It is true that Baba Nanda is depicted like a Mughal courtier and that Radha and the Gopis are wearing Mughal costumes and have a close bearing and resemblance to the ladies of the Mughal court. In fact the entire romantic text of the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and of Radha and Krishna seems to have been pictorialised in the forms derived from Mughal painting. The profusion of marble, the Mughal architectural style of buildings, palaces, pavilions and forts; the manner of rendering water, sky, clouds, trees, vines, flowers and tendrils, and the decorative arabesque and grill-work are typical of Mughal painting. But it is also true that while applying the conventions of Mughal painting, the artist added feeling and atmosphere which are romantic, informal and full of charm, contrary to the formal objectivity of the Imperial Mughal miniatures. Whereas in the best Mughal miniatures the artist attempts to faithfully observe and record the tangible facts of life, the Pahari paintings express the spiritual, emotional and imaginative inner-life through stylised gestures and moods of nature.



B-1 KANGRA, *Uddhava and the Gopis*, c. 1780, opaque water-colour on paper, Lahore Museum



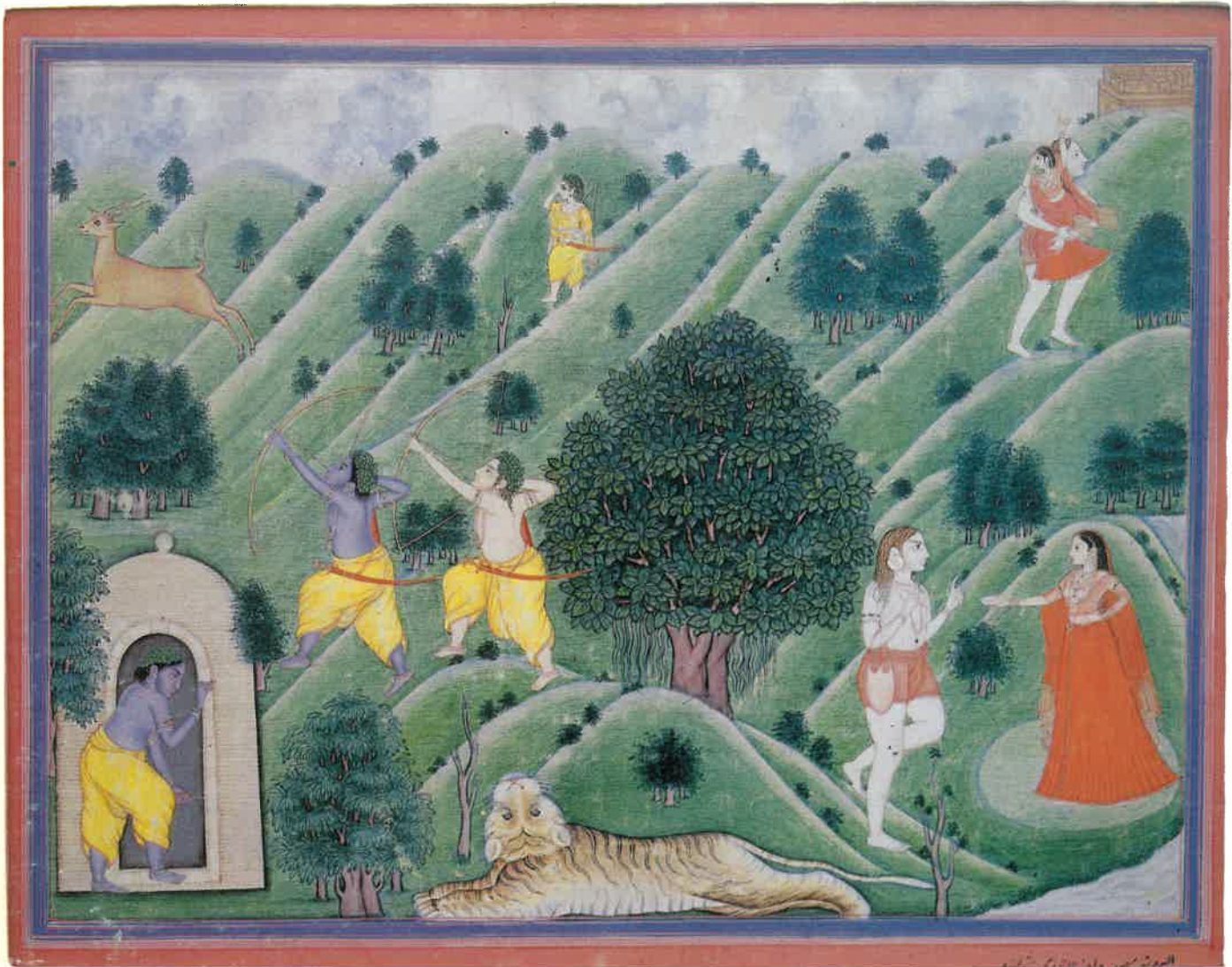
8. LAHORE SCHOOL, *Rishis Outside a Hut in Forest*, 1830 A.D., opaque water-colour on paper, 21 x 27 cm, Lahore Museum

Painting during the Sikh Period

Sansar Chand remained the paramount power in the south-eastern part of the hill states for over two decades. In 1806 the Gurkhas invaded Kangra and wrested the crucial fortress of Kangra from the Kanotch ruler. Sansar Chand appealed to the Sikhs but the intervention under Ranjit Singh (1792–1839) merely brought about a change in the controlling power from the Gurkhas to the Sikhs. The establishment of Sikh hegemony prepared the way for, "the Sikh influence to permeate painting style, and bring about diffusion of intent in both subject-matter and in presentation".¹³ During this period, when Ranjit Singh had established his suzerainty in the Punjab and restored law and order in the region, a number of painters mig-

rated to Lahore. A vestige of Mughal painting was still being practised at Lahore at the dawn of Sikh rule. Painters continued to maintain their quarters in the Lahore Fort where Ranjit Singh was also in residence. The arrival of the Pahari painters enriched painting at Lahore with the achievements of Kangra School, which was stylistically close to the tradition of painting being practised at Lahore.¹⁴

It is ironic that the Mughal style which had helped *Kangra Kalam* to evolve in a particular manner should now in turn try to emulate the style of Kangra. In the beginning the main subjects of painting were the ten Sikh Gurus and anecdotes from *Janam Sakhi*. The Sikh royalty



9. ALLAH DITTA, *Abduction of Sita*, Late 19th Century, opaque water-colour on paper, 21 x 28 cm, Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad

and nobles were fond of having their portraits painted. They liked to be painted riding a spirited horse or seated on a chair. Events from *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the legends of Krishna as well as the festival of spring (Holi) were also painted in miniature and mural forms. Hunting scenes and battle scenes were also popular. The painting during the Sikh period has a ruthless vitality and expressive power, characteristic of the period and the people. *Khalsa Darbar* comprised of a motley crowd of adventurers and upstarts, of warriors and physicians, of comptrollers and generals, of Dogras, Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. The Sikh portraits and Darbar paintings therefore, unlike the Pahari portraits, present characters who have no royal lineage. The Sikh miniatures portray people and events with raw realism and express emotions in an unabashed expressive manner—so different from the classi-

cal Mughal and sedate art of Kangra—which further enlarged the scope of subject and style of painting. Besides Lahore, painting was also patronised at other places during the Sikh and post-Sikh period, for instance, Kapurthala, Amritsar, Patiala, Jind and Nabha.

The late Ustad Haji Muhammad Sharif who settled in Lahore in 1945 originally belonged to Patiala where his father Basharatullah was a well-known court painter of the state. His grandfather, Allah Ditta was also a prominent painter of his time. While his father and grandfather practised the Pahari style, Ustad Haji Mohammad Sharif worked in the Mughal tradition. This may be because Haji Mohammad Sharif received part of the introductory training from Ustad Mirza Rukh who belonged to Delhi and had acquired the Mughal style of painting.



10. HAJI MOHAMMAD SHARIF, *Shahalam Badshah*, undated, opaque water-colour, National College of Arts, Lahore

Notes

1. Professor Hamid Suleiman, *Miniatures of Baburnama*, EAN Publishing House of the Uzbek SSR, Tashkent, 1970.
2. *Baburnama*, page 518, translated by A. Beveridge, London, 1922.
3. M. C. Beach, *The Imperial Image*, Pub: Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 1981.
4. *Akbarnama* quoted in *A History of India as told by its Own Historians*, H. M. Elliot and J. Downson.
5. *Ain-e-Akbari*, page 113, translated by H. Blochman, 3 Vol. Calcutta, 1938-39.
6. The Portion in Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.
7. *Indian Miniature Painting*, by M. S. Randhawa, page 33; published 1931, by Roli Book International, New Delhi.
8. Abinger Harvest.
9. *Akbar's Religious Thought Reflected in Mughal Painting*. Allen and Unwin Limited, London.
10. Percival Spear writes, "As European historians of India have been apt to overestimate the influence of the Greeks upon India.....the modern historian has been tempted to overplay the part played by Europeans in Mughal India before 1700". *History of India*, Vol. II, page 61, Pub: Penguin.
11. Sir Mortimer Wheeler in *The Indus Civilisation* emphasises the "sensitivity and vivacity" of modelling revealed by some of its statues. He draws attention to the figurine of the dancing god which "in spite of an element of 'frontality' is realistic, in which the muscular forms are indicated with observation and restraint....". Close observation and candid knowledge of human form is also betrayed by the stark realism of the Dancing Girl of Mohenjodaro. Describing her Mr. Wheeler writes: "the right hand rests on the hip; the left arm, covered almost entirely with bangles, hangs loosely, and the posture of the legs is easy. The head provocatively tilted, is a skillful impressionist rendering of a prognathic 'abnormal type' with large eyes, flat nose and bunched curly hair...."
12. Similarly Professor V. Gordon Childe in *What Happened in History* makes similar observations about the Indus valley sculpture. He writes: "Representation of the human form are usually naturalistic, a small bronze figure of a girl (the 'Dancing Girl') breathes an air of movement and vitality that cannot be matched elsewhere till the classical period of Greece".
13. *Indian Miniature Painting*, published in 1981, by Roli Books International, New Delhi, page 37.
14. F. S. Aijazuddin, *Pahari Painting and Sikh Portraits in the Lahore Museum*. London, 1977.
15. "We find that artists who worked for sometime at Basholi, Chamba and Guler also worked later at Lahore, then at Patiala and then at Sangrur in Nabha." R. P. Srivasta, *Punjab Painting*, page 5, Abhinav Publications, Delhi, 1983.

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Search For Identity

The Company Bahadur

In the middle of the 18th century, some Englishmen, mostly the servants of the East India Company, tourists and traders came in contact with local artists in the cities. They taught them the water-colour technique and then asked them to paint scenes and sites typical of India—what was supposed to be typical, of course, had to conform to the Englishman's romantic notions of the orient, and the vogue of the picturesque that prevailed in England at that time. With the increase in Company patronage the number of these artists rapidly multiplied. The artist was essentially patronised for his ability to copy, and was required to provide pictorial data on India, which conformed to the preconceived notions of both the "Sahib" in India and his relatives back home. These artists had slowly evolved a hybrid style which was a mixture of Indian miniature painting and the romantic style of 18th century English painting.

The establishment of the British colonial rule created peculiar cultural problems for the people of the subcontinent. The culture of a colonial society is determined by force on which that society is dependent for its existence. The colonial power, in order to impose itself, needs to convince the 'natives' of their inferiority. Hence, through the onslaught of its culture, it tries to disseminate ideas and values which are conducive to the expansion and consolidation of its political domination, presenting itself as their saviour. The colonist argues that if the "natives" want to become civilized they should make him their ideal. They should speak his language, wear his clothes, eat his food, acquire his manners and imbibe his values. He encourages them to reject their history, culture and traditions, indeed encourages them to negate their very being and to recast themselves in their master's image.

W. G. Archer draws attention to Lord Macaulay's Minutes of 1834 in which Macaulay viciously attacks Indian culture as, "absurd history, absurd, metaphysics, absurd physics and absurd theology" and advocates training of a class of persons, "Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect".¹

It is, therefore, not surprising that Lord Macaulay's educational and cultural policies were calculated to create "brown sahibs" and to destroy the traditional modes of thought and expression. Those who followed the craft and tradition of their forefathers were thus gradually starved through the hostility or indifference of their own countrymen. The situation was further aggravated by campaigns disparaging national culture (Ruskin and Max Muller had both in their own ways pronounced that Indians as a race lacked aesthetic faculty and sense of beauty). The official handbook of the Victoria and Albert Museum declared, "the monstrous shape of Puranic deities are unsuitable for the highest forms of artistic expression and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown as fine arts in India"² Such campaigns destroyed the last vestiges of traditional talent that had survived the political anarchy resulting from the disintegration of the Mughal empire. Those artists who survived the upheaval, tried to adopt the techniques of the west with disastrous results. Indigenous art was rapidly approaching extinction when an attempt at the revival of arts and craft was made by the establishment of art schools.

The Art Schools

Art schools were established at Calcutta, Madras, Bombay and Lahore on the basis of a strange imperialist logic. The growth of capitalism and the development of

the techniques of mass-production placed the British industrialist in a position to market an unlimited supply of goods at a relatively low price. The local craftsman working with traditional methods and techniques obviously could not hope to compete with industrial products. Evidently, this was a matter of concern for certain liberal minded Englishmen sympathetically interested in colonial affairs. E. M. Havel pertinently points out that imposition of tariff duties on British goods entering the subcontinent could have helped local craftsmen to survive but such a suggestion would have been considered outrageous at home. Instead, a singular sense of humour was displayed by establishing art schools in order to westernise the 'taste' of indigenous craftsmen, and thereby help boost Indian exports to England and Europe:

The art schools have been severely criticised for introducing a scholastic tradition foreign to the Indian temperament and sensibility, which supposedly smothered the native art instincts, making local art a poor echo of European art. The Schools introduced training in European techniques and methods which involved painting from models or plaster casts designed to stimulate the students' ability to see, measure, and to select. This has been considered as the root cause of vulgar and heterogeneous productions of the art schools. But surely this could not have been the main reason because the concept of realistic rendering of form, though never before so rigorously and consistently practised, was not entirely new to India. Gladstone Solomon, in support of "life-classes", has pertinently warned against this long existing tendency to "overspiritualise Indian art and to approach it from the mystical or antiquarian, instead of from the truly artistic standpoint, as though Indian art was to be dependent upon abstractions and emotions. Yet the finest paintings of India were founded on the same principles of Europe. A close observation, an intense love, and a firm adherence to nature, was the sure foundation on which the ancient Indian masters erected their gorgeous artistic fabrics, and by means of which they evolved their beautiful conventions. It was not on negation of form but on the profound study of it that the Buddhist art of Ajanta was nourished".³

Similarly, an artist brought up in the tradition of Mughal portraiture should have had little difficulty in adapting to 'eye-training' teaching methods. Mughal painting is the art of seeing things with line, the European painting of the Renaissance in mass. The process of visual scrutiny is

fundamental to both. One is, therefore, inclined to agree with those critics who are of the opinion that the students' inability to learn and absorb the new idiom was due mainly to faulty teaching methods and not because the idiom was alien to their native art instincts. Maurice Maindron expresses the same view when he states at the end of his volume on Indian Art: "Since the rise of the English power in India the decadence of Indian art was inevitable. Various heterogeneous influences had given birth to some hybrid and spurious productions coming out of the 'schools of art'" where "students were made to copy the advertisement for Pears Soap or some print or other".⁴ One cannot expect to achieve even reasonable standards of art by imitating commercial prints and poor reproductions of indifferent works of art.

New Bengal Movement

At the turn of the century, however, as the contradiction between the Indian bourgeoisie and British colonialism sharpened, sentiments against western cultural domination expressed themselves in the form of the New Bengal Movement. This movement was spearheaded by Abanindranath Tagore who, in the words of E. M. Havel, decided to break away from the European influence and "rediscover the obliterated tracks that his forefathers had trod". Needless to say, the "brown sahibs" were enraged at the audacity of the artists and intellectuals associated with this movement and persistently tried to discredit and discourage them. They encouraged lampoonists and humourists who attacked them with their cheap witticism, often illustrated with cartoons.

In due course of time, however, when the violence of reaction subsided, it became evident that the movement had left its marks on the people, resulting in a greater national consciousness. Paintings of medieval times and the Mughal school, frescoes of Ajanta and the rich tradition of sculpture were studied with a zeal and understanding never exhibited before. The "Bengal School" is perhaps a misnomer because it had an all-India character based on all previous traditions.

Talking of the modern Bengal painting, K. Chatterji tells us that the school was composed of many European romantics and Japanese aesthetes who eagerly worked to establish the school. Japanese artists such as Okakura, Taikwan, Gisida, Khatsuta, Arai and others, attracted by the Indian artists, had come to study Indian art while at the same time, giving training in Japanese techniques.

The ideals of the Bengal school are described clearly for us by K. Chatterji and A. Gose in the following two passages:—

- (a) "The ideals of this movement aimed at direct presentation of artists' thoughts with the minimum of materialistic intervention. It was as if the artist was trying to visualise his subject with his inner eye—thus attempting to go beyond what was visible to his outer senses and then was trying to translate his vision in the terms of line, colour and wash. The technique he adopted was meant for the revelation of what he felt and saw in the abstract and thus there did not seem to be any attempt or desire, at the display of mastery of the craft for its own sake."⁵
- (b) "The whole power of the Bengal artists springs from their deliberate choice of the spirit and hidden meaning in things, rather than their form and surface meaning, or the subject to be expressed. It is intuitive and its forms are the very rhythm of its intuition; they have little to do with metric formalities devised by the observing intellect, it leans over the finite to discover its suggestions of the infinite and unexpressible, it turns to outward life and nature, to found upon it lines and colours, rhythms and embodiments which will be significant of the other life and other nature, than the physical which all that is merely outward, conceals."⁶

There is indeed a certain grade of line in New Bengal paintings, but it is usually subordinated to effects of subdued mingling colour—washes designed to evoke a world of romance and fantasy. The paintings are sometimes flat and decorative, sometimes realistic, sometimes "bathed in sunlight and often submerged in the mystic haze of sombre hue", which tempt one into a dreamland enriching one's experience "with a thrill and quality of pleasure for which there are no equivalents in the actuality of our lives". Art, in this class of production is in a sense, "an escape from life—or a substitute for life—not a counterpart or repetition of it".

Most of the New Bengal paintings are small and done in water colours. They are usually based on themes from history, mythology and literature. In order to give individual interpretation of characters and incidents familiar to the people, many themes are painted over and over again. The technique and style of this painting are chiefly

inspired by Mughal art and Ajanta Frescoes, though the influence of Japanese and European art is clearly evident. A. Tagore's art is not interested in depicting action or dramatic moments. His paintings "wish to express meaning of silence and shadows and love that transcends mere emotions. The quiet colours—those of dawn and of the hour of sunset, which the artist employs, therefore, help him best in attaining their goal".⁷

Rabindranath Tagore appraised the whole situation with perspicacity and accuracy: "I am proud to say that Abanindranath had the temerity to acknowledge the truism that India during the days of her glorious past must have had a medium of self-expression, in her pictures and sculpture and architecture, which was her own. But when times are unfortunate truisms are hard to understand and to believe. Our people, too, have suffered from the idea that there was no such thing as a civilized standard of art in India throughout her history, that it had to be borrowed from European sources and that only Greece and Italy had proper expressions of art. They went on laboriously copying plaster-of-Paris models and some drawing books set before them and one could imagine that the result was not very happy, to say the least. At this moment Abanindranath started this movement amidst a hailstorm of derision and contempt but he persisted and the movement having passed through several stages is still going on developing its inner possibilities everyday. At the beginning, I am afraid, it was imitative, but instead of imitating European models, which are very distant to us.....they began to copy their own past. This was also unfortunate. But I suppose it had to be gone through to cure them of that pride in borrowing things which were not their own—that unnatural pride."⁸ Unfortunately, contrary to Tagore's good wishes and hope in the future, the movement never got cured from the "unnatural pride" in borrowing things which were not their own because in the words of Karl Khandavala "eventually it lost its way and gave up the quest for the summit to rest by pretty pools on soft verdure". The Bengal School was a "synthetically and artificially planned revival", a "conscious effort to revitalise Indian painting on national lines."⁹ Amrita Sher-Gil curtly summarised the movement by stating: "The work of the Bengal School is, in fact, entirely illustrative in quality and depends for its popularity on pictorial merit, or romantic appeal".

Unfortunately, the pioneers of the movement, while demolishing the viewpoint of Raja Ravi Varma, the chief

exponent of the European technique of painting, and the Art Schools, lost their own intellectual and aesthetic bearing. Instead of using the traditional art as a term of reference, and as a source of inspiration, they began to imitate it without understanding the social forces that had forged those traditions. Whereas the Mughal art had reflected the cultural and social ethos of the Mughal court, the New Bengal painting merely reflected a nostalgia for the glorious past. It failed to grapple with the immediately accessible realities of its own social milieu. Ironically, paintings of Varma and Tagore had more in common than has been admitted. Both eschew form and structure in favour of anecdote; both base their work on the illustrative and the picturesque elements and both in essence are romantics who fantasise reality. Whereas, Tagore took a pseudo-mystical stance provoked by nostalgia, Ravi Varma strove to exploit the picturesque and the erotic elements in everyday life.

In the context of relishing sensuous elements, it may be interesting here to refer to the work of Hamendranath Mazumdar, which is pregnant with eroticism. Describing a series of his paintings euphemistically termed as the "wet-cloth studies", a contemporary critic informs us: "The poetic spectacle of a fair maiden with her sari, wet and dripping, wound round her in picturesque folds and the transparent wet cloth discovering here and there, the suggestive flesh tints of her well-proportioned figure, caught the imagination of the artist". Another critic reveals to us the closely guarded secrets of the painting titled *Sure-Hit* by informing us that "Of all the weapons in the armoury of Beauty (Beauty with capital 'B') her glances are the deadliest of all, because they seldom go amiss"; hence the title *Sure-Hit*. Undoubtedly, the pictures as well as the words which describe them are both charming period pieces.

Both Abanindranath Tagore's struggle for revival, and Ravi Varma's efforts for change, failed to produce art forms of lasting consequence. They did, however, stir into action forces of art that had become static. The artists at this time were oscillating between diverse ideas, sometimes slavishly clutching at the forms and procedures of western art, sometimes assuming a rebellious mood and rejecting them all together, "now shutting its door against every kind of rays from the West and now borrowing all manners of western ideas in an attempt to fuse new life into its sap of old".¹⁰ Just as imitation of western techniques without understanding them was

bound to produce art that was debased and vulgar, similarly, "perpetual striving towards the past (was) bound to give the national neck a twist".¹¹ It was only when Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher-Gil came to the forefront, that these conflicting viewpoints were harnessed and given an adequate expression. But before one proceeds to review their work, one must pause over the work of two important painters of this period i.e. Abdur Rehman Chughtai and Fayzee Rahamin, who tried to solve the dilemma in their own individual ways.



11. A. R. CHUGHTAI, *Nightingales*, undated, 15" x 6½", water-colour

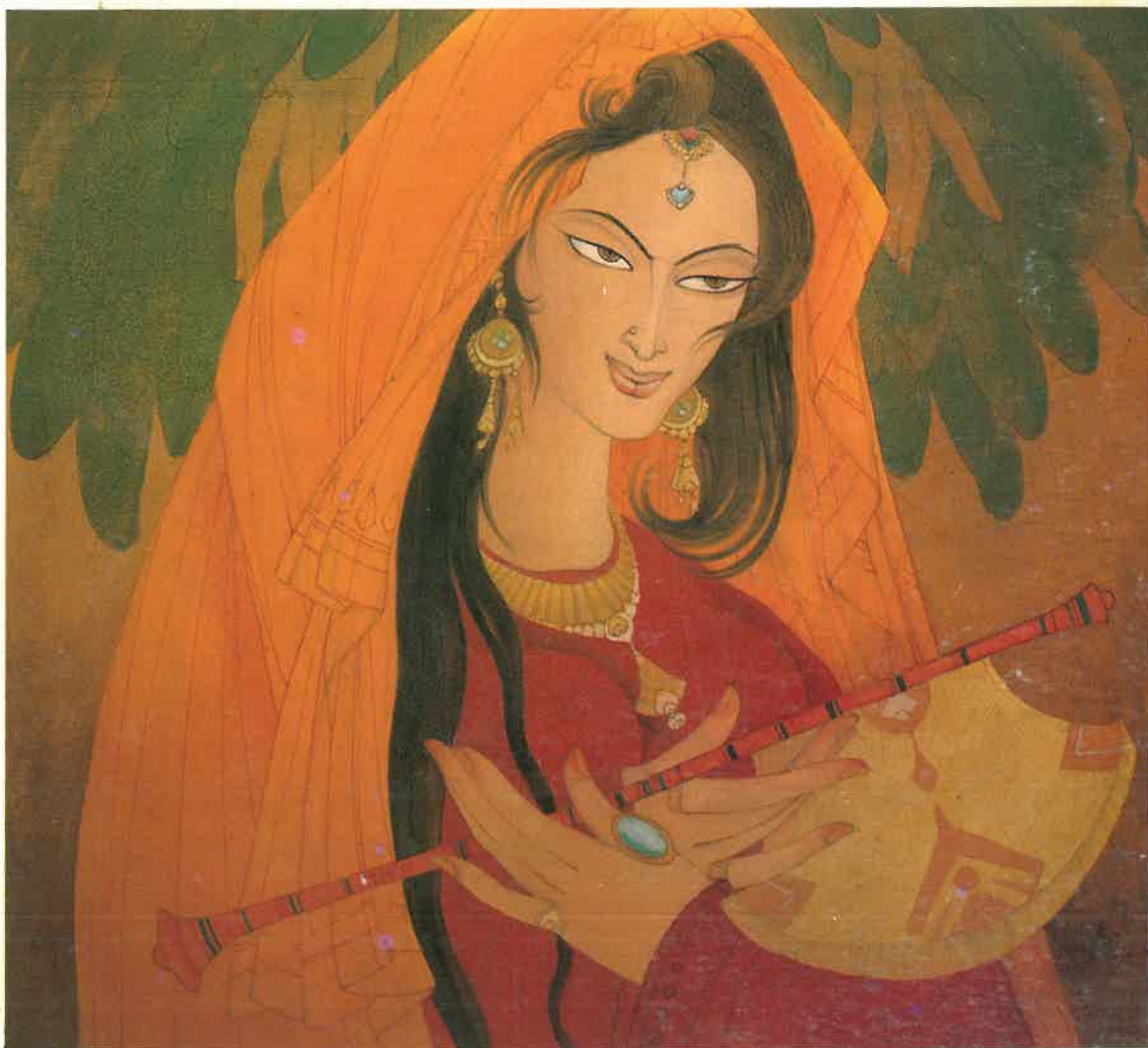
A. R. Chughtai (1899–1975)

A. R. Chughtai was a descendant of the chief architect of Shahjehan, Ustad Ahmed. From the very beginning, he aspired to revive the traditional Mughal style. This objective, which was also the original aim of the Bengal movement, was the guiding principle of his art, at least in the initial stages. Referring to his painting, Chughtai writes: "These humble creations are redolent of those old days when we were making efforts to live and dream with the brethren of this land.....this background of my art should not be lost sight of". Sen Gupta is, therefore, right in talking of the "conscious effort to revitalise Indian painting on national footing".

To realise these aspirations, Chughtai devised a Persian–Mughal mannerism in a flat romantic style. However, Persian painting has a gem-like quality, in colour and textural richness, which is absent in Chughtai's work. His horizontal compositions with the subordina-

tion of certain elements to the central idea, and his colours, are closer to the Mughal than Persian painting; but then Chughtai lacks the eye for particularisation which is the prime merit of Mughal art. His virtuosity in the use of line may recall the accomplishment of the Persian artist, but again unlike the Mughals, his line is not aimed at describing anything in particular. It is employed to create movement and to produce decorative effects.

Chughtai's claim on Indo–Pakistan's painting lies in helping raise national consciousness and in establishing a level of aesthetic excellence. Chughtai, with his imaginative skill and exquisite aesthetic sense, shows us how the puerile art of his contemporaries could not retrieve the strength lost through excessive emphasis on episode and unimaginative simulation of traditional forms. Mr. Agha Abdul Hameed, divides Chughtai's work into three distinct periods. The first period from 1918–1927, the second period from 1927–1932 and the



12. A. R. CHUGHTAI, *Untitled*, water-colour, 54 x 60 cm, collection Shahida and Iqbal Saigol

third period from 1932 to the present day.

Early in 1918, Chughtai laid considerable emphasis on detail and line. The colours were mixed to achieve dark elusive effects of atmosphere in the manner of Abanindranath Tagore. The world view expressed in his painting was romantic and passive. But by the end of this period when Chughtai illustrated *Diwan-e-Ghalib* under the name of *Muraqqa-e-Chughtai*, he grew dissatisfied with the style, considering it much too passive and remote from life.

The second period coincides with his visit to Europe and one finds the romantic view tinged with subdued notes of realism. The emphasis on line was reduced and the stress on mass increased. Chughtai also began to employ a purer palette. The linear quality which was originally modelled on Persian painting also underwent a significant change in England, where Chughtai came in contact with Pre-Raphaelite painting.

Pre-Raphaelitism was a protest against the materialism of the Victorian age. It ultimately became an escape into the past (like the Bengal revival) and the works of Pre-Raphaelite artists were strongly tinged with romantic and poetic aspirations, rather than purely aesthetic ones. The Pre-Raphaelites' feelings for an imagined past, re-affirmed Chughtai's own ideals. Their paintings, especially those of William Morris, Burn Jones and Beardsley, like the paintings of Abanindranath Tagore and Chughtai, flourish on decorative compositions, linear rhythm, and display a nostalgic refinement.

The exaggeration of forms in Chughtai's work (which became pronounced after his visit to Europe), may have been influenced by Beardsley's work, whose "graphic brilliance dominated a decade", and who was still a rage when Chughtai went to England. Most of Beardsley's work is in black and white; however, occasionally he supported his figures with washes and touches of colour. The dress and general attire of Chughtai's characters which are attributed by Mr. Hameed to "16th century Central Asia",¹² could have been borrowed from Beardsley's drawings done in the second half of the 19th century.

The pictures which belong to the last phase of Chughtai's work are more open and less cluttered with detail. There is also greater simplicity and assurance in the handling of the elements.

Some artists today criticise Chughtai for producing an art which is backward looking and which has no relevance to contemporary realities. They feel that while

studying the past, one must weed out the dead in order that the past may serve the present and that new and modern elements should replace the old and outdated. These charges are also levelled at the New-Bengal movement, but in order to make a correct evaluation of Chughtai it is essential to study his work in its own historical setting.

In a colonial country, the desire to establish a link with one's history and past culture is expressive of its growing national consciousness. In the subcontinent this consciousness emerged in reaction to the organised expansion of the political and cultural oppression. Incessant oppression of the native people made some artists, writers and intellectuals aware of the process through which they were entangled in the cobweb of colonial culture. Insistence upon the existence of national culture enables the colonised people to re-establish their own identity, and restore their confidence in themselves. Chughtai played a most valuable role in establishing the historical and cultural identity of an alienated people. It is in this context that one can truly determine the significance of Chughtai's work and its place in history.

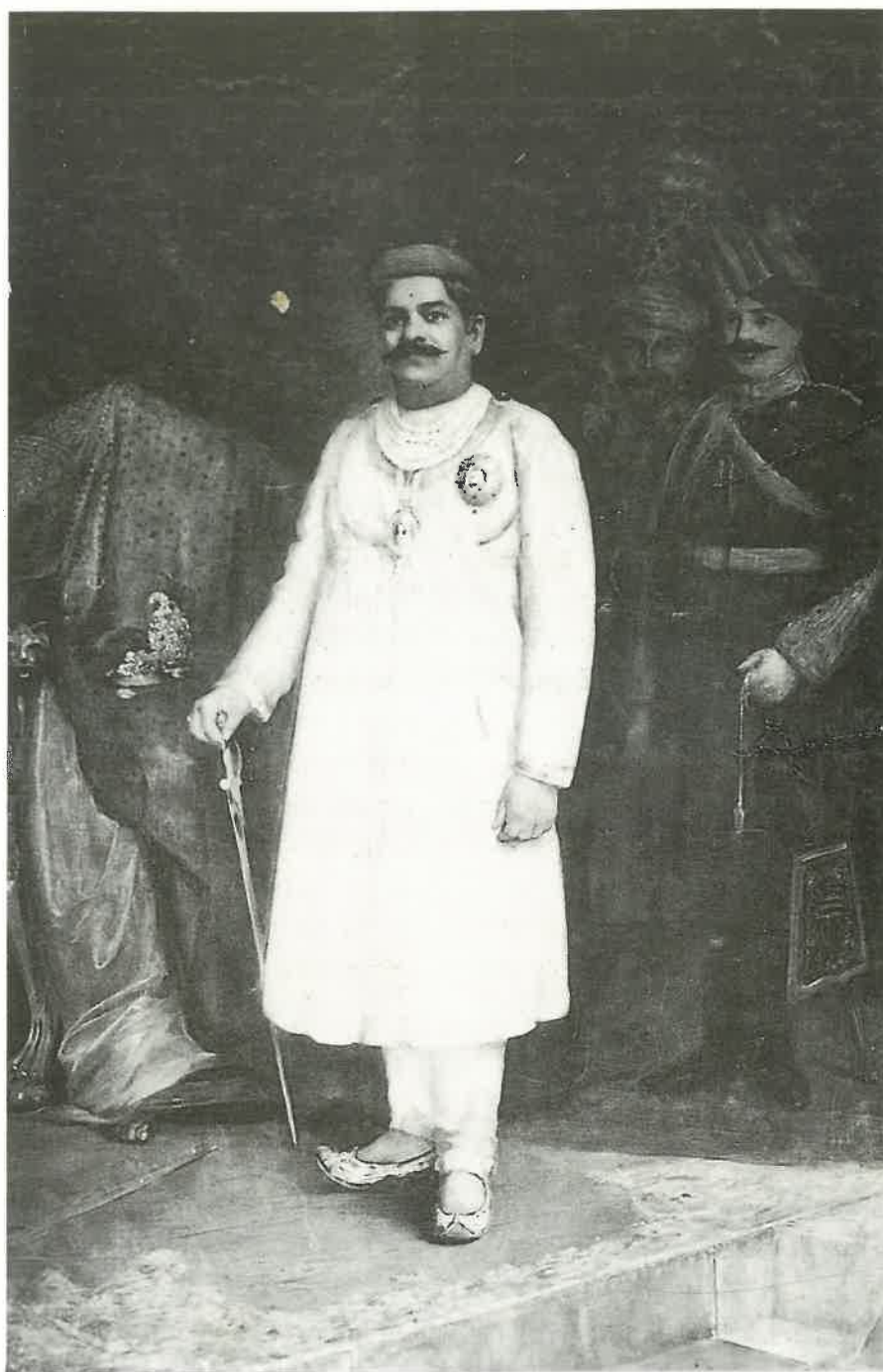
subject of his paintings was based on Muslim history as well as on Hindu mythology. However, following the end of the spirit of unity generated by the *Khilaphatist* agitation and the 1920-22 Non-Cooperation Movement which enjoyed the support of Hindus as well as Muslims, relations between the two began to deteriorate.¹³

Chughtai seems to have been fully aware of these developments in Hindu-Muslim relations. Consequently, from this period onwards, he began to conceive his works in the framework of Muslim history and art. He expelled all those elements from his paintings which reflected Hindu culture and civilisation and tried to glorify the great moments in Muslim history and culture.

Fayzee Rahamin (1886-1964)

Fayzee Rahamin perhaps epitomizes the conflict that prevailed at his time. His early work consists of paintings executed in a European style; the style in which Rahamin was originally trained. His later work, on the contrary, is derived from traditional Indian painting in form as well as content. These paintings which resemble blown-up miniatures are shallow and without much substance.

