

Ph. D in Art History
Symbolism as a Mechanism of Social Change and Spiritual Awareness
A Case Study of Pakistani Painting in comparison to the West

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This thesis by Aqsa Malik is hereby approved for submission to the University of the Punjab, Lahore for the partial fulfillment of the requirement for Ph.D. in Art History.

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Declaration

This thesis is my original work, executed through the research carried out during the tenure of Doctoral studies at Research Centre, University College of Art and Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

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Abstract

The use of symbols to convey religious, spiritual or emotionally intense ideas can be found in almost all the cultures that punctuate the history of the Subcontinent. The symbolism explored and used by Pakistani artists from 1947 to present is a continuation of the cultural background to which we belong. This use has certain similarities and dissimilarities with the movement of Symbolism in the West particularly in relation to the intent of the artists. While the Western artists addressed moral decadence and individual experiences through the use of symbolic devices, Pakistani artists belonging to a society with a different historical background used symbols for a more universal purpose. The use of symbols is rooted in the religious and spiritual traditions of the Subcontinent, therefore, a proper appreciation of symbolism used by Pakistani artists requires a serious consideration of this background. This dissertation is a first attempt in analyzing the use of symbols by Pakistani artists from this perspective. It maintains that Pakistani artists used symbols in their paintings in two distinct ways. One was for generating awareness about much required socio-political change and the other was for developing spiritual consciousness in viewers. It discusses the historical background of the Subcontinent, which was already rich in the use of symbols and compares it with the development of symbolism in the West. It then discusses the works of various artists who represent different approaches to use of symbols in their artworks. The symbols have been explained in terms of artist's intent and implications. The study will benefit scholars who are interested in understanding Pakistani art in terms of its symbolic repertoire and communication.

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Introduction

Art has been a mirror to a society as it absorbs and reflects the emotional and intellectual orientation of a very sensitive faction of society. Art cannot be appreciated without considering the time and social context in which it was created.¹ An art work contains in it a story of a political response, an economic constraint, a cultural preference and a stylistic priority along with a certain individuality subject to an artist's own inclinations. The information embedded in an art work contains a certain dynamism since art is produced in a reality that is characterized by a political, economic, cultural and psychological flux. This is why, all great art communicates a layered meaning subject to multiple interpretations.² To this end, artists have used various devices that could represent the intensity of their feelings and the subtlety of meaning they intended. The devices took many forms; we find artists experimenting with mediums, elements and principles of design, methods of producing an art work and even with mechanics of perception.

We can observe a long chain of art movements that were nothing but human attempts to create better events of communication. Amongst the various devices that artists introduced for the sake of expression or communication, the use of symbols has been one of the most potent means to express a richer meaning. The principal reason is that a symbol is not a representation by imitation but association. As Ross Murfin points out that symbol is 'something that, although it is of interest in its own right, stands for or suggests something larger and more complex - often an idea or a range of interrelated

¹Bjarne Sode Funch, *The Psychology of Art Appreciation* (Museum Tusculanum Press, 1997), 97.

²Charles Wei-hsun Fu, Steven Heine, and Professor of Religious Studies and Director of Asian Studies Steven Heine, *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives: Revolutionary War Soldier, Federalist Politician, and Mayor of New York* (SUNY Press, 1995), 16.

ideas, attitudes, and practices.’³ A symbol calls upon the subjectivity of the viewer in a way that the thoughts and emotions associated to the image rush through the consciousness and develop into a meaning, which is much more than the visual perception of an image. Holman distinguishes a symbol from an image in terms of function:

If we consider an image to have a concrete referent in the objective world and to function as image when it powerfully evokes that referent, then a *symbol* is like an image in doing the same thing but different from it in going beyond the evoking of the objective referent by making that referent suggest a meaning beyond itself; in other words, a *symbol* is an image that evokes an objective, concrete reality and prompts that reality to suggest another level of meaning.⁴

Therefore, when it comes to evoke a spiritual, political or cultural response, symbols serve as reference point for both the artist and the viewer. Appropriate use of symbols furnishes a mode of communication that engages the faculties of thinking, feeling and experience into an inimitable formation.

This dissertation is a historical overview of the use of symbols in Pakistani paintings. The diversity of usage highlights the different ways in which symbols have been used by painters while the significance describes the nature of message they communicated. The dissertation suggests that, unlike the Western symbolists, who used symbolism as a means to express their internal conflicts and social decadence, given the political and

³ Murfin, Ross and Supryia M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. 2nd ed. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 470-473. Print.

⁴ Harmon, William and C. Hugh Holman. *A Handbook to Literature*. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996. 507-509. Print.

cultural circumstances, Pakistani painters largely used symbolism as a mechanism for social change and spiritual awareness. The Pakistani artists used symbolism in a culture that had a long historical relationship with symbolism and therefore the use of symbols by Pakistani artists demands a fresh inquiry.

The present study maintains that in Pakistan, the painters have issued their comments through a variety of mediums highlighting socio-cultural concerns. The most important feature of their work is that symbols have been employed to subtly highlight the cultural problems in a spiritual domain. These symbols have been taken from ordinary life and have been given new depth. Another significant aspect is that these symbols, belong to a wide array of subjects and therefore target the masses in various ways. The symbols can be seen as the vessels to convey social commentary which helps to communicate pronouncements, which are relatable for the viewer.⁵ It is as if to say that no matter what area of Pakistani society is analyzed there is room for improvement.

Not only does this symbolic commentary help to delve into and analyze all aspects of Pakistani society but it also brings to attention many areas of Pakistani culture which have been usually overlooked or ignored, be it rural women, prostitutes, innocent children, abuse of religion or simplicity of life. The symbolic paintings serve to jolt the collective spiritual consciousness into thinking about these issues which are usually pushed aside and considered to be unworthy of serious consideration.⁶ Symbolism has allowed the Pakistani painters to highlight the plight of vulnerable factions of society and has served as a means for conveying their perspectives and concerns in a subtle manner

⁵Asit K. Halder, "Symbolism in Indian Art and Religion," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 9, no. 2 (1950): 124–27, <https://doi.org/10.2307/426331>.

⁶Peter Cooke, *Gustave Moreau: History Painting, Spirituality, and Symbolism*, First Edition edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

contributing to spiritual awareness of both individual and society. The dissertation also contributes through a comparative analysis of the use of symbolism in West and East.

Rationale of the Study

The study has been motivated by the very fact that the available literature on Pakistani artists do not incorporate a focused analysis on the use of symbols and therefore, for both students of art history and painters, there is a need to conduct such an inquiry. Pakistani painting has gone through various political phases, which have been registered by the artists and their concerns have been expressed in various ways. The political changes had a direct influence on both subject matter and form of painting giving us a unique historical progression of six decades in which many instances of creativity and innovation are notable. These instances have not been described with reference to the use of symbols. The diversity in the use of symbols and their significance gives us a distinct opportunity to see how different artists have experimented with communication in art.

Research Questions

The following are the main research questions of the present study:

1. What has been the nature of symbols used by Pakistani artists?
2. What are the various strategies used by Pakistani artists to communicate the meaning of symbols?
3. What has been the impact of the symbols used by Pakistani artists on Pakistani society?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is threefold. First of all, it gives a new perspective to appreciate Pakistani art and discusses various innovations of the artists that can only be fully understood in contrast and comparison to the movement of Symbolism. Second, it charts the historical trajectory of the use of symbols in Pakistani art. The trajectory has been explained with reference to political, economic and cultural aspects of history and has also been observed with reference to an artist's own preferences. Third, it discloses the use of symbols both as an artist's intent and as a device of communication mainly directed for social change and spiritual awareness. The intent of the artist, and possible interpretation of the work in the light of the symbols becomes a unique perspective to understand Pakistani art. The study will certainly be beneficial for the art critic and art historian as the analyses of the paintings incorporate historical factors and artistic devices. It will also benefit painters by providing them thoroughly discussed examples of symbolism in Pakistani art. The comparison and contrast of Pakistani painters with Western masters of symbolism will help them see their own work in a much required context.

Chapter1: Research Methodology

It has been noted that some writers use the terms ‘methodology’ and ‘method’ interchangeably.⁷They consider that methodology refers to the overall approach taken, as well as to the theoretical basis from which the researcher comes, and that method is the various means by which data is collected and analyzed. In this context, the approach taken here is to elaborate upon the methodology deployed in this work to interpret symbols in Pakistani paintings.

The research will draw from a variety of sources which include books, journal articles, newspaper articles, brochures of exhibitions and artists’ interviews. The relevant information will help in understanding what kind of symbols have been preferred by artists and what kind of message they wanted to communicate. The research will also draw help from various theoretical frameworks of analyses which have been used by art critics and art historians to develop understanding the nature and importance of art works of a certain time and social reality. Keeping in view the influences on Pakistani artists and the nature of work they produced a carefully tailored framework of analysis will be developed. The findings of analyses will help furnishing a historical view of the journey of painting in Pakistan with reference to use of symbols. To conduct analyses, there was a requirement to categorize symbols and then formulate strategies to interpret them.

⁷C. R. Kothari, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* (New Age International, 2004).

1.1 Categorization of Symbols

Depending upon the nature of response that symbols elicit in viewers, they can be categorized according to certain domains of human experience and association. Symbols can be religious, political, spiritual, economic or cultural.⁸ These categories primarily refer to meanings associated with symbols and not the visual forms of symbols, however, over time, the association of meaning to symbol becomes so integrated that minor modification in form invites additional interpretations.⁹ Additional interpretations can also be invited on the basis of the use of the symbol in a composition. An artist can use a symbol to convey a different meaning by juxtaposing it or counterpoising it to something new.¹⁰ This is the reason why ‘symbols have been of particular interest to formalists, who study how meanings emerge from the complex, patterned relationships among images in a work’¹¹, and ‘psychoanalytic critics, who are interested in how individual authors and the larger culture both disguise and reveal unconscious fears and desires through symbols.’¹² The history of art, particularly, of painting is abundant with such instances, wherein artists, through a sensitive use of symbols, gave rise to new interpretations. Their usage added to the significance of symbols as devices of communication and contributed in developing unique forms of representation.

1.2 Interpretation of Symbols

The study mainly concerns with interpreting symbols in the works of Pakistani artists. The use of symbols is varied across time periods and cultures. Since each culture has a

⁸Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Peeters Publishers, 2002), 420.

⁹Moshe Barasch, *The Language of Art: Studies in Interpretation* (NYU Press, 1997), 81.

¹⁰*Faith & Form* (Guild for Religious Architecture., 1978), 42.

¹¹Ross C. Murfin, *Heart of Darkness* (Macmillan International Higher Education, 1996), 311.

¹² Ibid

unique identity, therefore, the repertoire of symbols also varies, especially in terms of connotation if not in form. The connotation depends upon various factors such as the historical, political, economic and cultural currents of a society that shaped the preferences of its people.¹³ The variance amongst individuals of a society is not, by and large, qualitative, since symbols survive for their ability to call upon general subjectivity of people. An individual's perception of a symbol can differ in intensity from another but it essentially reflects similar associations.¹⁴ Due to this, symbols communicate to the masses and have a wider appeal. In some cases, a specialized symbol may demand an exclusive viewership in order to be exactly interpreted but such incidents are not frequent in art history. The movement of symbolism in European art is an important event in this regard. It was a reaction to Impressionism, in which the artists largely played with the application of the paint on the surface.¹⁵ Their purpose was to capture the impression of light through quick brush strokes as a shorter duration of time could only be dealt this way. Symbolism came into being with the realization that symbols can communicate ideas that exist behind lines, shapes, colors and forms. Symbolists preferred the communication of emotions and ideas instead of portraying realistic details.¹⁶ Their purpose was to communicate their subjectivity through half-stated and obscure subject matter.

¹³Nancy Morris, *Puerto Rico: Culture, Politics, and Identity* (Praeger/Greenwood, 1995), 166.

¹⁴W. R. Crozier and A. J. Chapman, *Cognitive Processes in the Perception of Art* (Elsevier, 1984), 29.

¹⁵Michelle Facos, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Art* (Taylor & Francis, 2011), 339.

¹⁶Russell T. Clement, *Four French Symbolists: A Sourcebook on Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, and Maurice Denis* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996), xi.

Mainly there are two major types of symbols analyzed in this study. One is the Spiritual/Cultural Symbols while the others are Political Symbols. For these two categories, two different methods of interpretation are used.

1.2.1 Spiritual or Sociocultural Symbols

We may say that the most important factor in interpreting the symbolic painting of Pakistan is the consideration of Pakistani society and culture. There is a deep and unique correspondence between the symbolic painting of Pakistan and Pakistani society. The use of symbolism in paintings drew its significance from the cultural trends in society and, in turn, affected the society in various ways. Mr. Taimoor Kamil, a Pakistani architect and a well-known researcher, defines the symbolic art of Pakistan as the mental condition of society. According to him, whatever happens in the society continuously affects the artist and his work. The symbolic Pakistani painter portrays both the internal as well as external truth. He is as sensitive for the chaotic society as he is for any kind of strains imposed on himself.¹⁷ In Pakistani context, the use of symbolism in painting has been therefore similar to imparting cultural awareness. It has been a source to educate the general public and to make them aware of their social conditions which they usually ignore or are unaware of due to some kind of restraint.

The symbols used in Pakistani painting are largely culture-specific because they are correlated with a local artist's experience. They draw attention to the surroundings, conventions, values and beliefs of the society to which the artist belongs. Marcella Nessim Sirhandi, an art critic, also realized the relationship between culture and art and

¹⁷ Kamil. Taimoor, lecture on Modernity Tradition and Art. University College of Art And Design, University of The Punjab. 19th Nov,2012.

stated that art lacks the air of authenticity without the reflection of its localized expression.¹⁸

One cannot understand the symbolic significance of the work of any Pakistani symbolist without knowing his or her sensitivity in relation to local environment and social experiences. As far as the sensitivity of a symbolist is concerned, it is not necessary that every painter is equally influenced by each and every aspect of the society. Instead, we find a selective sensitivity depending upon the fact that which particular social events shaped the personal experience of the artist.

In order to interpret the above category of symbols, the model used by Susan Langer has been deployed. She states:

Symbols occurring in art are symbols in the usual sense, though of all degrees of complexity, from simplest directedness to extreme indirectedness... [Symbol] formulates and objectifies experience of a direct intellectual perception, or intuition, but it does not abstract a concept for discursive thought...the art symbol is an absolute image, the image of what otherwise would be irrational, as it is literally ineffable: direct awareness, emotion, vitality, personal identity, life lived and felt, the matrix of mentality.¹⁹

1.2.2 Sociopolitical Symbols

Culture has played its role by providing a vocabulary of symbols with spiritual connotations that various Pakistani painters used but the political process had its own

¹⁸Muhammad Yusuf Abbasi, *Pakistani Culture: A Profile* (National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1992), 310.

¹⁹Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), 138.

dynamic. The political process affects every walk of life by shaping the opinions of people on matters of individual and social life and hence contributes to possibilities of social change. Pakistani artists being a sensitive faction of the society absorbed the political influences and then reflected and responded in a way that their works became a powerful commentary on the political happenings and directions. We may say that the political history of Pakistan has not only been recorded by historians and scholars but it has also been documented by symbolist painters of Pakistan. This chapter will analyze the use of symbols with reference to their political standpoints suggesting the dire need for social change.

The relationship between political process and symbolic visual arts has been explored by various scholars. The views of Michael Walzer, who is a political theorist, describe an important link between politics and symbolism. He constructs a relation between visual arts, state and the politics and their symbolic temperament. He contends that 'Politics is the art of unification, from many it makes one.' Further he describes state as 'one' which symbolizes many. He says, "the union of, men can only be symbolized, it has no palpable shape or substance. The state is invisible; it must be personified before it can be seen, symbolized before it can be loved, imagined before it can be conceived".²⁰ And the visual art is a very effective mode of turning an invisible, personified, imagined and symbolized thing into a visible form. There are so many examples of political painters all over the world who have been working side by side with historians in documenting and criticizing the critical political scenario of their countries.

²⁰Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, Revised ed. edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 11.

1.3 Nature of Analysis

The analyses of the paintings conducted in the study are both intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic analysis helps to understand how an artists used a certain symbol in his work while the extrinsic analysis casts light on why a particular symbol is used by identifying and explaining political, cultural and personal factors responsible.²¹ The analyses also compare the work of Pakistani artists whose work reflect traits of Symbolism movement either as direct inspiration or developing similarities without conscious intent. The study brings forth a history and collection of using symbols in painting to communicate the visions, ideas and feelings that the sensitive people of this land experienced and expressed. The analyses of the paintings conducted in this thesis are mainly of three standard types; formal, iconographic and contextual.

1.3.1 Formal Analysis

Formal analysis is a specific type of visual description. It is an explanation of visual structure, of the ways in which certain visual elements have been arranged and function within a composition.²² Strictly speaking, subject is not considered and neither is historical or cultural context. The purest formal analysis is limited to what the viewer sees.²³ Because it explains how the eye is led through a work, this kind of description provides a solid foundation for other types of analysis. It is always a useful exercise, even when it is not intended as an end in itself.

The British art critic Roger Fry (1866-1934) played an important role in developing the language of formal analysis we use in English today. Inspired by modern art, Fry wanted

²¹Theodore Gracyk, *The Philosophy of Art: An Introduction* (Polity, 2012), 174.

²²Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell, *Looking at Greek Art* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 21.

²³Marjorie Munsterberg, *Writing about Art* (www.writingaboutart.org, 2009), 14.

to describe what the viewer saw, independent of the subject of the work or its emotional impact.²⁴ Relying in part upon late 19th- and early 20th-century studies of visual perception, Fry hoped to bring scientific rigor to the analysis of art. His studies as a painter made him especially aware of the importance of how things had been made.

1.3.2 Iconographic and Contextual Analysis

Iconographic analysis establishes the meaning a work of art had at the time it was made. Any particular time or place provides different possible audiences, each of which will demand specific kinds of information and make certain assumptions. The iconographic argument always depends upon assembling historical evidence to reconstruct these things.²⁵ According to Munsterberg:

Like all types of art historical analysis, an iconographic analysis must begin with what can be seen in the object or objects being considered. On the basis of these observations, the objects are related to other visual images and, probably, texts. This process may involve considerable historical research in primary sources and many languages, or a single reference to an authoritative secondary source. The result may be more than one interpretation. If they are mutually exclusive, the historian and the reader must decide which one seems most convincing. More often, though, different interpretations address different aspects of the work, so all of them can be historically accurate.²⁶

²⁴Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (Courier Corporation, 2012).

²⁵Richard G. and Kleiner Tansey Fred S., *Gardener's Art Through the Ages II: Renaissance and Modern Art, Tenth Edition* (Harcourt, Brace College Publishers, 1996), 2.

²⁶Munsterberg, *Writing about Art*, 34.

Iconographic analysis explores the meaning of symbols in an artwork. Contextual analysis looks for the messages that the artwork would have conveyed to its contemporary audience, and at the religious and historical environment it was made in as well as considering biographical details about the artist.²⁷

²⁷Jo McDonald and Peter Veth, *A Companion to Rock Art* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Symbolist painters of Pakistan are the true representatives of the society. They have recorded the social history of the country in their own visual language and in their own distinct ways. This has imparted a diversity to Pakistani art but on the other it has given Pakistani painting, an integrated character. The images presented in the paintings by these artists, are not just images but an encryption of social events and corresponding emotional responses. In the available literature, the works of these artists have been discussed by scholars of merit but a far lesser attention has been given to the use of symbols. The realization of the fact that being a response to cultural and social issues and social scenario, Pakistani painting is locally modern, but has not been explicitly documented. It is also important to point out that none of the paintings in Pakistan have been interpreted solely from a symbolic standpoint. On the other hand, the use of symbols by artists in the West has been rigorously documented by Western scholars. This research bridges this gap in contemporary literature by focusing on the use of symbols by Pakistani artists. The study also draws a comparison of Pakistani symbolist artists with that of Western artists both in terms of events leading to the use of symbols and their formal representation in painting. Keeping in view this twofold objective, the following review of literature entails sources from both Pakistani and Western scholars.

Ijaz-ul-Hassan a well-known artist has recorded the art history of South Asia in his book *Painting in Pakistan*. Almost all the artists of Pakistan are classified according to the subject matter of their work. The book deals with traditional as well as conceptual painters of the time. Even though Ijaz-ul-Hassan himself, as a painter, is an intense critic

of society, he has discussed several painters in terms of their style and aesthetic quality of their paintings. Although he has given a brief account of the time period in which the artist was active he did not emphasize the stimulus and the incentive behind their inclination towards the societal concerns as the subject of their work. Neither has he interpreted the work of those painters who preferred to use symbols in their work rather than direct images.²⁸

In her book *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan*, Marcella Nesom Sirhandi, a famous art critic and vigilant researcher has covered the art history of Pakistan from 1857 to the contemporary period, including the art movements during the pre-partition and post-partition. The book is mainly divided into three parts: Roots of Painting in Pakistan, After Partition and Independence, and The Contemporary Scene in Pakistan. All of the aforementioned parts are further divided into sub headings according to the political and social status of the country and the art movements prevailing at that time with the reference to the painters active at the specific time. Marcella's book presents a complete picture of the development of art throughout the history of Pakistan especially from the 1970s onwards which was the most critical time in the history of Pakistan, given the fact that the artists of Pakistan represented a sensitive part of society and reacted against the political, economic as well as social uncertainty prevailing under military dictatorship. In order to express their antagonism, they took help from symbols to camouflage their resentment against supremacy. Most of the socio-political painters belong to this era;

²⁸Ijaz ul Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1991).

however Marcella has discussed only a few of those and never interpreted their symbolic significance.²⁹

Mohammad Yousaf Abbasi, in *Pakistani Culture*, has presented a deep study of different factors which helped to form and develop the culture of Pakistan. He stated that although Pakistan and India shared a rich culture, it is a fact that the culture of Sub-Continent, just like the land, got divided into Pakistani and Indian identities. Religion and politics are the key reasons for this division as both play an important role in setting the cultural standards. The national culture of Pakistan is based on Islam and it is the binding force between the regional cultures of Pakistan; Punjabi, Balochi, Sindhi and Pushto. Pakistan has four provinces and each province has its own language, dressing, food and ceremonial rituals. He has tried to develop a link between the society and culture by dividing the Pakistani cultural progress into two types; 1) material progress which includes agriculture, industry and trade, and 2) intellectual progress including religion, art, literature, philosophy and science. Both aspects have directly contributed to societal development making it clear that Pakistani culture is an amalgamation of all of these aspects.³⁰

Abbasi described art as an important part of Pakistani culture. He has presented a brief and informative chapter on the Painting of Pakistan, wherein, he discusses different painters of Pakistan such as Abdur Rehman Chughtai, Ustad Allah Bakhsh, Haji Mohammad Shari as pre-partition painters. The others include Anna Molka Ahmed, Anwar Jelal Shemza, Ozzir Zubay, S. Safdar, Ahmad Saeed Nagi, Khalid Iqbal, Gulgee,

²⁹Marcella Nesom Sirhandi, *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan* (Lahore: Ferozsons Ltd, Pakistan, 1992).

³⁰Abbasi, *Pakistani Culture*.

Sardar Mohammad, Sadequain, Ghulam Rasul, Sajad Ali Khan, Mansoor Rahi, Hajira Mansoor, and Arbab Mohammad Sardar as the modern painters of Pakistan. While discussing the life history, development of painting style and the subject matter of all of these painters, he said, "Our painters have an obligation to promote Pakistani sensibility without prejudice to create impulses and to react to foreign influence in a positive but selective manner. Blind imitation without reference to national ethos is not compatible with the growth of Pakistani culture". He further explains the role of art and the artist in the following words, "Art is a world by itself and knows no end. In the present congenial circumstances the artist would keep on his quest for self-discovery and explore new dimensions of truth and beauty".³¹

His argument sets out with a background idea that Pakistani culture is older than Pakistan. He has mapped out the history of Pakistan's culture back to Indus Valley and also discussed the influences of Meher Garh, Kot Digi, Harrapa and Mahenjodaro. He has tried to trace different influences in the evolution of Pakistani culture and also marked out the importance of advent of Islam in this region stating that Islam played a major role in the cultural changes in Pakistan. According to him, two other important major factors in development of the culture of this area has been the existent Hindu religion and the serious interference of British government.