Fayzee Rahamin was born in Poona in 1886. After completing his schooling he availed of an opportunity to travel to England where he joined the Royal Academy London, winning a scholarship at the entrance examina-



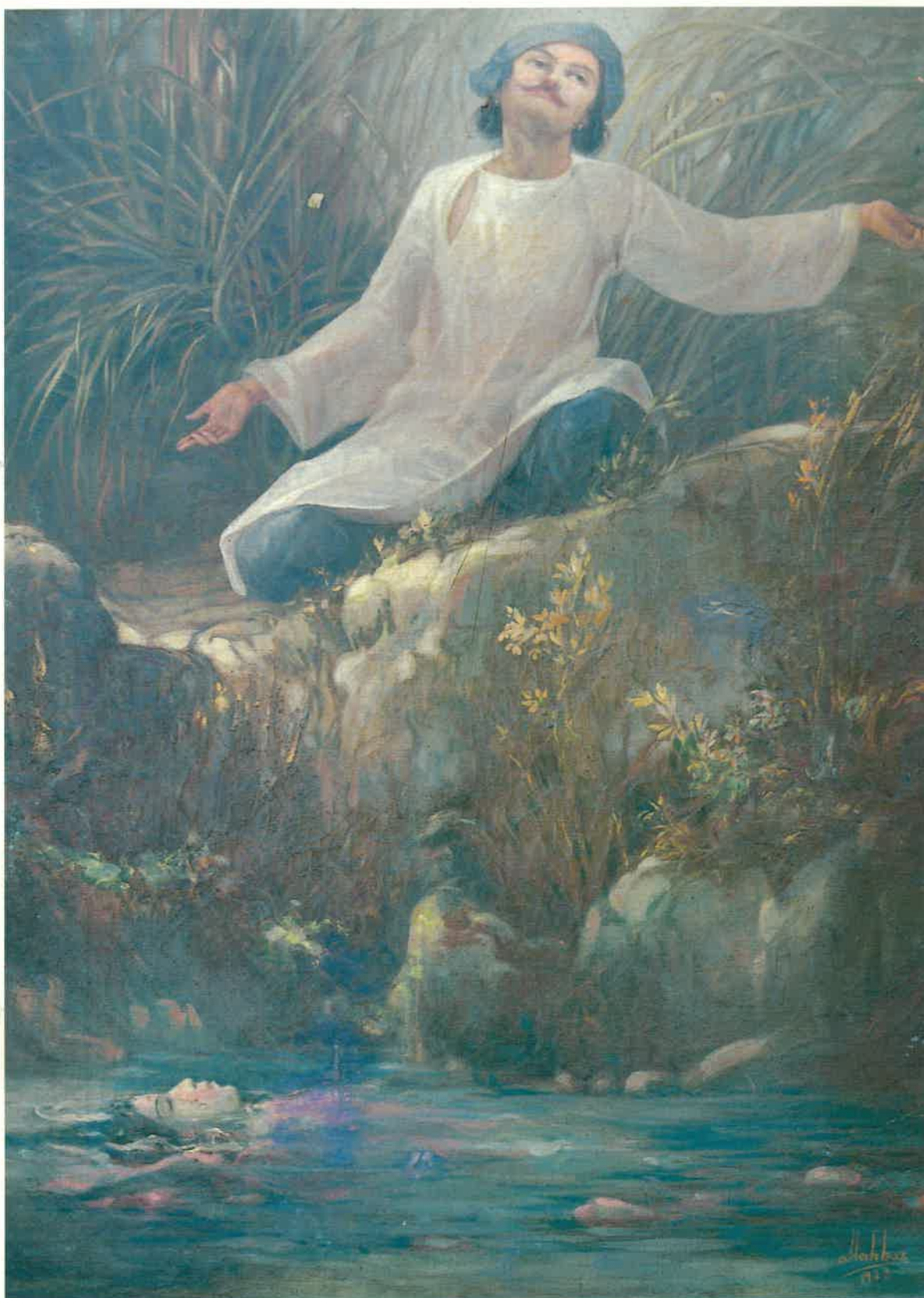
B-2. FAYZEE RAHAMIN, *Nawab of Baroda*, oil on canvas, Municipal Corporation, Karachi

tion. At the Academy Rahamin attracted the attention of J. S. Sargent, then at the height of his fame, who invited him to join his studio. Four years later, he completed the course, having in the meantime built up a reputation as a portrait painter. His portraits bring into relief the character of the model with romantic play of light and shadow.

The way to success seemed open to him but he suddenly decided to return to his country. The reason for this is clearly stated; he writes:

"Indian art has been crushed out by European influence. The ancient arts of architecture, music, painting

and literature have been gradually dominated by European masters until there is hardly a spark of vitality left. About 20 years ago, a few native men began to revive old arts in India but with little encouragement and much opposition. But they persisted and when I became old enough I joined them in their protest against the stifling of our national art life by foreign races. I felt that by painting native Indian scenery and themes and by visualising native Indian traditions I could do a real service to my people".



13. ALLAH BAKSH, *Sohni Mahewal*, 1923, oil on canvas, 59 x 50 cm, Punjab Council of Arts, Lahore

Ustad Allah Baksh (1895 – 1978)

While Chughtai and Fayzee were trying—Chughtai less consciously than Fayzee—to overcome the conflicts of their time, Allah Baksh was quite unabashed in produc-

ing works in the manner of English romantic painting. Ustad Allah Baksh started his career as a lettering artist. Later, in Bombay, he became a painter of theatre back-



B-3. USTAD ALLAH BAKSH, *Mountain Landscape*, 1949, pen and ink, Collection National Art Gallery

drops and cinema hoardings. Allah Baksh learnt his craft the hard way, not in an art college or in an academy, but on the streets of Lahore and Bombay.

Today, it has become fashionable in artistic circles to unceremoniously dismiss his paintings as sentimental, unrefined and low-brow. Allah Baksh executes his works with a directness and freedom which demonstrate a fervent joy at colour and a romantic ardour for atmospheric effects of light. He portrays his land, its culture and folklore, its people and their everyday life. His studies of

trees, their trunks and entwining shoots, of pebbles and stones strewn in the flat foreground of a landscape with abruptly rising banks of rock or clay, with strange plants piercing their roots in their flanks; of deep valleys drowned in velvety shadows with solitary peaks illuminated by rays which have strayed from a dying sun; of the pregnant atmosphere of an impending storm: these are all works in which he has captured something of the mystery of life underlying what meets the eye at a superficial glance.



B-4. USTAD ALLAH BAKSH, *The Storm*, 1967, oil on canvas, 150 x 95 cm, Lahore Museum

Bengal Folk Art

While the middle-class urban intelligentsia was in a state of cultural confusion, the folk artists continued to practise the tradition that their forefathers had evolved through generations of innovation and labour. Abanindranath Tagore, in his missionary zeal to revive the classical ideals expressed by Ajanta and by Mughal artists, had completely bypassed this form of painting. We have seen how the wanton, indiscriminate consumption of the Buddhist and Mughal painting eventually sterilized the New Bengal painting. There were, however, some intellectuals who became aware of the big gap between the detached and objective Mughal sensibility, and the vivacious, unabashed Bengali temperament, as expressed through its painting. The pioneering work in the discovery of Bengali village art was done in the 1920's, first by Ajit Ghose¹⁴ and later by G. S. Dutt.¹⁵ It was largely due to their efforts that a rich wealth of forms and popular conventions were brought within reach of the artist.

Bengali painting dates back to the unification of the provinces under the Pal dynasty (8th–10th century A.D.) and reached its fullest development between 14th to 18th century A. D. Bengali painting developed simultaneously with the popular *Vaishnavism* and *Sakti* cult which turned into a widespread democratic revolt against Brahminism. This cult constituted a threat to Brahmin priestcraft, by calling on the individual to seek perfection in his own way, irrespective of caste or convention. Bishu Dey and John Irwin¹⁶ inform us that the folk culture was the principal medium through which these revolts, religious in form but social in content, were spread among the people. The folk culture defied the priestly ethics by advocating rich humanism, implying sensuous appreciation of life as something to be accepted and enjoyed, in contrast to the orthodox emphasis on speculation and asceticism. The elements of revolt and protest are responsible for much of the vitality of the Bengal folk arts.

The earliest Bengal '*patas*' or paintings were mainly pictures of gods and goddesses, but secular scenes and portraits were also painted. These paintings were executed on cloth; unfortunately, very few specimens of this tempera painting have survived the ravages of time.

Apart from these, the earliest '*patas*' which have survived are the old *Ramayana* rolls consisting of a series of drawings depicting various scenes. The drawings are done mostly on paper scrolls measuring between 20 to 25 feet in length and about 2 feet in width, illustrating 12 to

15 episodes from the story of Rama. The pictures on the scroll are arranged in horizontal panels, one below the other designed to be rolled out to an audience, one by one, to illustrate the various episodes of traditional ballads which were chanted to the audience. Since the pictures are designed to narrate a story, only those figures essential to the narrative are included and all the superfluous details are omitted. The treatment of the elements is simple and the painter eschews light and shade, and perspective. Drawing of the figures is primitive in character, and bold colours are used without blending and mixing. But these elements are handled with such skill that the two dimensional world is vitalised into action, lending movement, expression and virility to the figures, and an epic quality to the narrative. The artist even succeeds in suggesting roundness in his figures by the careful modulation of line and the arrangement of the masses.

The Bengali '*pata*' painting continued in its traditional form till the 19th century. In the 19th century, however, the traditional painters in the cities were induced by their patrons to render mythological subjects in the new medium of oils. The works produced were shallow, and trite. Noteworthy of this period are the drawings, produced for the pilgrims at the temple of Kali Devi, situated in the vicinity of Calcutta. The Kalighat painters have the same uninhibited approach to painting as the scroll painters, except that, with the use of water colours rather than the usual tempera, the line becomes calligraphic in character. The Kalighat drawings depict religious as well as social and political subjects in an inexhaustible variety, which appealed to the imagination of the common people. Along with the depiction of gods and goddesses, these drawings humorously comment on the whole diapason of Bengali life. Domestic quarrels, social scandals, humorous skits on topical subjects, birds and animals all fall within the arena of their critical gaze.

The Kalighat painters, however, could not survive for long, because as soon as the local entrepreneurs realised the commercial potentialities of the Kalighat drawings, they introduced cheap lithograph which considerably reduced the demand for the original drawings. The Kalighat painters consequently had to resign themselves to the role of copying and multiplying the existing old '*patas*'.¹⁷

Jamini Roy

Jamini Roy was one of the first painters to take advantage of the rich living source of *pata*, and who succeeded



14. JAMINI ROY, *The Face*, water-colour, 23.5 x 20 cm, collection Mohammad Fayyaz

in organising his work within the traditional framework without sentimentality. Almost at the very outset of his career, Roy recoiled both from the academy art of the Calcutta School of Arts and from the wistful style of Abanindranath Tagore, moving in the direction of a more robust expression. Jamini Roy had grown up in the Bankura dis-

trict of Bengal in an atmosphere of folk painting. And later when he abandoned the art of Calcutta, he very naturally turned back to folk art. Through his contact with the traditional painting of Bengal, he evolved a singular style which was later, unfortunately, reduced to a formula. From the village artist he learnt the use of rapid line

and employment of colours. The calligraphic rendering of the line enabled him to give an expressive form to the essence of his ideas. In his early work, one can see how an appreciation of the Kalighat drawings enabled him to express the languid movement and sweeping curves of statuesque Santhal women. His later work is, however,

devoid of sensual elements characteristic of his early period. The curvaceous movement of line, and the gracious contours of his female figures are replaced by an austere horizontal vertical movement. The sensuous energy and flourish is replaced by ascetic restraint.

Notes

1. W. G. Archer. *India and Modern Art*, page 18.
2. W. G. Archer. *India and Modern Art*, page 20.
3. W. E. Gladstone Solomon. 'Bombay and the Revival of Indian Art'. *Indian Art and Letters*, Vol. I, May 1925.
4. Andred Karpeles, The Calcutta School of Painting. *Rupam* No. 13-14, January, 1923.
5. Kedarnath Chatterji, Modern Bengal Painting. *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. I, No. 11, 1933.
6. Aurobindo Gose, The Renaissance in India. *Rupam*, January, 1921.
7. Vasudeva B. Mehta. *Rupam* No. 21, January, 1925.
8. *Four Arts* 1935.
9. S. N. Gupta, European Influence on Indian Painting. *Rupam* Jan, 1924.
10. "The 14th Annual Exhibition of the Indian Society of Oriental Art" *Rupam* No. 13-14 Jan. 1923.
11. J. H. Cousins. "Future of Indian Art". A lecture delivered to the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta 1924.
12. Jalal ud Din Ahmed, *Painting in Pakistan*. Pub: Ministry of Information, Government of Pakistan.
13. Ambedkar, a leader of the untouchables, writes that between 1920-1940 there had in fact been "a civil war interrupted by brief periods of armed peace.... Taking the period from February, 1929 to April 1938 the Hindu and Mussalmans of the city of Bombay alone were engaged in sanguinary warfare for 210 days during which 550 were killed and 450 wounded". B. R. Ambedkar. *Pakistan and Partition of India* Pub: Thackaw Co. 1946 Ed.
14. Old Bengal Paintings, Ajit Ghose *Rupam*, July-October. 1926 (No. 27 and 28).
15. The Indigenous Painters of Bengal, Gora Sady Dutt I.C.S. *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Arts*, June 1933.
16. The Folk Art of Bengal, Bishu Dey and John Irwin *Marg*, Vol. I, No. 4.
17. A thin mixture of well-pounded plastic clay and cow-dung was applied to the cloth and then polished by gentle rubbing. Before proceeding to paint a coat of lime or chalk or powder made by grinding conch shells was applied on the under coating.

New Sensibility

In Bengal Jamini Roy's painting drew much of its emotional and graphic force by creatively seeking inspiration from popular art. Roy felt ideologically so committed to the common man and his culture, that he even used the common tools and materials of the village artist. In the Punjab, Amrita Sher-Gil displayed no such intellectual predilection. She was probably not even aware of the ideological and social conflicts of her time. But, oddly enough, almost all her major works depict common working people. Amrita's brush, like Roy's, had no time for "alluring trivialities or popular conceits" practised by Tagore and Varma.

Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–1941)

Amrita Sher-Gil was the daughter of a Punjabi father and a Hungarian mother. She was born in Budapest. At the time of her first visit to India in 1921 she was just over eight years old. Mr. Khandlavalala tells us that she was given an "old world education" which included music and drawing. Amrita's parents "wisely realising the importance of developing the already predominant artistic side" of their daughter and, "thinking that perhaps in an Italian school there would be greater scope for the development of an artistic nature" admitted her at the school S. S. Annunciata at Florence in 1929, where she was, "taught from plaster models". After a short and "disastrous stay" she rebelled against the lifeless routine of the drawing class and external discipline which tended to crush her personality. Consequently, she left Italy and returned to India the same year. In 1929 Amrita returned to Europe once again but this time she went to Paris where she first studied for sometime under Pierre Vaillant at the Academy of Grand Chaummiere. She then gained admis-

sion into Ecole de Beaux Arts, where she had an opportunity to study under Lucien Simon. Amrita was the first painter from the subcontinent to undertake a formal study of western painting.

Towards the end of 1933 Amrita, in her words, began to be "haunted by an intense longing for India, feeling, in some strange inexplicable way, that there lay my destiny as a painter". Amrita Sher-Gil returned to India for the third time in 1934. She was not yet twenty-one. Her impression of India was profound and different from the one she had expected. "It was the vision of a winter in India desolate, yet strangely beautiful – of endless tracks of luminous yellow-grey land, of dark-bodied, sad faced, incredibly thin men and women who move silently looking almost like silhouettes and over which an indefinable melancholy reigns. It was different from the India, voluptuous, colourful, sunny and superficial, the India so false to the tempting travel posters that I had expected to see." In Europe, Amrita had been painting in the western academic style but as soon as she put her foot on the Indian soil, her painting underwent a great change not only in subject and spirit but also in technical expression, becoming, in her words, "more fundamentally Indian". Amrita writes, "I realised my real artistic mission then: to interpret the life of Indians and particularly the poor Indians pictorially, to paint those silent images of infinite submission and patience, to depict their angular brown bodies, strangely beautiful in their ugliness, to reproduce on canvas the impression their sad eyes created on me, to interpret them with a new technique".

While realising her real artistic mission, she spurned what she calls tourist painting which was popular at that time. In her autobiographical article *Evolution of My Art*,



B-5. AMRITA SHER-GIL, *Portrait*, oil on board, 72.5 x 55.5 cm, Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad

she described these paintings without mincing words. She writes, "Those so-called paintings that depict an India where the sun shines with an inevitability, only equalled by the mediocrity of the conception and execution of that sunlight as it plays on flesh tints of standardised grey browns, had given opportunity to the ambitious artist to exploit the possibility of orange reflected light and blue 'half lights' (cheap tricks of the trade that have to be learnt but must be forgotten before one can even think of producing true works of art). Those serene or sun-flooded landscapes, consciously naturalistic, with authentic Indian ruins in the 'middle distance' serve as trade marks, conclusive, irrefutable proofs as to the genuineness of the article (manufactured in India) but not a brush stroke of which conveys India really. Those futile views of snowy mountain ranges (where ultra-marine blue laid on in neat washes represents shadows) have succeeded in destroying any aesthetic enjoyment that might otherwise have been derived even from the actual view of snowy mountain ranges. Those portraits of beggars, of the miserable, the proof of India viewed as objects of topographical interest without an atom of either artistic or human understanding". These remarks are pertinent to many painters even today.

Amrita Sher-Gil had the advantage of having formally

studied western painting, which armed her against half-baked notions of European art which had been popularised by Raja Ravi Varma. 'Style' for Amrita was not a matter of acquiring certain techniques and methods, but a product of the painter's sensibility, his individual mode of expression and perception of life. Amrita, however, had no reservations about borrowing from traditional or foreign sources if she found them useful or relevant to her work. Paintings of Cezanne, Gauguin, the frescoes of Ajanta and Mattancheri palace at Cochin, the miniatures of Basholi and the red-stone sculpture of Mathura, as well as the Mughal painting, have all influenced her work at one time or other. From Cezanne and Ajanta Frescoes (in different ways) she grasped how to organise forms. From Gauguin and the Basholi miniatures, she learnt how to organise colour, and from the Mughal artist she imbibed the virtue of emotional restraint and objectivity.

Amrita Sher-Gil's work can be divided into at least three distinct phases. The European phase, the early Indian phase and later Indian phase. We have seen how her painting underwent a change in technique and content when she returned to India in 1934. From 1934 to 1937 most of her works were guided by her desire to "interpret India and, principally, the life of the Indian poor on the plane that transcends the plane of mere sentimentality". She at this period wanted, "to be an interpreter of the atrocious physiological misery that abounds in our country". This was in a way a new dimension in modern painting. The Neo-Bengal school had completely avoided this theme. It is ironical that it was only among the Company artists that poor Indians had received any considerable notice. Raja Ravi Varma and his followers had also tried to focus attention on the poor people, as well as the common sights and scenes. Varma's work may be illustrative and superficial in its emotional and artistic appeal, but it introduced a significant trend in Indian paintings which was developed by Amrita and other artists who came after her.

A more lively and colourful mood prevails in Amrita's paintings of the post-1937 period. These paintings are executed in rich bright colours; in most of them she attempts to bring out the contrast between the hot reds and the greens one finds in the early Rajput miniatures. Her natural flair for colour which had been stimulated by the works of Gauguin came into full play when she saw and studied the miniatures of the Basholi school.



15. AMRITA SHER-GIL, *The Vina Players*, oil on canvas, 61 x 41 cm, Lahore Museum

Khandlavalala referring to this "subtle and quiet decorative tendency", informs us how Amrita was entranced when she saw the Basholi miniatures in his collection and that of the Lahore Museum. Their almost savage intensity and voluptuous gaiety in sheer colour were to her like an extravagant fairy tale to a delighted child. Although Amrita tried to maintain her grip on form, her later work became increasingly flat. In works of this period, she suggests space and volume not through light and shade, but through organisation of contrasting colour planes. She writes (letter, dated 13th April, 1938). "I have tried, though it is very difficult, to give all figures in these pictures the flat relief (I am avoiding volume) of card-board figures pasted onto canvas. And also of obtaining my effects of colour, less by play of light and shade, though they are all open air things, than by the enamelled translucidity of the paint.....itself".

This is one way of looking at Amrita Sher-Gil's later work. According to W. G. Archer "Amrita Sher-Gil, the interpreter of modern India, had died in 1937". Mr. Archer points out, "intense emotion is lacking and instead of expressing the tensions of the modern age she produced a series of pictures which are mere arrangements of colour. The human response to India had vanished and in its place has emerged a simple interest in technique".² Amrita herself writes, "great soulful eyes in a melancholy face.....romantic, you know. I have outgrown that sort of thing." Referring to the opening of her exhibition, she writes in a letter, dated 13th February, 1937, "the opening ceremony was performed by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts in the presence of over five hundred people. I sat on the platform by his side while he perorated on the tragedy that underlay my work, thinking I would burst out laughing any minute". Are these the sentiments of the same Amrita who in the early thirties wanted to be "an interpreter of the atrocious physiological misery that abounds" in India? Is it the same girl about whom Denis Proutaux³ exclaimed, "From where has this young girl learnt to see life with such pitiless eyes and this absence of illusions? "Was it the painting rendered by the same artist of whom Rabindranath Deb wrote,⁴ "And those expressive eyes.....yes in them is revealed the tragedy of man. Here the artist rises to tragic grandeur". What caused this transition from "tragic grandeur" to "mere arrangement of colour?"

The drying up of the content of the picture and an obsession with abstract colour can only be understood in

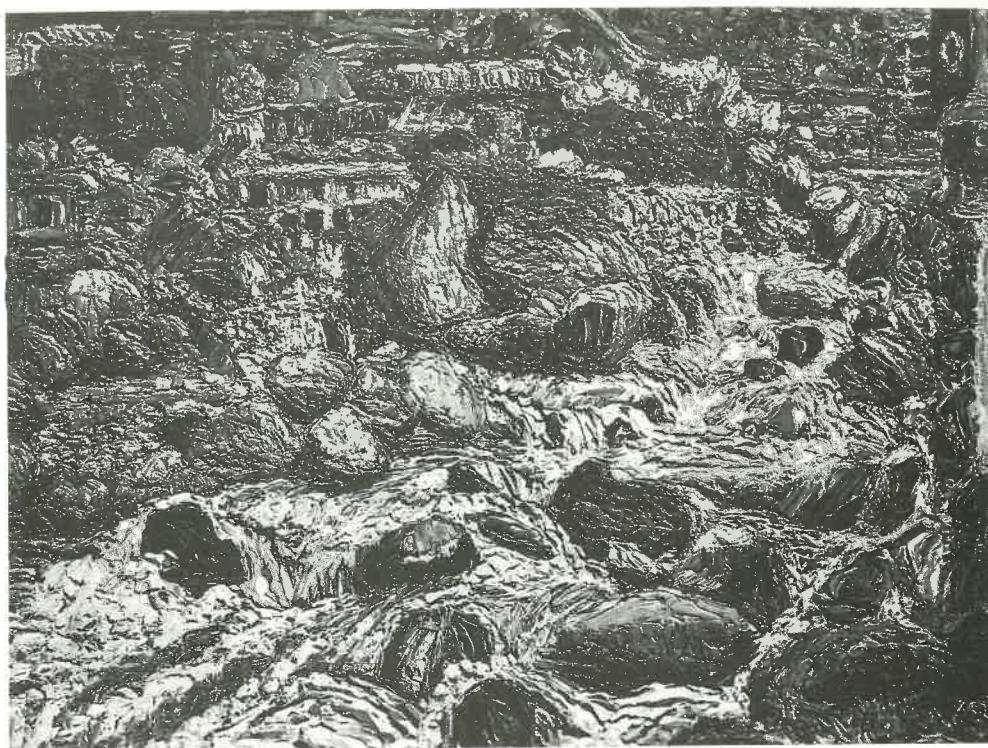
terms of her social background. Even in her works of the early thirties, one can see that she views the poor peasants from the viewpoint of her own class. She perceives these peasants as objects, which have surrendered themselves to their inevitable wretchedness. In her paintings the poor, though always painted with sympathy, are always static and seem to lack the ability to acquire consciousness. There is not even a faint hint of hope, let alone the desire for social change in them.

Lacking social perspective, Amrita tends to perceive human suffering from an idealistic viewpoint. That is why there is an abstract quality about human suffering depicted in her work. It is on account of the same idealist viewpoint that she chooses to stylise her wretched peasants into decorative compositions, where in spite of their suffering they pretend to be in decorative harmony with the world in which they exist.

The real nature of poverty and human misery which engulfed the poor peasants could only be fathomed through a firm social commitment. Amrita, because of the great social and cultural gap inherent between her and her subjects, was unable to fully identify with them. After 1937 we, therefore, see that her idealism and human response towards the poor begin to waver and she veers away to satiate her appetite for colour.

Anna Molka (Born 1917)

Amrita Sher-Gil, named Amrita after Amritsar, the "Tank of Immortality" died at Lahore on the 5th day of December 1941, when she was only twenty-nine. The tragic and painful circumstances of her death are shrouded in mystery to this day. In Amritsar, two years before her death, another woman painter, of Russian and Polish parentage, had arrived from England. Anna Molka was born in 1917 in London and received her formal training in art at the Saint Martin's School and then at the Royal College, where she met and married Sheikh Ahmad, a fine painter and a draughtsman, who later taught for sometime at the Central School of Arts, London. On their return to India, Anna Molka Ahmad was approached by the Punjab University, Lahore, and asked to start art classes. As soon as the Department was inaugurated many students from colleges for women, like the Lahore College, the Mahavidyalaya College and Fateh Chand College, immediately applied to join the fine art classes. Anna Molka recalls that, "Tongas full of *burqa*-clad girls beaming with enthusiasm also arrived from the Islamia College



B-6. ANNA MOLKA AHMED, *Rocks and Water*, 1968, oil on board, 18" x 24", private collection

to enroll themselves, but since the *Anjuman-e-Hamayat-e-Islam*, which ran the college, had not approved the subject they could not be accommodated". It is, therefore, not surprising that whereas in April 1947 she had on her rolls about 260 students, after Pakistan's independence in August 1947, she was left with 6. It is also interesting to note that it was as late as 1955 that male students were allowed to join the Fine Arts Department.

Anna Molka reminisces that when she arrived at Lahore to start classes she found "a hybrid monstrosity"—a disconcerting army of drawing masters, amateurs and English ladies flaunting their wishy washy water-colours, or attempting realism by painting on photographs. The few notable exceptions she found were Mohammad Hussain and Sobha Singh, who were strongly influenced by the new-Bengal art kept alive at Lahore by A. R. Chughtai and Sen Gupta. She also recalls Allah Buksh who churned out Krishna paintings for the orthodox Hindu families. The picture which Anna Molka paints of Lahore is rather disdainful. To talk of Chughtai as though he was the chief warden of the new-Bengal school at Lahore, is to deny his unique creative individuality and significance in our art movement. Similarly, it is rather ungracious to remember Allah Buksh only for his commercial pieces and not to take into consideration the large body of his work for which he was acknowledged as an *ustad* (master). Moreover, besides Chughtai, Allah Buksh, Mohammad

Hussain and Sobha Singh, there were a number of artists, some of them are mentioned in Chapter IV, who were active during this period.

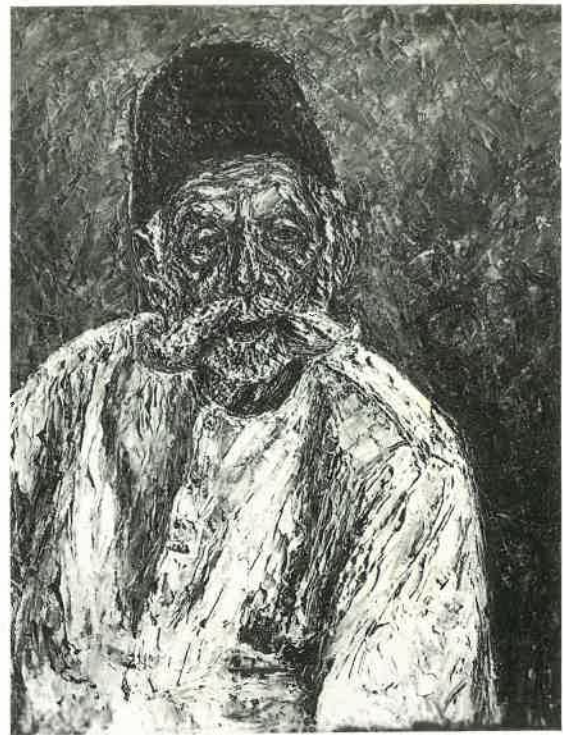
Anna Molka is an aggressive and exuberant artist. Her strong personality and fiery temper are expressed in her painting without artifice. Appropriately enough, she works in impasto with knives which add to the emotional urgency and force of her canvases. Usually she paints with skill and deftness. Her work aims at an expression which is well formed as well as powerful. Occasionally, when she is being too impetuous her yellows and purples, or her oranges and blues, appear to shriek at a loud pitch.

Anna Molka's work spans a broad vista ranging from landscapes, homesteads, portraits, figurative compositions, festivals, to symbolic and allegorical pieces. She is among the few Pakistani painters who draws inspiration from common life and events. In her paintings, the peasants and other poor working people are seldom presented as wretched objects but noble and heroic figures who are tenaciously attending to their labours. In her canvases, based on a natural catastrophe or a social upheaval, man does not knuckle under his ill-fate but displays courage and forbearance. "My subjects are all of life, the moving stream of joy, grief, deprivation and religious experience", she says in the booklet published on the occasion of her recent single-artist show at the La-

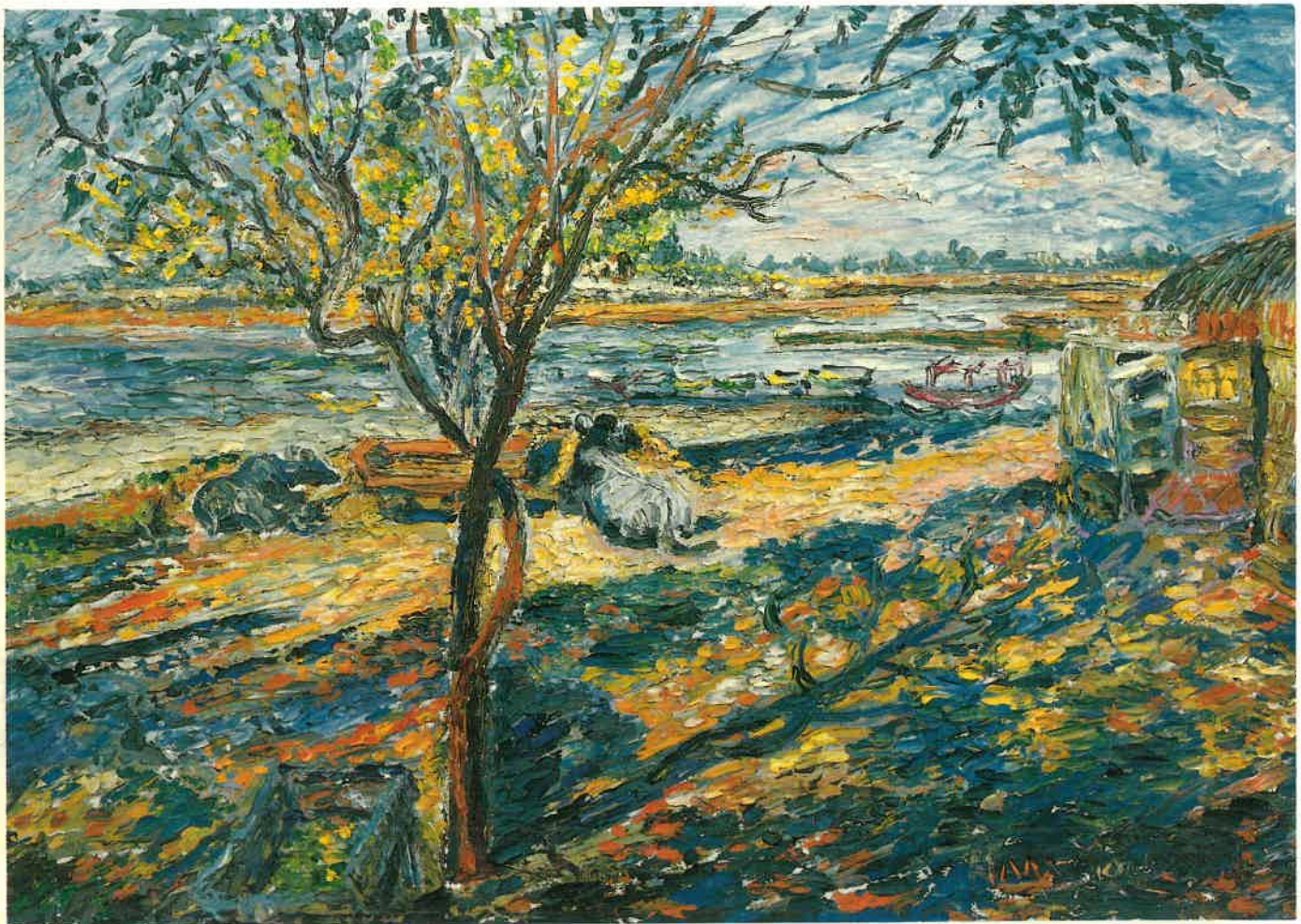
hore Museum.⁵

Her portraits are equally varied in their character and mood. They are a veritable gallery of painters, and important personages as well as all sorts of common faces. She has, however, always showed a preference for older people, people whose inner life has been calloused and furrowed on their bronzed visage. To portray this image, Anna Molka uses the knife not merely to apply a rich impasto to express the textural surface effects, but to carve out a person's inner-life. "An artist is a psychologist in paint", she says.

Mariam Habib records Anna Molka's auto-biographical narration of her development as a painter: "At first in my youth I practised a more romantic expressionism thrilled as I was by the sun, the warm hearted and warm coloured people. My present expressionism still depicts Pakistani life and people.....but now the subjects are more serious, introvert and religious....problems of the spiritual life, the soul, war, refugees, poverty, I draw in paint, mostly with a knife and impasto colours....draw-



B-7. ANNA MOLKA AHMED, *Haji Sharif*, 1966, oil on canvas, 24" x 18", artist's collection



16. ANNA MOLKA AHMED, *Landscape*, 1985, oil on canvas, 61 x 92 cm, Pakistan National Assembly, Islamabad

ing is exaggerated for a meaning, releasing the inner urge....colours get thicker as emotion is aroused, either violent or sombre”.

In 1947 when Pakistan came into existence, more pressing and immediate problems engaged the nation's attention, hence little notice could be given to art. In due course of time, the enthusiasm awakened by the creation of a new nation also permeated the sphere of art. Painters formed art groups at Lahore and Dacca, while the government tried to extend its patronage by establishing art councils. Frequent exhibitions began to be held which gradually increased the number of the viewers. These exhibitions were usually marked by interesting, if not always intellectually stimulating, discussions and heated controversies. The press often delighted in reporting these which gave an extra edge to them.

One such controversy flared up with the exhibition of Zubeida Agha's abstract paintings in 1949. Atiya Begum, wife of the painter Fayzee Rahamin, wrote the following letter to the Editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette*, 4th June, 1949.