Almost a similar exposition is given by Sayed Amjad Ali in *Painters of Pakistan*. The book deals with the development of art in Pakistan from the earliest recorded history (3000 BC) to the present time. Amjad Ali traced the stylistic and conceptual progress of the art of painting as well as documented the painter himself during different eras. The

³¹Abbasi, 337.

painters are either categorized by the correspondence to the subject matter and the similarity of their painting style or according to the common factor of geographical location. He has succeeded in giving an introduction of the artist and his conceptual approach concerning his or her subject matter under specific circumstances. Just like Ijazul Hassan, he has divided the painters into different groups according to their similarities. Amjad Ali has also traced the local as well as foreign influences which played a part in the stylistic development of a Pakistani painter. But this book is very dense in its content, as it deals only with the specific art theories and movements, which are difficult to understand for a common reader. It does not help the common reader to understand the message behind the image which the artist wanted to convey through visual symbols.³²

50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan is a study by Salima Hashmi, a renowned painter, and Quddus Mirza, an artist and an art critic, which documents the entire history of art in Pakistan. Art from the age of rock carvings to the present is discussed highlighting the relevant artists or artifacts related to the specific periods. The main concern of this book is to amicably put the artists' thoughts and outlook of the art of specific time into words rather than explaining the philosophy and message behind the art works. While discussing symbolic painters like A.R Nagori, Salima Hashmi, Iqbal Husain, Jamil Baloch and Jamal Shah, Quddus Mirza, instead of giving his own view or

³²S. Amjad Ali, *Painters of Pakistan* (Islamabad, Pakistan: National Book Foundation, 1995).

interpretation, has directly quoted them explaining their styles and the subject matter of their paintings. But the rationale and their symbolic contribution is not touched upon.³³

Akbar Naqvi's *Image and Identity* gives a brief account of the social, political as well as the art history of Pakistan. He presents a comprehensive and logical relation between the artist and society and the amalgamation of different cultures through art. He describes the fact that foreign influences, either political or cultural, do affect art and sometimes the personality of the artist himself. While discussing all these aspects, he also raises the question of an artist's personal identity and places emphasis on the need to develop the individual style and character. The book shows Naqvi's interest only in the personal and stylistic development of the artist rather than the symbolic interpretation of their work.³⁴

Mussarat Hassan's *Painting in the Punjab Plains* fills the gap in the art scene of united India under the British rule following the decline of the legitimate Mughal rule. She focuses on the paintings of the Punjab plains and records how the British influence affected the art sensibilities of this region; the emergence of the Bengal School of Art and later on the art scene of a young nation, Pakistan. This is a very resourceful book in recording the art scene, political influences and the subsequent art movements. This book also records the art work of the selected periods and the developing linkages rather than the individual interpretation or analysis of the paintings.³⁵

M. Athar Tahir, a painter and a writer, has authored *Pakistan Colors* in 2001, which mainly discusses landscape painters from all over the Pakistan. It includes painters from

³³Salima Hashmi and Quddus Mirza, *50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1997).

³⁴Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

³⁵Mussarat Hasan, *Painting in the Punjab Plains: 1849-1949*, 1st edition (Rawalpindi: Ferozsons, 1998).

Quetta, Kashmir, Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi. Athar has compiled landscapes and cityscapes and gave a brief description of the specific areas where the paintings have been painted. Sometimes he has even mentioned the name of the buildings, *Mohallas* and *galees* which a painter has portrayed.³⁶ On the same pattern, M.Athar Tahir compiled his *Lahore Colors* which consists of only the painters belonging to Lahore. He brings to light their works as painted in obscure nooks and corners of Lahore, old and new.³⁷

The abovementioned material is based on the books and articles which deal with the general introduction of art in Pakistan and its origin and development through the geographical and historical perspective. Along with these comprehensive studies on the painting of Pakistan there are some monographs written on the individual artists. These monographs present the complete life history and describe the development of the subject and style of work of specific painters.

Syed Amjad Ali has written a monograph *Anna Molka Ahmed an Artist an Institution* on Anna Molka Ahmed, who was one of the major symbolic painters of Pakistan. He has presented the life history of Anna Molka Ahmed and her work in a very simple manner. At the time this book was compiled, it was a big contribution in research in the field of art because at that time no research culture existed. Amjad documented the biography of Anna Molka Ahmad and discussed her style of painting which includes her style of rendering and the genres in which she painted mainly landscape and portraiture. But interpretation of symbols in her paintings was never Amjad's interest. This book is a

³⁶M. Athar Tahir, ed., *Pakistan Colours* (Oxford : London: Oxford University Press, USA, 2001).

³⁷M. Athar Tahir, *Lahore Colours* (Karachi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

successful attempt of to give a brief picture of Anna Molka Ahmad as an artist and her contribution as a pioneer in Pakistani Art.³⁸

Being socially and politically active A.R. Nagori is one of the major pioneers of symbolism in Pakistan known for his forceful and blunt expression. His daughter Amber Romasa has documented his work in *Nagori - Voice of Conscience*. It is a brief account of the different phases of Nagori's life, his training as an artist and his work from childhood till death. It contains some of the Nagori's photographs with his family, friends and colleagues. Romasa has compiled most of the images of her father's paintings and penned down the subject and the motivation behind his works through Nagori's own words. She has touched almost each and every aspect of Nagori's sensitive personality and his concern about the social and political situation of his country. She has told the story behind those images painted by Nagori but missed the important factor of interpreting the symbols used by the painter. Without the interpretation, the painting becomes ambiguous for the general viewer and leaves questions unanswered.³⁹

Abdul Fatah Daudpoto has explained the term 'socio political art' before presenting the works of Nagori. In order to facilitate understanding, Fatah has quoted several Western painters and social critics to elucidate the relation between art and society and their effect on each other. He has also given the examples of some Western artists like Francisco Jase de Goya, Edward Monet and Gustave Courbet who have painted the social aspects of life. He had to refer to foreign references because unfortunately there was no such literature produced in Pakistan to help Fatah establish a basis on which he could elucidate

³⁸S. Amjad Ali, *Anna Molka Ahmed, an Artist an Institution*, 1st edition (Idara Saqafat-e-Pakistan, 1987).

³⁹Amber Romasa, ed., *Nagori - Voice of Conscience* (Karachi: Oxford Univerysity Press, 2006).

on the importance of Nagori's socio-political work. Fatah seems to be the only writer who has interpreted Nagori's paintings to some extent. He has successfully described the subject matter and the story behind the imagery. He has tried to explain some of the symbolic images but he has not gone into a deeper study of the symbols Nagori has used in his work to convey his message to the general public. This research deals with symbolic painting in Pakistan and its interpretation in the light of Pakistan's socio-political conditions and culture, and ensures that a full command on the subject it is important to know the Pakistani society completely and study its political history and culture.⁴⁰

All of the locally produced literature is an important source for understanding the historical background and introduction of Pakistani Painters. It focuses the development of art in Pakistan and the complete record of the painters working in different decades of Pakistan. Only Virginia Whiles in his book *Art and Polemic in Pakistan* has discussed the awareness of Pakistani Painters with reference to their environment and society. But the discussion is focused on especially the art of miniature painting and its social and political symbolic significance. Miniature painting in the Subcontinent is secular and unlike some other painting styles such as the Christian and the Gothic it has much to do with religion. According to Virginia Whiles, it always has some symbolic connotation behind the images and she describes it as 'partially coded iconography'.⁴¹

Arts in Society, as the name of the book denotes, is a selection of essays by different writers and scholars on the issue of the relation between art and society. The author also

⁴⁰Fatah Daudpoto, *Socio Political Paintings in Pakistan A.R. Nagori A Painter of Protest* (Lahore: Sethi Books Publication, 2011).

⁴¹Virginia Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan: Cultural Politics and Tradition in Contemporary Miniature Painting* (London ; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2010).

agrees with the fact which Virginia Whiles discussed in her book with reference miniature painting that traditionally art was used to record and illustrate history. Historians realized that art may help to understand and visualize the character of any society. The author of this book has explained history as the 'development of human society'. He has divided visual arts into architecture, sculpture and painting. He said that there is a unique relation between the artist and his creation and the creation and the observer. The artist and his act of creativity and the observer and his response are human issues and are directly influenced by society. Nevertheless, the art work remains the same and has its own free standing which is judged by the personal growth of the artist and the unique response of every viewer. He has quoted William Blake “a fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees”.⁴²

The author suggests that there are three factors actively working behind the creative process. First is the creator who mentally and physically is involved in the creation of that art work. The quality of his work is dependent on his intelligence, his professional training and his sensitivity towards his society. The second factor is the art work itself which should be seen apart from the personality of its creator and the social conditions of the time. However, true comprehension of the art work depends on the third factor; the observer, who is the source of inspiration and the targeted result for the creator at the same time. This is due to the fact that the observer himself is a part of the society and might be the best judge for the quality of artwork. Being human every observer has his own personal response to a specific work or art.⁴³

⁴²Paul Barker, ed., *Arts in Society*, 2nd edition (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2006).

⁴³Barker, 7.

Symbolic Painting in Pakistan is not a new phenomenon. In the Subcontinent, Hinduism was the most powerful and strongest religion due to the fact that it was the earliest existing religion. And, Hindu art is known as exclusively symbolic art. In this research, the Hindu symbols are relevant as they are still found in Pakistani Painting. Hindu Art, therefore, is one of the sources, which can help us understand the relation between religion, spirituality and symbolism. Unlike Islam, the religion of Pakistan, the most important feature of Hindu art is the human figure. Almost a century earlier, E.B. Havell has discussed this aspect in his article *The Symbolism of Indian Sculpture and Painting*. Even till 1909 he claimed that this aspect of the importance of human figure in symbolism in Indian painting and sculpture has never been completely studied. Indian sculpture and painting mostly deals with immensity and purity of Hindu gods and goddesses. According to Havell, yoga is the source of spiritual insight of the Indian art work and the artist as well. Buddha and his *Palanas* (symbolic body gesture) and *Mundarâs* (gesture of the hands) are of great importance in Indian art. Even after so many centuries these *Mundarâ* and symbols used by the early Buddhist artists to represent Buddha during the age of *Mahayana* and *Hinayana* have continuously been used by Indian artists to represent their gods, deities and their spiritual powers. There is a philosophy Havell named Esoteric Hinduism to deal with the symbolism, in the relation between the male and female theology in Indian art. He has also described the ideal Indian beauty of the female figure and stated that the female in Indian art is the counter part of the male figure. The symbolism of the human figure in the art of painting cannot

be understood without going through the deep philosophy of the Indian art which belongs to the same region.⁴⁴

Before E. B. Havell in 1950, Asit K. Haldar had also published an article entitled Symbolism in Indian art and Religion and discussed the same subject of Indian Art and its symbolic significance with reference to religion and spirituality. The difference in both the articles is that Havell dealt only with the symbolic representation of human figure (Male and Female) and Halder discussed the same topic in general. He has taken symbols from religious Hindu literature and interpreted some of the important symbolic images like the Wheel of Chariot and the Egg and traced their origin in the philosophy of Hindu religion. This description of symbolic images is interesting because he has analyzed and interpreted them according to the situations which itself has symbolic significance in Hindu Philosophy.⁴⁵

The West followed a different trajectory in the use of symbols in visual arts. There was a whole movement of symbolism and then various exponents who deliberately used symbols for a coded communication. Pakistani artists were exposed to this movement, therefore, inspirations can be observed in Pakistani art. In order to understand the difference between the use of symbols in East and West, the following discussed books immensely helped in this research.

In *Kingdom of the Soul*, the author looks at symbolism as a cultural movement at the end of the 19th century with profound effects on visual art, music and literature. It argues that

⁴⁴E. B. Havell, "The Symbolism of Indian Sculpture and Painting," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 15, no. 78 (1909): 331–45.

⁴⁵Asit K. Haldar, "Symbolism in Indian Art and Religion," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 9, no. 2 (1950): 124–27.

the proponents of the movement responded to materialist currents in science and their social implications with an intent to blend spiritual and scientific domains. Due to this, the artists who preferred symbolism as a means of expression assigned a greater value to evocation and emotion in comparison to scientific definition and factual findings. Symbolists relied more on suggestion, in fact, emphasized it. The book also traces the origins of symbolism by discussing artists such as Edward Burne-Jones and Paul Gauguin, who are seen as important precursors to the movement. Edvard Munch, who is certainly one of the most influential symbolists has been seen as influential source for the movement of Expressionism. The author maintains that these precursors defined the basic character of the symbolist movement, which developed in Germany at the hands of artists such as Arnold Böcklin, Ferdinand Hodler and Kathe Kollwitz. The book focuses on the development of symbolism in Germany in a period of fifty years and provides a significant inquiry into the nature of symbolism thereby contributing to our understanding of the movement.⁴⁶

How to Understand a Painting: Decoding Symbols in Art has been an important work for this study since it focused on how to interpret symbols in painting. The author maintains at the outset that the art of painting has expressed abstract ideas using various forms, patterns and objects. The ideas such as love, hope, loyalty and melancholy have been the most preferred themes of artists who wanted to communicate a certain intensity. The motifs which they used although carried an ideological significance for the people of their time, they became more mysterious as the time passed. The symbols such as apple of knowledge by Holbein, black cat of Manet, candles of Magritte and flowers of

⁴⁶Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds, eds., *Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany, 1870-1920* (Munich ; New York: Prestel, 2000).

Georgia O’Keeffe have much to offer in their interpretation as each deploy a specific and original language of symbols. The author, discussing natural world and man-made symbols as expressed in paintings from fifteenth century to present, gives important insights into the art of interpreting symbols.⁴⁷

In a historical overview of the use of symbols, John Taylor examines the genesis of icons, their meaning and significance in the culture they were evolved. He begins his overview with an analysis of religious icon painting of the Christian era as it unfolded in Asia, Europe and Russia. The principal argument of the work casts light upon the secular significance of religious symbols in the hands of Roman Emperors who sought to establish their power through symbols. The book examines eighty paintings in terms of their background and interpretations. Since it encompasses art works and symbols from various cultures therefore it served well for the present study as it gives an insight into the relationship between culture and significance of symbols.⁴⁸

The books describing the lives and approaches of individual symbolist artists have also been important sources for conducting the present study as they draw attention towards the circumstances that shaped the artist’s personality and approach. In this respect, a book on Gustave Moreau casts light on the artist’s approach that culminated into what can be called pictorial symbolism. The author has examined some of the major paintings by the artist in terms of his ideology and aesthetic. The author also conducts a comparative analysis of his paintings with those of his contemporaries as well as those of earlier time. The author describes the life of the artist along with the shifts in his

⁴⁷Françoise Barbe-Gall, *How to Understand a Painting: Decoding Symbols in Art* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2011).

⁴⁸John Taylor, *Icon Painting* (New York: Smithmark Pub, 1979).

approaches from Neoclassical to Romanticism. Important events of his career such as becoming exhibitor at Paris Salon and a Professor at École des Beaux-Arts are also highlighted as they shaped his approach. The author through examining the factors that shaped Moreau's approach towards painting describes how his art became a reflection of his spiritual inclinations and how it affected the art scene of his time.⁴⁹

Since symbols carry a loaded meaning therefore their interpretation acquires a significant value. *Hidden Symbols in Art: The Illustrated Decoder of Symbols and Figures in Western Painting* is therefore a valuable source for understanding what goes on in interpreting a symbol. The book provides explanation of a variety of symbols through detailed commentary on 75 major art works belonging to different periods of past 700 years. The book provides description of nearly 500 figures and symbols. It also casts light on how to interpret symbols and themes such as nine Muses and Seven Deadly Sins.⁵⁰

Color has been one of the most widely used devices for symbolist painters. In his book, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism*, John Gage has inquired into questions related to interpretation of color by the human mind. Gage explores interesting scientific perspectives on the matter and probes into the psychological values assigned to different colors. The main argument that this seminal work advances is that color is a contingent, historical occurrence whose meaning, like language, lies in the particular contexts in which it is experienced and interpreted. The book includes a narrative that brings into play a variety of disciplines in developing our appreciation of color. It includes a

⁴⁹Cooke, *Gustave Moreau*.

⁵⁰Sarah Carr-Gomm, *Hidden Symbols in Art: The Illustrated Decoder of Symbols and Figures in Western Painting*, First Edition edition (London : New York, NY: Rizzoli, 2001).

description of optical mixing techniques that underlie mosaics. It describes the use of color as a symbol in paintings of medieval period and discusses color languages and practices. A further focus of the author is the ideas of notable thinkers and painters that have enriched the interpretation of color, these include, Goethe, Runge, Blake, Turner, Seurat, and Matisse. The book is highly informative as it brings into light various theories that explain our perception of color and thereby the power associated with color. It gives the reader a view into the implications of scientific discoveries on painting and then goes on to describe how psychologists studied color and its perception in late nineteenth century, especially in studies related to synesthesia. The interpretation of color has also been discussed in the light of twentieth century literature.⁵¹

Discovering the Great Masters is a quite helpful study in understanding the interpretation of symbols in painting. The book covers almost 500 years of painting from the renaissance onwards. The art of painting found a new character after medieval ages however, the strong tradition of using symbols in religious paintings continued to cast its impact. The book discusses the symbolism in the work of Giotto to Moreau through a carefully selected repertoire. Each painting that have been analyzed in the book is symbolic enigma. This book's innovative design pairs each painting with a page of die-cut windows that help the reader focus on specific aspects of each painting and features captions that highlight the most important symbols. The works discussed in the book include Renaissance masterpieces such as Botticelli's *Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus*, Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*, and Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment*. The

⁵¹John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism*, 1st edition (Berkeley ; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

book has turned out to be quite helpful for the present study as it gives various examples for interpreting intriguing and complex symbols in famous art works.⁵²

The movement of symbolism is also known for the specific themes that it preferred. Tate Gallery's catalogue is an important work in this respect as it explores the influence of British art on the movement particularly in terms of selection of themes. The works of artists such as Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Watts, Whistler, Beardsley, Khnopff, Moreau, Klimt and Picasso have been thoroughly discussed.⁵³

Christian art has been the epitome of using symbols in painting and therefore holds a significant place as a resources material for any study on symbolism. The book focuses on the works of renaissance artists and explains the signs and symbols they used in their works. The author discusses symbols as a universal language which was a product of Christian experience. The use of symbols reached its zenith in the works of renaissance artists who depicted Christian themes and biblical stories. The author casts light on how different symbols came into being, what they actually expressed, and how they were used by artists. The book is a lasting contribution to the field of artistic and religious symbolism, simplifying and beautifying a subject about which so little has been known.⁵⁴

Symbolism has been deployed by artists in their own unique ways, the study of individual artists and their unique use of symbols is therefore an important resource material for an inquiry into the use of symbolism in any culture. *Discovering*

⁵²Paul Crenshaw, Rebecca Tucker, and Alexandra Bonfante-Warren, *Discovering the Great Masters: The Art Lover's Guide to Understanding Symbols in Paintings* (New York, NY: Universe, 2009).

⁵³Andrew Wilton, *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910*, 1st edition (London: Tate Publishing, 1997).

⁵⁴George Wells Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art: With Illustrations from Paintings of the Renaissance, Unabridged Edition*, 1st edition (Oxford University Press, 1959).

Caravaggio is one such study that discusses both the artist and his unique use of symbols in painting. Caravaggio was one of the most famous painters of his time. The author describes Caravaggio's contribution to painting as an endeavor to bring realism into the genre. The use of light by the artist makes light a symbolic feature of his paintings. Caravaggio is also credited for his immense contribution in the rise of Baroque. The theatricality in his paintings and the use of symbols to express Christian morality and themes makes him stand apart from the rest of the painters of his time. Among the masterpieces included are *Boy with a Basket of Fruit*, *Bacchus*, *John the Baptist*, *Medusa*, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, *Amor Victorious*, *Ecce Homo* and *The Flagellation of Christ*.⁵⁵

The symbolism of modern art has a unique importance for discussing the symbols used by Pakistani artists. Symbolism in modern art was an expression of scientific, psychological and creative inclinations. *Nature's Experiments* demystifies the avant-garde value of experimentation and reveals new and important insights into a foundational period for the development of European modernism in the wake of science and psychology. The author argues that at the end of nineteenth century, the methods used in experimental sciences became a precursor to their application in the domain of art. The modern art and particularly symbolist work express this tendency of experimentation. The book convincingly stipulates that artists such as Maurice Denis, Édouard Vuillard, August Strindberg, and Edvard Munch, Allison Morehead used experimentation in creating the unique expressions that define them as modern painters. The author maintains that by using experimental methods to transform symbolist theories

⁵⁵Stefano Zuffi and Philippe Daverio, *Discovering Caravaggio: The Art Lover's Guide to Understanding Symbols in His Paintings*, y First edition edition (New York: Rizzoli, 2010).

into visual form, these artists broke from naturalist modes and interrogated concepts such as deformation, automatism, the arabesque, and madness to create modern works that were radically and usefully strange. The book therefore offers an insight into the unique character of the movement of symbolism that coincided with the experimental spirit of the sciences.⁵⁶ The book has been a crucial source of information for the present study since most of the Pakistani artists deployed symbolism in a way that drew inspiration from the works of modern artists. Although there was a mixing of indigenous sensibility but the Western influence remained dominant.

A very significant contribution to the study of symbolism is *The Symbolism of Paul Gauguin* by Henri Dora. The book provides with a comprehensive analysis of symbolism used by Paul Gauguin in artistic and social context. The author maintains that the Gauguin used a multi-layered symbolism and therefore the interpretations ought to be complex. The book furnishes an example of insightful interpretations as well as a comparative analysis of the artist with his contemporaries. Dora has performed an extensive analysis of the iconography of the artist as deployed in different media such as ceramics, woodcarvings, drawing and painting. His inquiry to ascertain the meaning of Gauguin's symbolism takes into account the literary sources ranging from classical mythology to nineteenth century literature and then also establishes a connection to the artist's childhood and upbringing. The book has been significant for understanding symbolism

⁵⁶Allison Morehead, *Nature's Experiments and the Search for Symbolist Form*, 1 edition (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2017).

and its varied uses as it gives a unique perspective for understanding Gauguin as a symbolist.⁵⁷

One of the key paradoxes concerning Paul Gauguin is the fact that he was both a profound individualist and at the same time the founder of an artistic school. For the young artists collectively known as the Nabis, Gauguin's personal version of Symbolism became the canonical route to modern art. The book, which accompanies an exhibition at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, reveals this double facet of the artist and his legacy through a series of successive encounters between Gauguin and his masters, his contemporaries and his pupils.⁵⁸

The movement of symbolism was also fuelled by the personal sufferings of the symbolist artist. The traumas they experienced in life developed a need to express the intensity of pain they went through and the use of symbols became a potent means to express a greater intensity. In this respect the study on the life and work of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo has been quite informative. Andrea Kettenmann's book *Kahlo* is an unusual contribution in understanding the emotional world of the artist and the use of symbols. The book maintains that one event in Frida Kahlo's life had a direct bearing on the nature of symbols she used. One was when in her teenage she seriously injured herself in a bus accident. Her spinal cord and pelvis bones were fractured and she was bed ridden for a year. It was in this condition that she started to paint. This gives an insight into the emotional foundation that characterized her work in her whole life. Due to this injury she

⁵⁷Henri Dorra, Gabriel P. Weisberg, and Richard R. Brettell, *The Symbolism of Paul Gauguin: Erotica, Exotica, and the Great Dilemmas of Humanity*, First Edition edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁵⁸Guillermo Solana et al., *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism* (London : [New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2005).

could not become a mother and this was an addition to her suffering. The intense meaning and use of symbolist devices in her paintings, particularly in her self-portraits, express the burden on her soul and the struggle she went through to survive in the midst of pain and loneliness.⁵⁹

The personal life of the artist in terms of psychological development and the environment that influences the variety of choices has been the sole determinant that characterized the use of specific symbolism. As Frida Kahlo developed an emotional vocabulary of symbols through the psychological trauma, in the case of Gustav Klimt, it was the social environment that played a key role in his development as a symbolist artist. Published to accompany a major exhibition at Tate Liverpool, *Gustav Klimt* explores the life and work of this unique and intriguing figure, who was at the epicenter of the cultural renaissance that swept Vienna at the turn of the last century. The book comprehensively discusses his sensual paintings, loaded in meaning and satire and embellished in gold. The book trace the influences that shaped Klimt's work by examining the relationship he had with architect Josef Hofmann, the all-inclusive design culture of Vienna that promoted clothing, jewellery, design and furniture. The book is a collection of essays on the artist and therefore provides the reader with multiple perspectives that help in drawing relationships between the events in artists life prompted by the social environment and his work as a symbolist artist.⁶⁰

Another artist who is perhaps one of the greatest symbolist was Edvard Munch. *Edvard Munch: Psyche, Symbol and Expression* is a collection of essays by notable scholars. The

⁵⁹Andrea Kettenmann, *Kahlo* (Köln: Taschen, 1999).