Sir,

The public of Karachi is flooded with exhibitions of paintings by the newly formed Fine Arts Society. Zubeida Agha's exhibition is the sixth, with a seventh in view within a few months of the society's existence. Art societies of prestige hold one annual exhibition where all artists' work are displayed and the hanging committee has a right to accept or reject an artist's work. Zubeida Agha's paintings are of the addled art type which she maintains (she) has learnt from an Italian. It may be of some interest to your readers if I quote the opinion of a well-known Italian painter, Chiargio de Chirico, on the type of work Zubeida Agha has exhibited: "Modern art can be seen in asylums. Today we can no longer speak of decadence so much as a complete artistic collapse. The practice of camouflaging lack of talent arose from the break of traditional good painting. Cubism—Fauvism—Expressionism—Abstractionism—Surrealism, were all vomited up by this so-called revolution.

Many men of science point out how the most important characteristic of modern art is the pathological one, that this kind of art is no novelty to psychiatrists. In hospitals for mental diseases similar expressions are too well known.

The issue was at once taken up by Mr. Hassan Habib and Mr. Arshad Hussain in their letters addressed to the

Editor, C. M. G. Mr. Hassan Habib writes in his letter of June 11, 1949:

Sir,

"There is a spirit and philosophy behind the new art, which judging from her letter in the C.M.G. of Monday last, Atiya Begum has failed to grasp. I am not an artist, but as a layman I have looked at Miss Agha's paintings from the psychological and sociological point of view, and have found those I understand, alive, realistic, and born of a true artistic impulse. Why confine 'decadence' to art alone? It covers all walks of life, particularly the spiritual and moral. Man by his own material progress is marked with death.

Traditional Fine Art has been associated with a kind of 'beauty' at once hypocritical in an age which has seen two brutal wars and the satanic misuse of atomic energy. Today alas, Beauty is no longer Truth. Deeper thought would see the canker sooner than the rose. Who advised a beautiful young lady: "Never think too much, it will make you look ugly?" The new art where it is sincere and genuine, might well show the mirror to Caliban. That for sometime at least might be its true function. If I were asked to describe some modern town (here or anywhere in the fashionable sophisticated world) I would say they were like "gilded dustbins". We live in these towns and are never shocked. But if we were given a dustbin to live in, would certainly find cause for serious resentment. That is the difference between words and a painting which puts you face to face with the reality. No wonder a visitor's comment after seeing Miss Agha's "Urban Landscape" was "I couldn't live with it".

As for artists and asylums, has not the modern world reduced itself to little more than a lunatic asylum? It is all insanity, fear and disgrace abounding. Recently a patient suffering from a fit of insanity was cured after she received half a dozen electric shocks. Why should not art follow this method which is already well recognised in psychiatry? Education as well as psychology in our day owe much to the study of the abnormal. The aim of art should be to educate, not merely to please the senses (or the sensual).

This was followed by a letter by Mr. Arshad Hussain published on June 15, 1949.

Sir,

"Atiya Begum's letter on Zubeida Agha's paintings published in the C. M. G. shows that her critical opinions on art have not advanced beyond the year 1912, when the

first impressionist exhibition was held at Grafton Galleries in London. At that time even a painter of Cezanne's stature was accused of hiding his lack of skill and knowledge behind the cloak of abstractionism. I could not have entered into controversy with Atiya Begum if I did not recollect an experience about 20 years ago in London where, uninitiated into the mysteries of art I had accidentally wandered into Burlington Galleries where an exhibition was in progress. As I stared in amazement at the drawing of a woman whose one eye seemed to be sprawling over her entire face, I noted a bearded man in corduroys standing beside me and studying the picture with great interest. I took him to be a humble British worker, possibly as ignorant of the intricacies of modern art as I was. I remarked to him, wishing to enter into friendly conversation, "were the eyes of the woman not absurdly disproportionate?" The man who turned out to be an art connoisseur gave me in a sentence a lesson on abstract art. He said, "what the artist has drawn is not the woman or the eye, but the womanness of the woman and the eyeness of the eye". It would be interesting for Atiya Begum to know that the artist whose exhibition I had visited was none other than Mr. Fayzee Rahamin."

"I am surprised, therefore, that of all persons she should fail to perceive the "Horsiness of the Horse", "The Windiness of Wind" and the "Womanliness" of the "Seated Woman" in Zubeida Agha's paintings."

Zubeida Agha (Born 1922)

Zubeida Agha had started painting at Lahore under the guidance of B. C. Sanyal in 1944. Agha Abdul Hameed, her elder brother, writes, "in 1946 she started lessons from Mario Perlinieri, an Italian prisoner of war, and a onetime pupil of Picasso. It was Perlingieri who introduced her to European painting and the tremendous experimentation that had taken place there in the middle of

the nineteenth century onwards".⁶ At college, Zubeida had read philosophy and political science which may be one reason why her early work eschews sensual elements in favour of abstract ideas. Her work of 1946 is somber and dull, devoid of humour or joy in form and colour. There is little light and almost no colour; instead she lays emphasis on shape and composition. The few colours that she grudgingly uses consist of earths, greys and blacks.

Zubeida abandoned representational painting for an abstract expression to give outlet to her inner response to nature. Zubeida "paints not the embodiment but the idea of beauty, love and hate, youth and creation, motion and change." In this context Agha Hameed informs us that Zubeida had in the beginning wanted to depict "the essence of things and ideas rather than the reproduction of their apparent form". Even most of the titles of this period, such as *Wind*, *Wisdom* and *Metamorphosis* are not used as descriptive labels, but vehicles indicating her emotional experience. Her work is a projection of her state of mind and mood. In 1949, she left for Europe, working first for six months at St. Martin's School of Art in London and then later for 3 years at Ecole de Beaux Arts Paris. While at London she exhibited at Trafford Galleries in 1951, and later in Paris at Gulene Henri Trouche in 1952. Humanism and the spirit of the Renaissance, and Zubeida's growing interest in natural colours and patterns found their way vividly in her work, with the result that her palette brightened. She no longer muffled her ideas in "the muddy monotonies" of her earlier canvases, but allowed them to come forth vividly in flat surfaces, occasionally relieved by volatile light effect or by dense patterns.

From the start Zubeida's work is noted for its boldness and emphatic contours, and her natural ability to simplify and reject unnecessary detail. In the process of doing so,



B-8. ZUBEIDA AGHA, *City Landscape*, 1962, oil on board, 10" x 39", private collection

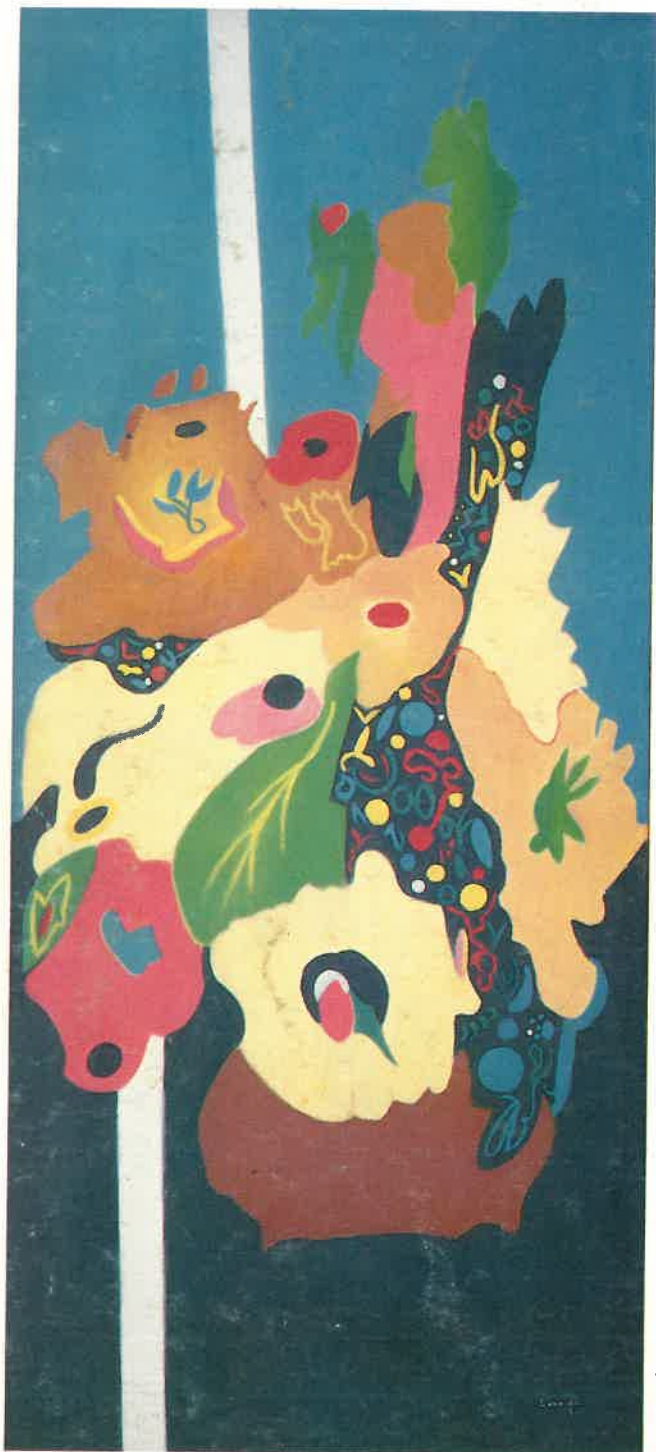
she creates compositions which are imaginative and aesthetically satisfying. While the content of most of Zubeida's earlier work is subjective and surrealist in feeling, much of her later work is more objective, imbued with a decorative and joyful spirit. Many of these later paintings are rendered with a candid freedom, and childlike artlessness which add charm and richness to her work. In the words of Mr. Wali Ullah Khan "the figures in her paintings are placed in a disorganised fashion without any sense of continuity. Yet the figures seem to move in unison; lack of imbroilication does not effect the basic, almost lyrical movement of the figures because they are not bound by any mundane descriptive explanation of causality".⁷

Not all her work is, however, done in this vein. Most of her cityscapes and some of her still-lives are carefully planned and steadily built. Many of these works, which reject the illusions of the third dimension show an influ-

ence of Matisse. Her growing preoccupation with flat colour gave rise to increasing use of decorative and abstract patterns, lavishly executed on the background of interiors and on still-life objects, or employed as a facile device to break the monotony of the surface planes. One of her most emphatic statements of colour, however, is found in a group of paintings based on bold horizontal and vertical black lines, framing rectangles of blazing red, orange and yellow; very close in effect to the stained glass. These colourful windows open on cityscapes, whose structures and interaction of planes are artistically delineated. In these paintings, again in words of Wali Ullah "the abstract city comes to life in scintillating jewel-like colours. They capture all the life, movement and vibrancy of heavily populated cities, even though there is not a single citizen visible". In her latest works, colour continues to play a dominant role and there is a greater sense of wonder at God's creations. Moreover, in spite of their



B-9. ZAINUL ABEDIN, *Famine*, 1943, black ink on paper



17. ZUBEIDA AGHA, *Burst of Flowers*, 1984, oil on canvas, 137 x 60 cm, private collection

apparent serenity there is an element of restlessness, lending them a strange sense of mystery which appear to come from a quest to understand the essence of reality.

Zainul Abedin

Zainul Abedin, the pioneer of the modern art movement at Dacca, was born in 1918 at Kishorganj in the Mymensingh district of Bengal. Before settling in Dacca he had lived in Calcutta, first as a student and then as a teacher. In Calcutta he came under the influence of Jamini Roy, Aban Tagore, Mukul Dev and Atul Bose. In 1947, Zain moved to Dacca, where he devoted his energies to the creation of the nucleus of a modern art movement.

Zainul Abedin has been one of the few painters who have, from the outset, recognised the necessary relationship of art to life. He revolted against the suppression of subject matter drawn from life, which Abanindranath and his followers were inclined to do, and unlike them he found much grandeur in the common man. To many of his viewers today, his attitude may seem romantic, but one has only to compare his work with the slick and enamelled surfaces of the academicians to assess the departure that Zain made.

Zainul Abedin became famous almost overnight in 1943, the year of the great rice famine in Bengal, by capturing the suffering of three million people, whose emaciated bodies and twisted corpses lay scattered all over Bengal. These sketches of the famine are charged with an emotional intensity which was completely new to the placid conceits of the New Bengal School. Each figure was taken from life and treated with economy without aesthetic elaboration. Every impression of his brush is charged with emotion and records his acute observation of the ghastly human situation. One of Zainul Abedin's critics, Mr. Jalaluddin Ahmed,⁸ Describes Zain's transformation from a passive romantic observer to an agitated participator. He tells us that Zainul Abedin, at the time of the famine, was a young art teacher who, as a boy, had run away from his home in order to grow up as a painter of romantic landscape, and spent his vacation painting the colourful Santhal women. One day Zain saw a mother and child very different from the kind of "Mother and Child" pictures he used to copy from the classics or paint from life. He forgot the art classes and went back to his basement room almost in a trance. That evening he painted his *Madonna* 1943 which "depicted a child

scavenging for milk in the famished breast of a horrifying skeleton which, not long ago, was its mother. The innocent unquenched search of the child stood out as the most eloquent commentary on the whole tragic situation, and haunted the viewer with a challenge to which nobody seemed to know the answer." *Madonna* 1943 is neither complex in its composition, nor in its colours. Like the subject, the technique has been reduced to the bare essentials which makes it all the more impressive and striking. The hand that drew it neither belongs to an aesthete, nor an intellectual, but a man moved by emotions and much of the vitality that the sketches draw is from the artist's power of narration.

Zainul Abedin considers his work as an "expression" rather than a "creation". This is true about his work where there is a sense of urgency in his narration. His later work is not merely less emotional but shows partiality for decorative design. The simplicity of execution and complete disregard of details, necessitated by an emotional urgency in the sketches, guide his later work, to explore aesthetic possibilities inherent in the subject. His predilection for linear harmonies has strong affinity with the Bengali folk artist; the corporal aspect of mass is never much developed. His stylization is not merely a manner



19. ZAINUL ABEDIN, *Santhal Women*, 1969, oil on canvas, 155 x 69 cm, collection Mohammad Fayyaz



18. ZAINUL ABEDIN, *Untitled*, 1963, oil on canvas, 62 x 246 cm, Packages Ltd., Lahore

taken from the village artist, it is based on a genuine desire to convey the essential poetry, rhythms and colours of nature. The line remains the dominant element through which he organises his forms and imparts life and movement to them.

Shakir Ali (1916–1975)

One of the modern painters to make most significant additions to abstract art in Pakistan is Shakir Ali. Shakir an introspective and a rambler, wandered from place to place in search of his metier. For a year in 1937 he painted in Sarda Ukil's studio at Delhi, where the style of Abanindranath Tagore was practised with great sentimentality and slickness. Later at the Sir J. J. School of Art in Bombay in 1938, he was introduced to impressionism as practised by its principal, Mr. Charles Garrard. The postgraduate studies in mural decoration in 1943 at the same school brought him in contact with Ajanta paintings. These



B-10. SHAKIR ALI, *Figures and Moon*, 1957, oil on canvas, 23" x 23", collection Iqbal Naeem Pasha

paintings with their sensitively idealised forms and their quiet but rich ochres, greens, and browns seem to have left a lasting influence on his mind. The influence of Kangra and Rajput and especially of Jain paintings has also been of notable importance:

Shakir invariably kept himself open to new ideas, with the result that he imbibed from varied forms of art and had a richness of experience denied to many of his contemporaries. Shakir looked back to tradition, but also admired the ventures made by the modern artists like Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher-Gil; he admired both Roy's stylization and Amrita Sher-Gil's sense of form and colour.

In 1946 Shakir left for Europe. His three years training at the Slade School in London introduced him to the dis-

cipline of western art. Later he travelled to France, where he painted under the guidance of Andre L' Hote who was then in the avant garde of the cubist movement. The years between 1949 and 1951 were spent at the School of Industrial Design, Charles University of Prague, where he assiduously tried his hand at textile designing. While at Prague he was, for a short while, attached to the Czech Textile Corporation. In 1951, he once again returned to London where he worked for sometime as a designer for a British textile firm.

Shakir Ali returned from Europe in 1951. At Karachi, he expected his work to be accorded immediate recognition, but looked in vain for a living as well as a sympathetic audience. Safdar Mir writes "The only passion he had allowed himself was the passion of the sublime, but his encounters in Pakistan were with the ridiculous." Shakir moved to Lahore in 1952 where he joined the Mayo School of Art (now the National College of Arts) and was appointed its principal in 1961.

Shakir Ali's influence on modern painting in Pakistan has been powerful and constant. This is especially true of painting at Lahore where he found a group of young painters who were searching for means to express their "very personal and unique mode of existence".

It was this search, Safdar Mir records, "which brought together the painters of Lahore, and which made Shakir Ali become involved with them. They were a motley crowd, always fighting among themselves. Quick to take offence, mean and bitter in their quarrels, but making up as easily and as frankly as falling apart. Shakir Ali being the eldest and the maturest had a hard life to lead; playing the peace maker he got knocked on the head from all sides. But it cannot be said that his pains were not rewarded. I have not seen more affection lavished on any artist by his contemporaries than on Shakir by the painters' and writers' crowd in Lahore."⁹ Shakir Ali's early works at Lahore of pre 1955 are simply designed but boldly envisaged. He used vivid earth colours to express his forms, which are further emphasised by thick black contours. His forms usually overlap each other to create two dimensional patterns, enriched by occasional texture. Some of these paintings express feelings of weariness and despondency. Europa and the Bull archetype was painted again and again, perhaps to underline man's helplessness in the face of brutish force. This aspect, however, should not be overemphasised, because in most of his paintings of this period the subject matter and

the emotional content are of secondary importance.

This phase was, after a brief pause, followed by a period where the "dull heaviness of his anguish" is over, and one finds his figures in an attitude of repose; in the gentle act of modelling a pot, or playing a tune or petting a bird. The colours of these paintings are mellow, supported here and there by texture. Occasionally, when the mellow harmony of colours is enlivened by a note of lemon or vermillion, the effect is delicious. The striking earth colours, the sense of plasticity, and noble conception of forms, lend charm and dignity to Shakir Ali's art.

Shakir Ali was an extremely moody and temperamental person, surrendering to spasmodic spells of meditation and brooding. During such periods, according to a critic, "he goes into hibernation" to absorb new ideas, and to discover visual concepts or "objective-correlative" to their meaning and to his feelings.

At the end of the fifties, he once again withdrew into himself. He emerged from this spell in the early sixties, in words of Altaf Gauhar "with a bird singing in his heart" and feverishly went on to produce a number of paintings in which he expressed a new rhythm of life through colour and images. "Each one of these" (paintings), according to Mr. Altaf Gauhar, "form a part of a process to discover the meaning of life itself".¹⁰

While Shakir was in Czechoslovakia, Fucik's book *Report from the Gallows*, and the tragic fate of the town of Ladice, destroyed by the Nazis during the war, moved him deeply. Shakir found Fucik's work "overflowing with a love of life, freedom and of the nation. Its author even in

his most difficult moments—when threatened with the sentence of death—was able to write about the sun, flowers and birds," and these are the motifs which have been brought to life in Shakir's own works.

To impregnate his forms with deeper meaning, he resorted to the use of symbols. His sun, moon, flowers and birds, the most frequent motifs in these works, have to be seen in a symbolic context. The frequently recurring images of a bird in cage or in flight, express his concern for man's desire to be free and his fear of losing freedom at the hands of oppressive forces.

Shakir Ali once observed, "Each one of us is born with a bird, free unfettered reaching out for the infinite. But owing to the prejudices of our civilization, the restrictions of our families and the superimposition of convention, that bird is caged and loses its notes of freedom. I am trying to find that bird in me. And if I do, I will pass it on. That bird will go right from me to you".¹¹ These sentences express the artist's spiritual attitude towards his work. Colours like images, besides being aesthetically meaningful, are also imbued with symbolic overtones. The use of symbols at times, gives a literary colouring to his work but his symbols are rarely used as a descriptive device to express thought processes. Mostly, they are evolved through the medium, and charged with multiplicity of associations, expressive at various levels of individual experience. Some of his symbols and forms seem to possess a mystical, devotional quality. But once again, the metaphysical experience is not formalized through a conceptual process but through the help of the medium. Medium is used here in a double sense; in the sense that Professor Askari describes it as the "struggle of the artist to express through the medium and the medium to express through the artist and the use of each to acquire an existence through the other".

This phase of Shakir Ali's creative evolution, unfortunately, came to a close rather abruptly in the late sixties. The sixties were in a sense, Shakir's most fertile period when he was full of creative exuberance and poetic mirth, interspersed with moments of mystic introspection. Not only does the mood and tempo vary from picture to picture, but the scale as well. In this period, Shakir executed some extremely fine murals which are aesthetically delightful and intellectually convincing in their imagery. These murals are based on different themes and subjects. His mural entitled *Pastoral* brings together his favourite images and symbols from the entire gamut of his work, to



B-11. SHAKIR ALI, *Untitled*, c. 1940–3, opaque water-colour on paper, 37 x 41 cm, collection Ijaz ul Hassan

produce one of his most elaborate statements expressing a longing for a new and a better world. His mural *Flight*, symbolizing freedom, shows a flock of blue birds, with their outstretched wings traced with lemon rising from this sordid dark earth towards a glowing sky, flying from darkness towards light; from servitude and ignorance towards freedom and enlightenment. *Leda and Swan*, on the other hand, portrays another facet of man's predicament, namely, the conflict of passion and denial. His mural in the Bait-ul-Quran, at the Punjab Public Library, Lahore, which is based on verses from the Holy Quran, has a gothic richness. Decorative floral elements culled from nature, delicate textures, filigree-work and colour nuances are inter-woven with calligraphic forms, to create a rich, sumptuous effect. His other important mural, based on calligraphic forms, was commissioned by the Pakistan Institute of Science and Technology, Islamabad. In this mural, Shakir Ali has composed the *Ayat-ul-Kursi* on a triptych and tried to create a stained glass effect. The mural is conceived on a heroic scale, hence, the effect is aesthetically overwhelming. About Shakir's employment of calligraphy, Ali Imam pertinently observes, "In his work he tries to evolve a calligraphic form, which is relevant to his basic imagery as a painter. His letters and works acquire the same character as his figures

and objects in his other paintings." This is borne out by almost all his work based on calligraphy.

Looking at the purely formal aspect of Shakir's work, the first element that strikes one is the simplicity and ease with which he can delineate an image, reflecting the essence of an idea without making any noise or fuss about it. His distortion and stylization are based on his familiarity with form, which serve to enhance the meaning and essence of his images and forms. In investigating the human figure, his approach is not of an anatomist but of an aesthete refining the harsh contours to achieve a lyrical expression. Shakir Ali, in the last few years of his life, once again fell under the spell of "brooding and meditation". At another time, when he was in hibernation and about to "begin" his work, he expressed his sentiments by quoting from Rilke:—

*Always at the commencement of the work
The first innocence must be achieved
When angels brought the binding message
If angels deign to come
It will be not because of your tears
But because of your humble resolve
To be beginning—to be beginner*



20. SHAKIR ALI, *French Landscape*, c. 1949, oil on board, 47 x 50 cm, collection Ijaz ul Hassan

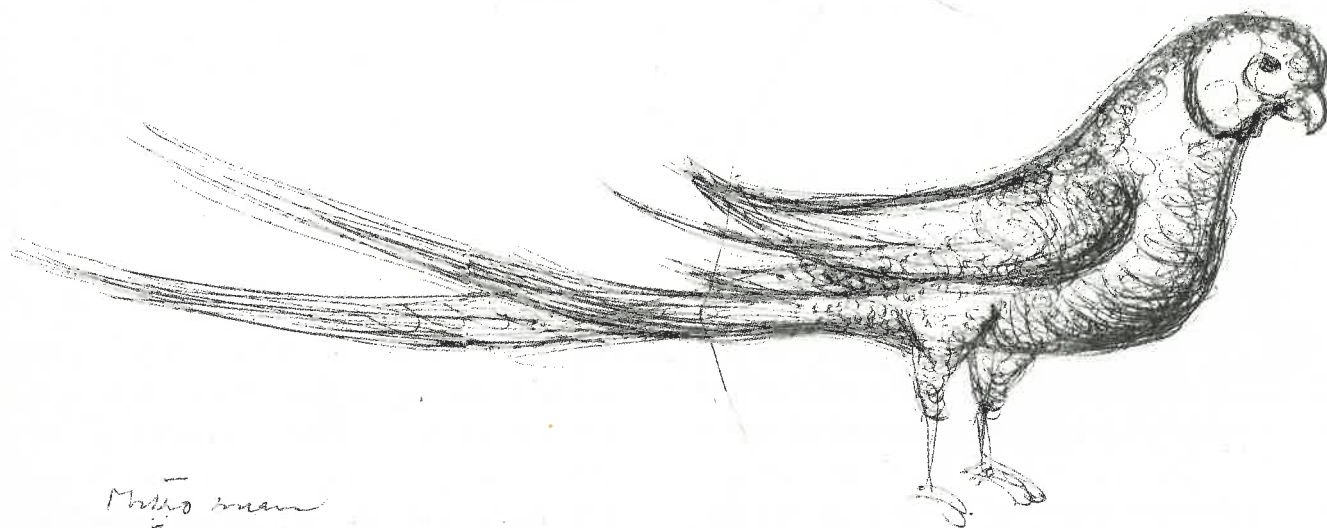


21. SHAKIR ALI, *Crucifixion*, c. 1965-66, oil on canvas, 152 x 100 cm, collection Chaudhry A. Ghafoor



When Shakir Ali broke his silence this time, his paintings were extremely chaste but emotionally restrained, auguring not a new beginning, but the beginning of an end. He died in February, 1975. Shakir had once said, "I often feel that in this cycle of birth and death I was born sometime in the period of Altamira caves. I feel like I lived

and painted with them. Then again I think I was born in Crete and I was one of the bull dancers. I was dancing with them as well as painting the frescoes. I was also perhaps one of those people who have been during the period of Akhnaton, and have painted Nefertiti. Then perhaps I was in Ajanta".¹²



B-12. SHAKIR ALI, *Mitho Mian*, 1966, blue ball-point on paper, 35 x 14 cm, collection Ijaz ul Hassan

Notes

1. *The Story of My Life*, Amrita Sher-Gil.
2. W. G. Archer, *India and Modern Art*. Chapter 5.
3. Minerva.
4. Rabindranath Deb, *Dynamic Quality of Amrita's Work. The Usha*, Vol. III, No. II, August, 1942.
5. Mariam Habib, *Anna Molka*, Pub: Lahore Museum, Lahore, 1984.
6. Agha Abdul Hameed, Profile. *Arts and the Islamic World*.
7. Wali Ullah, *Pioneer of Abstract Art in Pakistan*.
8. *Art in Pakistan*, Jalauddin Ahmed. Kagan Paul, Trench Trubner and Co., London, 1972.
9. Safdar Mir, Shakir Ali, *Painter's Painter, Contemporary Art in Pakistan*; Vol I, Number 6, June 1960.
10. Altaf Gauhar, Shakir Ali: *Urge to Belong. Artasia*, Vol. I, No. 2, Spring 1966.
11. *Shakir Ali, Talk at a Symposium. Artasia*. Vol. II, No. 11, Spring, 1966.
12. *Talk at a Symposium. Artasia*, Vol. I, No. II, Spring 1966.

Re-awakening in Lahore

Painting in Lahore, unlike in any other city of Pakistan, has a rich past. Prior to independence, there was an active group of well-established painters and art institutions. In addition to the Mayo School of Arts, the Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University and studios of individual artists, there also existed in Lahore some societies which actively organised exhibitions. The Punjab Art Society was, for instance, able to hold at least two exhibitions every year. In winter it held an exhibition at Lahore, while in the summer it shifted its activities from the sizzling plains to Simla, the summer capital of the Punjab and India, where it organised a grand show.

A 'modern revival of painting in Lahore, with its distinct character, had begun at least as early as the turn of the century. Lionel Heath, while reviewing the Punjab section of the Indian Art Exhibition at Wembley, approves of the decision made by the Indian Fine Art Sub-Committee, "to divide the art activities of India into three main sections" i.e. Bengal, Bombay and Punjab. He writes, "Although North of India has held its own in the history of painting in the past, and indeed may be said to have given birth to the finest of old painters, it has been slower to develop a modern spirit of painting than either Bengal or Bombay. Partly in consequence of its removal from a port and partly owing to its people's skill and interest in the decorative arts....." He continues, "The Punjab artists..... may (now) be congratulated upon having formed a very definite and distinct style of their own..... The Punjab artists are now in the forefront of this (modern) movement." From the artists who were in the forefront of the movement he singles out *S. N. Gupta*, *Rup Krishna* and *A. R. Chughtai*. In Rup's painting, according to Heath, "the

spirit of Indo-Persian tradition most happily see through his modern training". Heath feels that, "The newer school of thought may be said to be represented by a number of works by Mr. M. A. R. Chughtai". *Inayat Ullah*, *Mohammad Hussain Qadri* and *A. R. Asghar* are also praised for their originality. In conclusion, Heath writes, "The Punjab is represented by only eight painters, but it is safe to say that their exhibits leave an impression of personality and force".¹

E. B. Havell, while examining the Punjab exhibits at Wembley, is also of the opinion that, "In the Punjab section there is more evidence of an Indian artistic renaissance", but at the same time contrary to Heath, he finds, "the painters of the Lahore School, as far as the Wembley exhibits show, seem to be still struggling towards self-expression, without being quite sure of what they are aiming at". (*Indian Art at Wembley* by E. B. Havell Rupam, No. 21, January 1925). Heath and Havell may differ on their respective evaluation of stylistic and artistic maturity of the Lahore artists, but when Heath asserts, "The Punjab artists are now in the forefront of this movement", Havell endorses him by finding in 1925 "evidence of an Indian artistic renaissance" in the Punjab.

In the thirties and the forties, the modern movement gathered further momentum and a string of young artists came to prominence. A. R. Chughtai, Ustad Allah Buksh, Mian Mohammad Hussain, Soba Singh and S. N. Gupta were now followed by *Sheikh Ahmed*, *M. Lateef Chughtai*, *B. C. Sanyal*, *Sateesh Gujral*, *Ozzir Zuby* and *A. R. Ijaz*.

Sheikh Ahmed originally qualified as an automobile engineer from New York, but later took up art and got his diploma from the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London. He was an exceptionally fine draughtsman, as a re-



22. MOHAMMAD HUSSAIN QADRI, *A Mid-day Rest*, 1933, water-colour, 25 x 30 cm, Lahore Museum

sult of which he was appointed a teacher by the school. He remained with the school for about two years. In the thirties, when A. R. Chughtai proceeded to England, the school, according to Anna Molka,² attached him with Sheikh Ahmed because Chughtai was not too proficient in the English language. Anna Molka informs that Sheikh Ahmed helped him with his etchings, but how far Sheikh Ahmed influenced Chughtai's drawing can only be conjectured. Sheikh Ahmed in his lifetime painted hundreds of portraits, including one of the founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Later, with the help of one of his pupils, Aftab Zafar, who is a versatile illustrator, he established the Pakistan Institute of Arts and Design at Karachi. In the later part of his life he did some exquisite drawings and illustrations at this Institute. Among his illustrations, the outstanding ones are those he did for a book titled *White Camel* by Eden Philpot and about five hundred history illustrations for Silver Burdett Textbook Publishers, New York. Sheikh Ahmed also designed a number of posters for the Department of Tourism, for which he was twice awarded in Europe.

M. Lateef Chughtai who was one of Sheikh Ahmed's contemporaries in terms of sensibility and style, be-



23. S. N. GUPTA, *Radha Expectant of Krishna in Dark Night*, water-colour, 15.5 x 11.5 cm, Lahore Museum

longed to the age of Chughtai and S. N. Gupta. Ustad Lateef had a great command over his brush and the water-colour medium. The flourish with which he painted was amazing. He could delineate the human figure with a flick of his fingers.

B. C. Sanyal (Born 1904), according to one of his younger contemporaries, had based his style on the paintings of an English artist, Mary, who was married to Rup Krishna of Raman Krishna Publishers, Lahore. Rup Krishna was himself an intellectual and seemed to have held definite views on art and literature. He must have enjoyed considerable intellectual reputation to have interested a snob like Amrita Sher-Gil to seek his opinion on her work. The meeting unfortunately ended in a total disaster. Sateesh Gujral, who was then a student at the Mayo School, reports that quite by coincidence he happened to be standing close to the staircase leading up to Rup Krishna's flat on top of the publishing house, when he heard someone shouting upstairs. Soon an angry lady emerged on the landing, and to Sateesh's astonishment it was Amrita! To his further amazement, as soon as Amrita had arrived her paintings came flying after her from the upper-floor. Poor Amrita had no other option but to hurriedly collect her canvases and retreat from the scene at top speed.

In **Sateesh Gujral's** (Born 1921) view, Sanyal played a significant role in breaking the influence of water-colour painting of English painters like Cotman, and that of Shantiniketan and the Bengal School as a whole. Sanyal, after leaving the Mayo School of Arts, set up a studio of his own at Regal Cinema on the Mall. The studio was christened as the Lahore School of Fine Arts. Sanyal encouraged an open studio system and a number of young artists came and worked there. Zubeida Agha came for a while, as well as a number of artists who later had to migrate to India in 1947. Among these *Harkrishan Lal*, *Demente Chawala*, *Ramnath Mago*, *Charles Fabri*, and *Ratna Mathur Fabri* are today recognised painters of India, while *Dhanraj Bhagat* and *Amarnath Saigol* are well-known sculptors.

Sanyal's school was a much talked about place in Lahore. It was intrinsically different from the Mayo School of Arts and Crafts, which was essentially meant to train artisans. Whenever an Englishman spoke of arts in the context of the subcontinent he meant crafts. The two words were inter-changeable. Sanyal's studio, on the other hand, not only had a modern approach to art but



24. B. S. SANYAL, *Two Girls with a Goat*, oil on canvas, 103 x 62 cm, Lahore Museum

was also, socially speaking, a haven for the city's rich elite. The general atmosphere of the place was relaxed and liberal. Apparently, Hafeez Jalundhri and Faiz Ahmad Faiz were both regular visitors.

According to Sateesh Gujral *Harkrishan Lal* from Ludhiana, and *Pran Nath Mago* from Jhelum, were greatly instrumental in breaking new ground for a modern outlook. They were neither like Chughtai or like Amrita but somewhat like Breughal the Elder. They were both trained in Bombay at the J. J. School and, although working in the Kangra style, employed a bold expression to portray life. Both these painters exerted considerable influence on *Krishan Khanna*, who read English at the Government College, Lahore and visited Sanyal's Studio to paint. Krishan Khanna today is one of the leading painters of India, very much sought after and cherished in the art circles.

Sateesh Gujral, who is from Jhelum, was the only hindu painter who stayed back in Pakistan after independence. Sateesh had become deaf at the age of thirteen and decided to become a painter. He studied painting first at the Mayo School and then at the J. J. School, Bombay, where he received his diploma in 1947 and returned to Lahore. In 1952 he had an opportunity to work with Sequierors at the Palacio Nazionale De Bellas Arts in Mexico. In 1954 he decided to settle in India, where he became one of their most versatile artists working in paint, clay and ceramics, wood, metal and glass.

Ozzir Zuby (Born 1922), after obtaining his diploma in modelling from the Mayo School of Arts in 1944, had established his studio at Lahore in Royal Park. His studio was also, "the rendezvous of the town's creative elite".³ Zuby has worked in various media, but his work in sculpture is more powerful than his paintings. His series of busts of contemporary writers and poets boldly express form and personality and have a unity of style and purpose. Most of these were done at his Lahore Studio before he moved to Karachi. His set of 40 pen drawings, published by Elite Publishers Ltd. in 1971, are stylistically very different from each other. Samin Khan in the introductory appreciation writes that Zuby "has proved.....that he is a master in the different styles and schools of painting and drawing." There is one drawing which "In the genre style of Michaelangelo.....is statuesque", there is another which supposedly has a remarkable resemblance to Henry Moore's style, then there is a drawing of a woman and a horse which, "contains all the mo-

bility and vitality of Delacroix's painting of a horse". This drawing, according to Mr. Khan, "re-inforces our belief that man loves equally both horses and women or that men love horses but horses love women". Whatever be the philosophy, one cannot dispute Zuby's sense of rhythm and aptitude for decorative design.