⁶⁰Christoph Grunenberg and Tobias Natter, eds., *Gustav Klimt: Painting, Design and Modern Life* (London : New York: Tate, 2008).

essays explore the themes that artists have used, most of them are psychological upheavals such as anxiety and depression. Munch's use of color as a symbol has been exemplary. The book provides an interesting and significant overview of the artist's use of color, his sources for using certain symbolism and his unique imagery. The interpretations are in the context of psychology, philosophy and literature and therefore provide a rich variety of how these perspectives can help in analyzing and interpreting symbolism.⁶¹

In addition to books exclusively describing the symbolism used by notable artists, works that provide an overview of symbolism as a movement have been significant for the present study as they inform about the changing trends in the use of symbolism due to various shifts in political, social, personal and artistic domains. These books are relevant for the study since in the case of Subcontinent such shifts can be related to how symbolism was used by artists. In this regard, the adaptation of the movement in another culture has been an important case study. For instance, the movement of symbolism became acutely visible in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia. Featuring paintings, sculpture, photographs, and decorative arts, *Australian Symbolism: The Art of Dreams* is a book that helped in understanding adaptation of symbolism in another culture. It features some of the most well-known Australian artists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It examines two streams of symbolism in the case of Australian artists. One was in which artists drew inspiration from European trends while the other was when artists redefined their local experience through the use of symbols. It is the latter who are important in understanding the local use of symbolism in a culture

⁶¹Jeffery W. Howe, ed., *Edvard Munch: Psyche, Symbol and Expression*, 1 edition (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum Of Art, Boston College, 2001).

where symbolism was not originated and therefore this book has been a significant model for understanding the use of symbols by Pakistani artists.⁶²

Presenting an overview of the symbolist movement, *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* by Henri Dorra, is a monumental work focusing on the aesthetic theories of symbolism in both art and literature. The author has written an insightful account on the writings of symbolist artists, which make this book a primary account of ideas which were expounded by the artists who actively pursued the movement. The author has inquired into the roots of symbolism in both artists and art critics from mid-nineteenth century to early twentieth century. The book entails an analysis of painting and sculpture along with architecture and decorative arts. One chapter exclusively focused on literary developments encases and elaborates the relationship between artists and poets. The author has integrated the aesthetic dimensions of the movement, the mediums used and the variation explored. The historical overview of the movement with a particular focus on aesthetics makes this work uniquely important for the present study since it helps to see how symbolism evolved over time in the regions where it originated.⁶³

Another perspective of analyzing the genesis of symbolism is to see it in the context of art movements that preceded it. The book *Symbolist Art in Context* describes symbolism as a movement that was a bridge between Impressionism and Modernism. This is a very profound distinction as it helps to understand how Impressionist techniques acquired a new meaning in symbolism and how symbolism became a precursor to Modernism.

Symbolism, the author maintains, emphasizes ideas over objects and events, and

⁶²Denise Mimmocchi, *Australian Symbolism: The Art of Dreams* (Sydney: Art Gallery New South Wales, 2015).

⁶³Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*, Reprint edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

therefore it has suffered from vague and conflicting definitions. The author attempts at a clear and crisp definition of symbolism and tries to find the roots of the movement in Romanticism. The author argues that ‘Symbolism enabled artists (including Munch and Gauguin) to confront an increasingly uncertain and complex world—one to which pessimists responded with themes of decadence and degeneration and optimists with idealism and reform’.⁶⁴ The pessimist perspective on symbolism has been explored by Philippe Julian in *Dreamers of Decadence: Symbolist Painters of the 1890s* who takes one to a conducted tour through the bizarre symbolism of this half-forgotten world, introducing him to a large number of writers and artists. In this lively study their inventiveness and skill are explored afresh, and their fantastic imaginings and weird symbolism exposed to a sometimes ironic light.⁶⁵

Rodolphe Rapetti’s *Symbolism* is a seminal work on the movement of symbolism. The book is a result of a decade of extensive research and offers a powerful analysis of European symbolism. The book combines a historical perspective with an in-depth analysis of art works and establishes important linkages of the movement with the social reality and artistic context in which it originated and developed. The book traces the origins of symbolism in literature and takes into account new, rare, and previously unpublished archival documents among its sources, alongside a large number of iconic and lesser known Symbolist images, all carefully analysed and beautifully reproduced in colour. The author maintains that ‘symbolism had a huge impact on the arts and literature of its day, but also prefigured numerous aspects of modern art from Abstraction to

⁶⁴Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 1st edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁶⁵Philippe Jullian, *Dreamers of Decadence: Symbolist Painters of the 1890s*, trans. Robert Baldick, 1st edition (New York u.a.: Praeger Publishers, 1974).

Surrealism'. He is of the view that the artists of the movement combined culture, painting and poetry in unique ways just by meaningfully using colour and line. The author has explored the work of renowned symbolist artists and has focused on their fascination with eroticism, perversity, mysticism, religion, and the occult.⁶⁶ The great reach and intensity of symbolism has also been explored by Norbert Wolf in his book, wherein, he explores how symbolists explored themes of anguish, death, love and fear by using symbols from Bible and Greek mythology. The author has featured the works of Edward Burne-Jones, Puvis de Chavannes, Gustav Klimt, James Abbot Mc Neill Whistler, Gustave Moreau, and Odilon Redon describing the influence of the movement.⁶⁷

The use of symbolism is much older than the movement of symbolism; the mythological gods and goddesses were featured in art works of antiquity symbolizing power and glory. The symbols acquired new meanings with changes in culture and collective modes of interpretation. *Symbols and Allegories in Art* is a comprehensive anthology of symbols and explains symbols and their meanings for people of respective culture. For instance, night, 'the primordial mother of the cosmos, was often portrayed in ancient art as a woman wrapped in a black veil, whereas day or noon was often represented in Renaissance art as a strong, virile man evoking the full manifestation of the sun's energy.' Each entry in the book contains a main reference image in which details of the symbol or allegory being analyzed are called out for discussion. In the margin, is a

⁶⁶Rodolphe Rapetti, *Symbolism*, First Edition edition (Paris : New York: Flammarion, 2006).

⁶⁷Norbert Wolf, *Symbolism* (Köln: Taschen, 2016).

summary of the essential characteristics of the symbol in question, the derivation of its name, and the religious tradition from which it springs.⁶⁸

Symbols have been used to express power and glory of the gods but also of emperors. It has been a known fact of history that rulers used certain symbols and attributes to convey their might to their rivals and understood the power of a symbol to stand the test of time and therefore capable of conveying a message to subsequent generations. In *Symbols of Power in Art* the symbols used by rulers of great stature such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Constantine and Napoleon and then various royal dynasties of the world have been analyzed. The author examines not only regal paraphernalia such as crowns, scepters, thrones, and orbs, but also the painted portraits, sculptures, tapestries, carved ivories, jewelry, coins, armor, and, eventually, photographs created to display their owner's sovereign power, a vast collection of works that now forms a significant portion of the cultural heritage of Western civilization.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Matilde Battistini, *Symbols and Allegories in Art*, 1 edition (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005).

⁶⁹Paola Rapelli, *Symbols of Power in Art*, 1st Edition edition (Los Angeles, Calif: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011).

Chapter 3: Historical Background of Symbolism

Despite the fact that the theory of symbolism was introduced by the artists of the West as a reaction against the over-emphasized scientific attitude, it was not a new trend in the East. Symbolic use of images or indirect representation of the human thought through drawing and painting was being practiced in this region even before the emergence of language. Symbolism was incorporated either for the sake of delivering messages or representing religious ideas. The fundamental reason for this trend was the mode of religious communication that developed in the East.⁷⁰ Religious narratives and communication originated and evolved as a coded language in which words acquired a symbolic character for conveying the essence of a certain doctrine. The East had a more profound religious foundation compared to the West, particularly concerning metaphysical understanding. René Guénon, a French Metaphysician who has studied metaphysical principles and symbolism of several religions from both the East and the West, admitted and said, "What we are intellectually we owe to the East alone."⁷¹

3.1 History of Symbolism in the East

Symbolic Image making or the art of painting in Pakistan is as old as the cultural history of this region. Beside Muslims there were other inhabitants like Buddhists, Jains and Arabs, who had their own specific beliefs and culture to follow and their influence in the impressionable fields of art and literature is quite apparent. Jalaluddin Ahmed, a well-

⁷⁰James Hastings, John Alexander Selbie, and Louis Herbert Gray, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Scribner, 1961).

⁷¹René Guénon, *East and West* (Sophia Perennis, 2001), 163.

known Pakistani writer stated, "these are the reasons this land named Pakistan was believed to be a 'crucible of cultures'".⁷²



Figure 1. Frescos from Ajanta Caves, India, 2nd to 6th century BCE

The first organized use of symbols in painting can be found in ancient Ajanta cave paintings of 2nd century B.C to 6th century B.C (figure 1). The theme of these fresco paintings is mainly religion, life of Buddha and his preaching.⁷³ These early Indian paintings were symbolic due to the fact that no one was allowed to paint Buddha in human form. Consequently, artists had to use different symbols to depict Buddha and his preaching. These symbols included his throne, tree, Stupa (his memorial mound),

⁷²Jalal Uddin Ahmed, *Art in Pakistan*, Enlarged 2nd edition (Pakistan Publications, 1962), 17.

⁷³Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan*, 17.

Lotus flower and his footprints.⁷⁴ Moreover, these paintings depicted the daily life of a society. Interestingly, after the death of Buddha, there emerged two distinct schools of Buddhism; *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna*. The former focused on the preaching of Buddha and never presented Buddha in human form. This school mostly relied on symbolic representation. The other school believed in Buddha as a deity and therefore presented Buddha in human form.⁷⁵

After the 4th century, which was considered to be the precursor of the decline of Buddhism as well as Ajanta art, a new religion, Brahmanism came into being. Since Brahmanism had its foundation in feudal system, it had to evolve a new art form which supported religion and developed in favor of the rulers. The followers of this religion believed that godly bliss could only be achieved by good acts and not just by good intentions. They believed in the personal relation of an individual with god. They wanted artists to work in a medium which was more permanent and closer to reality and their beliefs. Unlike Buddhists who expressed themselves and their religion through painting, Brahmins emphasized the art of sculpture. They wanted a complete embodiment of their gods. This change of social and religious values played an important role in the decline of art of painting but at the same time it laid the foundation for the “golden period of sculpture”.⁷⁶

Interestingly, there are some similarities in Brahmanism and Hinduism like the idea of a personal relationship between man and god instead of practicing rituals. Hindus think

⁷⁴Sir John Hubert Marshall, *The Buddhist Art of Gandhara: The Story of the Early School, Its Birth, Growth, and Decline* (Dept. of Archaeology and Museums, Govt. of Pakistan, 1960), 8.

⁷⁵Ramesh Chandra Sharma and Pranati Ghosal, *Buddhism and Gandhāra Art* (Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2004), 18.

⁷⁶Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan*, 18.

that any image or sculpture which symbolizes a characteristic of divine grandeur is believed to be only a 'support' or an 'aid' to comprehend the message. The function and importance of symbolism has also been described in their Vedas:

...these forms are like the horse which enables a man to make a journey more rapidly and with much less trouble than if he had to go on foot. No doubt, if this man did not have a horse at his disposal he could in spite of everything, reach his goal; but with how much more difficulty! If he could avail himself it would indeed be a mistake to refuse it on the pretext that it is more worthy not to have recourse to any aid.⁷⁷

It means that symbols are not necessary but they provide expediency to reach the desired goal and an artist uses symbols to convey his idea or message in a visual language instead of words. It is something like converting a thought which cannot be seen and felt into something which can be seen and felt. Hinduism is one of the oldest and most practiced religion. It is artistically the strongest religion of this region. Hindus have their own philosophy of symbolism and the style of depicting this symbolism according to their religious knowledge. And this idealized style is totally different from that of West.⁷⁸ Earnest Binfield Havell a renowned scholar and researcher also marked the difference between the Eastern and Western symbolism:

The academic tradition of Hindu and Buddhist sculpture and painting was, and is still, entirely based on symbolism, and without the knowledge of interpreting it no one can enter deeply into the study of any branch of Indian art... The gulf

⁷⁷René Guénon and Samuel D. Fohr, *Symbols of Sacred Science* (Sophia Perennis, 2004), 8.

⁷⁸ -Indian Miniatures: the library of A. Chester Beaty. By Sir Thomas w. Arnold. Aryan Books International, New Delhi. 1936. Introduction p.xxi

which divides East and West is that which separates realism from Idealism...

Indian insists that what we call...reality is deceptive and truthful, and strives to express it through the ideal.⁷⁹

After the decline of Brahmanism, Buddhist and Jain manuscripts consisting of miniature paintings of Pala (9th-12th century) and the Gujrat school of painting (11th-15th century) gradually turned down the tradition of Fresco painting. Jain artists came up with Buddhist paintings along with text on palm leaves. The technique and style is different from the Ajanta paintings. The earliest Jain Paintings dating back to almost 12th century are iconic and symbolic and are very much similar in style to the Buddhist paintings of Eastern India (Ajanta).⁸⁰ *Puncharaksha-sutra* is one of the manuscripts painted in Ajanta style (figure 2). Although the paper was introduced in 14th century by Arabs, Jains were still giving preference to the old format of painting on palm leaves.⁸¹ The color combination of these schools was somehow influenced by the Persian painters. But the static composition and the weak rendering of the figures show artists' lack of interest and knowledge about human nature and anatomy. The figures have no charm and are crudely outlined. They preferred descriptive paintings and used different signs and symbols to make it more appealing. A very strong step taken by the Jain painters is that they never restricted themselves only to religious subjects, they also painted their legends and myths.

Between the 14th and 16th century, Jain painters were commissioned by the Hindus to illustrate their religious literature. Ijaz ul Hassan has mentioned a group of Jain paintings

⁷⁹Som Prakash Verma, *The Illustrated Baburnama* (Routledge, 2016), 410.

⁸⁰Anjan Chakraverty, *Indian Miniature Painting* (Lustre Press, 2005), 16.

⁸¹Chakraverty, 17.

in which Hindu subjects were painted in Jain style, i.e. Kulahdar group. Ironically, the turban as shown in these paintings was a typical Muslim headdress. The main reason was the syncretic relationship between Hindus and Muslims that led to mutual cultural influences of an equal magnitude. According to Ijaz ul Hassan this Kulahdar group of manuscripts is important because they were the basis of local foundations and in the future also provided to be basis of Mughal miniature painting.⁸²

Symbolism presented in the Buddhist, Jain and Hindu art is traditional symbolism. Symbolic Mughal miniature painting is also an example of traditional symbolism. This specific form of traditional symbolism revolved around the fact that the symbols used by the Mughal miniature painters were coherently predefined including the halo, cupid, hourglass, etc. These were the symbols that the painters had intentionally decided to paint with pre-assumed meanings in mind and they successfully achieved their goal by delivering their intended message to the viewer.

An important part of pre-partition artistic endeavors was the forming of an 'identity', one which served as a means of regaining a semblance of the self-image. Paintings during this era were also vital due to the bridge established between history and the contemporary milieu. The people were struggling to find their national consciousness and painting served a twofold purpose, a) it concretized and strengthened the existing neocolonial identity and b) It was a means of instigating a struggle against oppression, both covert and overt at the political and socio-cultural level. These paintings were also emblematic of a creation of self-confidence in the people of the East. They had hitherto

⁸²Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan*, 19.

been swayed under the shadow of the 'white man' but were finally realizing their own worth and separate identity.

Abdur Rahman Chughtai, a well-known artist, of this period was a key figure in the pre-partition movement. He reflected the subtle disharmony exhibited in Muslim-Hindu relations during the pre-partition era. Initially, Chughtai's symbolic work was an amalgamation of both Muslim history and Hindu mythology (figure 2). His later work has a deep spiritual significance and is depictive of his personal miniature style. Chughtai's strength is his lyrical and sensitive line, which plays an important role in developing his style. Another name of importance during the pre-partition period is that of Anna Molka Ahmed. Her most important contribution to this era (pre-partition) revolved around the existence of the agrarian class. However, her interpretation was symbolic and she presented peasants as not merely peasants but as noble figures struggling in symbolic existence against all odds. Therefore, pre-partition painting was based on the footing of finding an identity as a separate entity from the British as well as other parts of the Subcontinent.

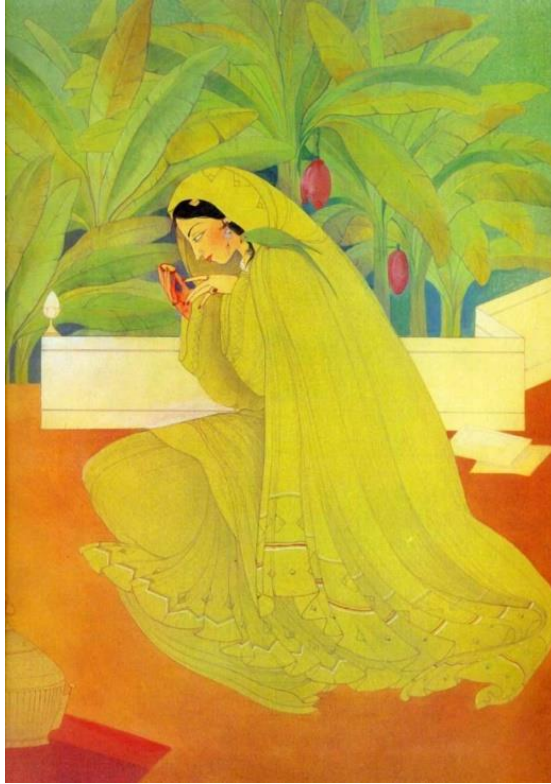


Figure 2. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, Hiranman Tota, Oil on canvas, 1952

Before partition there were many painters in this region working in their unique styles but by the time of partition some of them had changed their style and subject because of the foreign influences and financial restraints. There were very few rigid painters who had continued their work in their conventional style. Painting in Pakistan after getting freedom had developed quite a different stylistic and conceptual approach. It had been changing with time as the life of the country changed. An artist being a mirror image of society symbolically represents the era and society he belongs to. As the nation got its personal name and identity, the traditional symbolism in painting converted into personal symbolism. This study is going to analyze and interpret symbolically the work of several renowned painters of Pakistan who are the representatives of different decades in Pakistani art history.

Pakistani art of painting has an uninterrupted and extended historical background. The art of painting doesn't only represent the nature and the urge for religion, but also it carries the inner psychological values and the meaning beyond form and shape. In the spirit of Emile Zola who described symbolic art as to objectify the subjective instead of subjectifying the objective, Pakistani artists spelled out their inner world through symbolic painting.⁸³ Chang Yen Yuana Chinese scholar also formed a bridge between the subjective and objective. He said, "Painting must be sought for beyond the shapes; but this is difficult to explain to common people".⁸⁴ Chinese thought that subjective and objective were interrelated that one cannot understand each discipline without touching the other.⁸⁵

The Partition had sparked interest not only an identity, separate from that of the Hindus but one which was independent of the 'white man'. However, Pakistani artists, after the partition were initially influenced by the West and Western artistic movements. There was also a struggle as to which influence should be given more weightage, namely the old mythical influences, the Muslim influences or the more modern influences. It is also important to note that this period was significant due to the emergence of personal symbolism rather than symbolism which was only conservative and traditional. Artists of this era were beginning to discover who they were, as a whole as well as individualistically. For example, Zubeida Agha, a female artist, presented isolated cityscapes which were painted with exuberant colors (figure 3).

⁸³ Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism*, Harper and Row Publishers, Newyork,1.

⁸⁴Osvald Sirén, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting: Texts by the Painter-Critics, from the Han through the Ch'ing Dynasties* (Courier Corporation, 2013), 227.

⁸⁵Yijie Tang, *Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, and Chinese Culture* (CRVP, 1991), 144.

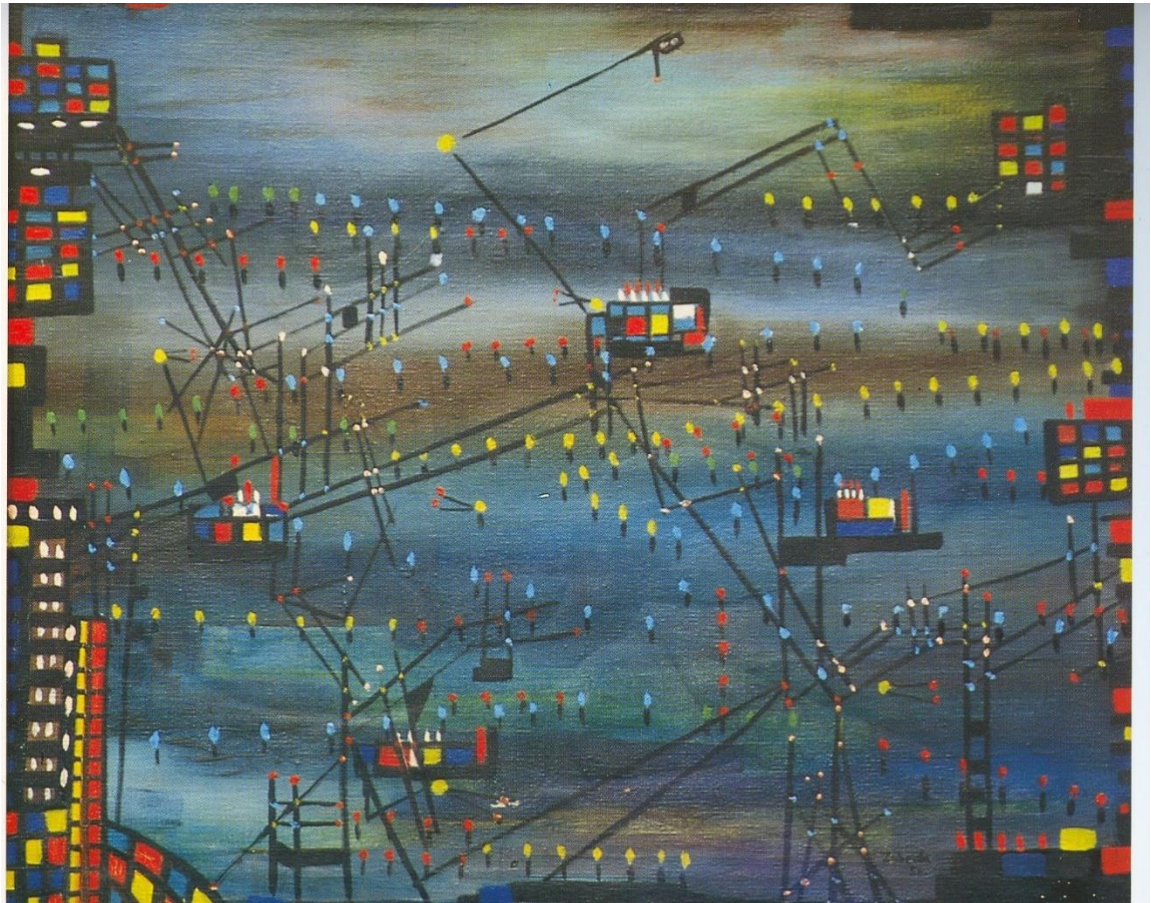


Figure 3. Zubeida Agha, Karachi by Night, Oil on board, 1956

This served as being emblematic of Zubeida's life, that of 'entombed existence', she had been allowed her pursue her inclinations but at the same time she was restricted to the proverbial 'four walls' of the house.

Anwar Jalal Shemza was also another artist of the post-partition who focused on symbolism which was influenced by both Western and Eastern influences. He interpreted Arabic calligraphy in a modern manner; therefore, rendering the Eastern into the Western, this was done to highlight the supremacy of the Eastern culture and the mystical nature of this region. This era pointed towards a Pakistani renaissance, one of

reawakening and relearning as well as melding the East and the West. Painters such as Shakir Ali were instrumental in bridging this spatial gap as in many of his paintings. Similarly, Sadequain took the Western philosophy of existentialism and transformed it into the Eastern framework. For instance, his crucifixion scenes (figure 4) concentrate not only on the agony faced by individuals but also on the fact that these individuals are condemned to live eternally on earth rather than rising to heaven.

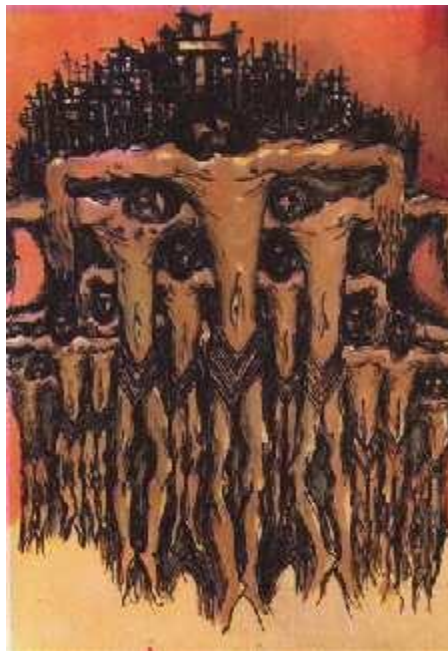


Figure 4. Sadequain, crucifixion, Oil on canvas, 1980

The contemporary art scene revolves around a myriad of different concerns but the most important is that art is now turning towards being statement pieces rather than only art for art's sake. One of the pioneers of this employment of art as a means of political statements is A.R. Nagori. Rather than merely painting stark images of barren wastelands, Nagori used vibrant colors to implicitly symbolize the turmoil created in the political arena. His paintings revolved around the tragic-comic which served to present a poignancy aimed at highlighting political problems. Ijaz ul Hasan, another contemporary

Pakistani artist has been successful in using symbolism to convey the socio-political problems in Pakistan. His use of juxtaposition is what symbolizes the difference between the idealistic and the real. Many of his pictures depict women/people from two different spheres; thus highlighting the divide between the aloof elite and the menial class. Where the aforementioned artists focused on presenting broader concepts and thematic concerns some contemporary artists emphasized individual statements in their artwork. For instance, Ali Azmat has also painted his social and cultural concerns. Mostly, he focused on body posture and the surroundings. He manipulated the surroundings to symbolize the fragmentation and breaking of the inner soul of individuals. His pictures through their starkness depict the solitude and fragility of the modern individual. He is also very sensitive about the impression of Islam; the official and most practiced religion in Pakistan. Contemporary art in Pakistan is neither restricted to mythological and traditional influences nor is it a reflection of Western artistic movements rather Pakistani artist have come into their identity as artists who have used to depict the socio-cultural scenario with its twists and turns. Rather than being subdued in a hazy world of mystical inspiration or one which seems parrot Western techniques, Pakistani artists have now come to understand how art can be used to bring about a positive change and the implications that it holds.

3.2 History of Symbolism in the West

In European art, symbolism was a literary and artistic movement that originated in late 19th century. It was not an organized and localized movement.⁸⁶ Instead it sprung up in different parts of Europe at different times, suggesting that the movement did not belong

⁸⁶Henri Peyre, *What Is Symbolism?* (University of Alabama Press, 2010), 6.

to a particular country or people but to a certain time. Symbolism emerged as a powerful response to impressionism. Embodying the core tenets of materialism and existentialism, impressionism built upon the scientific and socioeconomic developments of that time.⁸⁷ Symbolism on the other hand rejected those developments not from a regressive but from a subjective and idealist standpoint. From its standpoint therefore impressionism was a bland and meaningless reproduction of the material world, and contained no aesthetic or humanism. Symbolists were deeply weary of the established rationality and materialism of their time. Whether it was in sciences or in arts objects and materials were given far more importance than humans and their abstract mental reality. Hence by the same token symbolists rejected realism.⁸⁸ In such milieu they were confronted with the search for a fresh standpoint, through which they could identify themselves and distinguish themselves from other groups.

The primary source of symbolism was the general discontentment and grievance of its members in relation to the social milieu of late 19th century. Symbolists lived in a period of myriad social malaise with no possible solutions in sight. Feeling of sickness and loneliness pervaded the general environment of that time. The local traditions were being challenged by the exposure to foreign cultures and peoples. Such globalizations led many artists and theoreticians to realize the insignificance of their native heritages. The norms, codes and traditions which were known to them for a long time were appearing to be fragile and unstable. Furthermore, the failure of socialist and anarchist movements left the sensitive and socially aware people in an abysmal state. Religion on the other hand

⁸⁷Mary Tompkins Lewis, *Critical Readings in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism: An Anthology* (University of California Press, 2007), ix.

⁸⁸Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art through the Ages: The Western Perspective* (Cengage Learning, 2009), 671.

was completely co-opted by the bourgeoisie in its quest for the control on people's minds and hearts. Symbolists thus organized their efforts with a confused mindset. The apathy and emotional decadence of people instigated them towards discovering a new mode of thought and emotion. The art, literature and culture of European society ignited in them a desire for escape and rebellion.⁸⁹

The secondary source of symbolism was the socially subversive literary and artistic works of 19th century. The works of Oscar Wilde and Joris-Karl Huysmans were emblematic of such subversion. They submitted that art serves no social, moral, aesthetic or intellectual purpose. Art stands for itself, and it must be adored for its own merit and perfection, without resorting to any ideals and norms that lie outside an art piece.⁹⁰ This approach however mirrored the moral and spiritual degradation of late 19th century.

According to it individuals are allowed to live a hedonistic and purposeless life, regardless of its effect on society or mankind. Realism in this regard was mocked and discarded. Charles Baudelaire adopted this viewpoint in his own definition of modernity. According to him, modernity was a transitory phenomenon which can only be dealt on the plane of experience instead of norms and ideas.⁹¹ The role of art thus was to capture and elaborate this experience. Whether certain experiences conform to established morality or not is an irrelevant matter altogether. This viewpoint was often adopted to depict decadence and eroticism, because it could be. However, such anti-social viewpoint also led to aestheticism, such as that of Pre-Raphaelites, who exerted a strong influence

⁸⁹“Symbolism Movement, Artists and Major Works,” The Art Story, accessed October 15, 2017, <http://www.theartstory.org/movement-symbolism.htm>.

⁹⁰Stromberg Roland, *Realism, Naturalism & Symbolism: Modes of Thought & Expression in Europe, 1848-1914* (Springer, 2016), 235.

⁹¹*Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity* (Penn State Press, n.d.), 311.

on symbolists. Aestheticism by definition positioned art as an aesthetic rather than social undertaking. It resulted in emphasis on minute details and intricacies of forms and lines, in order to enhance the aesthetic gratification of an art form.⁹² As symbolism refined and matured, artists leaned towards a more aestheticized rather than a decadent perspective towards human life and emotions.

The anti-social tendency of symbolists took them to a rediscovery of romantic sensibility. Symbolists fully endorsed the romantic rejection of social norms in favor of a heightened subjectivity and imagination. In this regard the work of William Blake provides to be significant. His highly personal and spiritual viewpoint engaged the sensibilities of symbolists. In this way symbolism was a late 19th century romantic awakening.

Romanticism in essence is a revolt against the established rules and norms of human society. It is commonly identified with early 19th century European movement of romanticism. But in effect it can be found in almost all periods of human history. It is a function of human emotion and sensibility, and in absence of an objective framework it leads towards an emphasis on human individuality and emotions. Such was the case of symbolists who vehemently rejected the norms of late 19th century European society.

Prominent symbolist artists, Odilon Redon and Gustave Moreau, were influenced by romantic painters. The former's depiction of bizarre dreamy realms is greatly indebted to the disturbing imagery of romanticist Francisco Goya. The latter on the other hand was inclined towards tumultuous and exotic scenes such as that of Eugène Delacroix. Like romanticism essentially symbolism tapped into the discontentment and human decadence

⁹²William Hogarth, *Aestheticism in Art* (Parkstone International, 2012), 59.

of its time. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, the emerging symbolists followed along the romantics.

Symbolism emerged as a competent alternative to impressionism. It mobilized many rebellious and imaginative mind, willing to disturb the inertia and decadence of late 19th century European society. A particular case is of Paul Gauguin, who is one of the most significant French artists to be initially schooled in Impressionism, but who broke away from its fascination with the everyday world to pioneer a new style of painting, Symbolism. As the Impressionist movement was culminating in the late 1880s, Gauguin experimented with new color theories and semi-decorative approaches to painting. He famously worked one summer in an intensely colorful style alongside Vincent Van Gogh in the south of France, before turning his back entirely on Western society.

Seeking the kind of direct relationship to the natural world that he witnessed in various communities of French Polynesia and other non-western cultures, Gauguin treated his painting as a philosophical meditation on the ultimate meaning of human existence, as well as the possibility of religious fulfillment and answers on how to live closer to nature.

Gauguin was one of the key participants during the last decades of the 19th century in a European cultural movement that has since come to be referred to as Primitivism. The term denotes the Western fascination for less industrially-developed cultures, and the romantic notion that non-Western people might be more genuinely spiritual, or closer in touch with elemental forces of the cosmos, than their comparatively "artificial" European and American counterparts.

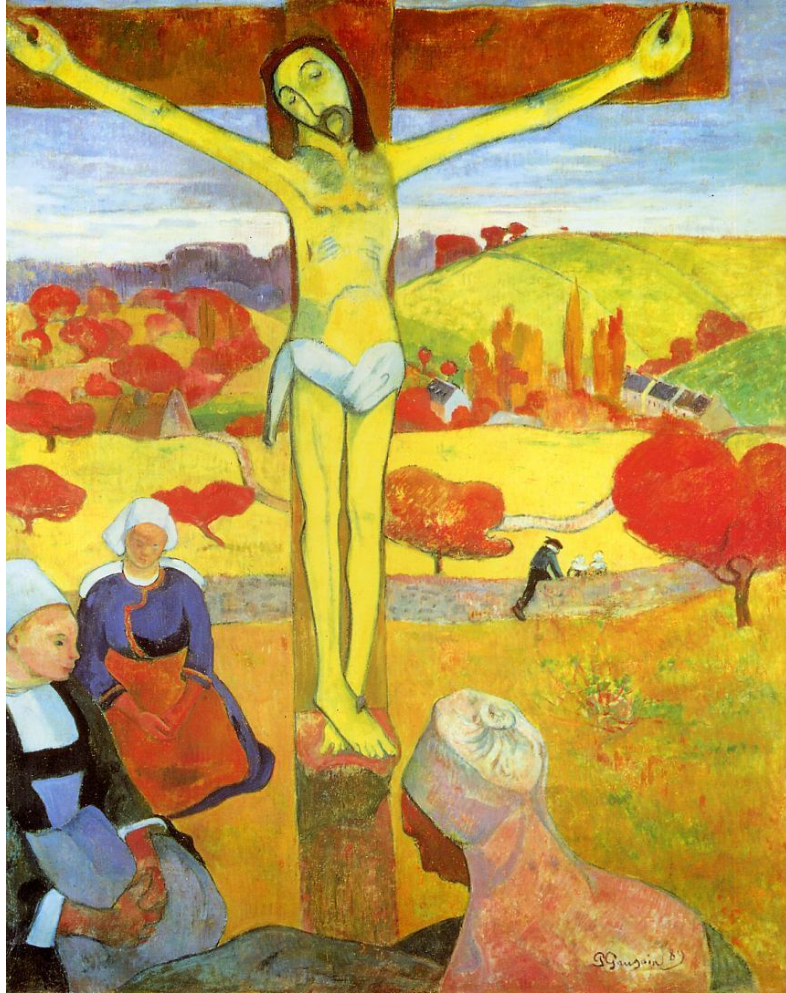


Figure 5. Paul Gauguin, *The Yellow Christ*, Oil on canvas, 1889

The Yellow Christ(figure 5) is a strong example of a style characterized by dark contours and bright areas of color separated by bold outlines and Symbolism (in which subject matter is idealized or romanticized in some fashion). The painting's predominant imagery, the crucified Christ, is evident, but Gauguin places the scene in the north of France during the peak season of Autumn foliage, indeed as women in 19th-century garb gather at the foot of the cross. It remains for the viewer to decide whether the vision is conjured in the minds of the pious or physically manifest in the contemporary landscape.

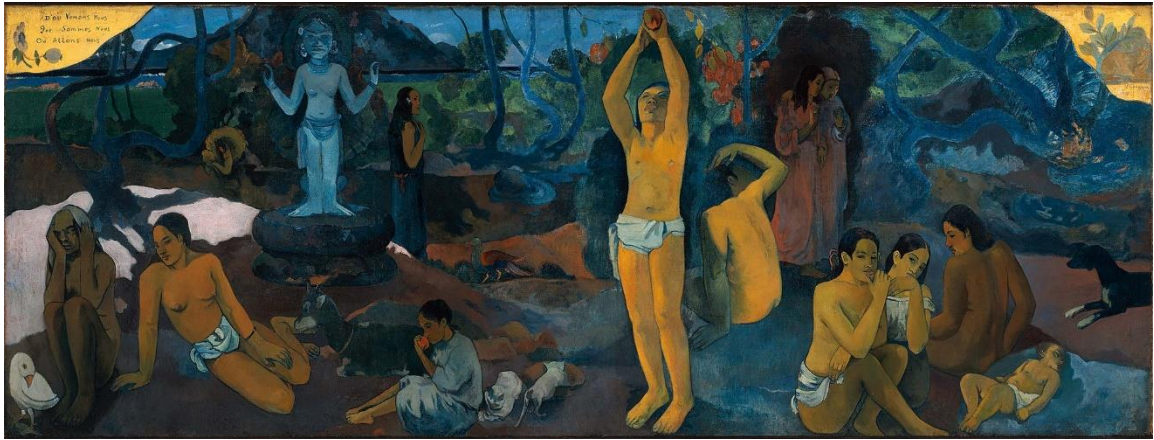


Figure 6. Paul Gauguin, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, Oil on canvas, 1898

In *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (figure 6) Gauguin's late-century magnum opus, painted in Tahiti, communicates a story in three stages from right to left, each stage corresponding to a question in the painting's title, which Gauguin inscribed, notably without question marks, in the upper left corner. The first stage of life, on the far right, is that of childhood; the second stage of young adulthood; the last stage of life's impending closure, here found at the far left, where, according to the artist, "an old woman approaching death appears reconciled and resigned to her thoughts." Unlike earlier attempts by Gauguin, this grand composition, derived partly from a long tradition of "stage-of-life" painting in Western societies, is not explicitly religious but, rather, more personal and obscurely spiritual. This is much in keeping with Gauguin's late-in-life retreat from European society into a culture native to what was then French Polynesia.

In employing such an evocative, yet oblique title, Gauguin alludes to his own increasingly philosophical and mystical tendencies of his mature years. He had always been linked by his contemporaries with a Symbolist movement in painting that was closely allied to French poetry of the 1880s and 90s, but rarely did he, himself, attach

overtly philosophical or literary references to his canvases. In *Where Do We Come From?* then, Gauguin is apparently looking back on a life spent largely apart from his own social and geographic wellsprings, and perhaps seeking mental, spiritual, and physical grounding in a world he consciously elected to serve as his "alternative reality." Many of the Western Symbolists artists explored the individual internal emotional world. For instance, Edvard Munch was an emotionally troubled artist which was largely due to his childhood characterized by loss of loved ones. The principal themes he explored in his works were related to human mortality entailing chronic illness and mysteries and tragedies of death. The emotional intensity that he experienced was expressed through his use of intense color tones and selection of mysterious content. Munch drew his inspiration from Paul Gauguin in terms of symbolic conventions, however, due to this peculiar subject matter, his works became more controversial. Munch began his career in the wake of Art Nouveau but did not adopt to the decorative aspect of the movement. However, in terms of subject matter, the inspiration is visible. Due to an emotionally troubled childhood, human psychology became his principal focus. His works therefore express the enigmas of human perception and its triumphs of imagination. The emotional tone of his paintings explored through the intensity of dazzling colors makes him a symbolist par excellence.

The symbolism of Munch acquired a universal significance since the use of intense color had a universal appeal. His selection of semi-abstract themes and equally semi-abstract treatment was an engaging strategy acted as a spellbinder for the viewer. Although most of the themes he explored express a personal narrative but the emotions involved in personal experiences had the power to elicit strong feelings in the viewer to the extent

that they had a cathartic effect. For instance, *The Scream* (figure 7) expresses the artist's style and expression in most pronounced way. One can see aesthetic appeals of Symbolism, Fauvism, Expressionism and even Surrealism in this masterpiece.

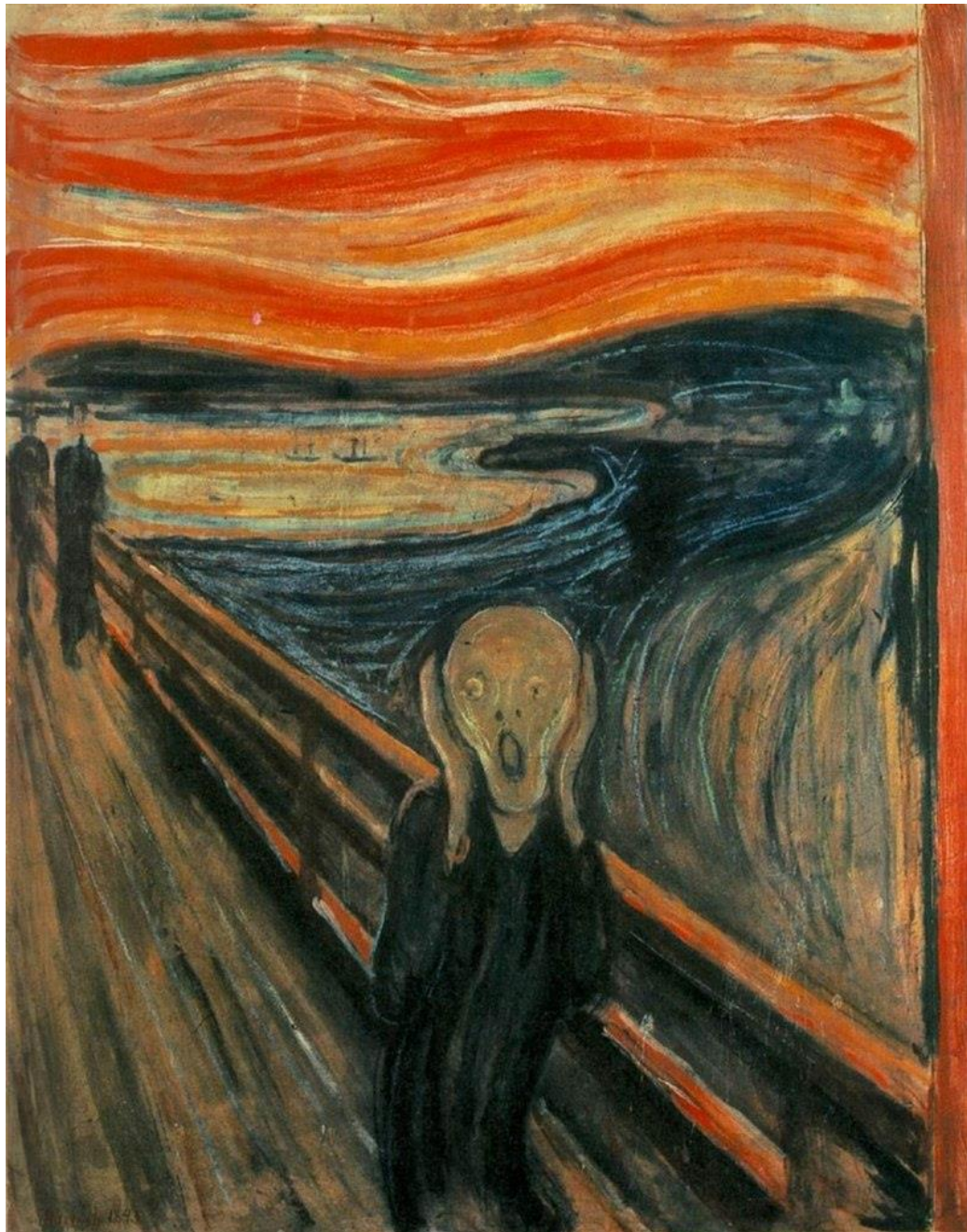


Figure 7. Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, Oil on board, 1893

The stunning visual of the painting is of a subject walking along a road. The anguish clearly observable on the subject's face is also encompassing the whole of painting through the use of intense colors. The artist recalled, "I was walking down the road with two friends when the sun set; suddenly, the sky turned as red as blood. I stopped and leaned against the fence ... shivering with fear. Then I heard the enormous, infinite scream of nature."⁹³ This was the moment when Munch's sister was admitted to a mental hospital, the personal traumatic experience was symbolically represented carrying all of its intensity.

Munch explored darker themes and the gloominess was captured through selection of specific color tone. For instance, *Night in St. Cloud*(figure 8) was a complex and dark memorial to Munch's father, who died a year before the painting was executed. The solitary figure and empty room depict the hollowness that the artist experienced. The painting shows the subject sitting in the corner of the room in crepuscular light giving the whole scene a specific emotional tone of sadness and solitude. The use of light and the shadows depicted in the painting give it a mysterious connotation. This is yet another example showing the personal experience expressed in its emotional intensity with a symbolic use of color. Munch can be seen as a painter who expressed his personal emotional turmoil through an enigmatic use of color and light in his paintings.

⁹³Edvard Munch and José María Faerna, *Munch* (Cameo/Abrams, 1996), 17.

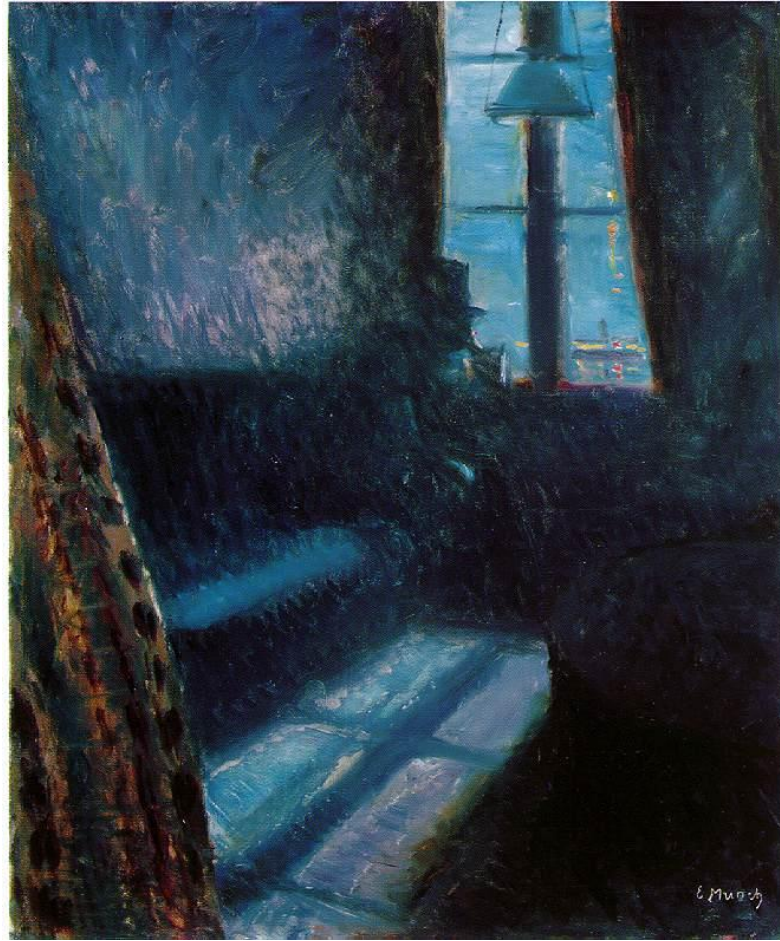


Figure 8. Eduard Munch, *Night in Saint-Cloud*, Oil on canvas, 1890

The symbolism of Gustav Klimt is characterized by social commentary is also visible in various works produced by the artist generally addressing the moral crisis of the society at the end of the century. For instance, in his 1902 work *Beethoven Frieze* (figure 9), the subject matter shows the narrative of Genii (three female figures), which symbolize humanity in search of fulfillment. The three women are shown dependent upon a knight wearing royal regalia. The knight is supposed to lead them to a certain end through a difficult path punctuated by elongated and obscure human figures. These figures represent the themes of disaster, sickness, death and other vices. The composition does lead to fulfillment as two figures interlocked in embrace are shown in a golden aura. The

treatment of figures suggest inspiration from Greek tradition of ceramics, which often depicted flattened human figures but at the same time Klimt blends the old and new given the cultural decadence of society as its principal theme. The combination of tradition and innovation directs the viewer towards a possible social change.



Figure 9. Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven's Frieze*, Oil on canvas, 1902

The symbolism explored by Klimt also had tendencies coming from romanticism. He explored the might of nature in opposition to human capabilities. For instance, in *The Park* (figure 10), he manipulates space to convey his message. The subject matter is a park in which a huge mass of foliage visually dominates the scene. The foliage is depicted in a way that its weight seems crushing the tree trunks underneath. The lower part of the composition shows a bench without human presence but it is juxtaposed in a way that the idea of sitting on it is like inviting the fear of being crushed by the weight of

the foliage. This aspect of the painting, which suggests the possibility of human interaction with nature's might is a romantic trait. Klimt in *The Park* acknowledges man's continued inability to fully tame nature and bend it to his wishes.