Abdur Rehman Ijaz has also worked in several styles, but these mostly represent the various periods and stylistic phases of the artist. There are works done in water-colour wash technique, but unlike A. R. Chughtai, the subjects are usually from life. He has also done oil paintings with well-rounded fleshy figures, similar to the technique and expression of Allah Bukhsh. These large canvases are followed by small portraits in oil, done on paper. The romantic composition of voluptuous maidens and sturdy males are at total variance to these objective studies of children, sent to pose for the artist, one is told, as a punishment from the adjoining school. In the closing years of his life A. R. Ijaz did a number of experimental landscapes by using dyed saw-dust, instead of paint. He also did some delightful landscapes with pastels made by the artist himself.

The division of the subcontinent in 1947 and the subsequent migration of Hindu and Sikh artists from Lahore to India considerably slowed down the art activities at Lahore. The Punjab Society was revived the following year and Mohammad Hussain Qadri was elected as the secretary of the society. But the society was unwieldy and lacked a real base.

The more spirited and ambitious young artists, however, found the prevailing atmosphere at Lahore, sterile and stifling. Intellectually, they could not relate to the hackneyed work and views of their older contemporaries and patrons. Unfortunately, the Pakistan Arts Council, Lahore, which had been established after independence was dominated, at least as far as painting was concerned, by conservative elements.

Chughtai and Allah Bukhsh reigned supreme in the field of painting and their authority could not be questioned. The post-independence generation of painters were radical in their outlook and infused with an aggressive enthusiasm. They refused to be brow-beaten by institutionalised authority.⁴ They condemned Chughtai for painting the pallid forms of the past and believed that traditions could not be kept alive by mimetic simulation of the past, but by the artists awareness of change and perception of contemporary realities. In order to present

and propagate their viewpoint on art and life, the young painters in the mid-fifties organised themselves into a group, called the Lahore Art Circle. *Moyene Najmi, Ali Imam, A. J. Shemza, Ahmed Parvez, S. Safdar, Razia Feroze* and *Miriam Shah* were the principal members of the Circle. *Qutab Sheikh* was also associated with the group for sometime, but in the mid-fifties he moved to West Germany. The modern movement was further strengthened by the active participation of *N. H. Qazi, Zakia Malik, Anwar Afzal, Tasneem Mazhar, and Haneef Ramay*. Hanif Ramay, who had expressed an inclination for abstraction in the early years, later applied himself to calligraphy in order to lend it a new form in the context of abstract art. It is interesting to observe that painters like Shakir Ali, Sadequain and others who viewed his experiments in calligraphy with amusement, should undertake similar ventures over a decade later.

The Lahore Art Circle represented a break from the romantic art of Chughtai in terms of content and treatment. While the content of Chughtai's paintings was mostly derived from the past, the new painters drew attention to the present. The decorous and bleached world of Chughtai was remote from the realities of life which some of these painters wished to paint. They refrained from painting 'noble' themes and instead tried to portray the ordinary.

This phase of interpreting life came to an end in the mid-fifties, when western modern art, particularly French post-Impressionism and Cubism, and German Expressionism, made an impact on these painters. Shakir Ali's arrival on the scene in 1952, with his first hand experience of abstract art, particularly Cubism, had strengthened their resolve to create a vigorous art which was consistent with the contemporary world.

Moyene Najmi (Born 1926), was one of the more active organisers of the Lahore Art Circle. Moyene's early work mostly comprises of paintings of architectural monuments, city-scenes and landscapes done in water-colour or gouache. The human figure has hardly ever received much attention from him. In the early fifties, when the younger painters had come together, Moyene was in close and constant contact with the work of his contemporaries. His association with Ali Imam was particularly close and he went out on frequent painting trips with him, which explains the striking similarity in their work of this period.

Moyene's awakening of interest in abstraction later

primarily emerged from his close companionship with Shakir Ali and A. J. Shemza. The shift from representational painting to abstract design based on form, patterns and texture, was partly the result of the general tendency at that time to study western Cubism, but partly due to the influence of the English painter, John Piper. Piper's post-war paintings, with their studied textural effects, and illuminated architectural details stimulated Moyene's aesthetic bias. Moyene's paintings are neat, carefully designed, and sensitively painted, bringing out subtle tones and textures with emotional refinement.

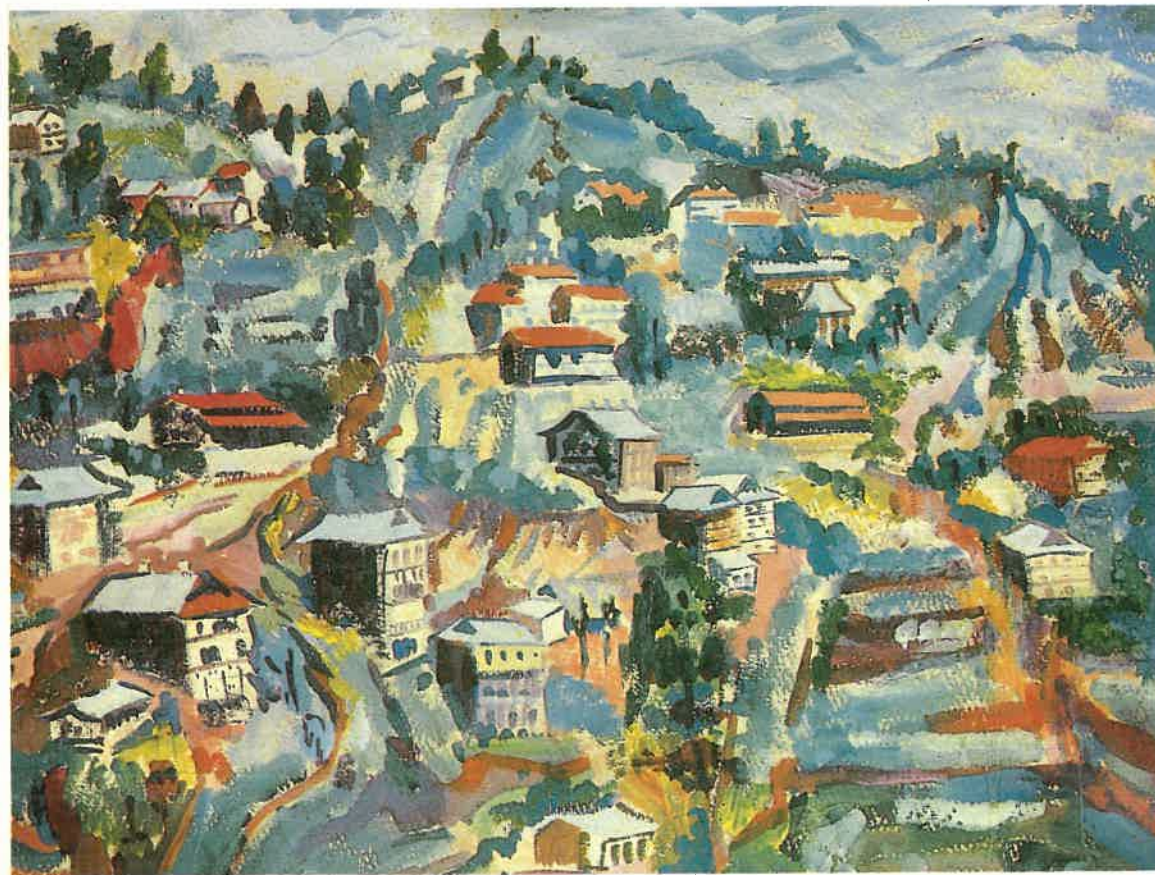
Ali Imam (Born 1924) in the fifties worked in an impressionistic style, whereas his paintings of the late fifties eschew tone and effects of atmosphere in favour of decorative design. The pastel earth colours and textural effects in these works were inspired by the traditional old buildings of Murree and Bahawalpur. Buildings are purposefully piled up, one on top of the other, to form Cubistic compositions which are decorative and structurally interesting. His later work does not make any fundamental departure in style or composition. However, in the later paintings, the texture is more prominent, the tonal values



B-13. ALI IMAM, *Bending Figure*, 1966, oil on canvas, 30" x 20", Karachi Arts Council



25. MOYENE NAJMI, *Lahore No. II*, 1972, oil on board, 81 x 81 cm, Pakistan National Council of Arts



26. ALI IMAM, *Murree Hills*, c. 1953–55, water-colour, 13" x 17", collection Shahid Jalal



27. A. J. SHEMZA, *Magic Carpet*, 1984, oil on canvas on silk, 40 x 30 cm

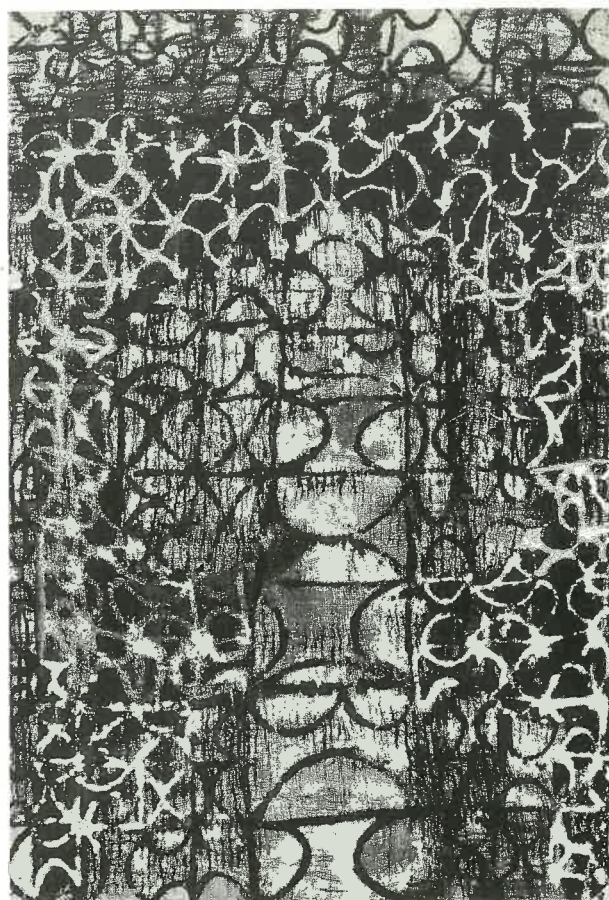
are more subtle, and his seemingly nervous line more aware of its aesthetic functions. There is also a greater variety in the choice of subject. His growing desire to deal with more complex forms deepens his interest in the human figure. By exploiting the human figure in multifarious arrangements he creates more complex and thought provoking variations than were possible with the static forms of architecture. Human figures are usually composed in groups which, however, echo the interplay of the architectural forms of his earlier work. The human figure in Ali Imam, has a gentle dignity where strong sentiments and emotions are restrained. In his more recent works, he has become particularly sensitive to tone and colour, which are exploited with tactful ingenuity. These canvases are covered with thick gritty paste which is applied by a knife. This thick layer of paint is usually cream, white or of a light pastel shade; through which subdued images are allowed to emerge. Quite often, the frozen silence of the picture surface is broken by spicy notes of yellow and orange which tease the viewer through the ivory facade.

Ali Imam, besides being a painter, has emerged as one of the leading art promoters in the country. He has helped several individuals in Karachi to build prestigious collections. The Indus Gallery has introduced many young painters to the public and provides one of the principal commercial outlets to Karachi artists. For his promotional work, he has been awarded the Quaid-e-Azam Award which is the highest award for promotion of art in the country. Running the Indus Gallery has been a full-time occupation, and this has inevitably affected the flow of paintings from his own studio.

Anwar Jalal Shemza (1928–1985) was born at Simla, where he grew up in the inspiring surroundings of the Himalayas. Shemza's family comes from Kashmir, whose people are proverbially known for their nimble fingers and decorative sense of design. Their silver work, their weaving and their ability to carve and embroider delicate patterns taken from nature, have made them famous all over the subcontinent.

Shemza studied painting at the Mayo School of Arts, Lahore, from where he received his diploma in 1947. Later he joined the Slade School of Arts, London. The Slade diploma was awarded to him in 1959, and he spent another year on postgraduate research in graphic arts.

Shemza's early training at the Mayo School in miniature techniques and formal tessellated pattern-making,



B-14. A. J. SHEMZA, *Untitled*. 1959. black ink and opaque water-colour on paper, Lahore Art Council

along with the exposure to his family's occupation of carpet-weaving, developed his aptitude for careful patterning and designing. His interest in structures or three dimensional forms, which is evident in his early work has been attributed to his keen interest in local pottery and its surface design. Shemza, however, rarely employs traditional motifs consciously in his work. His early work reveals a natural flair for ornamentation. At this stage the influence of synthetic Cubism is obvious. Analytical Cubism did not suit his purpose; it was not only too esoteric but greatly curbed his stylistic freedom and expression. Synthetic Cubism provided him with a relatively free field to express and to invent. Later his work became non-figurative, where calligraphic forms or a network of meandering lines weaves images and aesthetically pleasing patterns.

His drawing is bold and concentrated, and he handles his elements with precision. These elements are mostly based on geometry, which he regards as the very essence of form. His approach, however, is not rigid or dry. He combines the geometric elements into a "sensual choreography, sometimes into fantastic architecture"⁵ which evokes nostalgia and romance. The linear ele-

ments in his work sometimes remind one of the decorative carvings on the ancient walls and wooden balconies of the old city of Lahore. On other occasions they are reminiscent of the classic marble grills silhouetted against a radiant sky.

The scope of colour in Shemza's early work is limited, because he confines himself within the grades of grey and black. These are usually enlivened with texture which stimulate our visual faculties and help to enhance the impact of pattern. Later he discarded this muted and rather docile handling of the elements in favour of more provocative arrangements. These paintings, in terms of pattern and design, however, retain their basic characteristics, though his palette is more rich, varied and intense.

It is ironic that a man emotionally and aesthetically so rooted in his land should have had to leave his country and settle abroad. This separation made him even more conscious of the richness of his own art traditions. Shemza was among the first few painters who developed an abstract approach without apeing the west.

Critics have drawn attention to Klee's influence on Shemza, much of whom Shemza had studied in originals in Bern. But they also point out that, "what Klee adopted from Islamic culture, Shemza knew to be his birthright". Apparently Shemza agreed with Klee that, "Pictorial thinking is also a process of appropriating, ordering, realising and expressing a man's spiritual attitude to the entire world" (*The Mind and Work of Paul Klee* by Werner Haftman) or that, "Realities with art, make life larger than it usually appears" or that, "For the artist communication with nature remains the most essential condition. The artist is human; himself nature, part of nature within natural space"⁶

His later paintings, based on linear, geometric and architectural patterns are enriched with the flora and fauna of life. These are sometimes observed from life but always presented in, to quote Katrina and Burnhill, "rhythmically orchestrated and serially developed two-dimensional shapes, stored in the head, brought out in the very act of drawing rather than developed from observation". The works of the closing phase are generally much smaller in scale than most of his earlier works. Plants and plant forms which are calligraphically rendered, are also a departure from his earlier work. The paintings are small, partly due to practical considerations of transportation for holding an exhibition in Pakistan. This consideration apart, the little paintings are intimate and aes-

thetically exquisite.

Katrina and Burnhill tell us that at this time of his life, Shemza felt a need "to return to his own soil; to nourish his roots or possibly transplant them". He called the last series of his work, which was to form the travelling exhibition, "Roots". On 18th January 1985, Anwar Jalal Shemza died in Stafford. The exhibition planned by the artist was brought to Pakistan later the same year by his wife, Mary Katrina. It can never be known as to what direction his work would have taken had he come and decided to "transplant" his roots in his own soil.

Ahmed Parvez (1926–1979) much to the chagrin of his parents decided to become a painter. Disapproval of the family in his case meant the immediate necessity of finding a means of livelihood. The search for work took him to Karachi, where he tried to establish himself as a clearance agent. But the urge to paint was only temporarily shelved, because at the very first opportunity he joined the commercial studio of his uncle, Jacobus Michael, in Lahore in 1952.

Ahmed Parvez's early work is fashioned on his uncle's style, who made copies from European old masters and painted fat, sensuous females in rather studied attitudes. Parvez's work of this period is strongly imbued with eroticism. His female forms were probably also influenced by the erotic pen drawings of Picasso's nymphs and other nude studies of Picasso's classical period. It was mainly through the influence of Picasso, that later he tried to emulate Cubist painting. In Cubist paintings, he was particularly delighted by the still life and collages of Picasso and Braque. But very soon he moved out of this phase and his painting became stylized, full of gracious curves and tantalising angularities. Following this period, his work became increasingly abstract; he pursued his abstract ideals with the boldness and confidence of an oriental calligraphist, amalgamating the eastern sense of design and pattern with abstract expression. His painting is neither purely decorative nor merely formal. The mood varies from tenderness and nostalgia to violent protests. Quite often, his paintings are based on landscape elements, the bursting of seed pods or a firework display. At other times, the work seems to be inspired by the movement of heavenly bodies and the mystery of cosmic space. This strange sense of mystery and, in the words of a critic, the process of "tapering off into another reality" colours the mood of some of his pictures. What is most striking about Ahmed Parvez is his sense of colour. His



28. AHMED PERVEZ, *Untitled*, 1977, water-colour on paper, 39 x 25 cm, collection Chaudhry A. Ghafoor

paintings have been aptly described as “cascades of colour” and having a “jewel-like splendour”.

Ahmed Parvez executed his paintings of mid and post-seventies with greater spontaneity rarely pausing to critically examine them. Sometimes his forms seem less inspired by his vision which imparts authority to most of his other works. But then the quality of his work, to an extent, was determined by its quantity and his rather perfunctory method of painting.

Sheikh Safdar (1924–83) was born in the same year as A. J. Shemza. Safdar started his career in Bombay at the age of 17, where he worked for four years as a set de-

signer for films, and as a graphic artist finally establishing himself as a commercial artist. In the four years he spent in Bombay, he acquainted himself with the great art treasures of that region. The decorative influence in his paintings can be traced to the murals of Ajanta, and the sculptures of Ellora and Elephanta. Later, the forms of the Indus Valley civilisation and the Buddhist sculptures of Gandhara also found their way into his painting.

Whereas, Safdar’s early work was bold and illustrative in which traditional forms and figures were rendered in pastel colours outlined with thick black contours, his later work is more “cosmopolitan” in character.



29. S. SAFDAR, *Aerial View*, 1957, oil on board, 51 x 59 cm, collection Taufeeq Riffat

Notes

1. Modern Indian Art at Wembley by Lionel Heath I. E. S. *Rupam* No. 21, January 1925.
2. Anna Molka was a student of the Royal College and frequently visited Sheikh Ahmed at the Central School. Anna Molka married Sheikh Ahmed subsequently.
3. Jalaluddin Ahmed, *Art in Pakistan*. Kagan Paul, Trench Trubner and Co., London 1972.
4. "They were all—iconoclasts, individualists, breakers of traditions, mad. They were young. They believed in doing whatever they pleased. New experiences and an expanded scope had come their way. New nation was trying to forge itself into a unity to face the challenge of freedom. And this was the whetstone of their new and

vigorous sensibility. What they had inherited from their past seemed too static, self-satisfied, smug, non-violent, vegetarian. The colours were washed too often and gave an impression of bleaching. The lines were melodious, sugary, cloying, velvety, metaphysically inane. The art of painting expressed none of the conflicts and tensions of a vigorous community facing the challenges of the post-war world." *Safdar Mir, Shakir Ali, painters' painter*.

5. A. J. Shemza, An Appreciation by Jack Kinneir, Royal College of Arts, London.
6. Peter Burnhill and Mary Katrina, Shemza—Roots, *Exhibition Brochure*, June, 1985.

Pursuit of the Real

Khalid Iqbal (Born 1929)

Ever since the development of photography, people tend to ignore the realistic painter, as though the environment, in visual terms, has no connection with man's inner experience. The contemporary painter ignores the task of organising objective realities and tries to discover new techniques, in order to create sensational art. And since the art forms created by him cannot exist on their own, he invents intellectual jargon to support and defend them. John Canaday, while drawing our attention to this tendency, writes, (a) "I wonder....whether painting today does not occupy the same position in our life that fencing does. Until the invention of firearms fencing was necessary in order to defend one's life and honour. But after that it became a pastime for people who like to do it or to look at it, and the same may be true of painting. It used to be part of life but now it is a kind of residual sport. This would explain the appetite for novelty, the search for something new at any cost, the emphasis on fashionable values rather than the fundamental human ones".¹ On another occasion he writes, "We have managed to create the impression that all abstract art *per se* must be given the breaks on the probability that there is more than meets the eye, while all other art *per se* must be regarded with suspicion on the probability that it isn't as good as it looks. Things have come to the point where it is amusing to dismiss the Renaissance with a quip, but dangerous to one's critical reputation not to discover in any second rate abstract exercise some cosmic implication".²

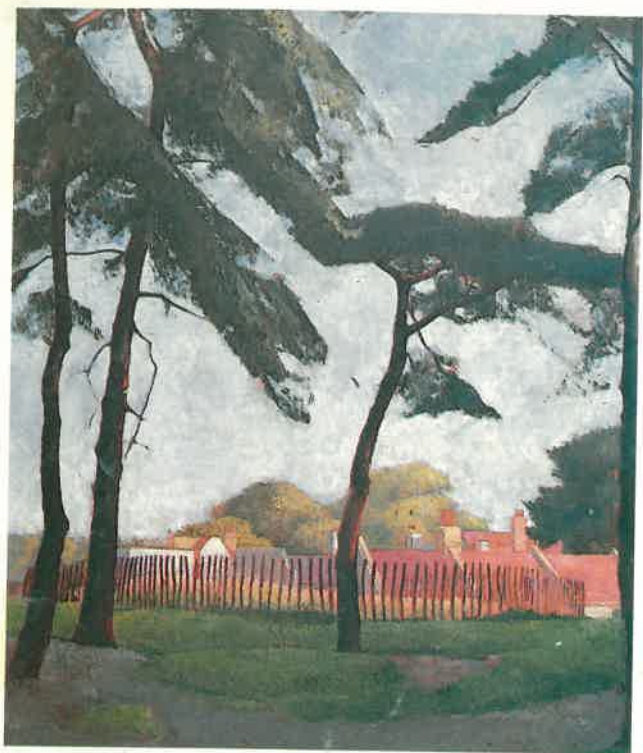
In England a group of painters had tried to arrest this tendency towards haphazard amateur experimentation, as far back as 1937, by invoking the established procedures of Cézanne. They formed a group, called the "Eus-

ton Road Group", consisting of Graham Bell, Sir William Coldstream, Claude Rogers, Lawrence Gowing and Victor Pasmore. They insisted that everyday life and subjects of local interest still had immense aesthetic possibilities. These painters maintained a rigid objective approach, evident from their studied impersonal style, and deliberately avoided any mannerism of the modern kind in their style.

While most contemporary painters at Lahore were breaking away from representational painting, Khalid Iqbal was among the few notable exceptions who refused to be influenced by this trend. He maintains that while contemporary European Art was a result of the artists rejection of old society and its value system, "our modern painting is based on looking at re-productions". There is, he asserts, no similarity of attitudes. It has "nothing of the spirit behind it. It is opposite of revolt. It is part of obedience".

Khalid Iqbal studied painting at the Slade School of Art, London, where Sir William Coldstream, the Principal, kept alive the ideals of the Euston Road Group. Khalid Iqbal's stylistic approach, though close to the aims of William Coldstream, differs from them in one respect. Whereas, Coldstream approaches the subject with emotional detachment, Khalid Iqbal, in spite of his methodical and restrained style, becomes involved with it. For Coldstream the reality of objects lies in their form, perceived through tone. Khalid Iqbal begins his paintings with similar aims, but comes out with very different results.

The mood of a particular landscape is as important to Khalid as its colours, tones and forms, with the result that his work can impart to the viewer the actual 'feel' of the



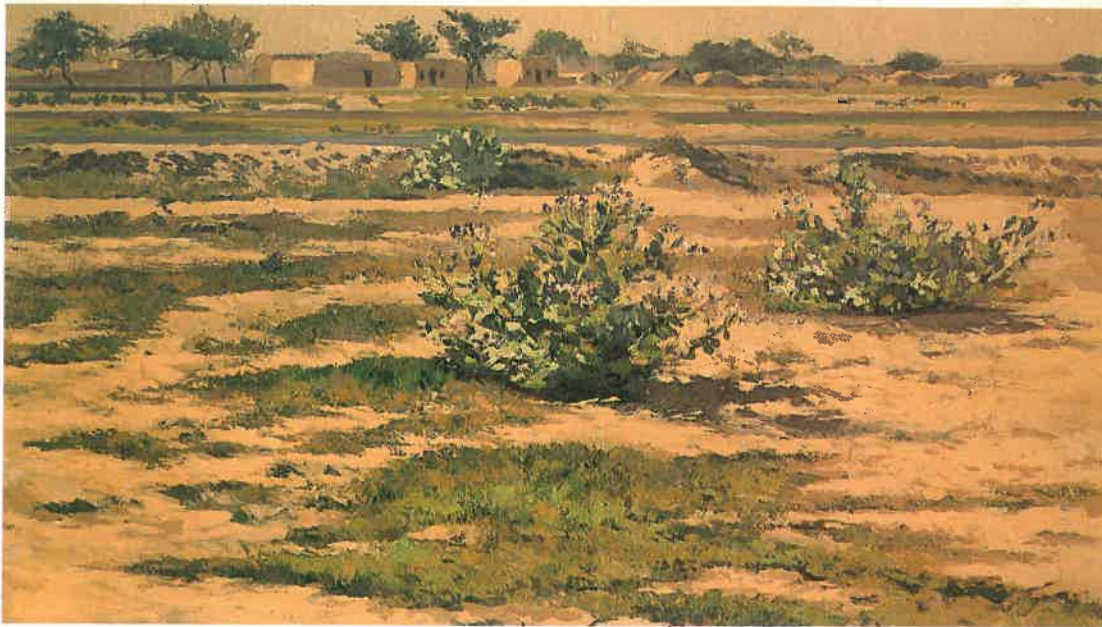
30. KHALID IQBAL, *Landscape*, 1954, oil on board, 26" x 21", private collection

subject. The English painter, John Piper, while looking at one of Khalid's paintings on a visit to the Slade, observed that he could easily identify the exact vicinity of London where the painting had been done. His portraits and figure studies, however, remain more objective and emotionally detached. In his portraits, he sometimes becomes occupied with sundry details for their own sake. One can, for instance, see in his portrait of the painter, Murtaza Bashir, that the model's projecting knee and the light reflected by his spectacles is a source of greater excitement to the artist than the model's visage.

Since Murtaza's portrait in the sixties, one cannot vividly recollect Khalid having painted important works representing the human figure. Even now, he draws regularly from models but these are mostly studies which, though quite chaste in their own way, cannot be called formal drawings. Occasionally, he produces small portraits of his gardener, the gardener's father, his brothers and his little daughter. These portraits are rather scrupulously rendered in several sittings on days when he cannot go for outdoor painting due to inclement weather.



31. KHALID IQBAL, *Bulrushes*, 1986, oil on board, 18" x 23", private collection



32. ZULQARNAIN HAIDER, *Aq*, 1989, acrylic on board, 21"x 36", collection Shehla and Tariq Saigol

Gardening is Khalid's second greatest passion. His undulating little garden has all sorts of plants crammed into it. The intimate little garden obviously reflects the artist's keen interest in plants, nature and landscape. Many regard Khalid as a painter of rural landscape. In reality he is a painter of the zone which lies between the urban and the rural, more specifically of the advancing outskirts of the Model Town (Lahore), penetrating into the retreating agricultural fringe around it.

The rural landscape is a great favourite with the genre painters who have had their academic grilling at the Punjab University, under the forbidding supervision of Anna

Molka Ahmed. Khalid Iqbal also taught at the same University, where he left a deep impression on many students. He is an intellectual and holds distinct views on art, history, and philosophy, in the liberal tradition. He is reticent on the subject of his own work, while most painters never tire of talking about themselves. Khalid paints, to quote him, because, "painting affords me an immense pleasure". On another occasion he mumbled, "Mine is a simple attitude. I like to paint a place, in a particular time of the day. No message or purpose or such". But his attitudes can be termed anything but simple. They are all intellectually cultivated. Khalid Iqbal's style, the way he



33. GHULAM RASUL, *Landscape*, 1985, oil on canvas, 54 x 86 cm. private collection



B-15. KHALID IQBAL, *Murtaza Bashir*, 1961, oil on board, private collection

builds up his picture through tonal values, stroke by stroke, is a byproduct of the process of observation and interpretation of facts and general nature of a specific visual reality. His style, technical procedures and choice of materials, are in accord with each other as well as in cerebral and emotional harmony with the artist. Khalid's is not a kind of academic realism which can be adopted. His can be a most destructive influence for those who try to model their works on his style as can be seen from the mishmash on display at exhibitions, with their unharnessed and contrary colours and tones. His realism is modern, engendered by a mind infused with a contemporary vision.

Khalid Iqbal left the Punjab University and joined the National College of Arts in 1966, and left it in the beginning of the eighties. Ever since he has stopped teaching, he has had more leisure for his morning and afternoon jaunts into the quiet agrarian outskirts of his neighbourhood. His paintings of the teaching days were naturally more studied and less spontaneous in their execution. The recent works are done with greater relish and excitement. The acute sensitivity to light and tone demonstrated in the earlier work persists, but now a freer

brush-work and greater stress on texture has enhanced the emotional content of the paintings. The effects of light, density of atmosphere, sense of open space, tactile values and subtle relationships of the tangible elements are sometimes now imbued with pensive moods. His insistence on painting the autumn with its rusts, ochres and browns, and its misty grey morning and dusty saffron afternoons, in itself betrays the artist's more subjective pre-occupation. A radiant late afternoon with a few bare trunks casting their placid long shadows, a misty winter morning with some forlorn bushes with their grey monotonous staring at close range, a distant tree with a branch quietly rising against a crisp sky, the parched earth, burnt grasses, the soulful silence of shimmering waters stagnating in a pool or flowing to their appointed destination, are some of the images which may impart to a viewer a feeling of loneliness and sense of loss. The human figures in his later landscapes have also become few. They are of little significance. Helpless little things, expressed through little brush marks, meant primarily to establish the comparative scale of things. There is, however, always a danger in reading too much into the painter's work and he would surely pre-empt one by saying, "painting is basically applying paint on the canvas" or that, "Art is a by-product, and the artist does not create art consciously".

Khalid Iqbal's influence on painting in Lahore has been profound. He has purged landscape painting of anecdote, sentimentality and academism, and given it its proper status. He is responsible for a whole school of landscape painters in Lahore who have slowly evolved their distinct styles. His chaste stylistic approach, the manner in which he maps-out his subject and allows individual elements to develop simultaneously, growing into a unified whole, have also influenced some of our abstract painters. This is, for example, evident in Shakir Ali's criss-cross hatchings, lateral brush-strokes, and the general treatment of the picture-surface of his later works.

Zulqarnain Haider (Born 1939)

Zulqarnain's works with objectives similar to those of Khalid Iqbal's. Ever since Zulqarnain was a student at the Fine Arts Department, Punjab University, he has had a close association with Khalid Iqbal. In the late sixties and the early seventies, Zulqarnain liked painting, "The golden and rich green fields of the Punjab with miles and miles of distance, the paths winding through them,



B-16. ZULQARNAIN HAIDER, *Water Channel*, acrylic on board, 51x76 cm. Private Collection

groves of trees in the countryside, glimmering in the strong sunlight". At the same time, he also found it interesting to paint crumbling old buildings of Lahore with their broken walls and balconies, and the crowded and colourful bazars and shops. This, according to Sajjad Haider was, "his own intimate world of bare-foot urchins, cots, ragged curtains, huts, shops..... a human landscape which has been thrown to the junkyard of memory. Once out of sight behind the facade of glamorous markets and glittering buildings, it has also gone out of mind".³

In 1972 Zulqarnain left for Paris to join Ecole Nationale Superior Des Beaux Arts, from where he received his Diploma Superior Des Arts Plastique, in painting as well as in drawing. He received "Bien Mentiañ", that is a distinction, in each of his diplomas. According to Professor Guignebert, Head of Painting Department at the Beaux Arts, "This rare achievement is due to the fact that he never availed himself of any vacation during his four years stay in Paris, and instead devoted all his time to his work"

Earlier his scholarship by the French Government, in the words of his tutor, "on account of his outstanding work, "had been specially extended from one year to a period of another three years. Zulqarnain Haider has remained a committed hardworking painter to this day. He is simple, quiet and modest, but full of warm feelings. His paintings are sincere and try to express what he sees in a simple idiom without modern pretensions. He spent four years working intensely at Paris but has managed to keep his vision intact. One cannot detect even the faintest hint at an attempt to be consciously modern. In this, he is a true heir to Khalid Iqbal. Zulqarnain's landscapes compared to Khalid's, marshal a larger number of facts and are evident of his having a greater eye for individual detail. Khalid is less concerned with things as they are, and more preoccupied with how they appear to the eye. Zul-

garnain is naturally also concerned with appearance but, at the same time, he also likes taking note of the specific form and texture of each object. The picture-surface of his paintings thus acquire considerable textural richness.