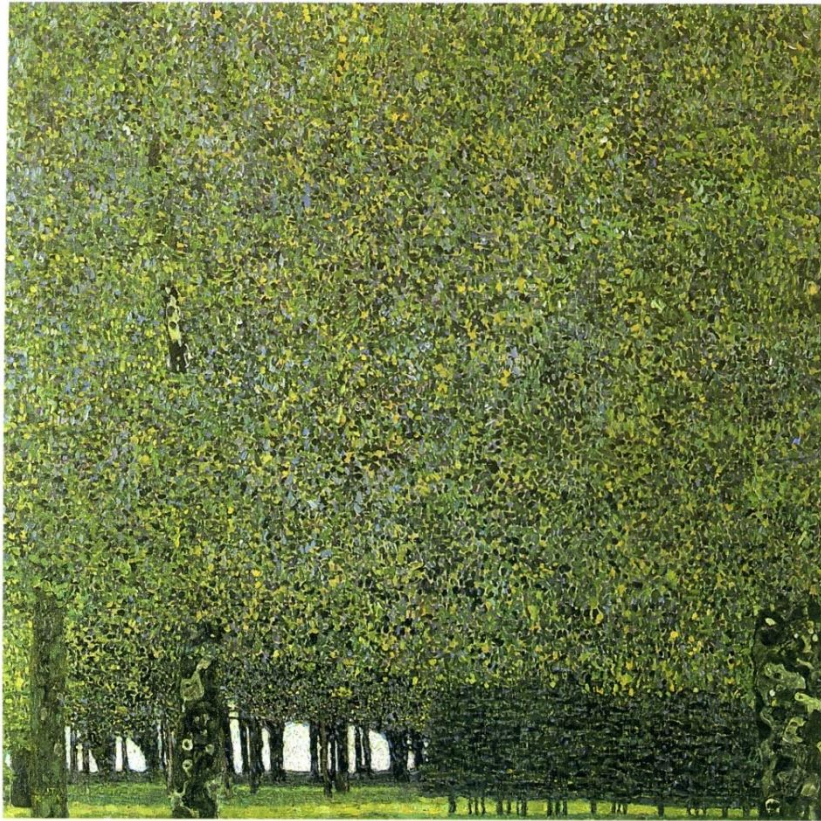


Figure 10. Gustav Klimt, *The Park*, Oil on canvas, 1910

Chapter 4: Symbolism as a Mechanism of Spiritual Awareness

One of the arguments advanced in the introduction of this dissertation was that the use of symbolism by Pakistani painters has, by implication, fostered a communication that contributed to the spiritual awareness amongst Pakistani people. This has been achieved through highlighting, undermining and reinforcing cultural connotations. To substantiate this position, a preliminary discussion about what is meant by spirituality and Pakistani culture is much required.

There are many aspects of life which are non-physical, spirituality is one of them. It is beyond human perception and cannot be measured through any physical or technological source. A human being does not own only a body (material) but also possesses a spirit (soul). And the true spirituality helps to find out the real self by pointing out the fact that there is something beyond this material world and which should be discovered to get enlightenment. Spirituality, in this sense, is different from religion but nevertheless integrated to it. Religion is a combination of beliefs and practices through which a person can build and sustain a relationship with God which includes all the physical and nonphysical aspects. Every religion carries its own kind of formal procedure to achieve the Divine willingness. Spirituality in contrast has nothing to do with corporeal experience. It is totally a non-physical phenomenon and focus only on a state of mind rather than the earthly things. It is related to the development of self within the constraints of worldly life. In contrast to a religion, spirituality is more tolerant and free flowing. The one who can achieve the highest level of spirituality is the enlightened one and is called a mystic or a Sufi. This ideology is deeply rooted in Pakistani culture.

The values and beliefs which are practiced by a society can be collectively called its culture. Most of the symbolic art work done in Pakistan is based on the values and beliefs which are generally practiced by the society and personally experienced by the artist. Symbolism in Pakistani painting can be seen as a cultural expression but since it is communicated with subtle qualifications, it influences the very culture of which it is an expression and this influence, in fact, as we shall see, contributes to spiritual awareness of an individual and hence society. The following account is an elaboration of symbolism in Pakistani painting as a cultural expression often highlighting societal as well as spiritual issues. However, before moving on to elaboration, let us become more definitive about what we mean by 'culture'.

Culture is a continuous affair of human life. It does not have any boundaries. The continuity of culture can only be assured if 'human life' is properly allied with its foundations, namely the society and religious background. This is especially true with reference to the Pakistani culture which is rooted in religious and spiritual background. Pakistan is recognized and differentiated by its rich culture and traditions and symbolic painting is one of the sources which not only reflects the culture of the country but imparts it a unique identity.

Sadequain and his cactus symbol exemplify the above position (figure 11). In a pure poetic Indo-Persian tradition, Sadequain employed powerful symbolism and metaphoric gestures in his paintings with abundance. He painted various series of paintings, each series rich with distinct creative idioms. Major body of his work can be categorized as Cactus Series, Mystic Figurations Series, Sun Series, Cobweb Series, Crow and Scarecrow Series, House of Cards Series, Sar-ba-Kuf Series, and Crucifixion Series, to

name a few. In Sadequain's own poetry, his sensitivity in relation to spiritual awareness can be clearly witnessed. For instance, the following two *Rubaayaat*⁹⁴:

In what situation, I am in

A terrible situation that I am in

In what contraption caught, is my heart?

In whose custody I am in

And:

How long shall I hold a mirror to my obsession?

How long shall I suffer in this world;

How long shall I suffer in the grief of life;

How long shall I suffer the burden of creativity?

⁹⁴Ajaz Anwar, *Sadequain, the Missing Link: Art* (Lahore, Pakistan: Heritage of Pakistan, 2012), 56.



Figure 11. Sadequain, Hope I, 1960s

Like most traditional artists in the East, Sadequain painted from his mind rather than from nature, thereby presenting a more faithful picture of his mindset and vision. By looking at the works of Sadequain from the partition to the time when he turned towards Calligraphy, one observes that he treated human figure and societal life in a particular way; man has been seen as a struggling entity caught in the shackles of the power structure of the society and in conflict with others. One of the factors that would have contributed in conditioning Sadequain's thematic approach came from his observation of society. Safdar Mir states that Sadequain came from a family with a classical scholarly

background, which was struggling for its survival in a hostile surrounding. In Pakistan, he witnessed the conflict of groups with traditional mindsets, found pessimism and despair amongst sections of the intelligentsia, the political thinkers and even common people. The first period of his work was a reflection of the chaos in which he found himself.⁹⁵

He identified himself with the cactus as a symbol of man's struggle for survival and striving for excellence in an inhospitable environment, and compares his mind to a perpetual battle ground of conflicting desires and ideas. The way he approached human form was unconventional. His approach by which he looked at man was a taunt on the societal injustice on one hand and perhaps a satire on the natural order on the other hand.

As Safdar Mir states:

His human figures—quite unlike his own frail physical frame—are all giants integrated with the image of the cactus, or other forms of a hardy nature. They are all full of a resistance and forceful élan which makes them grow tortuously out of the rocky landscape. There is nothing tender or frail about them. They are rough hewn and rudely formed. Everywhere there is a defiance of the elements which would keep them down. They are the symbols of Pakistani people full of the urge to exist in a world which can only understand the language of power. But it is not merely the Pakistani people who are engaged in this death defying struggle.

⁹⁵Sādiqain, *Sadequain: The Holy Sinner* (Mohatta Palace Museum in collaboration with Unilever Pakistan, 2003).

Sadequain's men and women, in essence, become the symbols of humanity fighting against the forces of death and disintegration.⁹⁶

Sadequain was a man who was thinking about life from a macro perspective. From this perspective, he symbolized man with cactus. In an interview, he told Rehana Hakim about his use of cactus, "To me [cactus] symbolizes the triumph of life over the environment.... I used to identify it with my own self. Then I started identifying it with the whole community"⁹⁷

Similarly, Marcella Sirhandi notes, "The burning red sun and dry, sterile environment are mocked by the triumphant cactus people. They thrive, proliferate and grow to army strength. They represent the forces of reason countering those of barbarians"⁹⁸. Ijaz ul Hassan also commented on the use of cactus as he wrote, "It symbolises, on the one hand, man's struggle against natural hazards (like the cacti'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."⁹⁹

Sadequain's approach is somewhat comparable to Odilon Redon. Redon is one of the most important and original of all the Symbolist artists. His visionary works concern the world of dreams, fantasy, and the imagination. One of the main themes in Redon's oeuvre is the decapitated or disembodied head. Often shown free-floating, and sometimes reduced to a mere eyeball, the severed head encapsulates the Symbolist desire to free

⁹⁶Sādiqain.

⁹⁷Sirhandi, *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan*, 57.

⁹⁸Sirhandi, 58.

⁹⁹Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan*, 81.

oneself from the shackles of the ordinary, mundane world, and achieve a higher state of consciousness through the exploration of dreams and subjective vision.

In *Cactus Man* (figure 12), a man's head emerges from a flower pot, his neck rising upward like the stalk of a strange hybrid plant. Delicate thorns cover his skin and head, giving him a cactus-like appearance while also conjuring Christ's crown of thorns, or other similar martyrs. With large dull eyes, a flattened nose, and wide lips, the head has an expression that is both observant and indifferent. The vase is decorated with an image of an Amazon slaying a man, referring to the Greek myth of women warriors whose conflation of feminine and masculine traits echoes the conflation of human and plant forms in the drawing. Redon's hybrid man-plant can thus be understood as an attempt to reconcile the two poles of human existence, nature and culture, wild and civilized.



Figure 12. Odilon Redon, *Cactus Man*, Charcoal on paper, 1882

Severed heads appear with great frequency in Symbolist art and literature. In *Guardian Spirit of the Waters*, a large head held aloft by wings floats above a tranquil sea, gazing upon a small sailboat with enormously expressive eyes. Seagulls flit through the air and skim the water's surface, while the water stretches out toward the distant horizon. A delicate halo surrounds the head, giving the strange creature a benevolent, divine aura

despite its brutish features. In Sadequain's own work, the severed head has been used as a symbolist theme (figure 13).



Figure 13. Sadequain, Man with severed head, Oil on canvas, 1960s

The personal experience of a painter is characterized by an artist's critical observation of society and his or her personal intellectual and emotional inclinations. These painters do not wear their hearts on their sleeves rather they surreptitiously convey their feelings to the general public. Their intellectual creativity is hidden in the symbolic visual language which they develop from their own sensitivity to interact with the viewer. For example, A.R Nagori, a Karachi based Pakistani painter, was very much aware of the complexity of the hereditary feudal system in Pakistan and being a sensitive artist, he was repulsed by the violation of the basic human rights. The result was the numerous symbolic paintings depicting violence in society, the laborious life of *thar*¹⁰⁰, women and their humiliation and exploitation by the egocentric patriarchal society. *Bounded Girls* (figure 14) is one of the best examples of his symbolic representation of the status of woman in the typical feudal system of Pakistan. Such themes compelled the viewer to reflect upon the difference between his or her historical spiritual identity and the existing social identity.

¹⁰⁰ Thar is a culturally rich but educationally very backward desert area of Pakistan. It creates a natural boundary between Pakistan and India. In Pakistan, this desert covers the eastern Sind Province to the southeastern portion of Punjab. It is also connected with the Cholistan desert near Bahawalpur. In India, it covers the state of Rajasthan and touches the states of Haryana and Punjab.

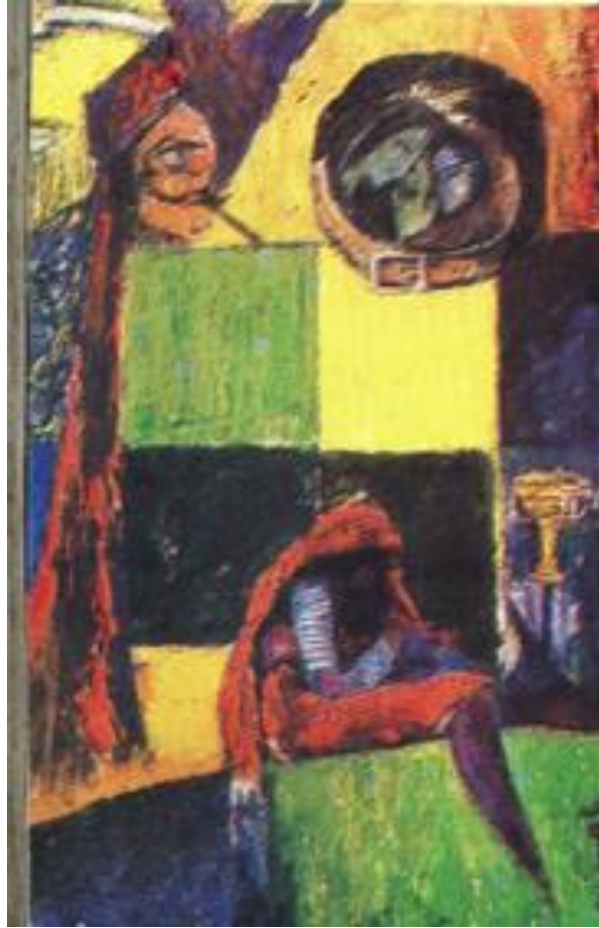


Figure 14. Abdul Rahim Nagori, Bounded Girls, Oil on canvas

In *Bounded Girls*, Nagori has delivered his message in this painting through a peculiar use of personalized symbols. For instance, he has painted faces of women bounded by a waist belt. The use of ‘waist belt’ can be rightly interpreted once we learn its significance for the artist. During one of Nagori’s telephonic interview he has denied interpreting the waist belt as the symbol of bonding, connectivity and strength and said that contrary to this Western ideology, he sees the waist belt as a separator of the body into two parts, although, of course, in reality the human body cannot be cut or separated into two parts through a waist belt. Waist belt, in case of Nagori, represents a separation within society between oppressors and oppressed. According to Nagori, males and females are the

counterparts of each other and equally important in forming the body of a healthy society. However, the feudal system has created a false separation between males and females. Nagori has objectified this idea of false psychological separation in his paintings through his colorfully designed and clearly pointed symbolic objects.

According to Goldwater, "one of the chief characteristics of symbolist painting (and its graphic derivatives) is the stress it puts upon the pictorial surface and its organization".¹⁰¹

Bounded girls seems to be a symbolic masterpiece according to Goldwater's position. Nagori has not only designed a complete pictorial surface but the design painted in the background is also very symbolic. The brightly colored designed background typifies *Ralli*, the Sindhi traditional hand stitched patchwork, which is another cultural symbol Nagori has used in this painting. *Ralli* also represents the laborious life of Sindhi women and is therefore a symbol that has a broader agreement when it comes to interpretation. In this painting, Nagori successfully elucidates torture, physical as well as mental, hunger, discrimination, poverty and degradation of Sindhi women. He emphasizes these women's plight by adding symbols related to the victimizers, namely the landlords. The turban, waist belt, mustaches, *khussa* and *hukka* are some of the symbols he uses to portray the feudal rule and their dominance over ordinary life. This portrayal of victimization, at once, takes the viewer to rethink his or her moral and ethical position in the backdrop of the Pakistani spiritual heritage in which human beings are seen as equal.

¹⁰¹Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York: Westview Press, 1980), 18.



Figure 15. Abdul Rahim Nagori, *Bheel Goth*, Oil on canvas

Nagori was a spiritually conscious artist who deeply felt the tragedies and sufferings of life. For him, art was a vehicle for externalization of personal feelings.¹⁰² The scene from *Bheel Goth* (figure 15) is another example of Nagori's typical symbolism for presenting the tough life of the demoralized and exploited women at the hands of the cruel *waderas* (land lords). The *waderas* are depicted by the white turban over the *ralli*, *khussa* and *hukka*. The turban is a typical headdress of Pakistani feudal culture. The status of a feudal lord is appraised by the size and the style of his turban. It is a ubiquitous symbol used by Nagori, which he employs to show the unknown fear of the feudal landlord over the innocent and harmless creatures, the peasant women. The background is almost the same as in the *Bounded Girls*. We observe various colored geometrical shapes giving the impression of a blanket made of hand stitched pieces of cloth. This *Ralli* also symbolize the different colors of life and the different social standards for the elite and the lower

¹⁰² Nagori, Abdul Rahim. Interview by Aqsa Malik, E-mail correspondence, Lahore, January 2005.

class. Bright and lively colors like yellow, orange and red have been juxtaposed with dark and gloomy colors like blue, purple and black. This symbolizes the difference between the happy and luxurious life of the landlords and the deprived and sordid existence of the peasant. Both classes are parts of the same society as dark and light colors of the *Ralli*, but there is a great divide between them, if not physical then metaphorical. Nagori was purposeful in using these contrasting colors, he said, “these dark patches enhance the effect of the bright patches and the bright patches makes the dull patches duller”. The same stands true for the society, the misery of the lower class keeps the domination of upper class alive, and the luxurious life enjoyed by the upper class, makes the deprivation of lower class more pronounced. In other words, the elite or upper class render the lower class more miserable and it is due to the oppression of the lower class that the upper class gains more power.

Just as Nagori has conveyed his concerns about the rural women, he was acutely sensitive about the intellectually and economically backward areas of Pakistan. The blazing sun and the unrelenting heat, symbolized by the warm orange color creates a setting for the complex image of a crow as a *Thirsty Thari Bird* (figure16). According to the Red Indians of North America, the crow 'is a great civilizer and the creator of the visible world'.¹⁰³ Nagori was certainly aware of this interpretation and saw the crow as the true civilizer of his own land. The bird is seen as such since it has survived in almost every part and in any climatic conditions of Pakistan, including *Thar*. Nagori believes that the women of the *Thar* have not changed their cultural and religious beliefs and

¹⁰³J. C. Cirlot, *Dictionary of Symbols* (Routledge, 2006), 71.

remained same as their ancestors. These women for Nagori, as the crow is, are the true civilizers.



Figure 16. Abdul Rahim, Nagori, Thari Bird, Oil on canvas

Nagori painted the poverty and deprived life of the women of *Thar* desert but this kind of depression and scarcity is found in every nation and culture of the world. The crow also symbolizes a universality, which has endured all and can endure more. The crow is the most intelligent of birds. He lives in just about every piece of land on earth and there's a

great body of folk lore about crows, of course. No carrion will kill a crow. The crow is the indestructible bird who suffers everything, suffers nothing.¹⁰⁴

The famous image of this thirsty bird sitting on an earthen pot, symbolizes the *tharri* woman holding the empty pitcher. It illustrates unfulfilled desires and unquenched thirst. It is one of the toughest albeit routine work for these women to fetch drinking water from far-off places, because there are no rains in the desert. There is no easy way to get water and given the fact that water is a basic necessity of life, the dilemma of these women can be understood. They spend a great deal of time and energy in fetching and collecting water for their families and the daily households. Nagori has chosen a very simple but deep subject to communicate that although water is the cheapest and valueless resource for a common man in Pakistani society, but for *Thari* women, it is priceless. This message is as symbolic as the images of this painting are. The pitcher is a traditional Pakistani pot made with the clay. It is used in villages and remote areas of Pakistan to collect, store and keep the water cold. Nagori said 'this pitcher in this painting not only carries water but the unfulfilled wishes and the needs of these woman, who do not know any kind of life other than this laborious one'.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, the pitcher gains strength to carry water after it is baked for a sufficient time. The pitcher can be seen as a metaphor for the heart of *Tharri* woman, which has gained its strength from the hardships it faced in the rigorous life of the desert. The subject matter of painting also echoes the spiritual metaphor of 'Ishq', which also stands for the spiritual journey, in which one goes through many hardships. The pitcher in this case again symbolizes the heart, which has to be filled by the wine of spiritual awareness.

¹⁰⁴Ken Lauter, *Songs from Walnut Canyon* (Xlibris Corporation, 2010), 51.

¹⁰⁵Nagori, Abdul Rahim. Interview by Aqsa Malik, E-mail correspondence, Lahore, January 2005.

Gender discrimination or social injustice faced by women in Pakistan has been a sensitive topic. The painters have used symbolism to convey their positions regarding social injustice and gender discrimination for two reasons. One has been that directly addressing the issues targets a pretty large faction of the society, which is in a state of denial and spiritual decadence. The second is that the power of symbols, in Pakistani context, can be more effective than direct communication since it can impact deeper and longer. Iqbal Husain a renowned social painter of Pakistan has presented a very different and bold side of the female ignominy. Husain belongs to the red light area of Lahore, and is famous for his paintings on the issues of the women belonging to the red light area. His own mother was a sex worker, therefore, from a young age he was exposed to the pitiable conditions of women in his mother's profession.

Iqbal Hussain used women to symbolize the hypocrisy of Pakistani society in a way that is comparable to Nagori. Nagori, focusing on the harsh conditions of desert portrayed deprived women, while Iqbal Hussain referred to harsh social conditions that deprived women of their originality. His woman is hidden behind a cosmetic veil, which has become a necessity of a prostitute's life.

Prostitution is believed to be a very derogatory profession in the Pakistani society. In the Islamic religion, prostitution is forbidden, and as a Muslim country Pakistan also has laws against it. But Husain believes in "*let them live*".¹⁰⁶ In his painting *Eid Namaz* (figure 17), referring to one of the major religious as well as cultural festival of Muslims, the *Eid*, Iqbal has portrayed a scene of Badshahi Mosque, adjacent to the famous red light area. He has painted two prostitutes who are busy in their make-up; one showing a

¹⁰⁶Nagori, Abdul Rahim. Interview by Aqsa Malik, Karachi, October 2010.

mirror to the other. It is ambiguous as to what they are getting ready for, the *Eid* festival or potential clients. He has painted a prayer congregation offering *Eid* prayer in the background. It seems that these ladies are aware that some of these *namazis* may come to visit them after the prayer has concluded. Iqbal Husain seems to compare the two personality types; one is the prostitute who is doing what is forbidden in religion but her offering is devoid of hypocrisy. Whereas, the other personality type, the so called Muslim worshiper, is presenting himself as pious and religious but internally he is not. Some of these worshippers have bad intentions and thoughts lingering in their mind even while worshiping, and the ladies sitting in the balcony know the fact and are waiting and getting ready for them. They are what they are and don't want to hide their identities or their profession.



Figure 17. Iqbal Hussain, Eid Namaz, Oil on canvas

The mirror that one of the prostitutes is holding, is not a new symbol in this region. It can be traced back to Mughal miniatures where kings and queens are being painted with the mirror in their hands or being shown a mirror by someone else. Husain uses the mirror as a spiritual symbol; reflecting the truth. Dadier Colin an astrologer and a writer of the interpretation of dreams describes looking into a mirror and raises question about one's appearance and the inner or real self:

People look at themselves in mirrors: they discover their own face and become more aware of themselves. Knowing what they look like and being able to recognize themselves in a mirror means that they can watch themselves. But do they see themselves as they really are?...The mirror offers people the chance to experiment with their reflection, to use it as a model to beautify themselves, put on fancy dress, present others with an image that matches the one they have of themselves.¹⁰⁷

According to the above proposition, the use of a mirror leads to two acts. The first is the spiritual function; becoming more aware of oneself and the second is to beautify oneself in order to correlate his own and people's perception about himself. The prostitutes in this painting are using the mirror in a similar way. The first thing that they are using the mirror for is to realize their true nature. They are aware of their nature as prostitutes and do not shy away from the fact. In fact, it is the second step of this reflective process, namely that of beautifying oneself, in which they are actually engaged. They know their physical appearance and they are trying to make it more attractive. They have an idealized image for themselves and are trying to convey the same to their customers. The mirror and makeup are interrelated images because the makeup is related to the beautifying of oneself. The makeup on a simplistic level is merely a tool for attracting customers but Husain makes it into a symbol so that he may comment on society.

The act of makeup represents our society where individuals hide their distorted selves and spiritual decadence behind seemingly pious acts. For Iqbal both these ladies and some of the worshipers are the same. The ladies are trying to beautify their physical

¹⁰⁷Didier Colin, *Dictionary of Symbols, Myths and Legends* (Hachette Illustrated, 2003), 339.

appearance by using cosmetics and the *namazis* are hiding their polluted internal personalities behind the veil of religious rituals. But there is a big difference; these ladies are trying to hide their physical appearance from the society but the *namazis* are trying to hide their inner selves. Husain said, “the lady holding a mirror is 'me' showing the reflection to the other woman which is the symbol of society”. According to Husain, “there is a prostitute inside all of us which we repress and consider to be impure. We all possess a double personality”.¹⁰⁸ All of us are guilty of duality but there are only a few who actually face their duality. The mirror is an important symbol as it serves as an index to the personality.

Being an interpreter of dreams, Colin takes the mirror to be a very rich symbol of personality analysis. He gives many interpretations of looking into a mirror from different angles. For him “to dream of looking in a mirror without seeing a reflection indicates that contact with the conscious self has been broken”.¹⁰⁹ A similar account can be applied to the painting at hand as the mirror which one lady is showing to the other is devoid of reflection. This portrays that the lady looking in the mirror has lost contact with her 'conscious self'. It implies that she is not aware of the fact that people don't want her because of her beauty, which she is trying to enhance by the artificial cosmetics, but use her for their lust only. In similar vein, the society has lost contact with its spiritual self, and the individuals are being abused by their lust. Like the prostitute, the people of society are only concerned about their appearance. They are offering prayer to show the world that they are pious, religious and have pure souls but internally they have immoral ideas in their mind of which the ladies sitting in the balcony are already aware.

¹⁰⁸Husain, Iqbal. Interview by Aqsa Malik, Lahore, June 2010.

¹⁰⁹Colin, *Dictionary of Symbols, Myths and Legends*, 339.



Figure 18. Iqbal Hussain, Untitled, Oil on canvas

Another painting (figure 18) on the same topic by Husain shows a prostitute laying on a bed. The folds of the bed sheet connote the turbulent ups and downs in the life of a prostitute. The bed sheet depicting red and blue colors is indicating the lustful nature of her profession. For Husain, these two colors are vibrant and are colors of desire. She is staring directly in the eyes of the spectator like the barmaid in *Manet's Bar* (figure 19).



Figure 19. Eduard Manet, A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, Oil on canvas, 1881

Eduard Manet painted *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* in 1881. This prostitute looks as confident and relaxed as Manet's barmaid. It is quite perplexing as to whether both the ladies are staring in the eyes of the spectator or gazing into the air. This perplexity is deliberately created by both artists to show the emptiness that the subject is experiencing. Another common feature in Husain's and Manet's representation is the necklace, which is quite prominent due to their low necked dresses. Ornamentation and makeup is very common in this profession and considered essential to attract the client. A necklace is a very important part of the body ornamentation of these sex workers. A necklace, is

therefore a personal symbol of glamour and false beauty in Husain's repertoire.¹¹⁰

Husain's lady is quite aware of the status she has been given by the society but she still wants to glamorize herself and enhance her beauty by wearing this type of jewelry.

According to ancient thinkers, the neck has an astrological association with sex; the necklace also betokens as an erotic link.¹¹¹ Both Husain's thinking and the ancient idea is applicable to the painting. Both ladies, the Manet's barmaid and the Husain's prostitute, pretending rich and beautiful, wear necklaces showing their profession and intentions through that symbol.

With the same confidence and ease that the reclined lady shows, there is a white cat sitting on the same bed. Cat is one of the symbols that Husain has used frequently used. It is important to note that the cat is a symbol of intelligence and is treated better and with care by our society as compared to other animals. Moreover, keeping a cat as a pet is a status symbol in Pakistan. A cat is vain of its appearance just as prostitutes are. Iqbal believes that for these women, prostitution is just a profession; they do not necessarily draw pleasure from what they are doing. Their case is similar to that of a sweeper who cleans the garbage and the filth of the area as a duty. By the same token, a profession does not define the person; being prostitute does not mean that these women are not pious or religious. Prostitutes have their own version of religiosity and piousness. Their spirituality remains anchored on a different ground. This is why the prostitute's pose is

¹¹⁰Husain, Iqbal. Interview by Aqsa Malik, Lahore, June 2010.

¹¹¹Cirlot, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 227.

one of peacefulness, she is at peace with herself and there is no sign of internal struggle.

The prostitutes pose of restfulness is reflected in the cat.

The colors used in the picture are significant. The hues are dark as if to indicate the corner into which prostitutes are shoved. The prostitutes, therefore, live a life of darkness and solitude because of the dual faced society which neither accepts them nor lets them live freely. Despite the glaring message conveyed in this painting which is a very real part of society, and is difficult to hide, these prostitutes and their profession is ignored and people tend to push the realization of their existence to the periphery.

It is not essential for a symbolic painting to have a very obvious symbol as we have seen in Nagori's and Husain's work; the atmosphere itself can be symbolic. The relation shown between things can also be symbolic. Similarly, the gestures and postures of human figures can have a deep symbolic significance. *Thah* (figure 20) is an example of this kind of symbolism. *Thah* is painted by a renowned painter and a social and political activist Ijazul Hassan. As the name of the painting indicates *Thah* is the sound of gunfire. Actually it is a satire on the image of a woman presented by the Pakistani society. The local popular image of a woman is compared to that of Vietnam. This painting also shows the status of women in Pakistani society, which Nagori and Husain have presented, but it focuses on another kind of woman. Nagori has symbolically painted the problems and degradation of the poor women at the hands of the feudal lords of the area. Husain has painted woman as a sex worker and depicted their treatment by the hypocrite society in his very personal indirect but bold style. Hassan's objective to paint a woman is completely different and satirical, it presents a dramatic contrast of Muslim

societies. He, in fact, juxtaposes two women; one being spiritually well poised, while the other symbolizes worldly show off.



Figure 20. Ijazul Hassan, *Thah*, Oil on canvas

The woman in the foreground is a famous Pakistani film actress, Firdous¹¹², who due to her tall height and voluptuous figure is considered a true Punjabi beauty by general public. Hassan has depicted Firdous in a sensual dancing pose. Although she is wearing the Pakistani national dress *Shalwar Qameez*, which is considered to be a very decent dress for a Pakistani woman, but given the posture, the curves of her body are quite obvious. The hair style, face makeup, nail color, jewelry and the way she is holding her *dupatta* far from her body is making her a show piece rather than a figure to respect.

Hassan took inspiration for this painting from the film posters which are actually

¹¹²Firdous is a Pakistani film actress of the 1960s and 70s. She gained fame from the super hit film *Heer Ranjha*.

degrading the Pakistani woman by exposing them to the masses as sensual objects. Ijazul Hassan has great respect for woman and believes that these actresses are not only the characters of the film but they highlight the real image of a woman that the Pakistani society wants to see.

The contrast is created through depicting a woman from Vietnam. She is holding her newborn in her lap with a small-sized *Quran* in one hand and the gun in the other, vigilantly looking at her enemies. She is wearing a simple pajama and a loose shirt with a scarf tied on her head. Her firm grip on the gun shows that she is always ready to attack her enemies and defend her child. The new born baby is symbolic of the future of her nation. The open *Quran* in her hand is the symbol of her true faith and love for her religion and depicts her spiritual awareness about 'self'. The whole figure is in black and white; the only color in this figure is the red color of *Quran* which shows that the only interest of her life is religion or religious teachings. Her hands and feet are crude, strong and rough like a warrior as compared to the Pakistani woman.

The use of color is also important in another sense. Firdous is wearing pink color which is emblematic of glamour. The Vietnamese woman, on the other hand, is wearing drab black and white clothes which depicts not only the seriousness of her mission but also her sincerity to her goal. Additionally, it seems as if Ijazul Hassan has juxtaposed the gun with the *dupatta* in this painting. Where the Vietnamese woman is holding a gun (which symbolizes that she is involved in defending her country and child), the Pakistani film star is holding the *dupatta* in her hand (symbolic of the fact that Pakistani women have become involved in the frivolities of pomp and show and have forgotten the values of decency and modesty). The red *Quran* is also juxtaposed with the red nail polish,

providing a room for comparison. The Vietnamese woman is protecting her country and child, whereas, the film star is posing in a provocative manner by embellishing and adorning herself and attracting men. The stance is also important, the Vietnamese woman looks out vigilantly for her opponents with a wary expression on her face as she is always ready to fight and stand by the side of her man in the time of war; Firdous is smiling and enjoying her provocative pose as if she is inviting male attention. According to Ijazul Hassan:

These two women are the true images of the status their society gives to them. Pakistani society see a woman only as a sex symbol, and the Pakistani women have forgotten their true status given to them by Islam, which is a status of a respect in the time of peace and of a true warrior and the guardian of their homes in the times of war when their men are fighting in battle fields. Vietnamese society has trained its women as true Muslim women.¹¹³

The title *Thah* Hassan has given to the painting is also very symbolic. On one hand, it refers to the gun shot by the Vietnamese lady and on the other, it is a word from a Punjabi Pakistani song choreographed for Firdous, *seenay naal lug jaa tu thah kr k* (come into my arms with a bang).

A.R. Nagori and Ijaz ul Hassan are two very bold commentators of the societal wrongs. Their symbolic paintings are not just static images; they are loud and piercing; they jolt and question our spiritual identity. The issues presented in their paintings are quite prominent and one can comprehend the message behind them very easily by their boldly rendered images and the treatment of the colors. But there is another young painter who

¹¹³Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan*, 92.

is relatively milder. Ali Azmat is a cautious observer of the society. His paintings convey his message in a silent but noticeable way. He paints very ordinary and simple images which are taken from daily life. Azmat's images testify to a symbolism of the everyday. There is no need to evoke pathos to describe emotions that they suggest; the effective significance is right there on the surface of things. With a calm and profound sensitivity his images leave a powerful impression in the observer's mind that instigates him to think and juggle.

For instance, *Let the Thousand Flowers Bloom*(2011) is the series of paintings in which he has painted human figures and used different symbols in an overwhelmingly effective way. The title of the series itself is symbolic. Flowers stand for the innocent children of Pakistan who are deprived of real happiness and contentment because of the terrorism and dangerous environment around them. We as society are not providing them with a favorable environment to flourish. Azmat has criticized and commented upon the present and future of Pakistani children. In Azmat's paintings, they children have been painted with grim and sad faces with a thoughtful gaze in their eyes. No matter what age, gender or social status they belong to their present and future contains the same element of risk. Their innocence is at stake because of the social and political ambiguity of the country they belong to. One of the paintings (figure 21) depicts a small girl who is playing with her doll pretending to be a doctor. She is trying to listen to the doll's heartbeat with her stethoscope. Azmat has used green and white Pakistani flag colors in the doll to represent the nation of Pakistan. The doll's face and torso are both colored green and the lower torso is painted white. Green color in the Pakistani flag symbolizes the Muslim majority whereas the white color stands for the religious minorities. The predominance of the

green color in the doll's body again indicates that both the Muslim majority and the religious minorities are suffering at the hands of terrorists and other disruptive elements in Pakistan. The girl is checking the doll's heartbeat which seems to be missing as the doll's eyes are closed. This perhaps indicates that the dying nation of Pakistan.



Figure 21. Ali Azmat, Girl Playing with Doll, Oil on canvas

Azmat's point of view is that our children are not normal because they are not being given a normal environment. Any environment where the children are growing up has a

deep and permanent effect on their psyche. Pakistani children are so much effected that even their games and toys depict violence. In the painting, the child's head is bowed and her face cannot be seen indicating that all Pakistani children suffer the same problems, all children are facing the same issues.

Another painting (figure 22) of the same series has the image of the same girl as in the last painting but she is dressed differently. The girl in this painting is dressed in a green and white, again indicating Pakistan. As in the previous painting, the face of the girl cannot be seen. In the whole series, Azmat has painted children in different settings symbolizing that all the children are same facing different issues. They can have different religions, different sects, belong to different province and the cultures, they can have different economic and cultural backgrounds but all of them are suffering in the same way.



Figure 22. Ali Azmat, Girl with Balloons, Oil on Canvas

The girl in the painting is standing with her back towards the viewers, either out of shame or out of fear. The social and political situation of distress and violence is obvious

in the images Azmat has painted. The Pakistani children are affected by this uncertain social condition in two ways; first, they are afraid of the doubtful and dangerous environment they are living in, and second, they are ashamed of being part of this society. These two factors are psychologically considered key role players in the social grooming and the mental development of a child. Similarly, the balloons that she is holding are very significant. Instead of their typical colors such as yellow, green or blue, Azmat has painted them red, which is Azmat's favorite symbolic color and he has used it in most of his painting in different connotations. One balloon is shown red and the other is red and white. The red one symbolizes bloodshed in Pakistan, whereas the other red and white combination is reminiscent of the Arabic headdress *keffiyeh*; a recurring pattern in his paintings, which considered to be a symbol of respect and status in the Arabic countries. However, Azmat has given it completely different connotation; it appears as the symbol of terrorism, because in Pakistan some so called religious activist groups are using it as their party symbol or the symbol of Islam. It draws attention towards the abuse of religion.

The balloons are held over the girl's head implying that the Pakistani children are living under the threat of war and terrorism. Azmat has also used the balloons as the symbol of uncertainty. As the life of the balloon can't be determined, the violence in Pakistani society is also unpredictable. Parents are not sure whether their children will come back from their schools or not. The children are continuously in the shadow of death and destruction.

Azmat has used the symbol of Arabic head dress *keffiyeh* in another painting (figure 23) of the same series. In this painting, Azmat has painted a young boy who is about to offer

the prayer. He is standing straight with his head down just like Muslims offer their *niyyat* before starting their prayer. He is standing on a *keffiyeh* instead of the prayer mat which shows that the Pakistani children have started misunderstanding Islam and the true meaning of the religion and are rather caught up in the rituals instead of being involved in the actual teachings of Islam. They have started seeing their religion only through the eyes of the people who wear this scarf. As mentioned above, this piece of cloth is being used by most of the terrorist groups, who have camouflaged themselves behind a religious facade. This image shows the confusion of the boy that whether this religion or religious preaching is something to provide internal and external peace or a means to bloodshed and growing antagonism in the society.

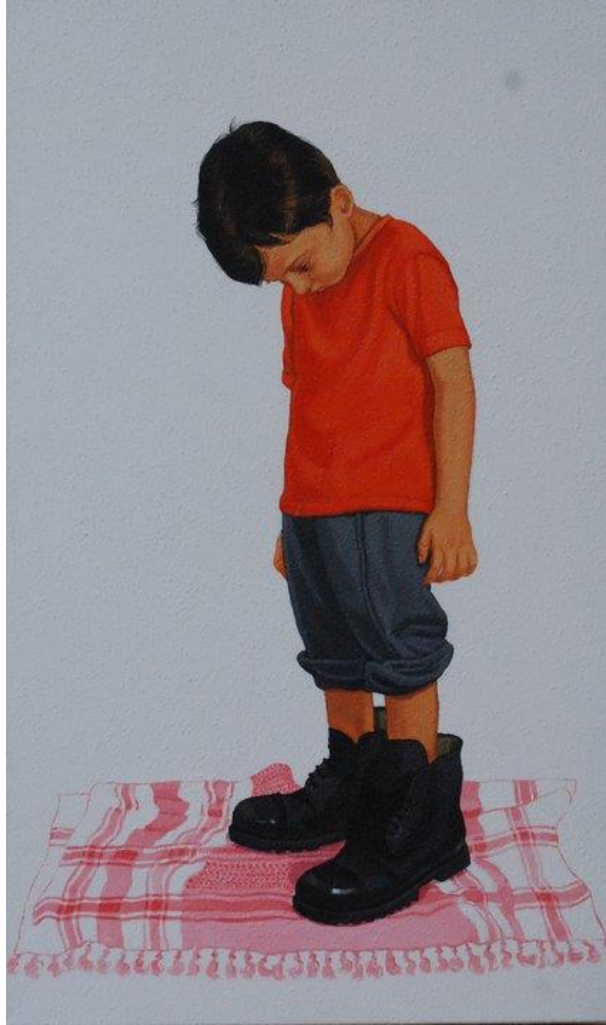


Figure 23. Ali Azmat, Boy on Prayer Mat, Oil on canvas

A rather unusual symbol in this painting is that of shoes. The shoes shown in the painting are worn by soldiers or police officers. Azmat has used this symbol in a personalized way and has lent dual meanings to the use of the shoes. The first and very apparent significance is that they symbolize the security forces. But then these shoes do not properly fit the child. The disproportionate size of the shoes is symbolic of how the security forces are not able to maintain peace essential for the proper grooming of

children. Another connotation Azmat seems to suggest is that the children of our society are bearing a heavy burden which is bigger than their age. The problems they are facing, their thoughts and feelings which are developing in them, are not in sync with their innocent age in which they should be playing with the toys or listening to nursery rhymes. Azmat has successfully portrayed the confusion of the children of Pakistan. The boy has a sad but thoughtful expression on his face. He is looking silently and thoughtfully towards his feet, especially at the shoes of bigger size. It seems as if he doesn't have any other option. It is as if he doesn't know the right path to take. He is Muslim by chance, born in a Muslim family and in a Muslim country but doesn't know what is right: To be a Muslim or not to be a Muslim?

The child's posture could also be interpreted as being one of shame. Azmat shows the same confusion of being ashamed or thoughtful sadness in the previous painting with the girl in green dress with balloons in her hand. The boy is hanging his head which is what children do when they are scolded or realize that they have done something wrong. This could point to the fact that Pakistani children are being punished for actions they never intended. Their innocence is being crushed by undue penitence. The so called religious people are censuring even the younger Pakistani generation for things that they have not done. The 'religious' factors are giving sentences on things which are not even wrong but are being presented as being so.



Figure 24. Ali Azmat, Portrait of a Boy, Oil on canvas

As it is mentioned above that not even a single painting of this symbolic series has a child with smiling face. Azmat has painted a portrait of a boy (figure 24) of approximately the age of 11 or 12 years. It is quite a simple composition but contains a thought provoking symbolic message. The boy has a very serious expression on his face, which is covered with bandages implying that there are some kind of wounds or scars under them. The child has a Pakistani flag painted on his cheek which is also covered with bandages. This shows that Pakistan is as injured as the face of the child and its future is as insecure as the future of this child. According to Azmat, “these bandages are symbolic of the sympathies of the world which work as first aid and it can only cover the wound but can’t heal it properly”. This indicates the world’s empathetic relationship with Pakistan. Dr. Rahat Naveed Masood, another famous Pakistani painter, commented

on Azmat's *'Let The Thousand Flowers Bloom'* in the following words, “[Azmat] uses the raw innocence of a child to evoke feelings of bewilderment, fear, anger and frustration at the troubled circumstances. Through a child's vision he draws attention to an adult perception of the ongoing crisis, wherein feelings of identity and loss surface intermittently”.¹¹⁴

Another very important aspect to notice is the unworried expression of the child as he is unaware of these wounds or scars on his face. It shows that he has become insensitive to this pain. The great poet of the Subcontinent, Mirza Ghalib's couplet explains this fact.

"Runj se Khoogar hua insaan to mit jata he ghum

Mushkilen muj par parin itni k aasaan ho gaen"

The couplet translates that when one has experienced myriad sorrows and problems, one becomes inured to pain; I have faced so many challenges that now nothing bothers me. The whole idea of the couplet is that intensity of sorrow leads to a numbing effect. It is reminiscent of John Keats' "a drowsy numbness pains" (*Ode to a Nightingale*) which revolves around Keats desire to escape into the nightingale's world to get rid of this world's fret and worry. However, where Keats wants to escape, here, Azmat and Ghalib have immersed themselves in the realities of this world from which there is no escape. Rather the only way to cope with this world is through a 'numbing of the senses'.

In another work (figure 25), a paper boat is designed with *keffiyeh* pattern with a doll whose face is depicted in skin color instead of the green. According to Azmat, this painting is based on his reminiscent feelings about his childhood memories: the games

¹¹⁴“Welcome to Pakistan Art Review,” accessed October 15, 2017, http://www.pakistanartreview.net/3th_Issue/3th_Page_1.html.

and the toys. The paper boat and doll are common toys for almost every child; girls play with dolls and boys enjoy playing with paper boats in the rain. He is trying to point out that an innocent childhood and such toys are gone from a child's life. Now the terrorists are playing with their childhood. Just like a paper boat which does not have a long life, the life of children has become unstable. Azmat said, "the time has changed now, Pakistan needs Noah's ark¹¹⁵ to save the future of our children not the paper boat". He believes that Pakistani nation is in the same condition as the nation of Hazrat Nooh. In times of spiritual scarcity, they need guidance and some miraculous rescue from the deadly situation. The colors of the boat are also symbolic as they are red and white. The red color is indicative of the bloodshed surrounding the innocence of these children and the white color is replete with the possibilities of the pure, peaceful and happy childhood that these children deserve.

¹¹⁵Hazrat Nooh's ark which he built on the order of the God to save his believers from the storm which God promised to send to destroy the nonbelievers.

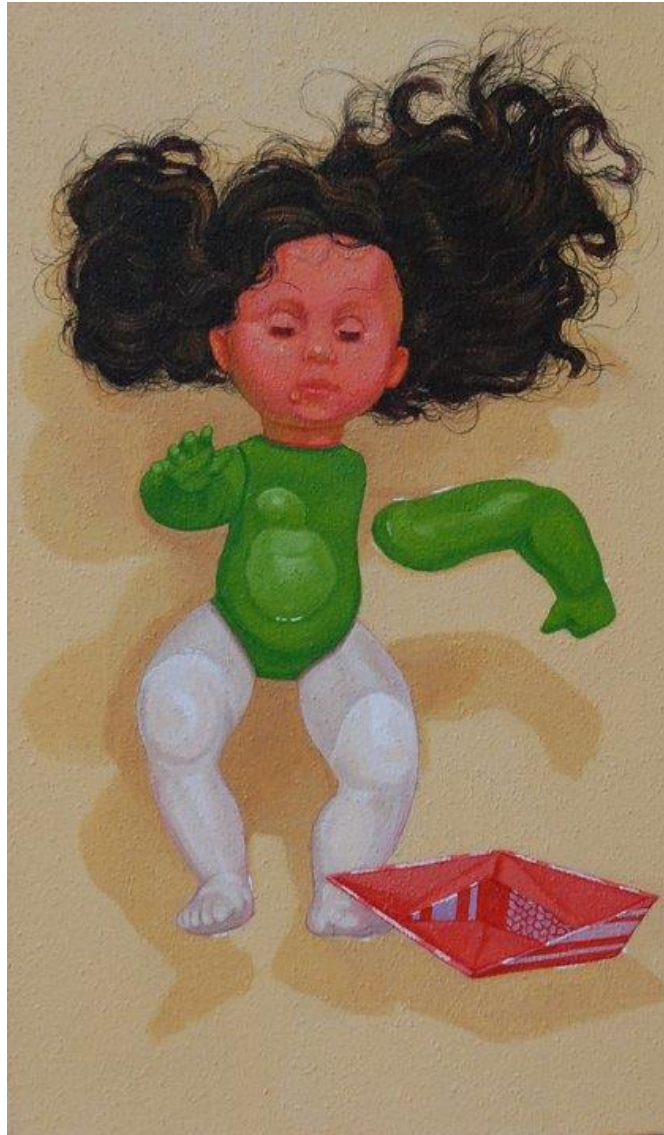


Figure 25. Ali Azmat, Doll, Oil on canvas

The doll is yet another symbol Azmat has painted. The broken doll's upper torso is of green color and the legs are painted white. The stomach of the doll carries a grenade, which could blow up any time. Azmat has presented the doll as a symbol of a Pakistani child who is victimized for being Pakistani. The bomb in the stomach of the doll shows that the terrorism is from within. Another point to note is that the doll is unclothed which

indicates that the Pakistani child's situation and emotions are naked to the world. The world can see them clearly if it wants to but the international community is not making any serious effort to recognize this. Another point to note is that the doll's arm is broken which could be an indication of the fact that the Pakistani children are physically or psychologically abused by the cruel society. Just as the doll's arm is broken, Pakistani children (especially of the lower class) are frequently physically abused. Another thing to note is the placement of the arms, one of the arms is moving towards the front and the other is placed at the back. None of the arms is hanging by the side, this could symbolize the fact that both the future and the past of the Pakistani children have the same bleak outlook. The right hand symbolizes the future and the position of moving towards front indicates the act of asking for help. The left hand is broken and turning towards the back, this could mean that the child has lost connection with roots. Consequently, the chance of a contented and terror free environment has been lost. The shadow of the doll indicates that the shadows of terror and fear loom dark in the minds of the Pakistani children. Even while playing with their toys this fear of uncertainty is there. They live in the shadows of apprehension.

According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (28 June 1712 – 2 July 1778), who was a European writer and philosopher of the 18th century, a sick child is prone to project himself into the toy. As such, the child thinks of the toy as an embodiment of himself and treats it with care and respect.¹¹⁶ The doll painted by Azmat is symbolic of the injured spirit of the Pakistani children. Children of present are the future of any nation and Azmat is very

¹¹⁶Cirlot, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 84.

much touched by the present condition of the Pakistan where the children are leading their confused present and foreseeing uncertain future.

An original and realistic technique and unusual choice of subject have pushed Ali Azmat to the forefront of Pakistani symbolic art. In another series of paintings with strong spiritual connotation "*Sirat e Mustaqeem*" he presents a visual response to the extreme beliefs and horrors of being claimed '*not muslims*'. He has targeted the orthodox shallow beliefs and fake rituals of our religiously uneducated society. It is a very courageous effort on Azmat's part to convey his resentment and distress targeting some of our brainless religious leaders and the uneducated and senseless society which acts and reacts according to these orthodox religious leaders. In fact, Azmat has placed himself in quite a dangerous situation by using the cover of Quran as the symbol of Islam.

Quran being the holy book of Islam is a very common thing in any Muslim house and is recited in almost every house daily. This daily encounter with Quran is the reason that one does not feel strange about Azmat's paintings. Azmat uses images and situations from routine life in order to make his work accessible to masses. Through his thought out compositions, Azmat's art does make the viewer think about the difference between the reality and the image on canvas.