Zulqarnain, as a landscape painter, has always been fascinated with vistas of space pervaded with light. In the agricultural flat-land of the central Punjab, finding vistas is not easy, but he went about looking for spots with distant panoramic views. In this period he did a number of small panels presenting effects of light and feeling of space, with a small delicate brush. Though these paintings were extremely attractive, and were quickly picked up by collectors, one found them a bit decorative. The horizontal long panels inevitably forced the artist to distribute, arrange and design the elements accordingly. Subsequently, he abandoned his pursuit of the panoramas and decided to concentrate on his main centre of interest; as a result, his paintings have become more compact. The subject itself is now closer at hand with which the viewer can enter into a more intimate relationship. At the moment Lahore and its suburbs form



B-17. IJAZ UL HASSAN, *Late Evening View Through Window*, oil on canvas, collection Fareeduddin Riaz



34. IJAZ UL HASSAN, *Laburnum*, 1983, oil on canvas, 84" x 108", The Pakistan House, N. Delhi

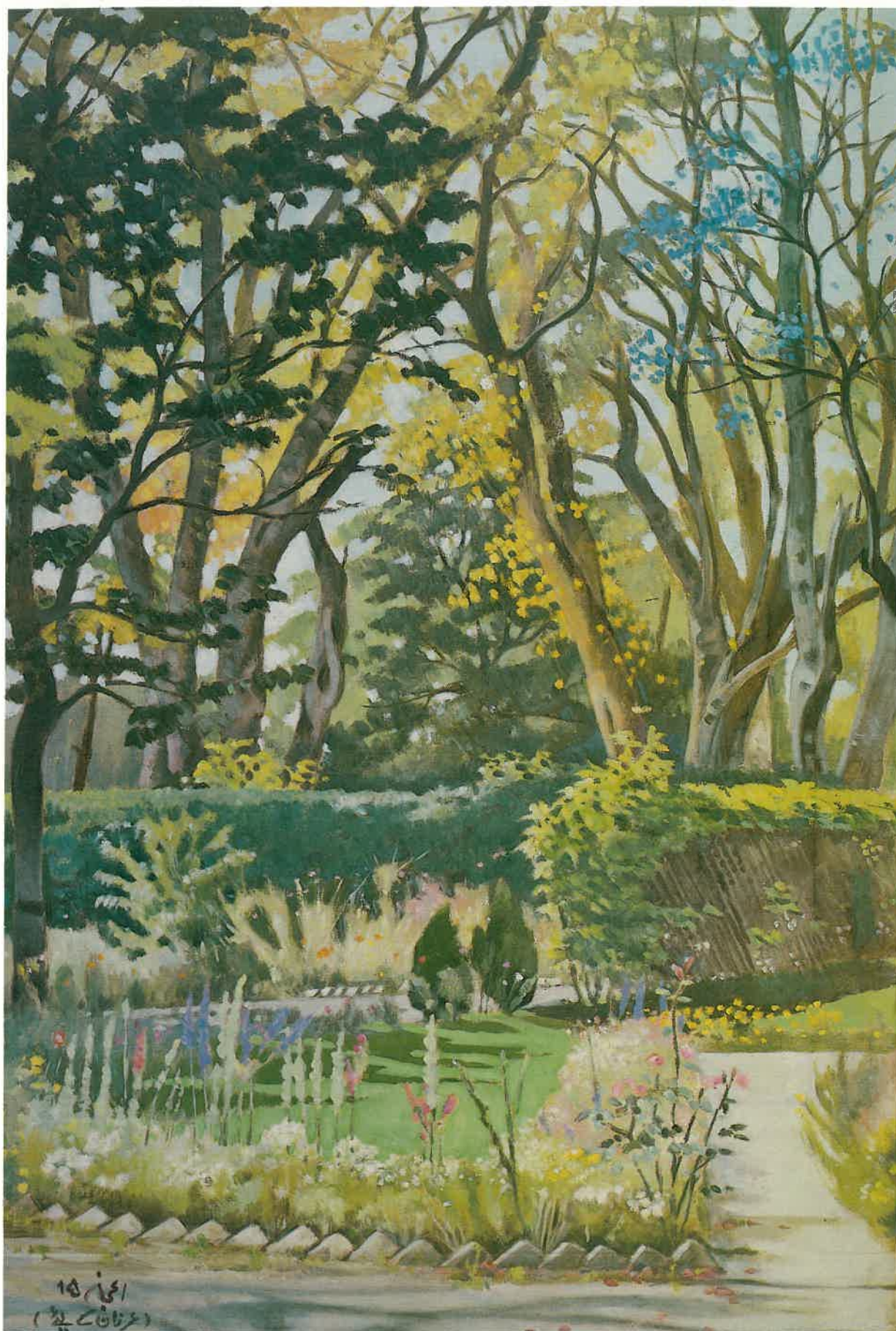
the entire gambit of landscape painters. Compared to the wild areas of the Punjab, the landscape which has been tackled by the painters so far may seem tame but to paint any landscape, as Zulfarnain puts it, "you have to go and stand in the field, feel its heat and be there for hours".

My own work of the late seventies is an effort at drawing attention to common and familiar sights. People become so accustomed to seeing everyday things that they actually lose touch with them. They take their existence for granted, till such time that a painting or a poem shakes them out of their stupor and repairs the broken bond. Often, while observing forms of nature, one recognises in them a deeper meaning and wider social implications. A mutilated wild *beri* tree sprouting innumerable shoots from the branch, which had been axed in winter, brings to mind the common man's suffering, as well as his irrepressible struggle to live. The wild *beri*, growing on the roadside, thus becomes indestructible, compared to the seemingly secure house of concrete and glass in the background. The form of an acacia tree with its agonised trunk and its twisted branches, the *peepal* trees majesti-

cally towering above vanishing garden flowers, become more significant in terms of meaning and emotions than merely a visual image. Similarly a laburnum laden with golden showers, dancing with abandon on the bank of a muddy canal in the scorching summer heat, is at total ease with itself and its environment. The laburnum thus becomes a symbol of unity, strength, and beauty inherent in man. A series of my paintings of this period present, *Views*, where one looks out from a window inviting the viewer to venture out from his comfortable glass cage into the real pulsating world.

Ghulam Rasool (Born 1941)

Ghulam Rasool's paintings of the mid-fifties, were realistic. Most of them were Punjab village landscapes, simply designed but executed without much concern for subtleties of tone and light. Later his work became more stylised and ornamental. Even now, most of his paintings are based on landscape elements, which are stylised and decoratively arranged. He divides the picture into segments of bright colours of raw intensity. Those of his paintings where the pictorial elements are greater in



35. IJAZ UL HASSAN, *Peepal in Autumn*, 1985, oil on canvas, collection Irfan Hussain

number are aesthetically more satisfying. The variety of elements enables the painter to create a rich mosaic effect that cannot be achieved with a few scanty forms. Where the elements are few, wide areas of colour seem to become wearied, losing much of their vivacity.

In recent years Ghulam Rasul's style of work has undergone a dramatic change, although the subject matter has remained unchanged: landscape and village scenes, streets and alleys populated by working men, women and children, and of course his typical herd of buffaloes

reposing under verdant canopies, or aimlessly posted in fields or ambling across the picture frame. It is the treatment which is now different, bringing a certain restlessness to the calm, crisp and flat areas of colour. The effect is sketchy and it appears that the artist is in an impetuous hurry to depict an instant impression of a given scene. There are several young painters who have tried to pursue reality with an un-faltering determination and some of these are included in the last chapter.



B-18. IJAZ UL HASSAN, *Jungali Beri*, 1980, oil on canvas, 69 x 102 cm, collection Shehla and Tariq Saigol

Notes

1. A Blue Note : *Melancholy Reflections of Possible Interest to Painters and Fencers*. September 27, 1959. *Embattled Critic*. The Noonday Press, New York.
2. Happy New Year : *Thoughts on Critics and Certain Painters as the*

Season Opens. September 6, 1959. *Embattled Critic*. The Noonday Press, New York.

3. *The Pakistan Times*, 3rd June, 1971.

Fate of Man

Sadequain (1930–1987)

After A. R. Chughtai, Sadequain has been the most well-known Pakistani painter. Like Chughtai, he had a distinct style which is recognized by an average viewer at a glance. In other respects, too, he had much in common with Chughtai; for instance, they have both illustrated the poetry of Ghalib and Iqbal, both liked to make comments, narrate stories and depict events in their paintings, and both in their own ways, arbitrarily exaggerated or idealised forms.

Sadequain was one of the most prolific and versatile Pakistani painters, producing an overwhelming amount of work. He worked at a speed and scale which might have even impressed Tintoretto. His work ranges from his Rubayyats, and some exquisite classical pieces based on calligraphy, to murals of huge dimensions, where human forms are distorted to express ideas or emotions.

Sadequain's early work is decorative and stylized, followed by a brief period of post-impressionism. According to Shamim Ahmed,¹ the most significant change in his painting took place when he retreated to the lonely shores of Gadani, 35 miles west of Karachi. Gadani is a barren place where the earth is dry and thirsty and where nature has a rugged majesty. The weathered hills with their exposed veins and sinews, the gigantic cactii, the patches of thorny undergrowth and other unfriendly inhabitants of this landscape appealed to Sadequain's imagination. In the lonely and sombre atmosphere of the deserted seashore, the mood of his paintings changed from the cheerful and colourful banter of his early work, to the morose and rather tragic attitudes, eloquently expressed in the later works.

While the encounter with Gadani stimulated both Sadequain's mind and imagination, it also created tech-

nical and stylistic problems. The problem became more acute as a result of the artist's increasing desire to comment on society and the general human condition. He had to evolve a pictorial vocabulary from life and nature and to establish a frame of reference, by which he could organise his forms into a meaningful and aesthetically satisfying whole. The pictorial vocabulary was derived from the desert cactii, and the traditional *kufic* script provided the basic formal framework. When the cactii, with their strong verticals and subtle horizontals, were silhouetted against the glowing desert sand or a moonlit sky, he perceived them in terms of *kufic* calligraphy. Sadequain exploited the basic form of this script, as he saw it in the cactii; this enabled him to design and organise his cactii-inspired figures. The metamorphosis of the cactii into intriguing arrangements of monumental human forms is such that at times, it becomes hard to distinguish between cactus and man.

The cactus in Sadequain's painting has a dual significance. It symbolises, on the one hand, man's struggle against natural hazards (like the cactii's against the harsh elements of the desert) and his ultimate victory over them; on the other hand, its ugly, hairy, and thorny form is exaggerated to represent man's moral decadence. While themes of growth and resurrection run through most of his work, some of his paintings, especially his "scare-crow series" depict men who have lost their spiritual vision. They are shown worshipping scare-crows, in order to seek protection from the crows. The crows are not intimidated by the scare-crow gods, and descend upon them in colonies. While the crows peck and nibble at the human flesh, nest, and multiply their menace, the men remain prostrate before their false and impotent gods.



B-19. SADEQUAIN, *Naqshi Kantha*, oil on board, 48" x 13", Karachi Arts Council.

This theme of surrender and alienation is further elaborated through his "cobweb series", in which grotesque human shapes are shown to be completely unmindful of the festoons of cobwebs in which they are enveloped. On other occasions, Sadequain makes the same point by showing us revolting vegetable organisms encrusting listless human forms. In his bitter and angry moments, Sadequain painted man in his meanest form; ugly and lascivious, devoid of the sense of beauty, truth and reason; an animal which merely excretes and copulates.

Sadequain's works in which he asserts man's strength and creative energy and his struggle to conquer the forces of evil, or harness nature, were usually planned on a grand scale. His mural at the Mangla Dam power station depicts the progress of mankind through the struggle of the working people. Sadequain's growing desire to comment on man, his nature and his predicament increased the narrative element in his work. He consequently, moved away from abstract "mystic-configuration" to a more representational style at least in his murals.

Most of Sadequain's more narrative works are in the forms of an allegory where each figure, personifying a particular value, is allotted a specific function in the narrative. The narrative eschews complexity of experience in favour of clarity of communication. The strength and virtue of these works lie, therefore, in their simplicity and the graphic force with which the forms make their point.

Sadequain's work of the last years of his life was mostly confined to calligraphy. During this period, he enlarged the scope of "the art of elegant writing" in a profound manner. According to him, he liberated the alphabet from its traditional bondage to words. The words in the Persian or the Arabic scripts can only be written by modifying the shape of each letter. The words thus negate the letters. But Sadequain wrote his words in an ingenious manner, whereby the actual shape of individual letters was sustained. This potentiality provided him with a wide scope to compose words and sentences in an endless variety of manner. He has, for instance, written the *Sura-e-Rehman* in 29 variations. By relating each word with its neighbour in a creative manner, he makes a sentence intellectually more meaningful and aesthetically satisfying. Sadequain's calligraphies are mostly textual interpretations which reflect the meaning of various verses by their very shape. Sometimes words or sentences are given a form which may supplement or enlarge their meaning. Subtle irony is brought into play in his mural,



B-20. SADEQUAIN, *Scare-Crow (Series)*, 1955, pen and ink, private collection

The Evolution of Mankind, at the Lahore Museum, by crowning it with the word *Aaj* (today) in a manner that the *Alif* and its *Mud* can also be perceived as a hammer, and the *Jeem* as a sickle. The word *Aaj* with a red sun rising behind it, thus becomes impregnated with greater meaning, and the *Aaj* becomes the *Aaj* of workers and peasants.

Mr. Ali Imam believes that "Sadequain, unfortunately involves himself with these clever variations. He might have been more concerned with the development of significant calligraphic images in consistency with his basic imagery. He becomes a victim of traditional writing which provides him with the opportunity to show off his skill in penmanship. To give his work the feeling of a painting, he usually fills the left out spaces around the calligraphic elements with thin washes of oil colour, in

water colour style, sometimes adding scratches, figures of moon, star, palm trees, etc. By doing so he contrives to build a painting, but in fact he misses the point, and in majority of his work, he is more of a calligrapher than a painter".²

Sadequain's calligraphic work has to be understood in its own context. Sadequain has enlarged the scope of the calligraphic tradition as he found it. He succeeded in putting a new life into an art form which had receded into the background. With his technical skill and imaginative resourcefulness, he discovered new possibilities of calligraphy, and made it a source of great interest and pleasure for aesthetes as well as casual viewers.

In his painting of the sixties Sadequain exploits calligraphy to build his imagery in a rich and profound manner.



B-21. SADEQUAIN, *The Last Supper*, 1961, oil on canvas, 36" x 82", collection Ardeshir F. Cowasjee



36. SADEQUAIN, *Mangla Mural (Detail)*, 1969, oil on board, 20x150 ft., Water and Power Development Authority

problems, perceived and experienced by him in the slums of Dacca. His paintings convey a sense of loss and tragedy, resulting from the social and spiritual alienation of man.

Murtaza Bashir's inspiration to paint came from Van Gogh. His earliest paintings are of paddy fields and rough peasants, rendered with thick brush strokes. In the fifties, Murtaza entered a phase of 'simplification', when he refined his line, reduced the range of his colours, and tried to overcome his early enthusiasm for the post-impressionists. The general direction of his work at this time, was strengthened by his visit to Europe in the mid-fifties. As a student of Academia di Belle Arti Florence (1954–1958), he was introduced to the study of Etruscan and Byzantine art, and the work of the Italian primitives. The simplification and meaningful stylization of these ancient works of art, which had an aesthetic and stylistic

bias very much similar to his own, confirmed his own artistic tenets. The Etruscan drawings also made him aware of the gulf that Picasso had narrowed between his own work and the archaic art of 3rd century B. C. Murtaza's work of this period is linear and decorative in which objects are superimposed to achieve an effect of what he terms "total unity". The subject matter is often romantic and even sentimental.

In the succeeding years, Murtaza's paintings become more complex, but basically they are exercises in composition and formal arrangement. There is, however, a growing inclination to tackle volume and shape. In spite of these stylistic developments, the focus of Murtaza's intellectual and emotional preoccupation has always been man and his fate in our world. Often we see children silent and lonely, mutely gazing at us with vacant eyes without a trace of protest. The paintings done in this



37. SADEQUAIN, *Mangla Mural* (Detail)

We have seen how in the early sixties he used the *Kufic* script to build his imagery from the cacti, in order to creatively express his feelings and ideas. In *The Last Supper*, one of the most formalistic works of this period, human forms are reduced in calligraphic terms to their essence. Again, in his more recent work, *The Evolution of Mankind*, mentioned earlier, calligraphy is used as an "oblique reference" to create a profound mode of visualising his ideas and feelings. The birth of knowledge, for instance, is expressed with graphic power by showing a galaxy of golden forms and letters radiating from a centre, symbolizing the rays of light and enlightenment.

Sadequain usually refrained from clearly identifying himself with any political ideology or movement, but among the painters of Pakistan his work, perhaps, has been the most vocal. As an artist, however, he never hesitated to glorify the inherent strength and creative spirit of

man, and his ability to build a new and better world. The work done in the last years of his life, draws upon many of the earlier themes, symbols and images, but these appear quite tame in comparison to the more forceful expression of the sixties. As a painter, Sadequain was the first to have liberated painting from private homes and transformed it into a public art, contrary to the dominating trend of modern painting.

Murtaza Bashir (Born 1932)

While Sadequain expresses disgust and indignation at man's debased existence, or idealises his irrepressible virtues, Murtaza Bashir deals with the complex inner world of man and his emotions. When many of his contemporaries were admiring the decorative aspects of folk arts, or weaving colourful patterns from the exotic Bengali flora and fauna, Murtaza Bashir tried to tackle human



B-22. MURTAZA BASHIR, *A Boy Holding A Bird*, 1961, oil on canvas, 36" x 28", collection Ardeshir F. Cowasjee

period are passionate outbursts of individual human suffering. A large number of paintings are of heads or faces. These heads, which often span the entire canvas, impress us with their overpowering presence. They implicitly portray a profound experience of suffering. Admittedly, this is not a bright world, but it is a real one, and the artist has the courage to face it, and make the viewer recognize it.

Some critics have termed Murtaza Bashir's paintings of this period as a "direct and spontaneous projection of (his) inner self". These paintings are dramatic and haunting, and reveal an obsession with decay, and human misery. Sometimes the symbol of a caged bird provides the necessary key to his thoughts and emotions. On other occasions, he conceives man fossilized or encrusted with

layers of loathsome organism. Quite often he magnifies the eyes to create a calculated emotional response. In such cases, the eyes, which have been described as "huge windows opening into his soul", become charged with intense significance.

Speaking of the emotional strains and stresses of this period, Murtaza recalls, "I saw faces in the fungus growing on the walls. I felt constantly watched by thousands of beings peering at me through cracks in the walls". In due course of time, these "cracks in the wall" narrowed but the grim texture of decay stricken walls remained, from which evolved the series of his non-figurative paintings called *The Walls*. Most of these paintings are imaginative, emotionally rich, and aesthetically provocative. But one

is left with a curious feeling that an image might at any time emerge from the rotting plaster and plant itself before the viewer.

No such feeling crosses one's mind while looking at the paintings of Nahid Ali. Almost all her mature work is non-figurative, and done in a somewhat similar vein to that of Murtaza's "wall" series, but her paintings are smaller in size and more subdued in colour.³

Hameed ur Rehman (Born 1928)

Hameed ur Rehman's paintings of the sixties acquired a certain grimness which is foreign to his stylized early work. The decorative ideals that guided his fresco, *The Fish Market* in 1957 are replaced by an emphasis on expression. The heavy and well-defined figures of his earlier work become faint and elusive. The forms which were sharply contoured and graphically composed, become blurred and ambiguous. The desire for order and equilibrium, once the artist's principal preoccupation, totally surrenders to imagination. When an artist begins to believe that humanity is sinking or "aimlessly floating hither and thither like an uprooted water hyacinth", then



B-23. MURTAZA BASHIR, *Head*, 1962, oil on canvas, 36" x 24", collection Ardeshir F. Cowasjee



B-24. HAMEED UR REHMAN, *Family*, 1966, oil on board, 34" x 36", private collection

he pays no heed to the rules of aesthetic order and form. And this is exactly what seems to have happened in Hameed ur Rehman's later paintings. Hameed ur Rehman maintains that, "Man lives a precarious existence, slave of chance and whims of destiny, in a world which is irrational, hostile and inexplicable." For Hameed, there-

fore, painting is a means of finding a way by which he could make this world more comprehensible and meaningful for himself, and perhaps for others. Hameed insists that his work should be understood in this context and none other.



38. HAMEED UR REHMAN, *The Face*, 1970, oil on canvas, 81 x 96 cm, collection Chaudhry A. Ghafoor

Notes

1. Shamim Ahmed, *Mystic Figuration*. Monthly Journal *Fellowship* (March–April–May) 1966.
2. *Aesthetic Problems of Calligraphy in Pakistani Painting*—Paper read

at Calligraphy Symposium Goethe Institute, Karachi, September 1974.

3. For Naheed see Chapter VIII.

Myths and Motifs

We have seen how Jamini Roy made use of the Bengali folk arts and how he slowly achieved a unique position in influencing painting. We have also seen that Zainul Abedin's "poetry of old age" is based on the linear rhythm and colour organisation that is characteristic of folk expression. Now we come to the work of some other painters from Dacca, like Saifuddin Ahmed, Qamarul Hassan, Rashid Chowdhry and Qayyum Chowdhry, who have also been in some way, motivated by popular expression and beliefs.

Saifuddin derives his thrilling rhythms from rivers in spate or a stormy sea, and weaves them into stylized patterns. Qamarul Hassan paints the female form with an erotic excitement which is one of the salient features of the Bengali folk art. Qayyum Chowdhry's approach to folk art is less sensual but more decorative. He uses the folk idiom to organise the pastoral landscape of Bengal into colourful patterns and decorative images. Rashid Chowdhry's work, in a sense, is unique among his contemporaries as the source of his inspiration is not folk art but folk-lore. His paintings aim to capture the aura of myth, magic and superstitions that prevails in rural Bengal.

Saifuddin Ahmed (Born 1922)

Saifuddin Ahmed studied painting at the Government School of Arts, Calcutta in 1942, and then later in 1958 at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London. Saifuddin, like Zainul Abedin, began by painting idyllic scenes of country life, employing subdued colours and supple flowing lines. By 1950 his interest in colour deepened and he made bold experiments in impasto, but the following year he changed his subject matter again and took to painting

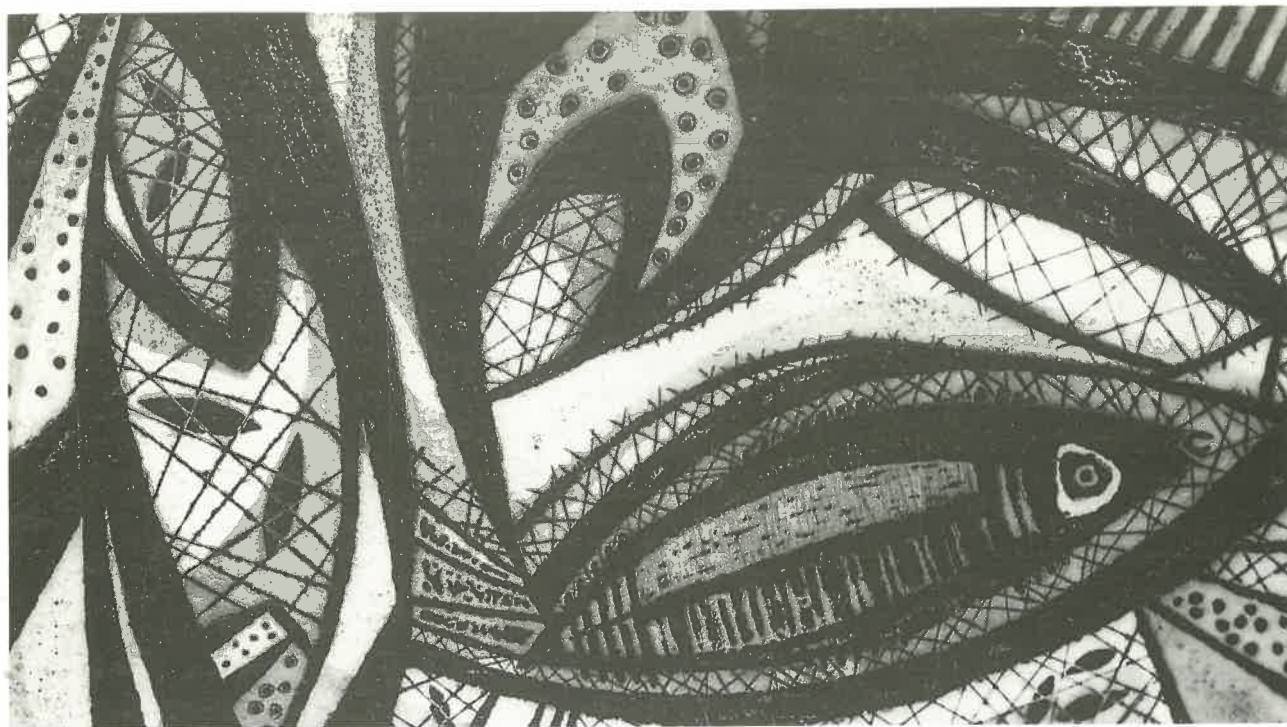
semi-grotesque, formalised figures. Saifuddin's stylized human forms have a striking resemblance to folk dolls and figurines. The most significant change in his style took place in 1958, while he was studying graphic techniques in London, where he produced a number of sprucely finished prints in different techniques.

Saifuddin's early paintings rely on observed fact. The rhythmic movement of water is indeed stylized but it remains close to our perception of water in motion. His later work is abstract where he aims to convey, through line and colour, the idea of water in gushing motion. On other occasions, he uses line and colour to create a network of spidery lines and flat expanding forms for their own sake. The languorous quality of these sodden forms and network of spidery strings evoke the luscious environment of Bengal which the artist seems to adore. Saifuddin's range is limited, but within this limited range he has produced works which are full of charm and beauty.

Qamarul Hassan (1921 – 1988)

Qamarul Hassan joined the Calcutta Institute of Art in 1938, but two years later he was forced by circumstances to find a job. Fortunately, he found a job to his liking in the workshop of a traditional doll-maker. He was thrilled to see "the featureless lump of clay come to life" with only a few strokes. He worked at the workshop for three years as an apprentice which, in addition to other freelance work, enabled him to save enough money to rejoin the Institute of Art and complete his studies.

Qamarul Hassan's most intimate contact with folk art was established later when he joined the *Bharatchari* movement. The movement aimed at inculcating volun-



B-25. SAIFUDDIN AHMED, *The Angry Fish*, 1964, mixed media etching, 10" x 18", private collection

social work and the principle of self-help. It spread all over Bengal in the early forties. It was also aimed at stimulating the folk arts, music and dance. Qamarul Hassan, who besides being a painter has also been a dancer, was strongly committed to the *Bharatchari* ideals, and worked hard in disseminating them. Ever since Qamarul Hassan became almost a part of the folk tradition. Later as Director of the Design Centre at Dacca, established to promote traditional arts and crafts, he was placed in a unique position, whereby he could remain in constant and close contact with the village artists and craftsmen.

The primary aim of Qamarul Hassan's work, is to bring art within the intellectual range of the common people. He, therefore, attempts to paint within their pictorial conventions. The manner in which he deals with an endless variety of female forms, and his ability to lend sensuous vitality and graphic vigour to them, puts him at level with the spontaneity of the folk artist. Qamarul Hassan is part of the tradition, where figures are stylized, where colours are basic and raw, where rhythms sway under the impetus of love and unabashed sexual desire and where primitive instincts are the motive force of life. Qamar is visibly moved by the erotic aspects of folk art which are incorporated in his paintings through suggestive exaggeration. His paintings are, however, never completely flat like those of the folk artist. By manipulating the flow and thickness of line he is able to impart a feeling of flesh and



B-26. QAMRUL ISLAM, *Composition*, 1964, opaque water-colour on paper, 30" x 22", private collection

convey a sense of volume to his figures.

Qayyum Chowdhry (Born 1932)

Qayyum also draws inspiration from the folk arts but, unlike Qamarul Hassan, he is primarily interested in the decorative aspect of it. The exuberance with which he simplifies nature into segments of pure colour, and the ease with which he organises them into a gorgeous arabesque of natural forms delights one's visual sense. Qayyum's painting is completely devoid of the rhythmic linear quality and erotic overtones which are so typical of Qamarul Hassan's work. Qayyum's approach is purely aesthetic. Form and space are related in the traditional manner by a simple juxtaposition and contrast of colours and forms. Later Qayyum's work became abstract. The decorative folk forms could still be detected but they appeared to have no direct reference to the natural world. These renderings may be more complex but many of his admirers maintain that they lack the directness and charm of his earlier statements.



B-27. RASHID CHOWDHRY, *Untitled*, 1964, oil on canvas, 20" x 20", private collection

Rashid Chowdhry (1932–1987)

Rashid is one of the most individualistic artists amongst his contemporaries from Dacca. His vision as it



B-28. QAYYUM CHOWDHRY, *Design and Figure*, 1963, oil on board 24" x 36", private collection

has evolved is quite unique. His very early work is fashioned after post-impressionism with strong influences of Van Gogh's impasto and brush work, but the most distinctive features of Rashid Chowdhry's work are born from his fertile imagination which imbues his provocative forms with a sense of mystery. His imaginative response to magic, superstition and folk lore is expressed through compact but propelling images, which make a poignant impact on the viewer. His forms are enveloped in a strange aura of mystery, and are in a state of weightless animation peculiar to dreams. His work, however, is

not surrealistic. Rashid does not attempt to record his dreams or portray the subconscious, but to visualise his imaginative response to the supernatural in folk lore. The illogical and irrational juxtaposition of forms as they exist in dreams are employed to express the folk world of magic and primeval fear. His jostling diaphanous forms swirl and eddy to create dynamic patterns. His forms are never at rest. They are always in a state of unrest, merging and emerging from each other to the beat of a savage drum, or immersed in a haunting rhythm of colour and motion.



39. RASHEED CHOWDHRY, *Decorated Elephant*, 1946, oil on canvas, 58 x 55 cm, Packages Ltd., Lahore

Image of Man

Inspired by the social concept of the elite, and conditioned by the market manipulated by art galleries, the modern art movement is heading towards formalism and suffocation of powerful human expression. Its adherents insist that art which expresses ideas based on reality cannot be artistic. They advocate "pure-art" and try to do away with the human image and man's surroundings. In many parts of the world, however the human image is back into art. In Pakistan, as mentioned earlier in Chapter III, there were some painters who insisted upon painting man and his environment and refused to be influenced by the non-figurative movement. We have in this context already surveyed Khalid Iqbal's work. It may be recalled that Shakir Ali and Sadequain also, in their very distinct styles, articulated their ideas through the human form. The present chapter presents the works of other painters who did not abandon the figurative tradition, believing in the everyday drama enacted by man and the immense aesthetic possibilities inherent in the human form.

Naseem Hafeez Qazi (Born 1931)

Naseem graduated in Fine Arts with a Master's Degree from the University of Punjab in 1956, and then in 1957 proceeded to study at the La Escuela Royal de Bellas Arts de San Fumondo, Madrid. In Spain she had the opportunity to study the masters of the Prado. She copied nudes of Rubens and Titian and was inspired by Velasques and Goya. In her paintings, Naseem skillfully depicts common sights and objects such as human beings, potted plants, still-life objects, alleys, slums, and house interiors. She has an instinctive feeling for colour and creates vibrant impressions of light, without consciously imitating it. She

builds her forms through free-brush-work and rich contrasts or chiaroscuro effects.

In her portrayal of humans, Naseem reveals extreme sensitivity and feeling. Unlike many realists, she does not view them as objects. She is vitally concerned with their well-being, which is manifested in her response to their little moments of joy and suffering, and the sympathy with which she observes them go about their daily chores. The large number of her works portray poor children, not as pitiable sweet wretches meant to extract charitable tears, or programmed to placate or justify middle-class conscience and hypocrisy, but with all their innocence and inventiveness, in a variety of attitudes and occupations. In their lighter moments, they are depicted playing games which they have invented themselves over the centuries. On other occasions, the harsher side of their life is recounted, when they are required to perform adult tasks at home or work as wage labourers in the market. An elder sister, a mere child herself, mothering a baby, a child mending an old garment or cleaning utensils, a girl scrubbing someone's floor or repairing to the bazar on an errand, a group of boys taking time off from weaving carpets, are only a few examples of the subjects which she has tackled in her paintings.

Colin David (Born 1937)

Colin David began his career as a painter who worked from the model. But later after his return from the Slade School he sometimes preferred to work on his paintings in the studio from memory. In these paintings one can see a shifting of emphasis to the elements of design. Colin's paintings are interesting in design, and subtle in tone and colour. Quite often an arrow is arbitrarily chalked to focus

attention or to suggest depth. To enliven the grey tonality of these paintings, Colin incorporates black and white stripes or chequered pattern which add a strident note to them. On other occasions, the same purpose is achieved by casually adding iridescent notes of colour, in the form of fruits or cushions which glow in their sombre setting. The treatment of figures is decorative and sensuous. And this aspect brings one to his nudes. In Colin's work the human body does not appeal to our sense of rhythm and harmony. Nor does it act as a reminder of our experience of any basic human emotion. The human body is one of the elements of design, like the other objects. However, one should bear in mind Kenneth Clarke's warning that the desire to grasp and to be united with another human body is so fundamental a part of our nature, that even pure form is inevitably influenced by it, and that one of the difficulties of the nude as a subject for art is that these instincts cannot be hidden, and thus risk upsetting the unity of responses from which a work of art derives independent life.¹

Along with these formalistic paintings, Colin has also painted some very direct and candid works on everyday life. Most of these are based on his family and his domestic life. These paintings have been executed with love and affection, which are born of deep understanding of the subjects.

Colin can easily broaden the scope and content of his work, if he were to develop this particular strain. The rich and variegated everyday life and nature could provide him with genuine and unlimited material for painting. In the entire last decade he has, however, insisted on confining himself to painting the nude. Because of the restrictions imposed on display of nudes by the government, Colin has been unable to exhibit most of his work. Evidently, this has also imposed an unconscious constraint on the artist to fully investigate and elaborate the subject.

Saeed Akhtar (Born 1938)

Similarly, Saeed Akhtar, who is one of the country's leading portrait and figure painters, can easily lend added meaning to his work if he had the patience to study personality, or tried to penetrate deeper into the mind and soul of his model. Saeed likes to present people in bold contrasts of light and shade with slick highlights. Often, when he leaves large sections of the canvas unpainted it merely enhances the slick effect.



B-29. COLIN DAVID, *Zara with Cats*, 1973, oil on board, 183 x 122 cm, Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad

Bevan Petman.

Historically speaking, Saeed has inherited this style of painting from Bevan Petman. Petman was an Englishman who was born and raised in the subcontinent. After independence, he opted for Pakistan. He was basically a portrait painter who in his life must have done hundreds of portraits, most of them for the army. He also executed scores of portraits of women in a vein of most blatant flattery. Petman was an extremely accomplished painter and could produce good works whenever he wanted. But, he spent most of his time doing commissions for his patrons, in a manner which they liked and deserved.

Mansoor Aye (Born 1941)

In the late sixties, Mansoor Aye expressed a mood of

pensive pleasure in life. The themes of his paintings were innocence, love and the beauty of youth, personified by a young girl, the moon and the moonlit night. His love-stricken dove-eyed girls were envisioned to bring back to the viewer, cherished moments of youth. He says: "To my mind the greatest miracle is the miracle of life, my work is a tribute to its few wondrous moments." He tries to convey to us the inner sentiments of young lovers in a state of contemplation. Many of his canvases were thus odes to the joyful poetry of "murmuring love" and "throbbing hearts."

The loneliness of Mansoor's oval-faced lovers in these paintings is complemented by the loneliness of the round moon, which with its perennial presence moodily showers its silver light on the lovers. These moon-faced girls gaze at the moon and the moon tenderly gazes back at them. The parallel of the moon-faced girl and the round moon is painted in various combinations to create different emotional and aesthetic effects. The eyes and other features are juxtaposed in various manners to create orchestration of moods, which elaborate these effects.

Mansoor's choice of subject may seem sentimental, but he seldom lets it degenerate into romantic effusion. The sensuous charms are restrained and the mood remains one of thoughtful contemplation. In his later works, love-torn girls appear a little stupefied. Their clear, shining eyes become blurred and uncertain. One feels that the steady vision of the moon-faced beauties have been tainted by an awareness of reality. Contrary to these works, his later paintings were executed in a perfunctory manner. They provide us with an escape into the world of colours where we are left with colourful dolls to toy with or, in more recent canvases, in words of critic, presented with, "female faces, musicians, and more stylised, cubistic and cute faces", which hide, "behind adorning textures or simply stare hard, unadorned in spontaneously produced.....images".²

Jamil Naqsh (Born-1937)

Like Mansoor, Jamil Naqsh has a fixation with one subject, and one theme—a girl and a pigeon—conceived by him, in an endless variety of exciting ways. The aesthetic unity and formal relationship that he contrives between his pigeons and his women, is fascinating. The pigeon and the woman do not merely complement each other. Sometimes, the two elements are joined together to make a striking pattern; or they are defined with an inci-



B-30. SAEED AKHTAR, *Perin Cooper*, 1966, oil on canvas, private collection

sive line which cuts into thick paint to render the point with force and clarity. On other occasions, the figures are fragmented into crisp overlapping segments, which are shuffled and re-shuffled into an unending variety of arrangements with the skill of a juggler. The inexhaustible sense of colour and natural sense of design, enable the artist to add charm and beauty to his work.

Some of Jamil Naqsh's paintings of the mid-sixties have a stark simplicity. His ochres, yellows and grades of



B-31. MANSUR AYE, *Untitled*, 1968, oil on canvas, private collection



40. NASEEM HAFEEZ QAZI, *The Old Man*, 1984, oil on board, 102 x 48 cm, private collection

browns, the striking directness but bareness of his forms, are close in spirit and character to archaic sculpture and painting. But the similarity, however strong, is superficial. His motley colours and shapes, his sense of form and design, and the manner in which he weaves the plastic elements into an organic unity, are modern in sensitivity and conception.

His recent paintings have become even more formalistic. But the colours have mellowed and the contours of his figures have been subdued to create a greater tonal and surface unity. It is delightful to see how he creates a quiet texture on the picture surface by proceeding to build his forms bit by bit. Each brush-stroke is applied on the picture-surface like a stitch of embroidery. Having qualified in miniature painting must have helped. The Mughal artist, for instance, builds up the foliage and shadows, to express texture and volume, through tiny dots. The technique is called, *Purdakh*. Jamil Naqsh is aware of this technique and adopts it to create rich textural and tonal effects.

In choice of subject, Jamil Naqsh is even more adam-

ant than Colin in his commitment to the nude. For decades he has not painted anything else. Painting of the female nude, whatever its finer points to which Sir Kenneth Clarke draws our attention in his most scholarly and persuasive manner is, by and large, one of the decadent strains of western art, both in its content and in its intention. It pampers male chauvinism and provides an artistic excuse to lust for women.

Jamil's nudes, particularly in his drawings and water-colours, are short, stocky and plump, with round bellies, heavy thighs, and small breasts. His women have a striking resemblance to Milliol's Greek peasant women. They have oval faces inset with sparkling eyes and a steady stare. These women in their sensual ambience are, however, closer to Renoir than Milliol. They are meant to be visually savoured and touched, but they are not explicitly erotic like some of the nudes which Bashir Mirza painted in the mid-seventies. Jamil, while expressing the sensual elements of female form in oil, chooses to break them up into abstract sections, which may be further divided and



41. COLIN DAVID, *Punishment*, 1973, oil on board, 183 x 122 cm, Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad

fragmented into smaller components.

Bashir Mirza (Born 1941)

Bashir Mirza as mentioned paints the nude with aggressive eroticism without dilating over aesthetic subtleties of tone and texture. This is especially true of a handful of canvases he brought back from Germany in 1971, in which highly simplified images of young athletic women, stretching their limbs at provocative angles, provide much sensual relishment to the viewer. Even the supposedly more urbane art crowd of Karachi created a "furore" over them, which prompted Bashir Mirza to write,

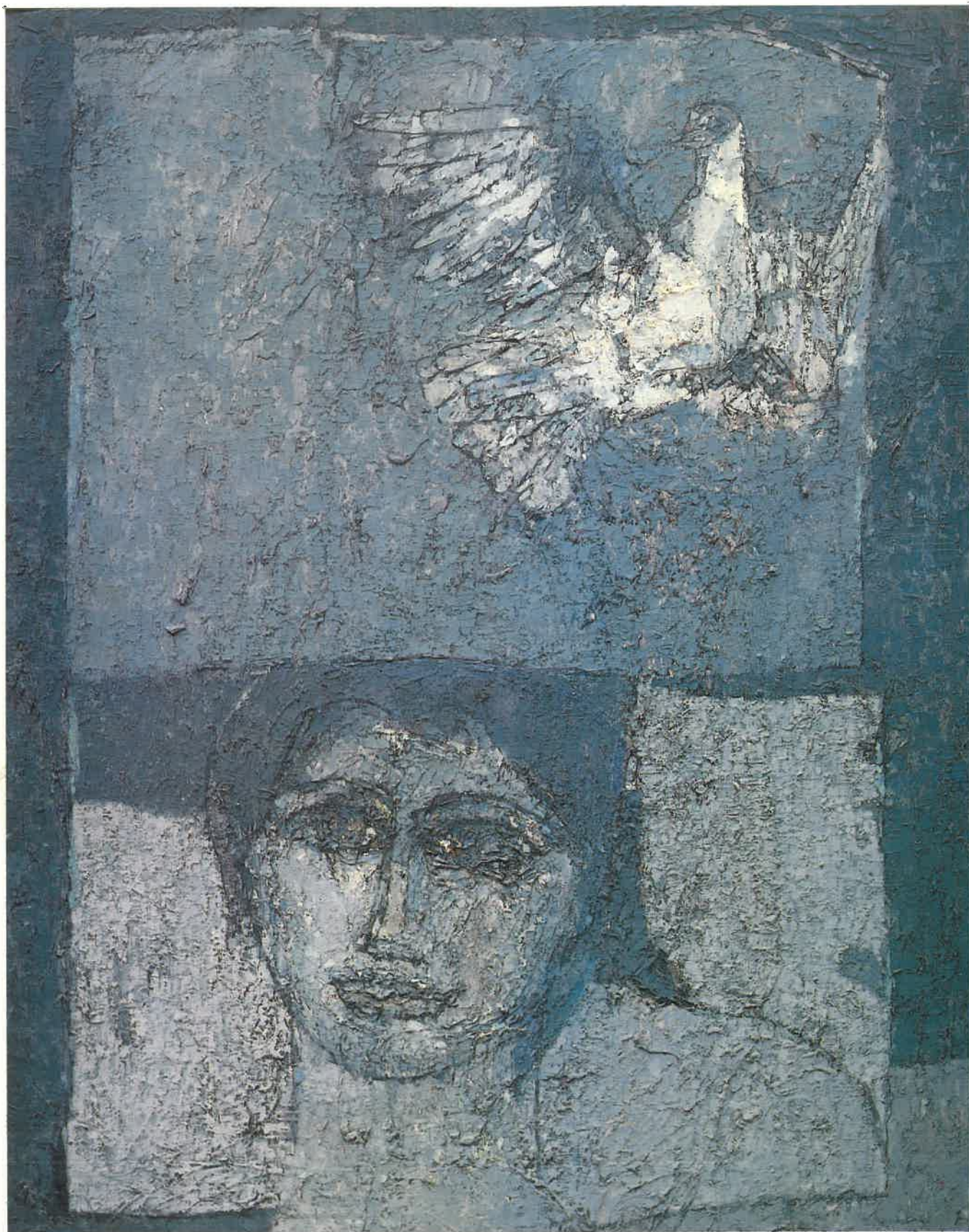
*She came from a far away land,
dressed in German colours,
No inhibitions
stripping in public
She shocked them and
all :... (though deep inside
....they rather fancied her).
But alas,
whispering, blushing
....they turned away
She wouldn't know and
they wouldn't say
Left alone,
Dejected
The poor little lonely girl
has come a long way³*



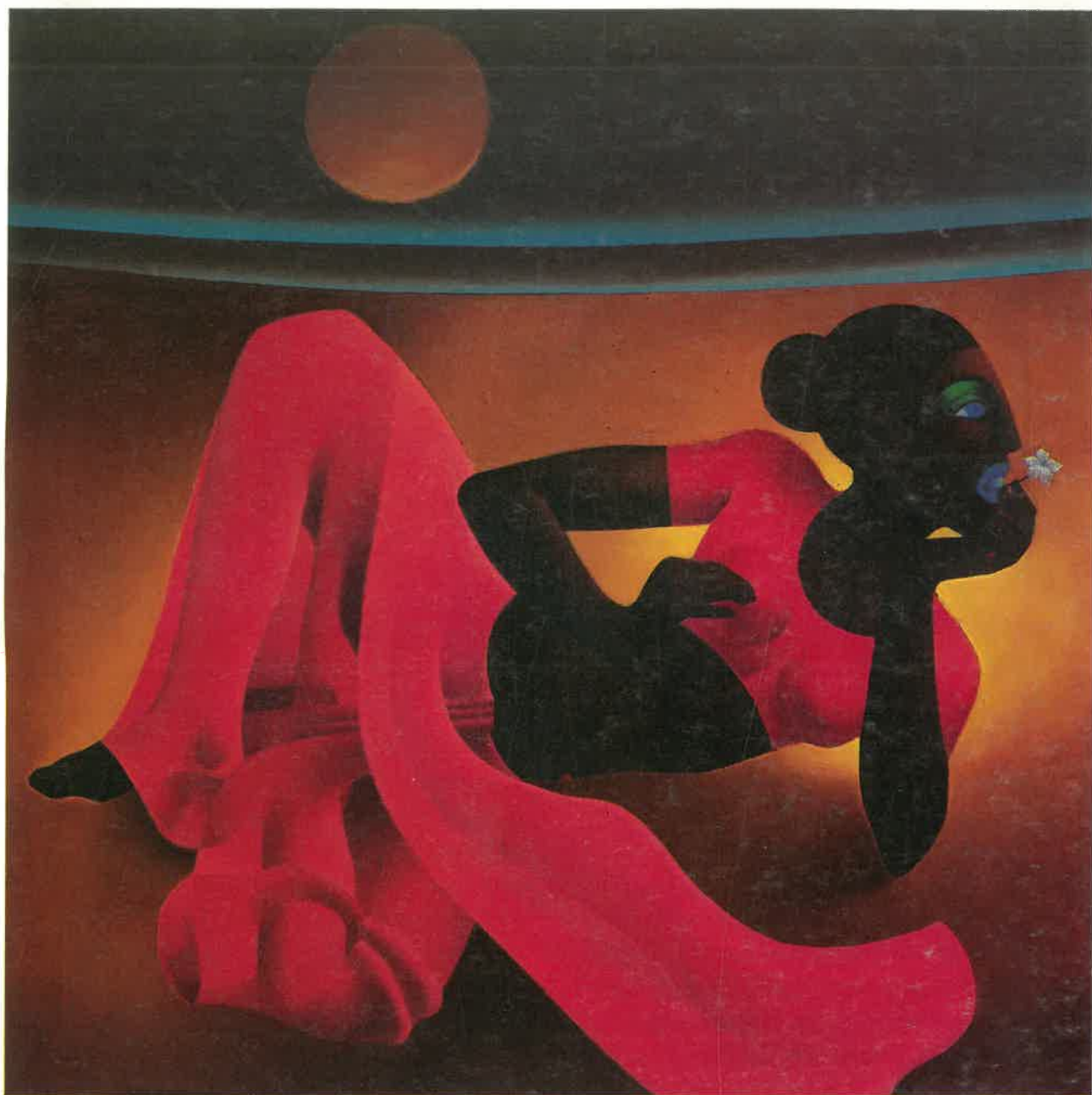
B-32. BEVAN PETMAN, *Dyer Petman*, oil on canvas, collection Shareef Hayat



B-33. JAMEEL NAQSH, *Protest*, 1966, oil on canvas, 34" x 52", collection M. Muzzaffar



42. JAMEEL NAQSH, *Women with Pigeons*, oil on board, 76 x 61 cm, Lahore Museum



43. BASHIR MIRZA, *Dame, Desert, Moon and the Sea* (Lonely Girl Series)

Bashir's German canvases were followed by a group of paintings which he called *The Lonely Girl Series*. She was still dressed in German colours, but the artist draped her scantily in order not to "outrage tender sensibilities".

The Lonely Girls with their lithe bodies, dreamy eyes and pouting mouths, "sensuous as an exotic perfume", are essentially reminiscences of the women the artist confides he has met or known. This group of paintings was followed by *The Flower, Flower Series*, portraying individual women with flowers. These women are at ease and do not provocatively stare at you like the *Lonely Girls*.

In the sixties, when he was young and unsettled, the temper of Bashir's painting was very different. According to a critic he was then, "dealing with ennui of our present

age of expressing a profound Weltschmerz".⁴ According to the artist himself, he was simply "learning to see and interpret things". Bashir has always had a feeling for drawing and most critics agree that his drawings of the period are more expressive than his oils. His studies, portraits of peasant men and women, and allegorical pieces are presented in a dramatic manner. His drawings mostly portray the suffering of oppressed people and the victims of violence and war, by drawing attention to their grossly exaggerated and distorted hands, limbs, and faces contorting and cracking under pain. This phase of his work was succeeded in 1967 by "Abstract Landscape-like Paintings" and after this "light-hearted sally into the realm of abstract art, Bashir Mirza was emboldened to

make deeper forays". In 1969 he held an exhibition called *Compromise*, in which he had made an attempt to arrive at a "compromise" between the formalism of Mondrian and the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollock.⁵ In the eighties, he once again made a 'foray' into abstract painting and produced a series which he called, *Sounds from a Distant Planet*. For Bashir, abstract painting, Amjad Ali reports, "is like loose informal dress put on after a day spent wearing a three piece suit with tightly buttoned collar". This may be so, but Bashir's general pronouncements on the state of modern painting though quite stern are worth pondering over. On one occasion he complained that our art scene has become totally, "commercial oriented" and "the artist's intelligence level is to paint in order to sell". He felt that among most artists, "There is lack of social commitment. There is no historical awareness. Artists do not react to political situations. They are quite content with producing formula painting. The dumber you are, the better you are".

Mansur Rahi (Born 1939)

Although Mansur Rahi has delved in the realm of non-objective painting, he has always preferred his paintings to have a subject and social theme and purpose. Rahi belongs to the generation of artists who graduated from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Dacca, when Zainul Abedin was the principal. The echoes of Zain's painful famine sketches of 1943 can be heard, howsoever faintly, in Rahi's scenes of hunger presented in "the world food crisis" series of 1974. Rahi maintains that art should not be too "esoteric and mysterious" and that one should, "let the artist and the public come half way towards each

other".⁶ His paintings like to draw attention to contemporary events affecting people anywhere in the world-famine, hunger, and war. In his canvases on orphans, and poor neglected children, he transforms their fears into strange unearthly images of beasts and monsters. Rahi is imaginatively innovative in creating his peculiar creatures and forms. Sometimes, torn and sheared limbs and parts may evoke, what a writer calls, a "feeling arising from ancient myths and primordial fears of man". This effect is greatly accentuated by his use of colour which lends a mysterious glow to the painting, creating an impression as though it was emanating from the images and objects themselves.

Rahi adopts the mannerism of Cubism but he has no consistent cerebral interest in it. Cubism conducted a reductive analysis of form into fragmented shapes. For Rahi, it is a convenient and handy manner of presenting his subject and expressing his intentions. The basic parts of the human anatomy are arbitrarily reduced to simple geometrical shapes which are altered and arranged, according to the needs of the picture design. Line is used to stress and delineate form. In canvases which are more abstract, it proceeds with a rhythmic flow, whereas in the more explicit figurative works, it sheds its formality and becomes charged with action, seeking to express and stress muscular energy and tactile form. The hidden side of a figure is sometime, in the mannerism of Cubism, presented by extending or spreading it around. The objects concealed behind forms in the foreground are made visible by making one see through their overlapping planes.

Some of our critics feel at odds with figurative painters, especially the ones who proclaim any kind of social commitment. They may allow an artist to investigate the aesthetic possibilities of human form, but to imbue human form with any kind of social significance or meaning becomes an anathema to them. When in 1976, Rahi returned from the non-objective world of "mists and clouds and amorphous objects and entities artistic" Amjad Ali felt it was "a pity that Rahi did not explore this world a little longer" where, "he could have found new and unexpected worlds of beauty and meaning". As a way of conclusion in his booklet on Rahi, he questions "whether the non-aesthetic value of social themes can co-exist with purist aesthetic values, as conceived in pure abstract art", asking the reader to hold his "judgement in abeyance, while hoping Rahi will succeed in his endeavour".



B-34. BASHIR MIRZA, *Girl with Tulips*, 1984, oil on canvas, 91 x 121 cm, collection M. Fayyaz



B-35. SHAHID SAJJAD, *Figure*, c. 1967, oil on canvas, private collection

Shahid Sajjad (Born 1937)

Shahid Sajjad's desire to capture and express the human form in different attitudes dates back to over three decades. In the sixties when he returned from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, bending over with a loadful of sculpture in wood, he made quite an impression in Karachi which was bubbling with art activities in those days. Most of his works were highly stylised expressing an un-inhibited inspiration from primitive art. Shahid felt particularly drawn towards the classical wood carving of Japan, and the sculpture of the Bantu tribe in central Africa. His simplified podgy wooden torsoes and figures were comfortably poised and well formed. In his reliefs and graphic work there was a much greater emphasis on creating a crisp linear image with a stress on design.

Shahid has ever since persevered to refine forms and seize meaningful gestures of the human figure. Unfortunately official reluctance to patronise sculpture has deprived the artist of opportunities which could have enabled him to fully express himself. A bronze relief, commis-

sioned by the Army's School of Armour at Nowshera, may have helped the artist to master the technique of casting but the work on account of constraints imposed on the artist, is a deviation from his familiar intellectual and aesthetic concerns. In the absence of public patronage Shahid has had to limit himself to modelling and casting small figures and plaques for the connoisseurs.

Rabia Zuberi (Born 1944)

Rabia is another sculpture of note who has persistently attempted to synthesise the human figure in a cubistic manner. It is sad that sculpture has not had the patronage which it deserves. It is a medium through which an artist can endow longer life to his work than any other medium. It can be most appropriately integrated with architecture, and through it an artist can interact with a broad spectrum of viewers right out in the open. I am afraid the mantlepiece or a drawing room table is not a place for sculpture but an apology for it.



44. MANSUR RAHI, *Composition of a Horse-Head in Evening Light*, 1977, oil on canvas, 75 x 90 cm, private collection



Notes

1. Kenneth Clarke, *The Nude*.
2. Introduction to Mansur Aye – *Exhibition Brochure*, Indus Gallery, Karachi-7, November, 1984.
3. This is the revised and censored version reproduced by S. Amjad Ali in his booklet: *Bashir Mirza*, Publisher, Idara Saqafat-e-Pakistan. The original version was first produced in the brochure of his exhibition of paintings of *The Lonely Girl Series* held at Indus Gallery

in December, 1971).

4. Nadir Hussain, *Man With a Mission*. *Outlook*, June 29, 1964).
5. S. Amjad Ali, *Bashir Mirza*. Pub: Idara Saqafat-e-Pakistan, 1984, Islamabad.
6. S. Amjad Ali, *Mansur Rahi, A Socially Conscious Artist*. Pub: Idara Saqafat-e-Pakistan, Islamabad, September, 1985).

New Perspectives

We have seen how abstract art was introduced in Pakistan in the late forties, and how some painters tried to incorporate it in their work.

Abstract art evolved in the west due to the peculiar nature and special conditions of social development. The increasing development of the capitalist mode of production reached a stage where it led to the alienation of human beings, materialisation of human relationships, and fragmentation of human personality. It also led to the isolation and denial of the individual. The individual's isolation, on the one hand, stimulated a powerful self-awareness and subjectivism and, on the other, created a sense of bewilderment and abandon. It was this state of alienation and bewilderment which caused the germination of abstract art.

The introduction, growth and development of abstract art in Pakistan has been caused by social forces of a very different nature. Abstract art in Pakistan is expressive of an overall economic and cultural dependence on the west. We have seen earlier, in a different context, how the colonialists discouraged the local artists from assuming their creative function and patronised them to become copyists and translators. The fundamental problem facing Pakistani artists today is not of mere 'alienation', but that of 'identity'. It was the principal problem for Chughtai, and it remains the principal problem of our modern painter. Pakistani painting, consequently, has to be approached not from the viewpoint of the artist's alienation but from the viewpoint of the artist's ability to forge his 'identity', to come to terms with himself, with his history, culture and social predicament. It is significant to note that many Pakistani painters, in spite of their borrowed forms, have managed to infuse them with indigen-

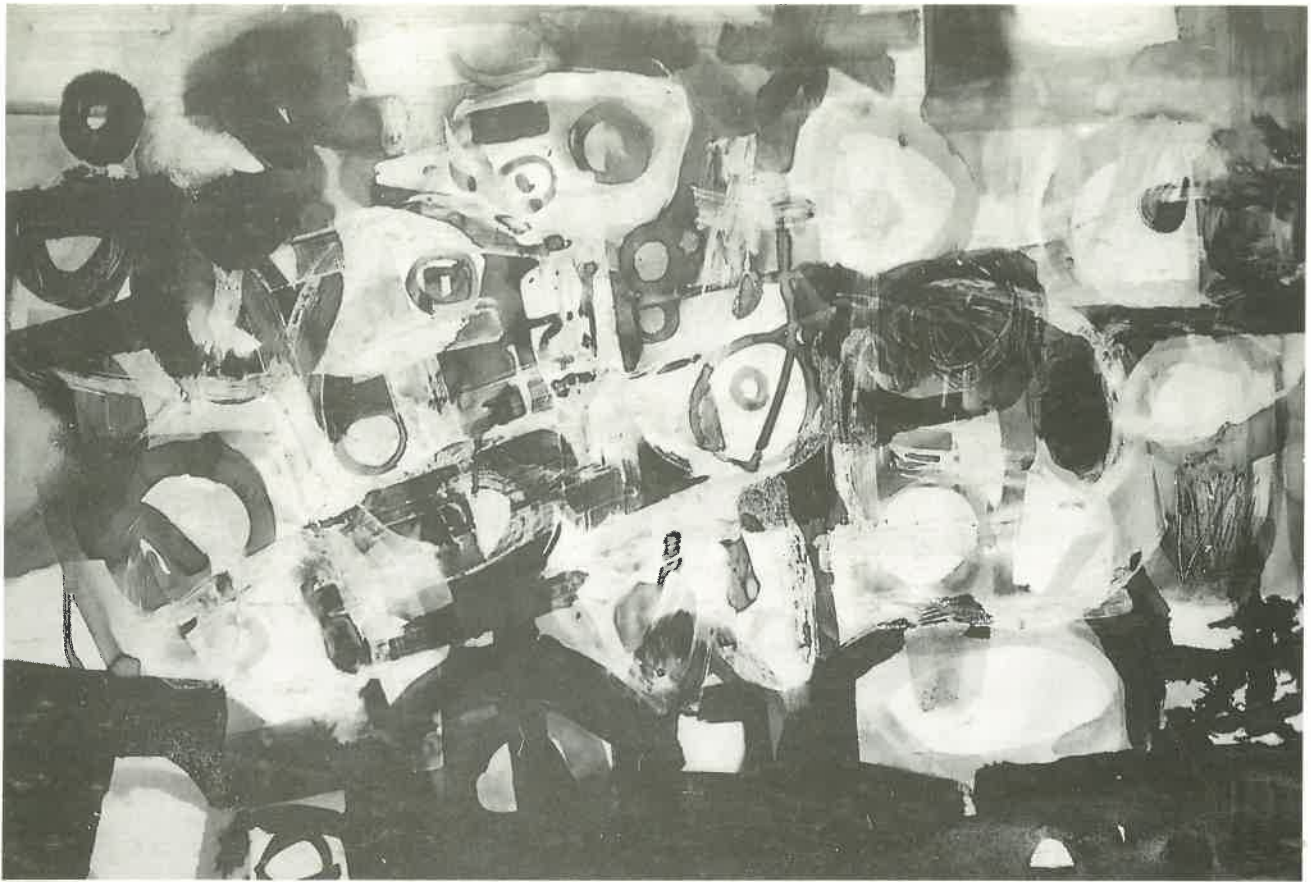
ous content, expressive of their individual experience. This is evident in Shakir Ali's work and in the works of some of his contemporaries discussed in Chapter III. This may also be evident in the work of painters who are presented in this chapter.

Aminul Islam (Born 1931)

Aminul Islam finds inspiration from natural patterns and structures representing primary forms and units of life, biological and microbiological. These organic forms seem to have invaded his work with their totality of growth and decay. While visualising the fascinating growth processes of life in nature, he also tries to suggest those paradoxical forces which produce life and, in turn, threaten to destroy it.

Aminul Islam is primarily a visualiser. The poetic, imaginative power with which he conjures up images, is the key to his emotive response to life and nature. His scientific interest in nature has not only helped him to glean exciting forms and patterns from it, but has also enabled him to travel, in the words of a critic, from "microbiological to phenomenal inspiration".

Aminul Islam's interest in organising space and structure goes back to the period when he was a student at Academia di Bellearti and at Scuolo di Masaico in Florence. His work of this period is strongly influenced by Picasso, especially the classical period in which Picasso has mocked the classical ideals, as found in Greek sculpture and Poussin, by grossly exaggerating them. After 1960, the representational aspect of Aminul Islam's work slowly gave way to an abstract expression. He felt that the representational technique, not merely restricted his range, but imposed on him a discipline of conven-



B-36. AMINUL ISLAM, *Transformation*, 1967, water-colour on paper, 20" x 30", private collection

tions, which were foreign to his immediate task of accomplishing an abstract distillation from nature, in terms of form and colour.

In his early abstract work, colour plays a secondary role, and the main emphasis is on the architectonics of picture-making. The dynamic contrasts of shade and interplay of forms to emphasise space/structure in his pictures, are the striking traits of this period. In his later work, he introduced texture which emphasises the materiality of his forms and lends a richness to his work. These paintings display a calm assurance in expressing space, a

confidence in planning composition, richness of texture, and expressive use of colour. The colour here becomes as important as shape. This is understandable, because the analytical approach has now been replaced by a more emotional one; hence the need of colour to express the complex shades of feelings and emotions. At the same time compositions become more open, and sharp contrasts are subdued. Aminul Islam, in these works, aspires to translate into visual terms, his inner response to outward stimulus. The emphasis thus shifts: from an aesthetic response, to an emotional response to visual reality. In



B-37. DEVDAS CHAKRABORTY, *Desire Symbols*, 1963, oil on canvas, 20" x 42", private collection

either situation, his ability to organise the elements in graphic arrangements remains the chief source from where his paintings derive their power and beauty.

Devdas Chakraborty (Born 1932)

In Dacca, in the late sixties, D. Chakraborty had a great deal in common with Aminul Islam. Both had a mutual interest in space, revealed a similar kind of muted richness in their deep reds, crimsons and blues, and both expressed an emotional temperament. Chakraborty, in his earlier work, quite often painted a frame within a frame, as a device to establish space. While dealing with multiple situations, he sub-divided the canvas into the required number of frames. This not only enabled him to establish interesting space distribution but, at the same time, allowed him to convey simultaneity of time sequence. His paintings of this period, with their predominant shades of black, blue and grey, add a sombre note to his human figures. These sorrowful figures later became abstract forms. Gradually, he also became interested in texture and colour for their own sake. The damp and crumbling buildings of old Dacca took him further away from Aminul Islam, bringing him closer to Kibria's periphery of work.¹

Rummana Saeed (Born 1935)

Rummana Saeed is not interested in texture for its own sake. Her abstractions originally drew their inspiration from the wattle and daub architecture of Thatta in Sindh. The buildings at Thatta are tall box-like structures, rising one on top of the other. These structures display a variety of rhythms through an interplay of planes in the changing light of the day. Rummana has tried to capture this rhythm in her paintings through form and colour. The conscious play of sequence and contrast is vivaciously expressed. In her earlier work, she did not deal with these architectural elements to capture their rhythmic values, but to organise them into interesting arrangements. The given elements were simplified and recomposed in closed compositions, so as to produce a compact design in terms of space and form relationship. The colours were few: yellows, ochres, and browns, reminiscent of the dwellings at Thatta, and were occasionally supported by shades of mauve or cobalt.

Rummana's paintings are almost entirely composed within a vertical and horizontal grid which helps her to create strong linear relationships. The sense of distance

is usually conveyed by including a sizeable chunk of foreground, which guides one's vision into the picture, or by placing the central mass of her painting against a flat background, usually the sky. When she wants to maintain a complete flatness of picture surface, she gives hints of recession by tonal variation.²

Raheel Akbar Javed

Raheel Akbar Javed's work, like Rummana's, is also mostly based on architectural forms and, like her, he seeks to capture their essence in terms of shape, colour and texture. Raheel's work, rich in other aspects, does not possess the rhythmic quality of Rummana's work. Raheel has arrived at abstraction logically from his earlier representational work. While painting city-scapes in the representational style, Raheel found himself more and more interested in the surfaces that he was painting. Allowing one to influence the other, he began to pick up a colour, a surface, an interval, which he repeated in other parts of the canvas until the whole became interlocked.

Raheel's work is usually planned on a smaller scale than Rummana's, but his areas are large and the elements of composition are few. Again, whereas in Rummana texture is incidental, in Raheel it is present in its own right. To enrich surface and produce effects of colour and texture, Raheel makes clever use of transparent or crumpled paper. Usually his decorative surfaces are flat. The sense of space and dimension is suggested by placing one element on top of the other. The composition creates sharp vertical movement of vision which conveys an idea of space to the viewer.

Raheel's later canvases are tremendously colourful. His glowing colours are voluptuously rich and tactile, providing pleasure and visual delight. His stress on colour in these paintings of the mid-seventies, is so strong that the distinction between colour, form and surface is minimal. These rectangular forms of pure colour are so assertive in their bearing that one seeks no external reference. The overlapping rectangles, sometimes glossy, sometimes opaque or transparent, and sometimes translucent in their brilliance, are at complete ease in the radiance which they permeate. Later in the mid-seventies, once again one sees the colours of life, casting their hues on the enamelled brilliance of these paintings. Once again, one can see the abstract rectangular forms transforming into old city walls, adorned with windows and balconies, with horses, *tongas*, *rickshaws* and pedest-



45. RUMANA SAEED, *Composition*, 1963, oil on canvas, 96 x 96 cm, Lahore Arts Council

rians emerging in the foreground. Along with these “reminiscences” of the old city of Lahore, Raheel also produced a series of landscapes. These landscapes however,

unlike the city scapes, do not record anything in particular. For instance, they do not depict a phenomenon in parts, but rather attempt to impressionistically capture the visual essence of the whole in its totality.³

Nighet O’Brien (Born 1938)

The paintings of Nighet O’Brien, better known as Nighet Idrees, paintings are more spontaneous than Raheel’s. Nighet does not attempt to portray broad vistas or dwell over few prominent elements of a landscape. On her canvas, the elements of nature intermingle with the humans to create a complex pictorial relationship. But the human figures lack the human identity. They are rendered in the form of signs which express a nervous disposition. These signs are usually crowded together in the far distance, which make it difficult for the viewer to ascertain the cause and circumstances of their agitated state. The subtle nuances of tones and water-colour effects enhance the mystery and ambiguity of her forms and figures. The meaning of her paintings, consequently, can only be understood in terms of one’s own response to



46. RAHEEL AKBAR JAVED, *At the End of Rainbow There is Another Rainbow*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 86 x 86 cm, Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad



47. NIGHET O'BRIEN, *Sail Boats*, 1985, oil on canvas, 61 x 51 cm, collection Khawaja Naseer ud din

their mood and their total visual effect.

Zubaida Javed (Born 1937)

Zubaida Javed's canvases are calm and placid in comparison with the activity which animates Nighet's work. Zubaida paints landscapes and urban scenes, not to present their appearance but to convey mood and the quintessence of visual experience. Her method and approach are quite simple; either she observes things in her mind and then searches for the subject in life or, conversely, takes a few moments to record a reference, make a study, or plan a layout of a subject which may catch her attention. In the studio, she may spend five to six days changing colours till they conform to her mood and the spirit of the subject, according to her imagination and her aesthetic needs. Zubaida lays considerable emphasis on composition and, while composing her paintings, she likes to concentrate on establishing a strong focus of attention, refraining from distributing or dispersing the elements on the picture-surface. The content of her well-composed works is equally varied, ranging from houses, market places, landscapes, to road builders, boats, houses and



48. ZUBAIDA JAVED, *City Crossing*, oil on canvas, 53 x 78 cm, Pakistan National Council of Arts

alleys at various moments and seasons. Similarly, her palette is equally rich, and varies from silver blues to reds and magentas, which are used to express the mood and spirit of the subject.

Khalid Mehmud (Born 1936)

Khalid Mehmud also paints in a somewhat similar manner, but Khalid likes to draw greater attention to the



B-38. KHALID MEHMUD, *Lahore Street*, 1989, oil on canvas, private collection

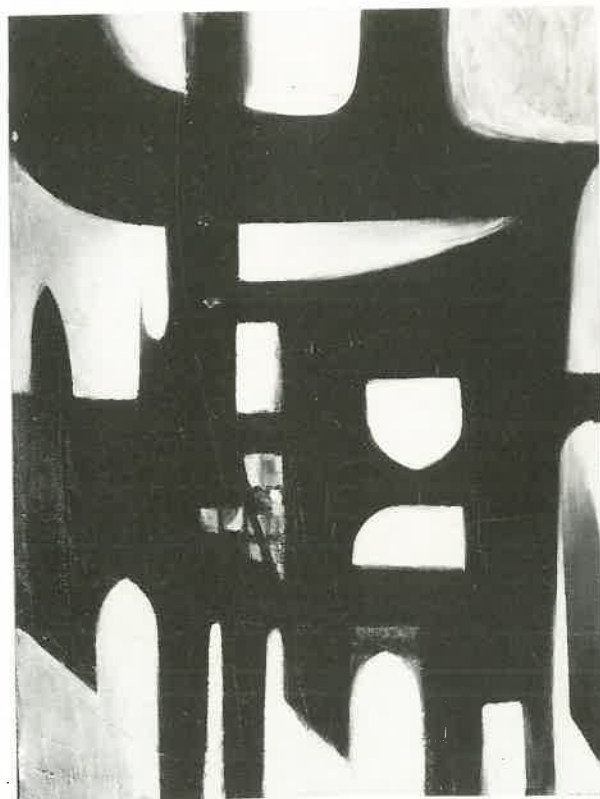
human figures which are expressed in a highly simplified form, smeared on the canvas by strokes of the brush. They are presented either huddled together in groups, or crowding a street against a background of tall buildings.

Ajmal Hussain (Born 1925)

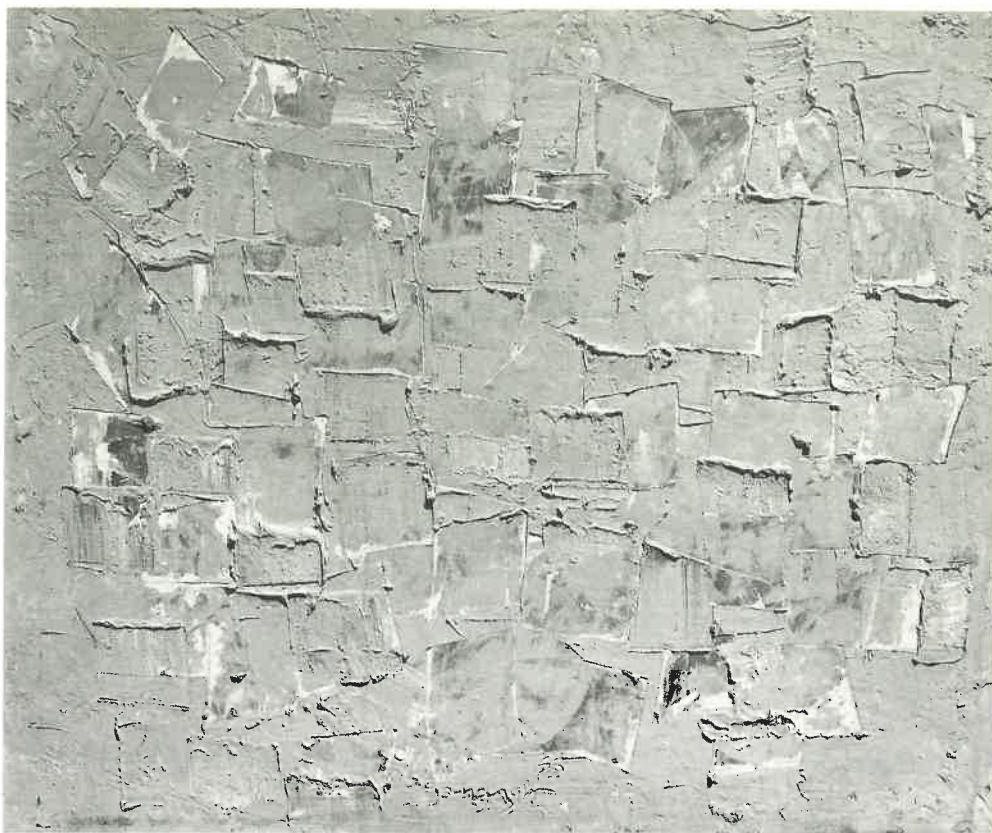
Ajmal Hussain's early abstractions are planned on the same plastic and compositional principles which are found in the works of Raheel and Rummana, but with one fundamental difference. Raheel attempts at creating an aesthetic order by arranging things in an abstract pattern. Ajmal Hussain, on the contrary, tries to express the complexity of experience and moods of nature derived from within. Ajmal's early work comprises of barren flat forms, which provoke an impact through line and pattern. Ajmal broke away from this bold representational style to evolve a new method by which he could impart to his figures, structure and dimension. The colours, which had hitherto received little attention, became a potent element in his painting. His strong sense of design and bias for pattern, however, continued to guide his work.