Azmat is very conscious about his religion and its purity. In this series he portrays the perceived insincerity and criticizes the forceful assertion of faith. He chose the 'image' of Holy Book, *Quran*, wrapped traditionally in its cover to represent the religion Islam. Through this symbolic imagery he has depicted the various ways in which religious authorities are exploiting Islam for their own benefit. Salima Hashmi a painter, teacher

and a writer observed this exhibition and said that “Azmat's symbolic images are nothing but the translation of his ideas, which are not part of his usual repertoire. The swaddle which covers the Qur'an is a symbol of protecting the sacred word. But from whom? The hands which handle the sacred book are encased in plastic gloves, disposable items which can be shed in a moment. The lips that kiss the book can easily lie and defame. Grenades are the menacing motifs which embellish the cover”.¹¹⁷



Figure 26. Ali Azmat, Quran with Black Cover, Oil on canvas

In this whole series Azmat has tried to point out the spiritual character of Pakistan's ideology that Pakistan was created on the basis of religion and it included respect for other religions as well. However, now since Islam itself is not properly respected in Pakistan, the equivalence principle between Islam and other religions has been severed,

¹¹⁷ Salima Hashmi, Catalogue on Ali Azmat's *Sirat e Mustaqeem*. Canvas Gallery, Karachi.

this is portrayed in a very suggestive painting of this series. In this painting (figure 26) the cover of *Quran* is of a very unusual color; it is painted black. Azmat has painted it to portray that the *Quran* is present in this cover, but it is definitely not. Azmat has created an illusion by using black color. Black has been used to indicate the Shia religion as well as to depict the unknown. Black is also used for mourning. It is as if Azmat wants to comment on the sad plight of the Shias in Pakistan who are persecuted by the other sect. The image of the lion formed with the calligraphic scribbling depicted on the cover of this book has been probably used to portray Hazrat Ali because Prophet (PBUH) has given him the title of *Haider* after winning an important battle in the history of Islam, the battle of *Khaiber*. *Haider* means lion and the title was given to Hazrat Ali after his valor and bravery in the battle field.

Moving from the general to the specific (the Shia sect is not restricted to only Pakistan but is a well-known sect throughout the world), the moon and star are symbolic of the Pakistani flag. A very important point is that the star is red which indicates the great amount of bloodshed caused by *Shia Sunni* riots. The change in the color of the Pakistani star from white to red also indicates that Pakistan is no more a peaceful land, rather it is one marked by atrocities and violence. The religious tendencies of the Pakistani community are based on aggression and violence rather than tolerance and peace. Dogmatic principles are followed without making any allowances. This is why Islam and Pakistan are associated with terrorism and terrorist activities and have been subverted from peace to terrorism.

The black color could be interpreted as symbolic of mourning given the state of affairs in Pakistan concerning sectarian violence causing a great deal of bloodshed. The most important factor is that *Hazrat* Ali, who is the most important figure in Shia sect is also revered by every other sect and by each and every Muslim but still there are differences leading to violence. In the painting, there are three lions on the cover of *Quran*. One is in the center and the other two are facing towards him. It seems as if they are standing against each other for purposes of fighting or resistance. This indicates that the people who are killing the *Shias* are not different people, they are follower of the same religion, i.e. Islam. Azmat said, "they are Muslims, believe in one Prophet PBUH, and *Shia's* 12 Imams are sacred and respectable for them also, then where does the difference lie? What if their way of offering their five prayers is different?" It is important to note that there are some minor differences in the way of offering the prayer in different sects. Nevertheless, it is prohibited to kill another Muslim on the basis of his method of offering his prayer differently. It is only because of their preconceived beliefs and rigidity that these sects (led by the religious leaders) have been causing turbulence throughout Pakistan.

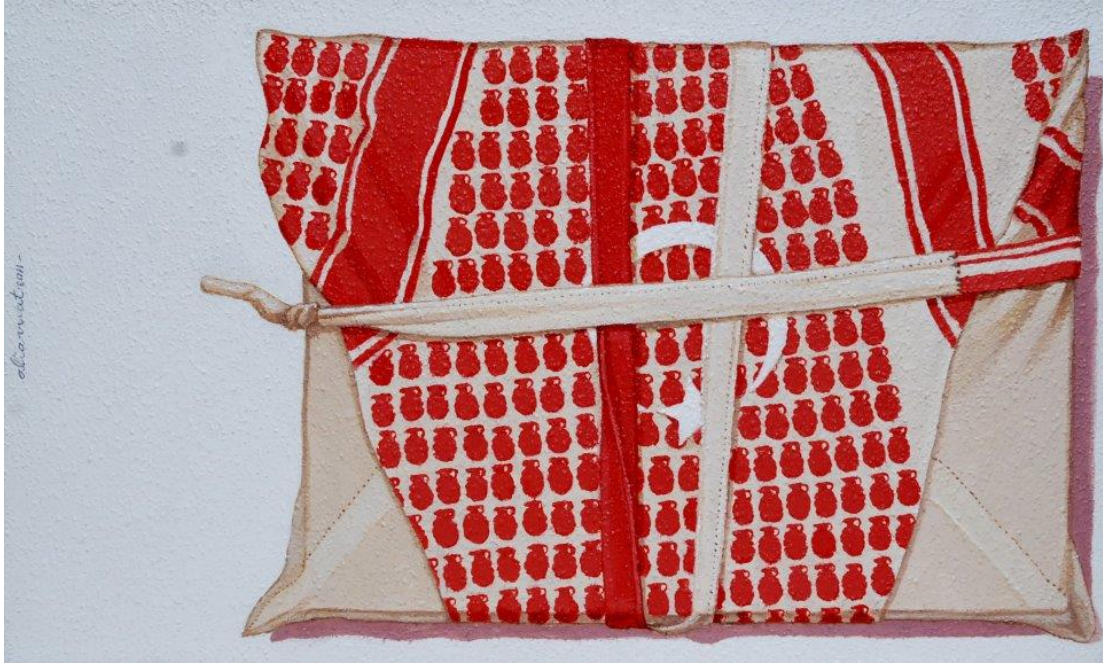


Figure 27. Ali Azmat, *Quran with Keffiyeh*, Oil on canvas

A very obvious and dangerous root cause of the misguidance and confusion about religion in Pakistan is fake, uneducated and biased religious leaders, who spread intolerance and panic among sects. Azmat has used a specific symbol to point out those activists. The first aspect which strikes the viewer is the use of *keffiyeh* pattern (figure 27). The headscarf material has been used as a cover of *Quran*. It is considered to be a symbol of piety in the Pakistani society with respect to Saudi Arabia, *Makah* and the Arabs. This headscarf is also used by some Pakistani preachers (*moulvis*). An important feature is the superimposition of the Pakistani crescent and star on the *keffiyeh* material. This is as if to say that Pakistan is a country in its own right but it is being overrun by terrorist elements. Another very important aspect of this painting is the use of small red grenades, which have been weaved into *keffiyeh* emblem. The reason for this is that

religion is now linked to terrorism and anarchist elements. The main focus is towards the Taliban which is a so called religious group but has carried out a number of terrorist attacks. The religious leaders use their *madrassas* (learning places) to train the terrorists and instigate them to negative action.

The fact that the Pakistani moon and star is not quite clear points towards a growing crisis of spiritual identity in Pakistan both as a nation and a country. This loss of spiritual identity and the empowerment and strength of terrorism is also shown by the tied ribbon of the cover. The real meaning of Islam has been completely overshadowed by the terrorists. Pakistani Muslims have lost their identity as Muslims and are merely known as Pakistanis who live in a land of fear and uncertainty. Pakistanis are no longer known as peace loving people but are rather known as terrorists throughout the world.

This whole series painted by Ali Azmat uses an ordinary cultural object 'the cover of Quran' which although not prominent but has a definite significance for it protects the Quran. It is very rare to have a Quran in any Muslim household without its cover.

Azmat's selection of this object shows his deep observation of his culture and the daily life as well. While most of the Pakistani symbolist artists dealt with the intellectual world, a few of them became more focused on the emotional world and nostalgia of simple life. Dr. Shahida Manzoor, a researcher and a well-known symbolic painter, also chose a distinct variety of cultural symbols to paint her perception and emotions.

In her series titled *Dying Heritage* (figure 28), she has painted tongas which represent the true Pakistani culture. The tonga was formerly the most used vehicle to travel from one place to another. It was considered a very respectable way to travel not only in the rural

areas but also in the urban society. According to Dr. Shahida, the advent of industrialization and mechanical scientific development has destroyed our true culture. Dr. Shahida has painted two tongas in a wind storm which is not only effecting the tongas but it also carrying away the tall buildings in the background. This storm connotes the storm of pollution and destruction because of scientific development, the mechanical approach and preference of mechanization and manufactured things over the simple and organic life.



Figure 28. Shahida Manzoor, Dying Heritage, Oil on canvas

The whole painting gives a very dull and diffused impression. Each object is overlapping and merging in the other. The only prominent shape in the painting is the wheel. Wheel is a symbol of continuous progress for Dr. Shahida. It is very symbolic that she has presented the wheel of the tonga in a way that it appears close to the viewer but at the

same time disappearing into the flow of the wind storm. This shows that one can see only what is in front of his eyes. The mechanical progress and tall buildings takes us far from nature. Shahida Manzoor has used the tonga as a symbol to emphasize how the whole Pakistani culture is disappearing into the smoke screen created by the so called advancement of society.

The tone and overall appearance seem to present a foreboding of grimness which has been caused due to the industrialization of Pakistani society. The colors employed by Shahida Manzoor are very dark in order to render the indistinguishable features of the painting. The mood conveyed by the colors is that of sadness and depression. In other words, the colors are not only reflective of the current situation but also seem to point towards a more polluted and dilapidated future. The blurriness of the image is indicative of not only the dust storm but also depict the pollution caused by industrialization causing the atmosphere become clouded and blurry. Not only is the environment clouded but so is the lifestyle of Pakistani people. The Pakistani lifestyle has become more complex and convoluted. Just as pollution does not allow one to see clearly, similarly the complication of the Pakistani society has rendered it more obscure and indistinct.

Overall, the painting depicts how Pakistani society is changing for the worse. The simplicity of the society is now being replaced by complex and convoluted scientific inventions which are affecting the former harmony and repose of society on the whole.

An entirely different approach to symbolism and spirituality is clearly observable in Shahida Manzoor's Freedom series (figure 29, 30, 31). The prominent symbol in the three paintings of this series is the Pelican. The selection of Pelican is ingenious as two of its features are quite central to the understanding of spirituality. One is its ability to fly

for long distances, which is symbolic of the spiritual journey of human beings that has been explained by mystics in detail. For instance, the first division of the journey is explained as a journey from ordinary life into truth. The second division involves journey with the truth and in the truth, which symbolizes a perfection of the soul. The third stage is the journey from the truth and with the truth to the created, which means that when a Sufi has acquired perfection, he returns to the life he left. The fourth stage is again a journey with the truth in the created, which is the social interaction of the Sufi, wherein, he preaches the method.¹¹⁸ The second feature is that Pelicans are mute, which refers to the mystic process of self-realization in which a Sufi does not involve in worldly affairs and does his *riyazat*. The stages of spiritual journey are also stages to attain freedom, and this has been reflected in the title of the series.

The predominant colour in the above painting is red. As is known, red is the symbol of passion as well as bloodshed. Furthermore, the dripping effect in the bottom of the painting creates a sense of flux and transition in the subject matters. When we see these two elements in the context of the red colour scheme that Manzoor has chosen, we predict an imminent chaos in the life of these pelicans symbolizing the human beings in the toils of social injustice. This has been symbolized in the third painting of the series, where a female figure is visible. The paintings suggest a spiritual solution to mankind.

In the Western intellectual and artistic tradition freedom has been generally considered a liberation from sociopolitical and economic boundaries. Manzoor's concept of freedom however differs from all these notions and concerns a different dimension altogether; which is largely spiritual. The female figure that appears above the pelicans symbolizes

¹¹⁸John L. Esposito, *Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), 26.

this freedom, which is spiritual instead of social. The whirlwind which encapsulates the figure is the strident process through which one realizes one's own real self and comes to grips with one's changing spiritual formation.



Figure 29. Shahida Manzoor, Freedom I, Oil on canvas, 2014



Figure 30. Shahida Manzoor, Freedom I, Oil on canvas, 2014



Figure 31. Shahida Manzoor, Freedom III, Oil on canvas, 2014

The work of Pakistani artists particularly the symbolism they have used to express deep seated emotions draws its substance from the spiritual repertoire of culture. We do not find direct symbolic references to mystic traditions but even then the whole visual narrative is emphasized in a way that is peculiar to Islamic mystics. We find that their

method of spiritual communication has been to use similes and metaphors to communicate deeper truths of life. A follower and interpreter of a Sufi tradition knows this for a fact that every word used in every sentence of a meaningful Sufi narrative is important since it correlates to a deeper reality. Moreover, the deeper reality, as a matter of Sufi consensus, cannot be fully understood but can be felt.

This has been the main forte of various mystic traditions that feeling is seen as a means of knowing.¹¹⁹ Feeling is seen as a judgment, dissatisfaction means that something is not resolved or something is lacking, satisfaction is associated to harmony, which stands for an internal state when things have fallen into place, the microcosm is unified with the macrocosm.¹²⁰ However, it needs to be clarified here that the spiritual feeling of sadness is different from everyday experience of sadness. A spiritual feeling qualifies on the basis of the fact that it integrates both the individual and cosmic dimensions of life.

Pakistani symbolist painters communicate integrated feelings, one can relate to the deeper meaning, which is contemplated beyond mere personal preferences. The artists have created their art works in a way that the viewer registers the emotion but then also realizes the fact that there is more depth to the message communicated. Whether it is the cactus in Sadequain's paintings or the Pelicans in Shahida Manzoor's works, they stand for a meaning that can only be deciphered if we understand their message on a cosmic scale.

This very trait of such works that they propel the viewer into a reality beyond personal dimension is what can be seen as a mechanism of spiritual awareness.

¹¹⁹H. M. Garelick, *Modes of Irrationality: Preface to a Theory of Knowledge* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), 39.

¹²⁰*Parabola* (Tamarack Press, 1977), 80.

Chapter 5: Symbolism as a Mechanism of Social Change

The tradition of presenting the political record in visual language is not new in the Subcontinent. It has been practiced throughout the Mughal period from the emperor Akbar till Jehangir. There has always been an official painter who was ordered to paint the emperor's grandeur, adventures, and important political events. Nevertheless, there is a very big difference between the symbolic political paintings of Mughal period and the symbolic political painting of Pakistani painters. Mughal paintings are just the illustrations of the events and adventures of the Mughal rulers; they were by no means opinions of the artist.¹²¹ The ruler was the authority and nothing could be done or undone without his permission. Painters were patronized by the rulers and they were bound to paint whatever they had been dictated by the rulers as they lived in a period of rampant dictatorship.¹²² Amber Romasa, Nagori's daughter, in his book also admitted this fact and wrote, "Art also often received patronage when it best fitted the state's dictates."¹²³ *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Sheikh to King* is the best example of the Mughal symbolic political painting (figure 32). It was painted by a famous court painter Bichitr, who was patronized and supervised by the Mughal emperor Jehangir. The painting shows Emperor Jahangir giving a holy book to a Sufi saint. The other characters in the painting are a Persian ruler, a European and a local person who is probably the painter himself. The size of the figures is according to their political status; it is used as a symbol. In this miniature Jahangir wanted to show that he is inclined towards spiritual personalities

¹²¹Ebba Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature*," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19, accessed March 3, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/7762184/Jahangir_as_Francis_Bacons_Ideal_of_the_King_as_Observer_and_Investigator_of_Nature.

¹²²Mohammad Azhar Ansari, *Social Life of the Mughal Emperors, 1526-1707* (Shanti Prakashan, 1974).

¹²³Romasa, Nagori - *Voice of Conscience*, 8.

rather than worldly people, or that he is, 'extolling the supremacy of the spiritual over temporal power'.¹²⁴



Figure 32. *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings* from the *St. Petersburg Album*

1615-1618

¹²⁴Amina Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court*, 1st US Ed. edition (New York: Harry N Abrams Inc, 1992), 43.

Pakistani painters used political symbolism in a totally different scenario. After 1947, leaving behind colonial rule and pursuing a practical democracy, Pakistanis practiced freedom of expression. The painters like A.R Nagori and Ijazul Hassan who have witnessed each and every political era of Pakistan expressed their take on the political process. Their works not only documented the political injustices of their times but also expressed their revolutionary ideals of social change in a symbolic way often to the extent that they became threatening to oppressive political regimes. Nagori explains the role of painter and painting in politics in words, which clearly convey the extent of his approach. He said, “painting is not interior decoration. It is an instrument of war for offence and defense against the enemy”.¹²⁵ Both Nagori and Ijazul Hassan used intense symbolism for conveying their message.

The use of symbolism with political undertones flourished due to the fact that the political history of Pakistan witnessed many twists and turns. Depending upon the mode of government changing between democracy and dictatorship, there were times of freedom and there were times of oppression. A number of Pakistani painters used art as a medium to not only comment upon but also criticize the strictures accompanying the military dictatorships. These painters have been able to depict the problems faced by the masses through their paintings but at the same time the paintings condemned oppression through the use of powerful symbols. Nagori, for instance, resorted to color as a principal symbol in order to convey his perspective.

¹²⁵Romasa, *Nagori - Voice of Conscience*, 7.

Nagori is remembered as a 'socio-political activist with paint'.¹²⁶ He has never been afraid of backlash with reference to the subject, whether it is related to an individual or an establishment he is criticizing. In one of his correspondences he said, "I paint the suffering of masses and it is as if I am suffering from a disease which forces me to create a voice against the injustice surrounding me. Nobody cares if I am a persona non grata for the establishment."¹²⁷

Nagori had an antagonist's perspective on dictatorship and always raised his voice in favor of democracy. A powerfully thought provoking collection of Nagori's political paintings is his *Series of Symbolic Alphabets* (1984-1985). It is a reflection of his thoughts, wherein, he targeted the military dictatorship. He stood against the Martial law in Pakistan and targeted its aristocratic governance and political authority through his symbolic visuals. In his *Series of Symbolic Alphabets*, Nagori gives us a message that the initial learning of alphabets has changed from innocence to impiety. This series was painted in 1988 under the extremely oppressive dictatorship of General Zia-ul Haq, who ruled Pakistan from 1977 to 1988. Most of the political work that Nagori produced was created in this time of servitude. Nagori jolted the government by introducing new usage of alphabets. 'B for Butterfly' became 'B for Bomb Blast', and similarly other letters got also associated to other events of social injustice. In Nagori's series, 'C' would stand for Crime / Corruption, 'D' for Dacoits, 'F' for Fire, 'H' for Heroin, 'K' for Kalashnikov, 'R' for Rape, and 'W' for War.

¹²⁶Sirhandi, *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan*, 149.

¹²⁷Nagori, Abdul Rahim. Interview by Aqsa Malik, Karachi, October 2010.

Nagori also used 'pig' as a symbol but with a new meaning. The West considers it a symbol of wealth and prosperity but in Pakistani society pig is a symbol of disgust. In Nagori's painting '*W' for War*', (figure 33) pigs represent the leaders of different sects residing in the same country. The title, "War", refers to the civil war which broke out in the country between different factions due to the orthodox policies implemented by the establishment of that time. During 1988, Pakistan was under extreme military pressure. President General Zia ul Haq, who was a dictator, used Islam as a means to sustain power, and tried to forcefully implement a personalized and quite orthodox version of religion. A particular instance was implementation of the Law of Blasphemy, which became the root cause of agitation among the civilians.



Figure 33. Abdul Rahim Nagori, W for War, Oil on canvas

The Law of Blasphemy was first introduced in Pakistan by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and was implemented thoroughly at all levels by General Zia-ul Haq during 1986.¹²⁸ This law has been described in the 15th chapter of the Penal Code of Pakistan. It deals with different offences regarding religious matters, ranging from degrading Prophet (PBUH) to making

¹²⁸Shameem Burney Abbas, *Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws: From Islamic Empires to the Taliban* (University of Texas Press, 2013), 14.

changes in the Quran. The implementation of this law under the dictatorship of General Zia-ul Haq was politically biased and had long reaching implications.

Originally, Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance and guides Muslims to respect other religions. The implementation of blasphemy law under General Zia-ul Haq corresponded to snubbing and harassing religions and sects. As a result, minorities were treated as slaves. The particular use of the law underscored sectarian violence. Cross killing had started among different sects, which amounted to massive riots and demolition of holy places. It was a war inside the country initiated by its own nationals. Muslims were not safe from other Muslims, because this law did not demand a proof; it was given the same dictatorial authority. A.R Nagori, being a sensitive and informed individual, had to aggressively respond.

In *W for War*, there are four colors in the background depicting different religions. Four swine forming “W” are wearing four different colors. A wine with a yellow color is placed before a red background and a swine in red is placed against yellow. A swine with blue and green is also placed against opposite colors which shows positive cultural intermingling and problematic religious interference. Nagori has successfully portrayed the psychological disturbance of the nation by painting a sign in the center of “W”. He has very cleverly inverted the sign of peace into his own sign of War. Nagori has also added a female sign, prominently visible in the circle, with a red cross over it. This female sign depicts the Pakistani nation, whose existence is eliminated, suggests the cross. In fact, this is a personalized symbol, which is a combination of the two signs, one is the female sign and the other is the universal sign of peace. Nagori presents a female sign with red cross being an extension of the converging lines of the peace sign. The

female sign is in white color which shows that the nation is originally peaceful. The white color suggests that the public is averse to all destruction and bloodshed and is not willing to be a part of it. Nagori has redesigned the peace sign as the war sign because according to him, in dictatorship, war breeds under the illusion of peace. We may interpret that Nagori has presented this combination symbol as the symbol of the persecution of women by the dictatorship. As a matter of fact, many women writers, journalists and political activists were treated with pretty harsh measures under General Zia-ul Haq. The interpretation is valid since Nagori himself said that his paintings can have several meanings at a time. Nevertheless, no meaning will not nullify the other, rather, each meaning will be maintain its separate totality.



Figure 34. Abdul Rahim Nagori, Z for Zindabad, Oil on canvas

An interesting painting from this series is *Z for Zindabad* (figure 34). It is also a satirical commentary on the political authority of General Zia-ul Haq. In this painting, Nagori has painted the dictator with a crown on his head. The crown has been used as a symbol to convey the connotation of a Monarch. This symbol has been frequently used in the time of Mughal emperors. There are several Mughal miniatures in which the painter has used the symbol to highlight power and glory. Nagori did not paint the dictator in realistic detail, instead, he painted a man wearing a crown, boasting himself as a king. The mustache, dark eyes and the green colored army uniform clearly symbolize General Zia-

ul Haq.¹²⁹ His body language and the way he is sitting with pride and confidence, support his portrayal as a king. Nagori, on a satirical note, shows him obliviously sitting on a mound of missiles instead of a throne. In the middle of the mound there is a pattern with blue, red and white stripes which indicates the flag of the United States of America. Two shaking hands in the middle of the image of American flag is the symbol of a so called friendship between America and Pakistan. This image of the hands has been used as a statement of the fact that America as a super power is controlling the whole world. Pakistan, like other third world countries was also being manipulated by America in her war against Russia. Every political change in the country was an influence from the US administration and the dictator would nothing but a puppet. In this painting, Nagori presented General Zia-ul Haq in his puppet character, who is aware of the strings but is blindfolded by the greed for power.

Another interesting aspect of this painting is the division of the background. It is divided into three parts with three different colors; blue, green and red. The upper part in blue color indicates the influence of the US administration giving false hopes to the dictator. The man's upper torso is placed against the green color, the color of Pakistan's Muslim majority, which shows that he is exerting his corrupted influence on his land and his people. The feet of the seated man positioned on the missiles are placed against the red color which points towards death and destruction. The most significant part is the lower portion which is in red color and this red color depicts the restrained and suppressed

¹²⁹ Zia ul Haq became the army Chief of Staff and soon after started to plot overthrowing of Bhutto's government. Bhutto had appointed him but he slyly planned a coup de tat and became the ruler of Pakistan in July 1977. Quite a few actions took place during his regime such as the suspension of the constitution and Islamization of the state of Pakistan as well as establishment of the Hudood Ordinance and the Blasphemy Ordinance. He was closely supported by America in his fight against Russian communist forces.

class. There are distorted human faces holding up their hands. They are burdened by the weight of the upper class or the so called establishment. These oppressed faces represent the whole nation, which has taken on the whole burden of their ruler's greed to rule and the vested interest of America who is controlling the puppet head of the state. Nagori was successful in showing the distance, physical as well as rational, between the head of state at the time and the people. According to Nagori the word "Zindabaad" does not mean "Pakistan Zindabaad" but in this painting it stands for "Zia Zindabaad".