In these paintings Ajmal, like Rummana, has tried to capture, in terms of light, shade and mass, the essential character of his urban habitat. Most of his paintings of this period are executed within a horizontal-perpendicular arrangement. But whereas in Rummana the arrangement merely provides a term of reference, in Ajmal Hussain, especially in his paintings of the sixties, it is employed to express the dynamic character of the modern metropolis; consequently, the subtle horizontal perpendicular arrangement transforms into a massive network of screeching girders. These jutting black forms, supported by colour and light effects, exert a strong visual impact and establish the emotional mood of the picture.

Ajmal's interest in line as a vehicle through which he manipulates ideas and emotions, is partly inherited from his early work, and partly the outcome of his study of Kline and Japanese calligraphy. Kline's magical pertinency and the sense of brevity also imbibed from Japanese art, have left their mark on his work. The abstract shapes and forms that appear in his canvases are, however, mainly derived from within. The subjective treatment of form, line and colour, regardless of their descriptive value, has given Ajmal the freedom to probe into the deep recesses of emotional experience. This has brought the painter closer to his belief, that, "painting



B-39. AJMAL HUSSAIN, *Inspirational*, c 1967, oil on canvas, 41" x 31", private collection



B-40. SYED JEHANGIR, *Bouquet*, 1967, oil on canvas, 35" x 35", private collection

must tell something, evoke certain emotions, convey the incommunicable, portray the invisible, even describe the inscrutable". This would be a gargantuan undertaking by any painter, anywhere. One, however, wonders whether Ajmal's definition of the function of painting is tenable, if applied to his own work. Ajmal painted quite actively in the sixties, followed by a long gap of silence. Recently, his paintings have appeared on the scene once again. Most of these are highly simplified figurative works rendered in flat colours. In their own way, they are quite charming and innocent. More recently, he has produced some abstract pieces with a rather intriguing symbolism which is at a striking variance with his figurative works.

Syed Jehangir (Born 1935)

Syed Jehangir would have perhaps endorsed Ajmal's statement on the definition of painting; however, unlike Ajmal's paintings of the sixties, which often display powerful notes of movement and emotive flourish, Jehangir's painting is on a lower key. Instead of the dramatic bold gestures, there are in him soft notes of melody. His earlier work was, however, considerably more robust. Time apparently "slowly erased the sharp edges of passion" and he settled down to a more quiet and meditative form of expression. His paintings are indeed conceived as

melodies in praise of the colours and moods of nature. The idiom which he has adopted is subjective and personal. To give visual shape to his experience, Jehangir creates an abstract orchestration of colour that is in harmony with the central idea of his experience.

Abdur Razzaque (Born 1932)

Abdur Razzaque conveys a greater sensual appreciation of life than either Ajmal or Jehangir. Razzaque's paintings can be termed as echoes of the visual worlds but, unlike the works of Ajmal and Jehangir, they are not thought-provoking.

Razzaque's paintings consist of an assemblage of images and forms which may be either vague and evasive, or sharp and fragmented, but always pregnant with sultry associations of the verdant landscape of Bengal. His forms have a languorous heaviness of the rain-drenched foliage, and his shades of colours are akin to the exotic markings of tropical birds and butterflies. The notes of movement and light which imbue his forms and colours seem inspired by his perception of the sky which is in an everchanging state there.

Lubna Agha

Lubna Agha developed her representational approach



B-41. ABDUL RAZZAQUE, *Forms and Colours*, 1967, oil on canvas, 41" x 39", private collection

to semi-abstract, and then on to a more complex and mature style, in a relatively shorter period of time. At a cursory glance, her canvases display a configuration of colours on an expanse of chaste white. Occasionally, pastel shades are encouraged to cast their shadow on this white expanse to create colour cadences, which help to enliven the surface and lend dimension and perspective to the painting. A closer look reveals that her configuration of bulbous and "hopping forms" have an oblique sexual reference. These forms are organic and biological. Many of her images can be associated with male and female organs. The artist, however, does not contrive to produce effects which are sexually provocative. What seems to interest her is not sex, but the power of sexuality. For her, sex is a form of energy, through which she tries to express her state of mind and feelings.

Most of her paintings, according to Akbar Naqvi, "throb with a dull ache and there is no scope for the frenzy of deep passion. One hears echoes from memory, not the dark reverberation of the unconscious". Some critics

have cautioned against the inclination to discover symbolic or sexual overtones in Lubna's paintings. Ali Imam, for instance, asserts that her forms are purely non-figurative, and that her colour configurations have to be seen in their "dynamic space relationship".⁴ Our response to her work, however, is not entirely aesthetic. Her paintings would lose much of their meaning and intensity if approached from a purely formal viewpoint. It is really, in the words of Akbar Naqvi, her ability "to give shape and body to the secrets of the self" that commands one's interest.

In the eighties, while Lubna was living in the United States with her second husband, she realised that "she could not continue to ignore drawing and painting the human form, the people and (her) feelings related to the outside world". The paintings of this period, the artist informs us, represents her "confusion, inner turmoil and dissatisfaction resulting from separation of our spiritual and material selves". In these works, she relies on her intuitive and subjective observations, evolving a language



49. LUBNA AGHA, *Composition*, 1978, oil on canvas, 51 x 46 cm, collection Mohammad Fayyaz

and symbols to express her hopes and despair. For instance, the newborn child, trees, plants, eggs, and roots are positive images representing growth and life. The image of a falling figure, on the other hand, represents in the words of Lubna, "my inability to determine my own place in the scheme of this universe" What do the

superimposed figures represent? Passion and denial, or love and fulfilment? The meaning of her many forms and images is not obvious which, in fact, enhances the viewer's participation. Her forms can be sexually quite suggestive which has always been a source of strength for her work.⁵

Notes

1. See Chapter X for Kibria.
2. Rumana left Pakistan to settle abroad at the end of the sixties.
3. Raheel has not exhibited in Pakistan ever since he proceeded to U.S. in 1973.
4. Akbar Naqvi, *Lubna Yousaf—An Introduction*, September, 1974.
5. Lubna Agha. *Exhibition Brochure*, Publisher: Indus Gallery July, 1986.

Reality Recedes

The pictorial investigation of de Buffet and others have shown that old walls and inscriptions are significant architecturally, or in terms of communication. Apparently meaningless patches and partially effaced inscriptions, or smudged indecipherable passages of graffiti have a meaningful reality of their own. The peculiar reality of the written communication, combined with the curiosity of the viewer, gives visual power to pictures that are based on these elements.

Among the painters who have been preoccupied with the aesthetic potential of weathered walls and ancient inscriptions, the works of Muhammad Kibria and Iqbal Geoffrey are of special significance. The names of Zahoorul Akhlaque and Abdul Basit, too, may be included; however, their approach is not consistent with the general practice in this field.

Muhammad Kibria (Born 1929)

Muhammad Kibria, is one of the leading exponents of non-figurative painting. His work is subtle and full of what is loosely termed as, "painterly qualities". His eye for tone, sensitive use of texture, and economy of means lend significance to his canvases. Whether Kibria is painting, or etching, or working on the litho stone, he remains within the limits of the medium. The potentiality of each medium is, however, exploited to its maximum advantage. This conscious self-restraint in order to plan and organise his work within the set boundaries has forced him to experiment, and to discover new possibilities. While engaged in experiments, Kibria does not lose sight of his creative purpose. Consequently, he rarely resorts to slick effects that can sometime be accidentally achieved. Even where the accidents are part of expression, they

seem to have been consciously encouraged and aesthetically anticipated.

Kibria's painting, when he left the Calcutta College of Arts, was realistic, which was subsequently modified by the influence of indigenous sculpture. The rhythmic values of the classical sculpture and study of Modigliani, reinforced his expression by removing superfluous elements from his style. To begin with, his work became flat and two-dimensional, with lyrical overtones. In due course, these decorative flat forms became more organic. The feeling for texture also became more noticeable. The basic approach, nevertheless, remained decorative.

Kibria's inquiry into the abstract qualities of line, colour and texture became more persistent after this stage. His figures which were already approaching fossilization were further encrusted with texture, leaving behind only faint traces of their original self. The shift from the image to the basic grammar of painting put him in a convenient position to capture the intangible forces, which were now his focal interest. These forces could emanate from his response to a meaningless texture of earth, an incidental scratching on a wall, shades of atmosphere, or effects of light. Quite often, more than one of these elements find their way into a single picture. Sometimes, encrusted layers of bacterial growth, humid soil surfaces, graphite scratchings, shadows of rich tropical foliage and elusive light effects intermingle in a single work.

Kibria's work of the late sixties is noticeable for its artistic restraint. In the early sixties, he was creating striking individualised forms, assertive, demanding, and proudly conscious of their own presence. One is forced to accept the stark reality of these brazen forms, even when they violate one's aesthetic sense. Kibria's work of the



50. MUHAMMAD KIBRIA, *Painting in Grey-Green*, 1964, oil on board, 65 x 65 cm, collection Shahida and Iqbal Saigol

late sixties is even more esoteric, where he tries to seek authority within himself alone.

Iqbal Jafree (Born 1939)

The subtle velvet touch of Kibria is strongly set off by Iqbal Jafree's stylistic gusto. Whereas temperamentally Kibria is quiet and orderly, Jafree is an eccentric given to polemical outbursts/

Iqbal Jafree, who has mostly painted in Europe and the U.S.A., escapes national or regional origins. He employs an idiom, which combines the pictorial investigation into aesthetic potentialities of weathered walls and ancient inscriptions of the west, with Muslim callig-

raphy. In evolving this idiom, his efforts were considerably facilitated by the general tendency of the American and European painters after 1950 to borrow motifs and technical procedures from oriental art. It was believed that there was a very close link between the modern art and oriental calligraphy. This provided Jafree with the crucial link with western painting. An important distinction, however, must be made between Jafree's aim and the aim of these western artists. When de Buffet writes on the wall, or when Tobey makes a delicate pattern with his "white writing", or when Pollock "drips" and winds "lariats of paints", these painters are not trying to say anything in particular, and the viewer can interpret them as

he likes. The procedure with Jafree is the same, but the intentions are different. His aim is to "integrate modern art into a traditional structure of belief", which he achieves mainly through the use of symbols and images.

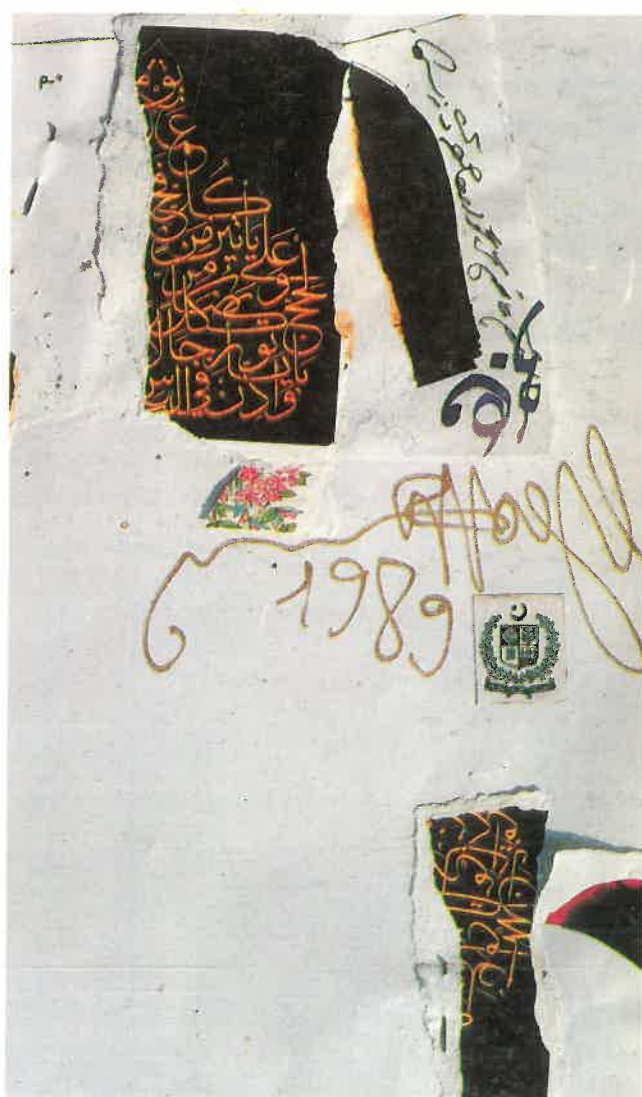
For instance, one of the recurring calligraphic form in Jafree's paintings is a *Mandala*, a square or a circular form which supposedly becomes charged with superhuman power when contemplated upon by a devotee, transporting him to a higher realm of spiritual experience. All this apparently adds to the communicative potency of his symbols and enhances the meaning and impact of his

paintings. Other forms and shapes, which do not have symbolic or hypnotic value, are derived from hieroglyphic forms and traditional motifs. But in the case of Jafree, one is advised not to hurry to any hasty conclusions, because his symbols and forms have intellectual and emotional complexity which defy clear-cut definitions.

Unlike Kibria, Jafree's paintings have a strong intellectual bias. Hence it is fruitful, at times, to consider the titles of his paintings, which are odd but are not without meaning. Titles are deliberately employed by the artist as "discreet clues to vocalise a phenomenon". The title pro-



51 IQBAL JAFREE, *Untitled*, 1989, mixed media



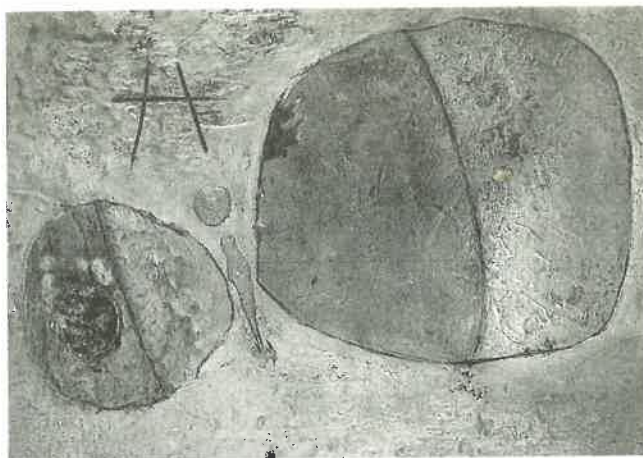
52 IQBAL JAFREE, *Untitled*, 1989, mixed media, private collection

vides a *modus operandi*, by which one can be led into the secrets of the abstract phenomenon that he has created on the canvas. The closeness of calligraphy to Jafree's work has been suggested, but it must be mentioned that calligraphy appears in Jafree's work, not as an element of conscious beauty, but as a guiding line for his shapes and forms. His paintings are small in scale, richly textured, glowing with the muted lustre of his colours. The dramatic structural black and white of Kline, the sequential recording suggested by Pollock's drip technique, exploitation of accident and chance, the peculiar reality of written (often indecipherable) communication have all been incorporated in his paintings.

Iqbal Jafree, who stopped painting in 1967, came back to Pakistan in 1986 to hold one exhibition each at Karachi and Lahore. These exhibits comprised of sculpture, paintings, collage and "objects" created from bits and pieces collected from waste. Compared to the earlier period, these works have acquired an objective form and meaning. Complex and highly subjective forms and symbols which were supposed to have psychologically, or spiritually, moved the viewer are now replaced by works which strive to strike at the outdated and false cultural, spiritual, social and aesthetic values of the viewer and the establishment.

Abdul Basit (Born 1935)

The early works of Abdul Basit and Zahoor ul Akhlaque (born 1941), reveal a candid preoccupation with scratchings and rough accidental patchwork on old surfaces, but they are less vigorous and consistent than

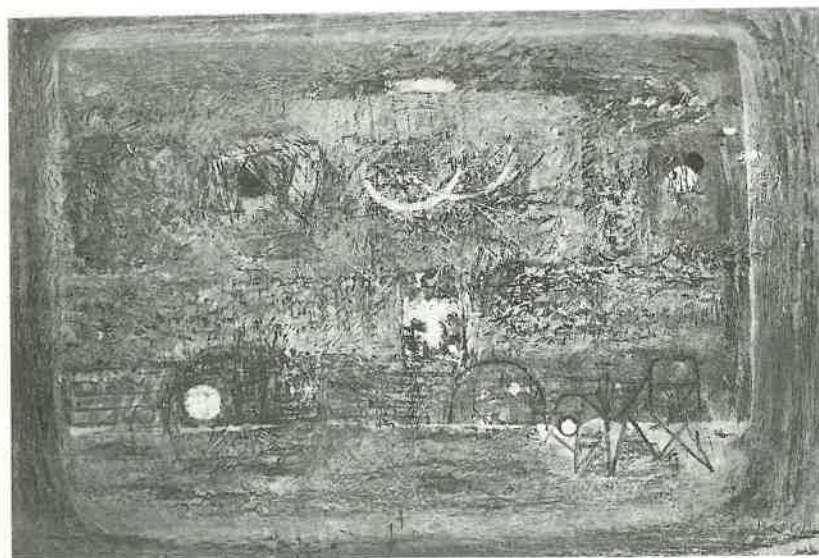


B-42. IQBAL JAFREE, *Truth*, 1963

the works of Kibria and Jafree. Their approach is primarily decorative and their interest in walls was relatively brief. The peace and quiet of Basit's flat decorative surfaces, rich with a gentle coating of texture, arbitrarily derived from old walls, were soon broken by ripples of movement which have since acquired a force and momentum.

Zahoor ul Akhlaque (Born 1941)

A different kind of movement, more lyrical in character, has in a similar manner come to the forefront of Zahoor's work. The well-kneaded textures and decorative surface elements are animated by calligraphic strokes, or a maze of meandering lines. This check-work of lines is a kind of "signature pattern", which is evolved spontaneously. This intuitive and spontaneous manner of working, reminds one of the wood carvers of Swat. These Swati craftsmen work in an arbitrary fashion. They

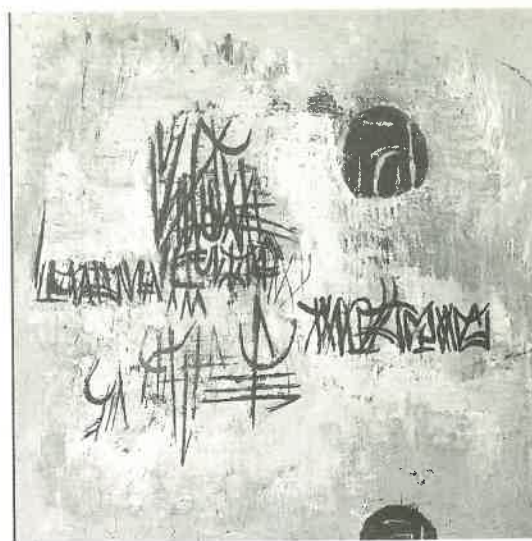


B-43. ABDUL BASIT, *Faces of Moon*, 1967, oil on board, 24" x 36", private collection

take a plank of pinewood and carve geometrical and floral patterns without tracing any design on it. Since the total design evolves spontaneously, without a conscious plan, every form and pattern is unique. Yet there is a unity of design which is achieved through the harmonious flow of linear movement. This is almost exactly how Zahoor proceeds to work on his canvas. His form and patterns, however, have no connection with the outside world.

Zahoor's work has always been pictorially striking. His paintings are usually well planned and neatly executed. This perhaps is best illustrated by his paintings and graphics of the mid-sixties. In these paintings, Zahoor adopts a very simple method of arranging his forms in a charming and provocative fashion. The composition is derived from the title pages of ancient manuscripts, where the illumination is usually set off-centre on the right side of the title page. Zahoor, while following this procedure, paints an empty page with the traditional rectangular border. The empty page is then usually filled with some nuances of calligraphy. Sometimes, the calligraphic lines casually crawl across the decorative border to the outer rectangle of the canvas.

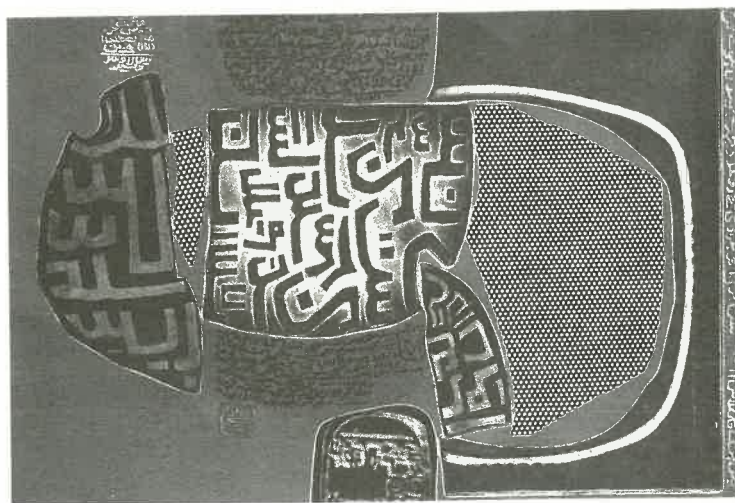
In some of his later compositions, the nuances of calligraphy are replaced by images which are given a decorative treatment. One of his recurring images has been that of the atomic mushroom, by which Zahoor attempts to condemn wars and violence and wishes to draw the viewer's attention to the aggressive and vicious nature of imperialism, which is the source of wars in modern times. But the artist presents the image in a formal setting and allows his concern for pictorial form to subdue its menacing nature. The rising cloud of fire is reduced to a decorative



B-44. ZAHOOR UL AKHLAQUE, *Composition*, 1966, oil on canvas, 37" x 37", collection Jameel Naqsh

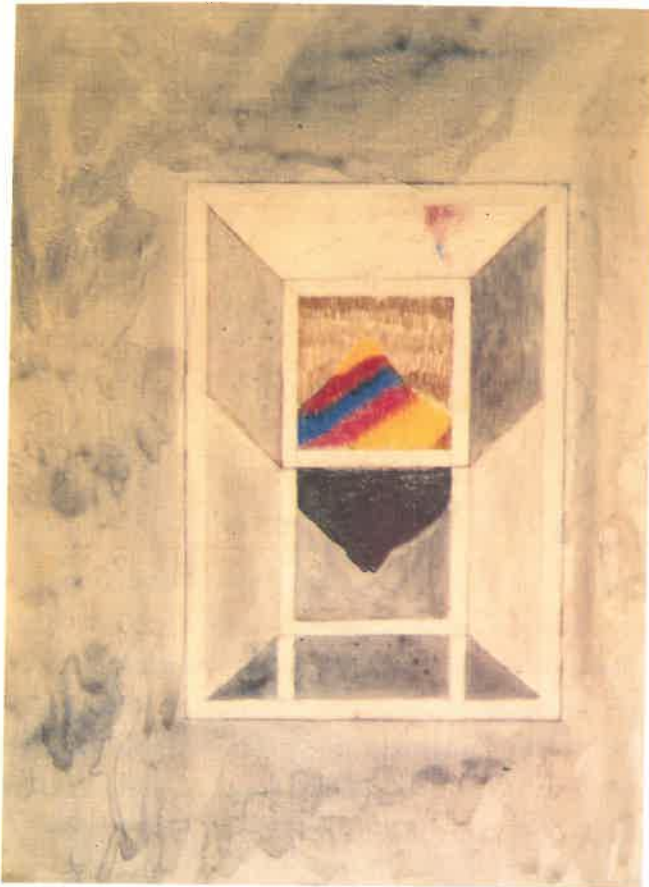
pattern. Even in other works, Zahoor's formal approach and predilection for aesthetic surface effects restrain him from expressing his meaning and intentions with greater clarity. This, according to some critics, justifies the cerebral nature and subjective complexity of the artist's work. It may be so, but at the same time if *The Unidentified Objects*—the title given to a series of his paintings—were brought into a clearer focus, it could enhance their meaning without necessarily detracting from their aesthetic significance.¹

Rasheed A. Arshad (Born 1937), **Ahmed Khan** (Born 1939) and **Maqsood Ali** (Born 1935) have also, in their own characteristic manner, tried to employ aesthetic conventions which depend on exploiting textures and inscriptions. Ahmed Khan prefers to compose his forms and images in crisp compositions, Rasheed, on the con-



B-45. AHMED KHAN, *Talisman*, 1967, mono-print, private collection

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53 ZAHOOR UL AKHLAQUE, *Untitled*, 1990, Acrylic on wood, 10" x 15", private collection



54. RASHEED A. ARSHAD, *Untitled*, 1973, oil on canvas, 76 x 60 cm, Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad

trary, likes to delve deeper. His paintings are almost entirely based on elements of calligraphy which are sensitively integrated with colour and texture, to create an aesthetically rich abstractions. Maqsood approaches his canvases cautiously with considerable deference to subtle effects of tone and texture. While many of the works are aesthetically appealing their meaning remains rather obscure.

Kamil Khan Mumtaz (Born 1940)

At the beginning of the sixties, Kamil Khan Mumtaz, now an architect by profession confined himself to the pure abstract pictorial value of form, colour, line and rhythm. A process of internal reasoning led him to the realisation that every product of human effort contains an expression of that man's total situation, and that one function of art is to record the evolution of man through the expression of his particular location in time and place.

Inevitably, this led to the process of searching for the most possible powerful statement. Kamil wanted to overwhelm his audience through his paintings which were an externalisation of his inner turmoil. He wanted painting to overpower visually and emotionally, as he had been overwhelmed by his own experience. This desire automatically led him to a study of Tachism, abstract expressionism, and action painting: The gradual elimination of superficial elements resulted in the dominance of a single all-pervading black form. These forms, which are derived from traditional calligraphy, seem to fill and expand beyond the confines of the canvas and make a powerful impact on the viewer. This striking imagery of line is not merely bold, but simple and sensitive. Later, Kamil began to look inwards to explore himself. In the process, he completely withdrew into a shell, but then something suddenly and unexpectedly pulled him out and the full spectrum of the colours and the smells of nature burst upon his vision.²

Ismail Gulgee (Born 1926)

Two decades ago, one felt that although the paintings of Ismail Gulgee expressed greater ardour and tumult, they were less coherently constructed than Kamil Khan's works. Often in the process of overwhelming the viewer, Gulgee lost his own balance. His extravagant use of colour and his dramatic flourish in the treatment of elements, often lent a shallow feeling to his canvases. Most of his work of this period remain wanting in form and



55. ISMAIL GULGEE, *Composition*, 1984, oil on canvas, 91 x 121 cm, collection Mohammad Fayyaz

genuine emotional verve.

In the seventies, however, the rather garish colours and slick treatment of calligraphic forms transformed into exquisite calligraphic rhythms and decorative harmonies, which seem to burst the confines of his picture frame. This effect is particularly startling in his large canvases, where one sees constellations of colourful dots and patches, combined with nebulous clouds of different hues to form heavens which are set in motion by the artist's emotions. Each part of the canvas is painted with loving care, each brush-stroke is aware of itself, every impression is infused with light, which makes the picture surface vibrate with a transcendental glow. In the other canvases, where the approach is less subjective, calligraphic forms are created which immediately seize one's physical and imaginative faculties by confronting the viewer with their dynamic presence.

Gulgee's work seems so rich and precious that one cannot help associating it with a treasure. The use of gold-leaf, beads of paint, and pieces of glass intensifies this effect. Professor Sajjad Haider aptly described one of

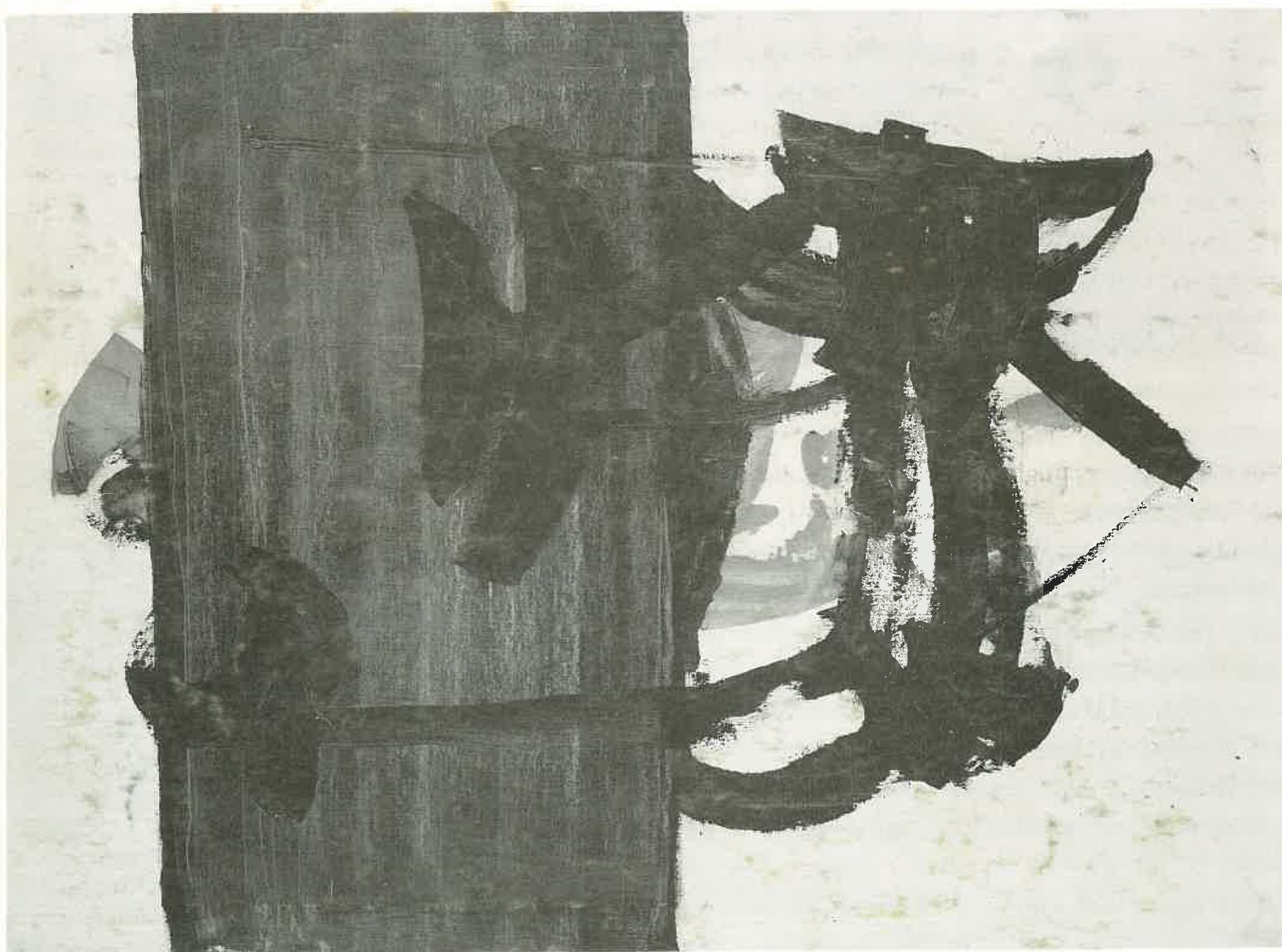
his works as, a "grand larceny". Gulgee's paintings are essentially fantasies. But they seem to enhance self awareness, inspire hope and impart joy by stimulating our sense of beauty and rhythm. These are not esoteric paint-



56. ISMAIL GULGEE, *Composition*, 1971, oil on canvas, 20" x 22", collection Shehla and Tariq Saigol

ings where the viewer is often consciously excluded by the artist. Gulgee, while painting, wants to carry the viewer along by appealing to his emotional and sensual faculties. This is what makes Gulgee a serious painter, different from many of his contemporary 'moderns' who are perpetually striving to produce something 'different'

or reshuffling empty old forms to deal a new hand. But regardless of the failings of his contemporaries, Gulgee's world view is idealistic. It is a world which is harmonious and beautiful, where evil and suffering cannot cast their poisonous and dense shadow; but it is a world which is remote from our complex human existence.



B-46. KAMIL KHAN MUMTAZ, *Painting*, 1964, oil on canvas, 92 x 123 cm, Lahore Arts Council

Notes

1. Further comments on his work see chapter XI.
2. Kamil has stopped painting since the mid-seventies and devotes

himself entirely to architecture.

chaic styles, and uncritically submit to popular demands. For instance, miniature painting which once expressed the life and ideas of its time, has today become a mere curiosity, patronised by antiquarians and tourists. The "oriental paintings" of **Hajra Mansur** (Born 1946), which express a pensive mood with water-colour washes, are creative in terms of rhythmic design but lack a modern vision.

The miniatures of **Salahuddin** (Born 1939) indeed depict his mastery over the traditional techniques, command over line, and a steady hand in filling small details, but all of his work is confined to the established themes and conventions.

Khalid Saeed Butt (Born 1950) is also regarded a master of miniature painting but unlike most other artists in this field, he at least attempts to create his own compositions.

Bashir Ahmed (Born 1953) has also undergone the discipline required of a miniature painter. He has made bolder attempt to break through the conventional format in order to express the 'miniature' in terms of tone and new materials rather than surface decoration. Some people are of the view that this attempt to fill old bottles with new wine is part of a wider search for one's roots.

Similarly, **Najmi Sura** (Born 1951) displays imaginative resourcefulness in exploiting the colours, forms, and patterns of Pahari and Rajput miniatures. She revels in colour and her canvases are playfully executed, having a striking effect on the viewer. Sura seems to have a contemporary sensibility but she has never made an attempt



58. NAJMI SUR, *Untitled, C. 1986*, oil on canvas, private collection

to assemble elements from her own time.

Laila Shahzada, in dealing with the past, ventures into the dark recesses from where she recovers, in the words of a critic, her "vivid and distinctive forms", peculiar to her individual vision. Most of her forms are of archaeological nature. *The Courtesan*, the *Bearded Noble*, and the powerful lusty bull of the Indus Valley Civilisation, as well as Buddha from Gandhara, boldly find their way into her canvases.

Mansoor Hassan, like Laila, is also imaginatively drawn towards ancient civilisations. Since 1974 she has lived abroad, mostly in the U.S.A. In 1983 she had an op-



59. LAILA SHEHZADA, *The Jewels of (Taxila) Buddha*, oil on canvas, 36" x 72", private collection



60. MANSOORA HASSAN, *Lahore Silhouettes*, 1987, mono-print, 28" x 36", private collection.

portunity to travel in South America, while her husband was posted in Bolivia. She is a modern painter who uses a contemporary idiom to assemble her images and forms, which have been borrowed from cultures as far and apart as Tiwananku, Alhambra, and Gandhara. In many of her recent works, iconography and architecture of the pagan civilisations of Bolivia and Peru consummate with elements of Moorish and Ottoman calligraphy and arabesque. These are sometimes artistically blended with images from the Buddhist Civilisation of Gandhara.

Fortunately, her images and motifs, cleverly extracted from widely distant cultures, do not embarrass each other. On the contrary, they seem to accentuate and complement each other's presence, underlining the essential human spirit and creative endeavour common to the cultures of all civilisations. The effect of some of her monoprints is evocative, making one conscious of yesterday, of the passing of time, of mutability and change. Among her works which reveal this particular frame of mind, the images of Lahore, her home town, are more expressive. The old and familiar buildings and monuments of this old city, conjure up phantom-like images from the past, creating a much deeper impression than some of the aesthetically better crafted works.

It is interesting to observe in **Nahid Ali** (Born 1947), a shift from her non-figurative compositions to paintings which are named after the richly carved Chauhankandi Tombs. In her works, she enjoys deriving aesthetic pleasure from the visual aspect of the textures and designs of old stone carvings but refrains from touching upon the theme of death. These paintings explore form, colour and texture, and try to integrate traditional motifs in fresh combinations. But she still regards abstract to be more concrete than the objective, because according to her "it incorporates and transmits the essence of reality". Ac-

cording to her, "Symbols, are the things that stay...with their help we can present a world view and bridge the distance between our past and present."⁴

Nahid's earlier works were built on pure elements, where she seldom employed motifs. Her later works express greater feelings. She is a natural painter who likes to make her point forcefully. She seems to take pleasure in rendering texture, and delights in the use of colour. Mehr Afroze, who is a painter and a friend of Nahid's, however, regards her abandoning of "pure painting", as a descent from "the Himalayan peaks to the foothills".

Mehr Afroze's (Born 1948) own work has been, in the past, uncompromisingly abstract. Her prints and paintings create a very personal world employing, in her own words, the "primitive man's expression". Even today, in spite of the advancement of civilisation, Mehr points out, man breaks established rules and conventions to express himself. He cannot, for instance, resist doodling and scratching on walls. The imprints on walls tell a tale of his longings as well as his frustrations, dreams, and fantasies. At the same time, these unconscious doodles and signs may also betray personality. The process of construction and destruction of political slogans on street walls may in themselves produce extremely satisfying aesthetic effects. Along with the aesthetic values, the lines and colours also express emotional values. Similarly, harshness or softness of texture may communicate



61. MEHR AFROZE, *Composition*, 1984, mono-print, 39 x 32 cm, collection Ali Imam



62. NAHID ALI, *Chaukandi*, oil on canvas, 92 x 76 cm, collection Ali Imam



63. QUDSIA NISAR, *Composition*, 1980,
water-colour on paper, 39 x 30 cm, collection Ali Imam

intensity of feeling like, for instance, the tone in a voice. Mehr employs texture to establish a particular intensity of tone, rather than for its tactile value. In her intaglio prints, she feels that she can create greater variation and gradation of texture and tone than she could in any other medium. The accidental effects, she finds, add to the vision of her work and enrich her aesthetic method. In one of her recent exhibitions, whose theme was *Puppets and Masks*, she has taken a great leap forward into making "wry social comments". Mehr, however, sees humans as puppets who have remained essentially the same over the centuries; whose emotions and thoughts have been proscribed by their respective societies, and whose freedom is curtailed and confined by strings of fate, and the small ambit of the little stage on which they have to perform. The hideousness of the masks, on the other hand, is meant to depict the hypocrisy of individuals who go about

wearing them, trying either to flatter themselves or to deceive others.

Unlike Mehr Afroze, who patiently builds her forms, layer by layer, **Qudsia Nisar** (Born 1948) likes to precipitate hers swiftly. Mehr observes, "Qudsia lives in a dream world but makes her dreams come real". Qudsia's creative processes are sparked off when she forms a connection with the outside elements. This may be sudden and unexpected. She, however, never proceeds from a given system, letting everything work out spontaneously on paper. The artist is also conscious that "spontaneity should be controlled by the skill to paint," because, "you may have a sudden experience but because of lack of skill you may fail to express it". According to Qudsia, her roots and her vision of life provide the essential content of her work.

Qudsia finds nature more inspiring than man. She

thinks that human beings are too predictable, while nature has mystery and complexity. Her painting cherishes beauty as much as ugliness because both are important and real. Her works have an innocence and simplicity of the direct and uninhibited renderings of a child. Sometimes in an agitated state, she wants to release a trail of ideas which may overcrowd the limited space available or be drowned by her gushing emotions. But these are rare occasions.

Wahab Jaffer (Born 1941) started painting at the age of 32. He turned to painting as a means of discovering his self when his industry was nationalised in the seventies. The pursuit of painting, I am told, gave him insight into life and its pleasures and pains. Initially, Ahmad Parvez acted as a 'germinal' influence, but Jaffer's work of the period is quiet, sedate and peaceful in comparison with Parvez's noisy riot of colours. Jaffer enjoys using colour and brushing paint with gestural strokes, more than any other element. It is through the variation and intensity of colour, that he creates different moods in his canvases. Scores of faces of women which he has painted in recent years can be of any colour, ranging from vermillion to green, and this applies to the backgrounds as well. His colours not merely provide a visual experience, but impart a tactile feeling through application and richness of paint. Although Jaffer's paintings are visually attractive, what strikes one most is the timid and quiet nature of the women he has painted. Seeing them listlessly adorning his canvases, one cannot help thinking of butterflies pinned on radiant cushions in a collector's cabinet.

Mashkoor Raza (Born 1950), who was till recently producing abstract works in the expressionist traditions, is trying his hand at painting the nude. He is a talented young artist with an unsteady direction but a prodigious output of work.

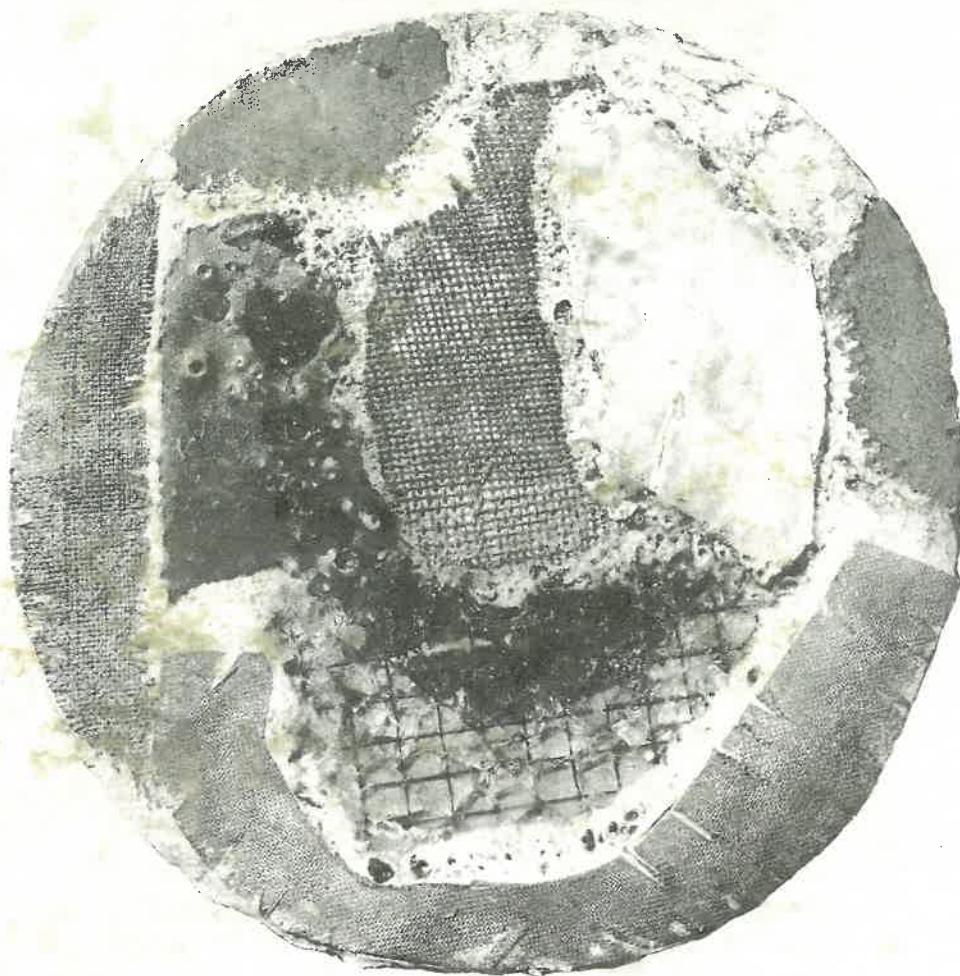
Mussarat Mirza is one of the rare artists who has turned to non-figuration when the general trend is to the contrary. Until recently she was remembered for her mud-houses, roof-tops, sleepy villages, and women and children in the streets. In the seventies her paintings became simpler, based on a single image or a few elements, a sunlit window, a shadowy valley or a dark doorway which seemed to express her moods in a more poignant manner. Her recent works are a dramatic departure from her usual tactile forms and earth colours. She recalls, "I was so tired of oils, half finished paintings lined my walls, and I was unable to work on them. I was overcome by a



64. WAHAB JAFFAR, *Three Women*, 1983, oil on canvas, 92 x 61 cm, private collection.

sense of solitariness. I needed some sort of a turning, and I found it almost by accident when I started on water-colour – there was an immediate chemistry between the medium and me", and as a consequence of that, her works were "liberated from the appearance of the tangible". She now speaks of an imagined universe, which is "lyrical and sensuous", and her former heavy-textured surfaces in impasto have, "burst into clouds of vibrating colour".⁵

Mussarat's "clouds of vibrating colours" are crystallised and enhanced in their richness and luminosity by **Masood Kohari** (Born 1937). Kohari painted unobtrusive semi-abstract oils in the sixties. In the later half of the sixties, he became interested in ceramics and decided to learn firing and glazing from a traditional potter. Within a short period, he surprised everyone by producing some extremely vivid and colourful pieces, a few of which are on display at the Shakir Ali Museum. Clay, instead of canvases, is the base on which he paints. Instead of paint he uses glazes, chemicals and fire, to create unpredictably beautiful colours, textures and designs. Often wire mesh, or netting of different patterns, is added to the tile before it is fired. This enables him to establish his design and im-



B-47. MASOOD KOHARI, *Veil Nebula*, Ceramics

agery. The medium is extremely restrictive but Kohari manages to exploit it to its maximum. These "fire-paintings", as the artist likes to call them, remind one of telescopic photographs of sun-spots, nebula or surface of a distant planet, or elsewhere biological life and chemical activity, seen through a microscope. This feeling is considerably encouraged by the titles given to the works, such as, *Black Hole*, *Pleiads Cluster*, *Cosmos*, *M 81*, *Theta Orionis*, *Corona Borealis*, *Supernova*, and others of equally impressive import and sound, which go rather well with his imaginative work. His recent work in glass has opened new corridors of possibility, challenging him to even greater imaginative indulgence in colour and texture, as well as in extra-terrestrial flights of fancy.

Imran Mir (Born 1950) represents post-painterly abstraction which resists the subjectivity and painterly extravagance of abstract expressionism, represented in Pakistan by Ahmad Parvez and Gulgee. Ironically, in the early seventies, he greatly cherished Ahmad Parvez's freedom and spontaneity. This was later replaced by a disciplined point of view as manifested in the western art

movements, such as Constructivism, De Stijl, Hard-Edge, and Minimal Art, favouring simplicity of form, shape and colour.

In 1971 Imran proceeded to Europe, and the United States, and returned to Karachi in 1980. He has since gone through three phases. His paintings of 1981 presented simple primary forms of rectangular shapes, very much like iron girders, floating or suspended in space, against a background of softly graded tones of subdued colours, blending into each other. In the succeeding three years, the elements were further purified and refined, adhering more strictly to the basic properties of painting. The subject of painting is its form, while the meaning of painting lies in its seeing. These canvases, which have been called *The Seventh Paper on Modern Art*, have been neatly drafted with considerable deliberation. In these 'Papers' the artist once again makes an attempt to eliminate evidence of his own self by employing elementary geometric forms of squares, circles and triangles. Imran may wish to add, "I know the grammar of painting but I am not consciously producing art". In one of his exhibi-



77. NAZEER AHMED, *Boats*, 1988, water colour, 10" x 15", collection, Naseer ud din Sheikh

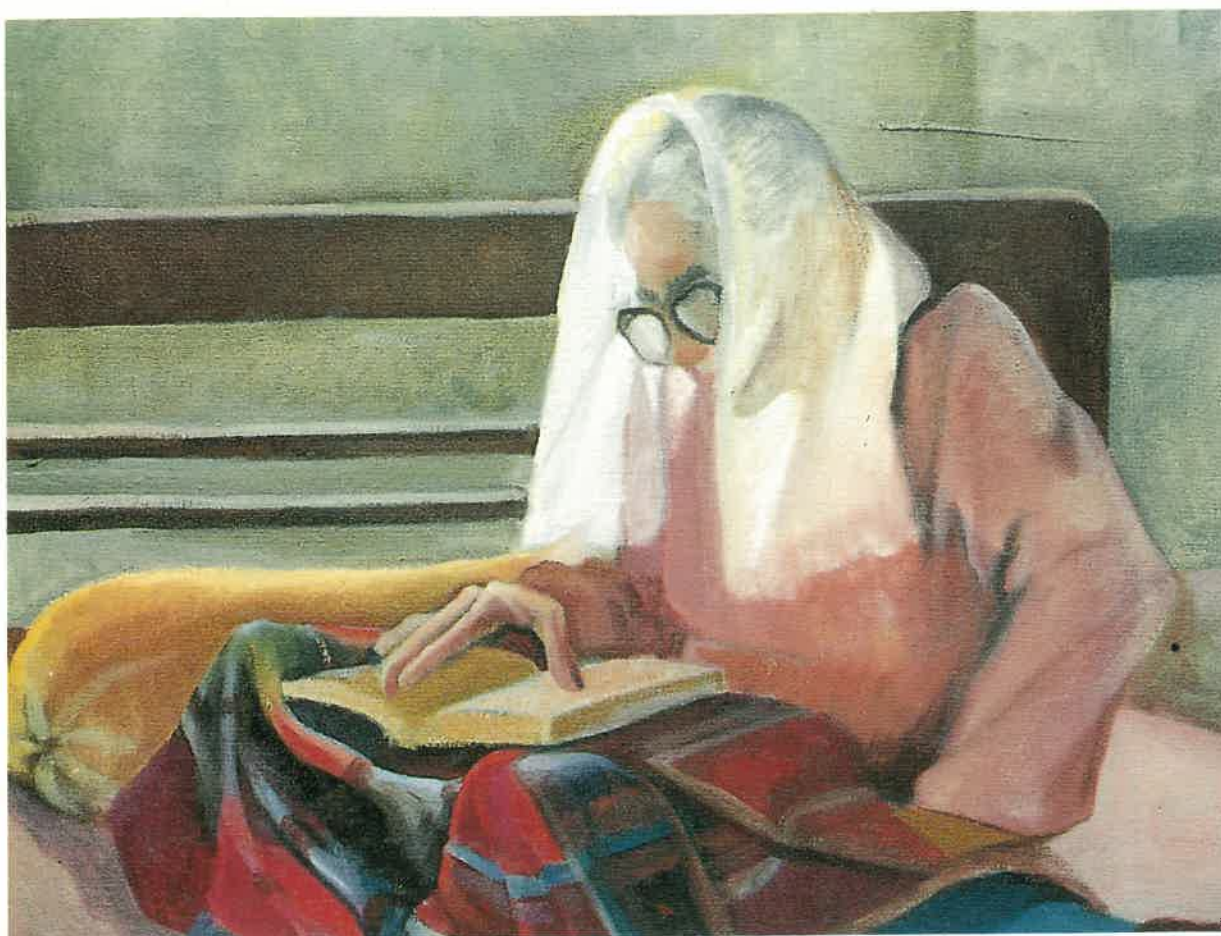
Musarrat has remarkable talent for capturing personality. Her paintings have simplicity of conception and present the subject with directness, without over elaboration. She renders her forms and figures with resolution, and avoids obsequious effects. People expressively come to life in her canvases with soft interplay of light and shade, revealing the artist's intimate perception of life, and her deep sympathy for the humans presented to the viewer.

Mohammad Ali is one of the most striking young figurative painter who has come forward to command our attention in recent years. He works with an effortless gusto and displays remarkable adherence to interpreting the life and likeness of the people he paints. What lifts his work above mundane reporting is his ability to endow his subjects with breath of life and feelings imbued with the artist's own vitality and vision.

A number of painters who have emerged since the seventies, find landscape painting inadequate for expressing their emotions or social commitment. Instead of recording or interpreting 'merely' visual facts, they prefer to express ideas and their reactions to immediate events. In the past, Sadequain and Shakir Ali were both socially aware artists though they expressed themselves in generalisations. Whereas Sadequain presented the human conflict, such as for instance, between good and

evil, darkness and enlightenment, oppression and revolt, in a quasi-allegorical form, Shakir Ali expressed man's longing for peace, love, and freedom through symbols and poetic abstractions. The new generation of socially motivated painters had no patience with generalities. They liked to be specific and to the point. The democratic and working class movement in Pakistan, the Vietnam War, the struggle of the Palestinian people, and the Chinese cultural revolution, inspired the artists and the writers alike. My work of the seventies was also inspired by events in Pakistan, and in other parts of the world. Thousands drowned by tidal waves in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), the brutal killing of workers at Landhi, Korangi and SITE in Karachi, the Vietnam War and the Mai-Lai massacre, as well as reaction to the ruling elite's cultural and spiritual decadence and economic subservience to imperialism, found expression in my work through popular images.

Traditionally, painting has been far too closely associated with the establishment to take up cudgels against it. Most artists in the past brewed storms in their own tea-cups. Abstract painting itself, which was a product of rebellion in the west, began to reflect compromise and obedience. It never had the same spirit, the same soul. It never really questioned the prevailing ideas and value structure of its society. Many of our 'modernists', in



78. MUSARRAT HASAN, *Old Woman*, 1990, oil on canvas, 18½" x 23", private collection

fact, represented the decadent aspects of bourgeois culture. When they came into natural conflict with the outdated and dying feudal ethos, it was easy for them to present themselves as pioneers of the new modern culture. Many 'moderns' are even today quite content wearing apparel, donned and long discarded by modern western artists. What they today consider to be groovy and experimental, has long since become part of history in the west. Many of the younger painters have, however, made a conscious attempt to come out of this groove. They may be loud in expressing their intentions, but they mince no words in what they say.

Nayyara Wajid (Born 1950) has a highly personal style and vision which is unusually rich in texture and forceful in its linear movement. Her paintings express her personal trials and pains in a dramatic way. The addition of three dimensional objects like wires, tubes, fabrics, plastic toys, fabricated human limbs and other bits of this and that, do not merely express her innovative spirit, but also enhances the meaning and emotional impact of her work. For Nayyara, painting is a means of pouring out her heart and her smouldering emotions. Her younger sister,

Samina Wajid, paints in a milder vein. She has a rather quaint style which is both expressive and decorative. All objects and individuals in her painting are moulded by her strong personal vision. Unlike the Wajid sisters, Salima Hashmi likes to depict the social realities of her time in a smart aesthetic format.

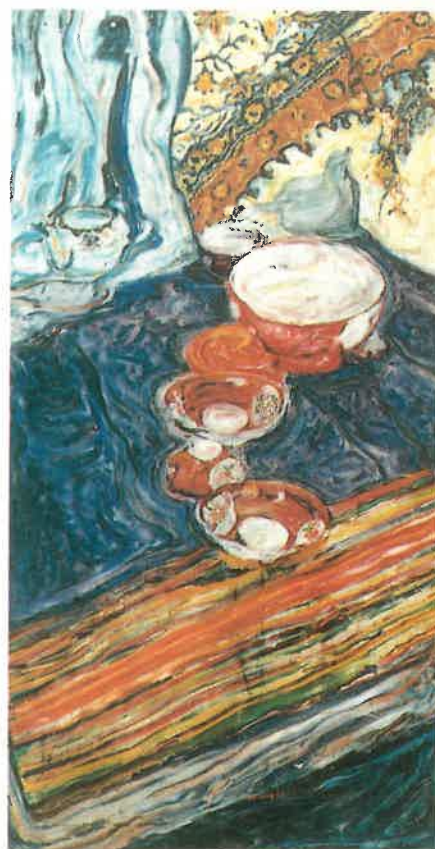
Salima Hashmi (Born 1942) has been painting intermittently for about a decade and a half, but it is only during the past few years that she has begun to paint with some consistency. Salima's few early canvases are still-lives with semi-abstract objects, presented in muted tones and colours. By the mid-seventies, these rather sedate paintings had become aesthetically awkward in their attempt to accommodate the artist's desire to comment on life. She did this by inference through images and symbols: an anguished face roughly chalked on the canvas, a hand with fingers charged with pain, streaks of blood, intermingled with news-clippings, pasted to verbalise her message.

Salima's present works usually draw our attention to a particular problem of life. Her reason for focusing on women, in her recent works, lies in the crystallisation of

woman as an important political and social force. The woman's image is partially composed and sensuously presented as an animal of prey, in a rapacious male-dominated environment.

In her paintings she draws the viewer's attention to the erotic parts of the woman's torso, apparently in an attempt to hold him guilty for perversely gazing at her nakedness. There is a curious feeling that the woman is being disrobed in public, but since this is being done by the artist herself, it fails to produce the desired sense of guilt. The female figure is emotionally, intellectually and physically inert. There is neither struggle, nor any protest, instead a sense of total submission.

A. R. Nagori (Born 1938), on the other hand, has no patience with aesthetic niceties. His message is often too loud and his images are explicit in content and clear in their intention. While Salima's paintings lose much of their meaning due to the elusive nature of her expression and content, Nagori's work, due to the raw nature of his expression, fails to penetrate deeper into the depths of our consciousness. In Salima, the aesthetic aspects dominate her mind while she is structuring her images.



79. NAYYARA WAJID, *Still-life*, 1975, oil on canvas, 40" x 21", Punjab Arts Council



80. SALEEMA HASHMI, *Inspite of Wrath-2*, 1987, mixed media, 18" x 20"



81. IJAZ UL HASSAN, Let a Hundred Plants Bloom (on ushering of democracy 1988), 8' x 16', Oil on canvas

Nagori, on the contrary, makes no attempt whatsoever to lend an adequate form and grace to his figures and images, which could enhance and enlarge the meaning and significance of his content.⁶

In the mid-seventies a young artist approached me and announced that he was doing a lot of revolutionary

painting. When asked to throw some further light on the subject he squared his shoulders and declared with considerable self-righteousness that he had used copious quantities of red paint. One could neither scoff at him nor indulge in a smile, because the man was in dead earnest. One never got around to see the works, and one has not



heard of the artist ever since. This kind of twisted thinking however continues to prevail even today.

Good intentions or noble motives do not by themselves give birth to art. The artists who lay verbal stress on content or good social motives often turn out sterile, un-inspiring products because they have not actually ex-

perienced or even perceived their subject. Life which has not been lived cannot be portrayed, interpreted, or expressed, in a convincing manner. Ideas and feelings which have not fired the mind and imagination or touched the heart are inevitably insipid and lifeless. On the contrary the artists who worship form for its own



82. IJAZ UL HASSAN, *The Green Revolution*, 1973, oil on canvas, 99 x 160 cm, private collection



83. A. R. NAGORI, *Scare-Crow, C.* 1986, oil on canvas, Private collection

sake, who separate form from content, aesthetics from ideas, and beauty from meaning, have indeed chartered many unexplored paths, but at the expense of deviating from the grand avenues of life.

If today one is intimidated by artists and journalists who present abstract and semi-abstract renderings as specimens of contemporary modernism—it was in 1918 that Malevick painted White Square on a White Background—one is also amused when artists attempt to

join the ranks of martyrs by smearing red on their aprons. However, if the object of painting is to express truth then it may be pertinent here to quote Albert Einstein. When somebody reproached him on the grounds that his formula of gravitation was longer and more cumbersome than Newton's formula which had an elegant simplicity, he replied, "If you are out to describe the truth leave elegance to the tailor."⁷

Notes

1. Zeno, *The Mafia of Culture*. Cultural Notes. *The Pakistan Times*, November, 17, 1972.
2. Zeno, *Art and Revolution*. Cultural Notes. *The Pakistan Times*, November, 29, 1972.
3. I have discussed this attitude at greater length in *Some Comments and Observations About Our Modern Painting on the Occasion of 5th National Exhibition*. National Exhibition Brochure, Pub: by Idara Saqafat-e-Pakistan, 1984.
4. Tehmina Ahmad, *Vision of the Universe*. *The Star*, May 1986.
5. Zephyr, *A Touch of the Mystical*: *Star* (Weekend) Karachi Jan 23, 1986).
6. For more detailed information on young painters the reader may refer to:
 - (a) *A Brave New World* Part I and II by Ijazul Hassan published consecutively on 22.8.85 and 29.8.85 by *Star Weekend* edition.
 - (b) *The Youthful Renaissance* by Ijazul Hassan published in-December 1985 in *'The Age of Youth'*, *A Star Special Report*.
7. Arthur Koestler. *The Yogi and the Commisar*. Pub: The MacMillan Company, New York, 1965.

List of Illustrations

Monochrome

B-1. KANGRA, <i>Uddhava and the Gopis</i> , c. 1780	28
B-2. FAYZEE RAHAMIN, <i>Nawab of Baroda</i>	39
B-3. USTAD ALLAH BAKSH, <i>Mountain Landscape</i> , 1949	41
B-4. USTAD ALLAH BAKSH, <i>The Storm</i> , 1967	41
B-5. AMRITA SHER-GIL, <i>Portrait</i>	46
B-6. ANNA MOLKA AHMED, <i>Rocks and Water</i> , 1968	49
B-7. ANNA MOLKA AHMED, <i>Haji Sharif</i> , 1966	50
B-8. ZUBEIDA AGHA, <i>City Landscape</i> , 1962	52
B-9. ZAINUL ABEDIN, <i>Famine</i> , 1943	53
B-10. SHAKIR ALI, <i>Figures and Moon</i> , 1957	56
B-11. SHAKIR ALI, <i>Untitled</i> , c. 1940–3	57
B-12. SHAKIR ALI, <i>Mitho Mian</i> , 1966	60
B-13. ALI IMAM, <i>Bending Figure</i> , 1966	65
B-14. A. J. SHEMZA, <i>Untitled</i> , 1959	68
B-15. KHALID IQBAL, <i>Murtaza Bashir</i> , 1961	76
B-16. ZULQARNAIN HAIDER, <i>Water Channel</i>	77
B-17. IJAZ UL HASSAN, <i>Late Evening View Through Window</i>	77
B-18. IJAZ UL HASSAN, <i>Jungali Beri</i> , 1980	80
B-19. SADEQUAIN, <i>Naqshi Kantha</i>	82
B-20. SADEQUAIN, <i>Scare-Crow (Series)</i> , 1955	83
B-21. SADEQUAIN, <i>The Last Supper</i> , 1961	83
B-22. MURTAZA BASHIR, <i>A Boy Holding a Bird</i> , 1961	86
B-23. MURTAZA BASHIR, <i>Head</i> , 1962	87
B-24. HAMEED UR REHMAN, <i>Family</i> , 1966	87
B-25. SAIFUDDIN AHMED, <i>The Angry Fish</i> , 1964	90
B-26. QAMRUL ISLAM, <i>Composition</i> , 1964	90
B-27. RASHID CHOWDHRY, <i>Untitled</i> , 1964	91
B-28. QAYYUM CHOWDHRY, <i>Design and Figure</i> , 1963	91
B-29. COLIN DAVID, <i>Zara with Cats</i> , 1973	94
B-30. SAEED AKHTAR, <i>Perin Cooper</i> , 1966	95
B-31. MANSUR AYE, <i>Untitled</i> , 1968	95
B-32. BEVAN PETMAN, <i>Dyer Petman</i>	97
B-33. JAMEEL NAQSH, <i>Protest</i> , 1966	97

B-34. BASHIR MIRZA, <i>Girl with Tulips</i> , 1984	100
B-35. SHAHID SAJJAD, <i>Figure</i> , c. 1967	101
B-36. AMINUL ISLAM, <i>Transformation</i> , 1967	104
B-37. DEVDAS CHAKRABORTY, <i>Desire Symbols</i> , 1963	104
B-38. KHALID MEHMUD, <i>Lahore Street</i> , 1989	108
B-39. AJMAL HUSSAIN, <i>Inspirational</i> , c. 1967	108
B-40. SYED JEHANGIR, <i>Bouquet</i> , 1967	109
B-41. ABDUL RAZZAQUE, <i>Forms and Colours</i> , 1967	110
B-42. IQBAL JAFREE, <i>Truth</i> , 1963	116
B-43. ABDUL BASIT, <i>Faces of Moon</i> , 1967	116
B-44. ZAHOOOR UL AKHLAQUE, <i>Composition</i> , 1966	117
B-45. AHMED KHAN, <i>Talisman</i> , 1967	117
B-46. KAMIL KHAN MUMTAZ, <i>Painting</i> , 1964	120
B-47. MASOOD KOHARI, <i>Veil Nebula</i>	128
B-48. JAMAL SHAH, <i>Portrait</i> , 1982	132

Colour

1. GUJERATI, <i>Kalpasutra</i> , 1510 A.D.	18
2. GUJERATI, <i>Mullah Dawood</i> , Luran Chanda Illustration, 16th Cent. A.D.	20
3. MUGHAL, <i>Jehangir Preferring a Sufi to Kings</i> , by Bichitr, c. 1615–18	22
4. MUGHAL, <i>Jehangir Entertains Shah Abbas</i> , c. 1618, Borders attributed to Mohammad Sadiq, A.D. 1746-47	23
5. MUGHAL, <i>Equestrian Portrait of Shah Jehan</i> , inscribed to Govardhan, early 19th Cent.	23
6. MUGHAL, <i>Darashikoh</i> , by Ghulam Ba-Akhlash Abul Majpas, 18th Century	25
7. PROVINCIAL MUGHAL, <i>A Love Scene</i> , c. 1760–1770	27
8. LAHORE SCHOOL, <i>Rishis Outside a Hut in Forest</i> , 1830 A.D.	29
9. ALLAH DITTA, <i>Abduction of Sita</i> , Late 19th Century	30
10. HAJI MOHAMMAD SHARIF, <i>Shahalam Badshah</i> , undated	31
11. A. R. CHUGHTAI, <i>Nightingales</i> , undated	36
12. A. R. CHUGHTAI, <i>Untitled</i>	37
13. ALLAH BAKSH, <i>Sohni Mahewal</i> , 1923	40
14. JAMINI ROY, <i>The Face</i>	43
15. AMRITA SHER-GIL, <i>The Vina Players</i>	47
16. ANNA MOLKA AHMED, <i>Landscape</i> , 1985	50
17. ZUBEIDA AGHA, <i>Burst of Flowers</i> , 1984	54
18. ZAINUL ABEDIN, <i>Untitled</i> , 1963	55
19. ZAINUL ABEDIN, <i>Santhal Women</i> , 1969	55
20. SHAKIR ALI, <i>French Landscape</i> , c. 1949	58
21. SHAKIR ALI, <i>Crucifixion</i> , c. 1965-66	59
22. MOHAMMAD HUSSAIN QADRI, <i>A Mid-day Rest</i> , 1933	62
23. S. N. GUPTA, <i>Radha Expectant of Krishna in Dark Night</i>	62
24. B. S. SANYAL, <i>Two Girls with a Goat</i>	63

25. MOYENE NAJMI, <i>Lahore No. II</i> , 1972	66
26. ALI IMAM, <i>Murree Hills</i> , c. 1953–55	66
27. A. J. SHEMZA, <i>Magic Carpet</i> , 1984	67
28. AHMED PERVEZ, <i>Untitled</i> , 1977	70
29. S. SAFDAR, <i>Aerial View</i> , 1957	71
30. KHALID IQBAL, <i>Landscape</i> , 1954	74
31. KHALID IQBAL, <i>Bulrushes</i> , 1986	74
32. ZULQARNAIN HAIDER, <i>Aq</i> , 1989	75
33. GHULAM RASUL, <i>Landscape</i> , 1985	75
34. IJAZ UL HASSAN, <i>Laburnum</i> , 1983	78
35. IJAZ UL HASSAN, <i>Peepal in Autumn</i> , 1985	79
36. SADEQUAIN, <i>Mangla Mural</i> , 1969	84-85
37. SADEQUAIN, <i>Mangla Mural</i> (Detail)	84
38. HAMEED UR REHMAN, <i>The Face</i> , 1970	88
39. RASHEED CHOWDHRY, <i>Decorated Elephant</i> , 1946	92
40. NASEEM HAFEEZ QAZI, <i>The Old Man</i> , 1984	96
41. COLIN DAVID, <i>Punishment</i> , 1973	96
42. JAMEEL NAQSH, <i>Women with Pigeons</i>	98
43. BASHIR MIRZA, <i>Dame, Desert, Moon and the Sea</i> (Lonely Girl Series)	99
44. MANSUR RAHI, <i>Composition of a Horse-Head in Evening Light</i> , 1977	102
45. RUMANA SAEED, <i>Composition</i> , 1963	106
46. RAHEEL AKBAR JAVED, <i>At the End of Rainbow There is Another Rainbow</i> , 1973	106
47. NIGHET O'BRIEN, <i>Sail Boats</i> , 1985	107
48. ZUBAIDA JAVED, <i>City Crossing</i>	107
49. LUBNA AGHA, <i>Composition</i> , 1978	111
50. MUHAMMAD KIBRIA, <i>Painting in Grey-Green</i> , 1964	114
51. IQBAL JAFREE, <i>Untitled</i> , 1989, mixed media	115
52. IQBAL JAFREE, <i>Untitled</i> , 1989, mixed media	115
53. ZAHOOOR UL AKHLAQUE, <i>Untitled</i> , 1990	118
54. RASHEED A. ARSHAD, <i>Untitled</i> , 1973	118
55. ISMAIL GULGEE, <i>Composition</i> , 1984	119
56. ISMAIL GULGEE, <i>Composition</i> , 1971	119
57. KHALID SAEED BUTT, <i>Naika</i> , 1986	122
58. NAJMI SURA, <i>Untitled</i> , c. 1986	123
59. LAILA SHEHZADA, <i>The Jewels of (Taxila) Buddha</i>	123
60. MANSOORA HASSAN, <i>Lahore Silhouettes</i> , 1987	124
61. MEHR AFROZE, <i>Composition</i> , 1984	124
62. NAHID ALI, <i>Chaukandi</i>	125
63. QUDSIA NISAR, <i>Composition</i> , 1980	126
64. WAHAB JAFFAR, <i>Three Women</i> , 1983	127
65. IMRAN MIR, <i>Seventh Paper on Modern Art</i> , 1987	129
66. IQBAL HUSSAIN, <i>Two Sisters</i> , 1982	130
67. JAMEELA MASOOD, <i>Garden</i> , 1987	131
68. GHULAM MUSTAFA, <i>Wazir Khan's Mosque</i> , 1987	132
69. GHULAM MUSTAFA, <i>From the Balcony</i> , 1987	133
70. IJAZ ANWAR, <i>Kashmiri Bazar</i> , 1985	134
71. TASNEEM SHEHZAD, <i>Peshawar Street</i>	134

72. MEHBOOB ALI, <i>Mohalla Chirhi Maran</i>	134
73. M. A. AHED, <i>Untitled</i> , 1987	135
74. SHAHID JALAL, <i>Charar Marsh</i> , 1985	135
75. GHAZANFAR ALI, <i>Swat River</i> , 1984	136
76. RASHID KHAN, <i>Untitled</i> , 1973	136
77. NAZEER AHMED, <i>Boats</i> , 1988	137
78. MUSARRAT HASAN, <i>Old Woman</i> , 1990	138
79. NAYYARA WAJID, <i>Still-life</i> , 1975	139
80. SALEEMA HASHMI, <i>Inspite of Wrath-2</i> , 1987	139
81. IJAZ UL HASSAN, <i>Let a Hundred Plants Bloom</i> , 1990	140
82. IJAZ UL HASSAN, <i>The Green Revolution</i> , 1973	142
83. A. R. NAGORI, <i>Scare-Crow</i> , c. 1986	143

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