Another example of Nagori's political paintings and a criticism on military dictatorship is '*Perched Bureaucracy*', (figure 35). It is an example of his bold satire on the egotistical bureaucracy. He painted this in year 2004, in times, when the whole Pakistani nation was bearing a dictatorship in the disguise of democracy. This was under the dictatorship of General Pervez Musharraf, who took over the government from Muslim League, a democratic party, in 2002. After that, he got himself elected through a referendum to entitle himself a legal president of Pakistan. There is no law in the Pakistani constitution pertaining to electing a president through referendum. The opposition strongly expressed their disagreement but all in vain. The question in the referendum which was written in the forum was "For the survival of the local government system, establishment of democracy, continuity of reforms, end to sectarianism and extremism, and to fulfill the vision of Quaid-i-Azam, would you like to elect President General Pervez Musharraf as President of Pakistan for five years?".¹³⁰ This was a similar question that was put forth by Zia-ul Haq about 20 years back while seeking presidency through referendum. It said, "Do you endorse the process initiated by

¹³⁰Humaira Awais Shahid and Kelly Horan, *Devotion and Defiance: My Journey in Love, Faith and Politics* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 89.

the President of Pakistan, General Mohammad Ziaul Haq, for bringing the laws of Pakistan in conformity with the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and for the preservation of the ideology of Pakistan, and are you in favor of continuation and further consolidation of that process and for the smooth and orderly transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people”. The question left no option for dissension. General Parvez Musharraf proved himself to be a dictator by appointing his favorite persons to official posts without considering their capability to perform the duties. Three Prime Ministers changed during his tenure but all of them were just puppets at the hand of dictator.



Figure 35. Abdul Rahim Nagori, Perched Bureaucracy, Oil on canvas

Nagori has portrayed the above mentioned scenario in this painting. He has painted a night scene with a large tree trunk bereft of leaves. There are six owls sitting on different branches of the tree. The owl sitting in the middle is larger in size and looks like the leader. The moon is painted in the dark sky behind the tree. Adjacent to the moon there is an image of the Faisal mosque. A strange depiction in this night scene is the image of a woman embracing her child lying under the tree trunk. The whole dark atmosphere of the painting depicts the time during which it has been painted. Darkness shows the hard

times which the Pakistani nation was going through. The image of the Faisal mosque refers to Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. As Islamabad is the capital of Pakistan, all the political decisions, resolutions and policy matters are formulated in this epicenter of the country. Almost all the famous politicians have their official as well as personal residences in Islamabad. It also establishes Faisal Mosque as an icon for the 'Establishment's Islam' which is quite different from the Islam of the entire community. The dry tree trunk shows the weak internal structure of the country. The figure of a woman with a child symbolizes the suffering of the motherland and the nation. The roots of the tree are gaining nutrition from their bodies but still there is no hope of regrowth. The tree which is symbolic of the establishment, seems to run the country by despoiling the land and the nation. The mother and the child both look afraid and are unaware of the snake who is sucking their lives from their bodies. The image of the woman embracing her children is repeated in many of his paintings, it is representative of the oppressed masses.

The description of the whole scene helps one to understand the significance of the owls sitting attentively on the different branches of the tree trunk. An owl is a bird of night and is considered very sharp and wise according to Western symbolism. This may be due to the fact that an owl can see in dark which symbolizes his power of foreseeing. Its attentive and alert posture shows him as being dutiful and conscious of the surroundings. However, in our society and religion the scenario is very different. Contrary to the Western symbolism of the owl as a wise being, the same bird denotes bad luck and is a lover of haunted places. Islam describes the night as the time of darkness and evil. As a bird of the night which sleeps during the day time and stays awake at night, the owl is

considered to be a wicked creature. In Pakistani society, it also denotes foolishness. Using the owl, Nagori symbolizes the major institutions of bureaucracy, who sit idle while much injustice is happening in the country. It also implies the selection of incompetent officials who are appointed by Parvez Musharraf and running the institutions. Normally owls are the residents of desolate places and make their nests in dead hollow trees. The painting on the whole represents the owls as having power over our internally shallow country, which shows a lifeless and dejected nation which is not in any condition to help the country anymore.

The symbol of owl is a deliberate appropriation by Nagori. He has taken the symbol from the monogram of the Staff College of Quetta. The owl was the main figure in that monogram since 1905 till 1979, it was only later that the saying of the Persian poet and thinker Saadi was utilized and the slogan was changed. It says, "Pir sho, beyamoz, Saadi" ("grow old by learning" Saadi"). The owl was replaced with the word "Iqra" the first message of God to the Prophet (PBUH) and to the entire humankind. The message implied learning.

Nagori painted in order to present a statement against martial law and the repressive regime. His way of painting is as strange as his way of thinking. On asking him why he always criticized the establishment through his work, he replied "I don't see, it is necessary to infuse political slogan but if one is sensitive to the human suffering around him or her, unconsciously, those torturous situations effect his or her personal psyche and the troubled minds find an outlet in the externalization of one's situation as a relief from

pain”.¹³¹ Nagori’s paintings draw their substance from the pain he suffered, nevertheless, they are painted in quite vibrant and attractive colors with richly designed compositions. He always raised questions against any malicious political moves which were undertaken without considering the status and religious discrimination of the people who are affected by it.

Being a political symbolist, Nagori was well aware and ever present in his time. The choice of subject matter clearly describes him as a person who is fully awake and is conscious of the atrocities around him. Nagori’s painting entitled *Lal Masjid* is one such example (figure 36). The mosque was a scorching political issue of the Musharaf’s regime. *Lal Masjid* is an old mosque situated in Islamabad adjoined by *Jamia Hafsa*; a school of religious learning for females. In 2007, it was assumed and declared by the government that *Lal Masjid* and *Jamia Hafsa* run by two brothers, Moulana Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid was a hiding place for militants and the brothers are playing an active role in protecting them and providing them with ammunition. Consequently, this *Jamia Hafsa* was raided by the military at the discretion of the government which caused severe bloodshed and terror in the whole country. Abdul Aziz was arrested and his younger brother Abdul Rashid was killed. As the result of this operation several human lives were wasted; many innocent women and children of *Jamia Hafsa* were killed during this operation. The operation was considered unnecessary and termed a cruel act by some of the opposition leaders and thinkers. Nagori chose this controversial issue in order to bring it to the general public’s attention in the following painting. There are several

¹³¹Nagori, Abdul Rahim. Interview by Aqsa Malik, Karachi, October 2010.

aggressive women holding batons in their hands. They are covered completely in black robes called *Burqa*. These veiled women are rushing towards another woman who is holding her child in a state of shock.



Figure 36. Abdul Rahim Nagori, *Lal Masjid*, Oil on canvas

The title of the painting, *Lal Masjid*, is symbolic. *Lal* is an urdu word meaning Red, which for Nagori, became a symbol of bloodshed after the *Lal Masjid* incident. It is a mosque; a place meant for worship, but as its name is *Lal* red signifies, it witnessed the havoc and disaster of several men and women. In the painting, the blues and greens have been juxtaposed with the red which could be indicative of the fact that there was relative peacefulness in the vicinity. Similar to the employment of contrasting colors, Nagori has

also created a point of comparison by juxtaposing Faisal Mosque with the *LalMasjid* in order to highlight the conflict. Nagori has used several historical buildings in his paintings as the symbols. The Faisal Mosque is a frequently appear in building in Nagori's paintings to indicate the city of Islamabad. Faisal mosque is government's possession while Lal Masjid is a private entity. Faisal mosque is painted in white surrounded by green and blue colors; both the colors of life and peace. Similarly *Lalmasjid* is also painted white but in contrast to Faisal Mosque it is surrounded by red color, which indicates danger, bloodshed and turmoil around it. The white color is the symbol of sacredness and purity which is present in both the mosques as they were built for this purpose.

Another important feature of the painting is that no male figure has been painted. This could be due to the fact that Nagori wanted to concentrate on the role of the females during this incident. Although females weren't actively involved in *Lal Masjid*, close to the *Lal Masjid* was *Jamia Hasfa*, a religious seminary for females run by the directors of *LalMasjid*. These females, depicted in the painting are wearing black *burqas* holding batons. The artist by using the *burqa*, pointed out the patriarchal society. He has altered this dress into a persuasive symbol of the exploitation of women rights. In the Pakistani society just like this black robe which does not allow a woman to show her physical self, her intellectual and psychological existence is also controlled by the male authorities.

The female students of *Jamia Hafsa* continuously carried out protests during the operation and even before this incident, they had set up a 'moral police' to guard the mosque, *Jamia* and its residents either men or women. According to Nagori these *burqa* clad women did not do anything by their own intentions, they were forced and guided by some powers to undertake such actions. Nagori places these figures in a form of a mob. There are figures behind the figures and the whole crowd is wielding batons in their hands, which indicates that the movement of this mob is controlled; the females on the front are threatened by the females standing behind. Nagori has also painted the same symbol of mother and child in the corner implying the stressful state of nation. As a matter of fact, during the whole *Lal Masjid* operation, many women and children were facing danger inside and outside the *Lal Masjid* complex. These innocent women and children were at the mercy of only a few female combatants, who had been trained and brainwashed by their perpetrators.

Nagori was apprehensive of the danger that the government and *Lal Masjid* inhabitants put these women and children in. He favored talks rather than military action and did not support the whole operation conducted by the government. The government, of course, deemed the operation to be necessary since in its opinion, *Lal Masjid* was housing terrorists in the guise of militants. Humanitarians like Nagori, however took a more sympathetic view towards the people in and around *Lal Masjid* and claimed that instead of such an intensive and damaging operation the government could have peacefully resolved this issue through peace talks and negotiations. Nagori, as a socially perceptive artist is not only sensitive to artistic vibes but more acutely to the problems of the general public.

Another incident Musharaf's rule that influenced Nagori was the dismissal of the Chief Justice of Pakistan. In *Supreme Sacrifice* (figure 37) Nagori refers to the incident of 2007 when the Pakistani Constitution was suspended at the behest of Pervez Musharaf. He was occupying the controversial position of being both President and Chief of Army Staff. Musharaf also gave a summary dismissal to Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, and arrested prominent lawyers. He declared a state of emergency in Pakistan in order to supposedly calm down the turbulent situation. During this period a number of lawyers who had been peacefully demonstrating in favor of an independent judiciary were ill-treated, detained and even tortured.

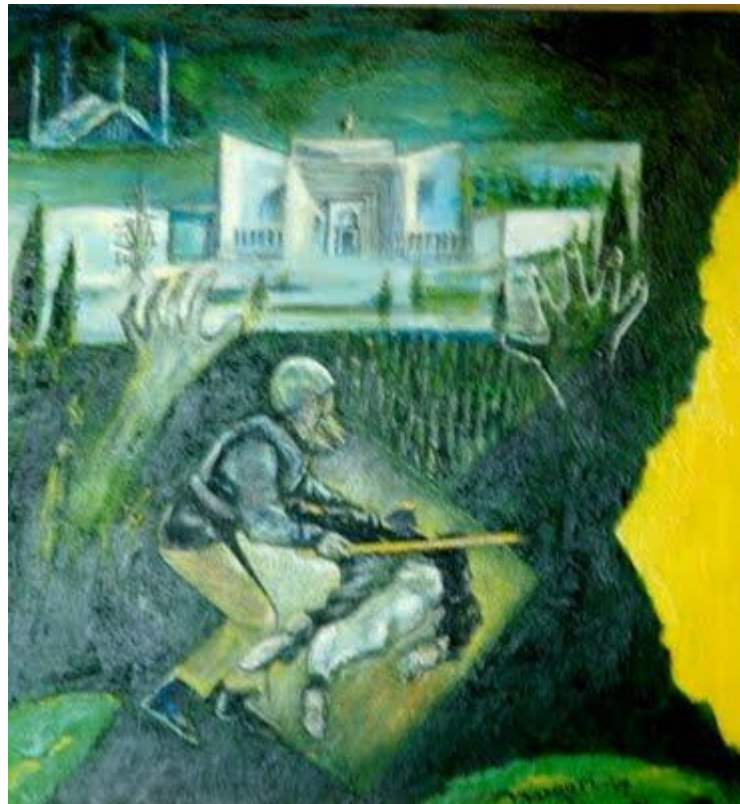


Figure 37. Abdul Rahim Nagori, *Supreme Sacrifice*, Oil on canvas

In *Supreme Sacrifice*, Nagori is pointing towards the same incident. It is important to note the title of this painting is a pun on the word 'supreme' since it means both the greatest sacrifice and it could also connote the 'sacrifice of justice'. The painting depicts a lawyer, who is being scolded and beaten by a police officer. The whole scene is shown inside a hilly jungle, with Supreme Court shown in the background. The path leading to the Supreme Court building is surrounded by cypress trees, a feature of Mughal gardens in the region. The cypress trees are used to depict the authority of the institution by assigning it a royal outlook. An important satire in this painting is the figure of the policeman who has a dog like face. A dog is extremely loyal to its owner; similarly, the police force is shown loyal to the dictator.

Nagori has used the dog as a personalized symbol. Just like his owl in his *Perched Beuraucracia*, he has painted the dog in terms, which are diametrically opposite to those of the Western ideology. The West derived the meaning of the dog from the duty of the sheep-dog, which is to guard and protect the sheep. In Christianity dog is considered to be an emblem of faithfulness and closeness. According to another study, dogs are 'Man's best friend' and "have been domesticated in Europe in the 7th millennium BC."¹³²

Nagori has imbued it with a completely opposite meaning derived from the Pakistani Muslim society. In Islam, a dog is considered an unholy and impure animal. Conversely, judicial personnel or 'qazis' are kept in high regard in Islam. The act of dog-faced police beating a lawyer, connotes 'qazi' which points towards the degradation of justice in an Islamic country by the guardians of nation. This image is quite ironic because it shows

¹³²Jane McIntosh, *Handbook to Life in Prehistoric Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 112.

the humiliation of an institution of the justice by the people who are supposed to protect it by helping it in implementation of its policies. A country like Pakistan which was created solely for the basis of upholding Islamic law and Islam has come to such a turn that its judiciary has been imprisoned and basic human rights are being violated.

An important feature of this painting is the inclusion of the Faisal Mosque in the background. Nagori always used the Faisal Mosque to symbolize the government administration based in Islamabad. The dark hands in the painting which are not quite reaching the building of Supreme Court are symbolic of the evil forces either are in the disguise of police force or the establishment who tried to take over the Supreme Court building which has a Pakistani flag on top of it; symbolic of the highest authority of law and justice in Pakistan.

A very strong symbol in this painting which is not the center of interest and seems just to be a space filler is the tree of cypress. Cypress is an ever green tree from coniferous family. It is native to Asia, Southern Europe and North America. A very interesting characteristic of this tree is that the male and the female flowers are on the same tree so that it can propagate itself in a variety of soils, needing only a moderate amount of moisture but definitely requiring pure atmospheric conditions.¹³³ This characteristic of cypress perhaps motivated Nagori to use it as an important symbol. He used it as the symbol of portraying all kinds of discrimination whether it is gender discrimination or class discrimination. For him as the flowers of the cypress tree our society is a combination of men and women, who are equally beneficial to the society and should get

¹³³John ABERCROMBIE (Horticulturist.), *A General System of Trees and Shrubs. For All Useful and Ornamental Plantations in Gardens, Etc* (London, 1780), 70.

equal rights. In this painting Nagori has used this symbol as an indication of the equal division of rights and the authority of law over each and every member of the society.

Another interpretation of the symbol could be that the Cypress trees were usually planted in sacred places and Nagori implies that the building of the Supreme Court is a sacred place where people seek justice. In an interview Nagori said that during his childhood he was very interested in Greek myths and he commented that he remembered . That in Greek mythology the cypress tree is the symbol of losing a partner or a friend.¹³⁴ A survey conducted on *The Status of Cypress in World Myths* seconds Nagori and says, “Cypress is sign of mourning and sorrow and losing the friend”.¹³⁵ The situation which Nagri has depicted in the ‘*Supreme Sacrifice*’ is also voiced by the cypress symbol. Along with the holiness of the institution of justice he has also presented the bitter reality by showing the riot between the two friends, the originator and provider of the law and justice the Supreme Court and the supposed implementer of the laws and justice the police.

Ijazul Hassan, a contemporary of Nagori conveyed his political discourse through his paintings, which serve as graphic reminders of his ideology. He employs symbols in his paintings to convey his political concerns and is quite aware of the nuances of the trade.

¹³⁴Linda A. Fairstein, *Bad Blood* (Simon and Schuster, 2007), 285.

¹³⁵Mark G. Boyer, *An Abecedarian of Sacred Trees: Spiritual Growth through Reflections on Woody Plants* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 39.



Figure 38. Ijazul Hassan, Face to Face, Oil on canvas, 1972

Face to Face (figure 38) is part of a series of three paintings which revolve around the separation of East and West Pakistan. The separation of East and West Pakistan was quite a dark period in the history of the region. There were a number of causes for this violent separation but the foremost was the geographical divide between the two parts of the country with India in between. Although there had been problems since the inception of the two states, the main problems started when the Pakistani Army showed its biased concern, on the orders of Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan. He was the Chief of Army Staff, a four star General and the third President of Pakistan from 1969 till the separation of the East and West Pakistan. Soon after getting the powers he declared Martial Law to control the agitating situation of the country. He was least interested in prolonging the Martial Law and General Elections were held for the first time in the history of Pakistan. These elections resulted in the success of *Awami League* under the leadership of Sheikh

Mujeebur Rehman in East Pakistan. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the founding leader of Pakistan Peoples Party, won from the West Pakistan. Both the parties and their leaders refused to accept each other's victory. Yahya Khan mishandled the situation and tried to handle this political agitation through military action. The students and personnel of East Pakistan were claiming their right to government due to the fact that East Pakistan had won in the general elections. A guerilla faction of Bangalis, *Mukti Bahini*, tried to combat Pakistani armed forces. The members of this force were considered to be freedom fighters. Yahya Khan launched an operation dubbed Search Light Operation to silence the *Mukti Bahini*. Things came to a head when India entered into the war in support of the East Pakistan and on November 22, 1971 India launched a military strike on Pakistan. Due to the dual pressure of the *Mukti Bahini* and the attacks launched by India, Pakistan finally conceded to its defeat in the war and on December 17, 1971 Pakistan submitted a formal surrender. The separation war caused a number of casualties and many people were displaced or fled to India as refugees. The duration of the war was nine months but during this time, 300,000 to 3,000,000 people were killed and about 30 million people were displaced. Despite this bloodshed, the separation did prove to be economically and socially viable as both East and West Pakistan not only had different locations but their language was also different (which was part of the bone of contention). Although both countries became stronger financially as a result of this separation, the bloodshed and moral humiliation faced by the common man was quite brutal. Ijaz ul Hassan was quite affected by this turn of events. For him the separation was necessary but the way it took place was not humane. Face to Face is a symbolic representation of the emotional and physical

condition of two innocent nations in the aftermath of a cruel and senseless political move.

There are two semi-nude human figures in the painting confronting each other, one is dead and mutilated and the other is looking at the mutilated corpse. This seems to point to the inevitability of the gruesome scenes of war. The placement of figures is symbolic of the separation of East and West Pakistan. The figure viewing the corpse is shown in a bended posture as if it is trying to comprehend the corpse. There is a certain amount of realism in this painting. Comparing it with the real life scenario in the images below, the posture and the health condition of these children effected by the war is very similar to that of the corpse.

The red, green and white colors of this painting are quite symbolic. Their symbolic significance is clear by their visual impact exuding richness and boldness. Ijazul Hassan has successfully conveyed both an entanglement of the separate identities of the countries as well as a puzzling juxtaposition of the flags of two countries. In fact, it is through the colors of the flag of the countries, which are quite similar, that he has shown the similarities of the countries. The background which is predominantly green, and is also the national color of Pakistan's flag, also has a star and crescent on it. In this green background, there is a splotch of red color. The colors red, yellow and green combined represent 1st flag of Bangladesh in 1971. It contains a red circle in on a green rectangle and there is a yellow map of Bangladesh in the center of the red circle. In 1972, the image of the map of Bangladesh was removed from the red circle which left only a red circle on a green rectangle.

The difference between the Pakistani and the Bangladeshi flags is mainly the inclusion of the white in Pakistan's flag compared to the absence of white in the Bangladeshi flag. Similarly, the Pakistani flag has a crescent and star, whereas the Bangladeshi flag contains a red circle, which the Pakistani flag does not have. These differences are conveyed in a subtle manner by Ijaz. There are two shades of greens very prominent in the background. This division of one color into two shades shows the division of one country or one Muslim nation into two countries or nations. It is also emblematic of different hues within one nation, in other words, the ideological differences within the same country or nation. Another point to note is that all the colors which have been used in the painting are quite bright but the two figures are presented in black and white as if to portray the monotonous and sorrowful existence of people during war. The War of Independence of the two states has actually become the cause of corporeal and emotional loss of the innocent common man. Ijazul Hassan believes that whether the separation was necessary or not, the methodology of the separation was flawed and inhumane.

This painting is actually based on the separation of East and West Pakistan but the message it reveals is for the entire human race. It focuses on the fact that hostility, war and bloodshed should not be the way to resolve political complications.

Green Revolution (figure 39) is a continuation of the East and West Pakistani theme; another angle of the same story. In this painting there are three images of crying children painted in black and white, vertically composed in the center of the painting. They are surrounded by the green and red Monstera leaves. Monstera is a plant with big green leaves. The plant is quite symbolic because of the edible value of its leaves and fruits. It highlights the nourishing quality of the plant which in turn symbolizes the soothing

embrace of Mother Nature. However, man has been exploiting Mother Nature through war and bloodshed. The seepage of blood into earth during wartime seems to be what Ijazul Hassan is pointing out. Ijazul Hassan is a deep observer of nature and owns a beautiful garden in his home. He has painted lots and lots of paintings inspired by the vegetation of his own garden. Monstera is one of his favorite plants. The character of Monstera which inspires Ijaz ul Hassan is the feral growth of its seedlings towards dark areas. That is why they are found mostly under the shadowy trees creeping up its trunk. Once the plant finds support, it starts growing in the direction of light.



Figure 39. Ijazul Hassan, Green Revolution, Oil on canvas

Ijazul Hassan has related the above process of growth to human beings and forecasted an optimistic vision of future. Children are vertically placed in same manner as the new leaves sprout upwardly on the plant. However, there seems to be a juxtaposition of the healthy growth of plants and the continuous suffering of the children. Ijazul Hassan painted this immediately after General Yahya's campaign in favor of agriculture and agriculturists which had no viable results. These reforms and activities did not help the poor and depressed factions of society. They did not alleviate the hunger pangs of the poor or grant hope for the future.

General Yahya also claimed to be a faithful and sincere leader by making different socio-economic policies. *Green Revolution* is a comment on these land and economic reforms that General Yahya initiated. This was supposed to augment the farmer's efforts and help put the country onto the road of self-sufficiency and economic progression. In order to make Pakistan self-sufficient in agricultural practices, General Yahya emphasized the need for improved seeds and the quality of the crops but did not attach importance to the unsatisfied farmers and their suffering families. In his painting, Ijazul Hassan has pointed out the hollowness of the promises accompanying General Yahya's Green Revolution. The green color of the foliage represents the promised abundance that the improved wheat grain but the presence of red leaves shows the contrast of the real and the actual.

The inclusion of the red leaves is an important factor of the painting. It can be interpreted as symbolic for the arrival of autumn referring to the downfall of economic stability in Pakistan. Or, it can be a metaphor for the masses becoming aware of the hollowness of the regime's empty promises and vision of hope. The foliage is green symbolizing abundance and hope, a promise but some of the leaves are red indicating these promises

might not take into account the poor factions of society. For Ijazul Hassan, red is the color of hopelessness and death. And green according to J.E. Cirlot, 'is a connecting link between animal life and decomposition and death'. To raise the same confusion of color, green and red are used to symbolize life and death, and hope and despair.

The greenery is juxtaposed with the black and white image of a child crying out. The treatment of black and white figure against the bright fauvist colors is the same as in the last painting "Face to Face". The time period, background and the under currents of both paintings are the same; both present the juxtaposing of surface prosperity with the hidden misery behind it. The lushness of the foliage is contrasted with the monochromatic child who is hungry in spite of their being agricultural reforms. This crying could be due to hunger or due to the atrocities caused during General Yahya's reign. Ironically, the land which General Yahya wanted to make a land of abundance is also the land of miserable and hungry children who are not being fed. The image of the child in Ijazul Hassan's paintings does not stand only for a child but it actually represents the whole nation.

The same image of this crying child is found in another of paintings '*Peace*' (figure 40). This painting is also related to the theme of Green Revolution and shares the same subject matter; it represents a satire on good governance of General Yahya Khan, who imposed Martial Law in Pakistan in 1969. Ijazul Hassan shows the hollowness of General Yahya's liberal thinking and policy making. According to General Yahya and his followers, 'peace' was their forte which could not be achieved without the liberty of woman in society. Responding to the actual reality of this claim, Ijazul Hasan represented in his painting, a seminude woman standing in front of the picture of a crying

child. Their expressions are shown diametrically opposite. The lady with her hands raised in the air has the expression of victory or liberty contrasting with the crying child. The image of the child with Monstera leaves is the same as that in Green Revolution.



Figure 40. Ijazul Hassan, Peace, Oil on canvas

The contrast between the woman who is shown fully liberated in a manner that is more akin to the Western model of freedom. The woman is blonde, fair skinned and blue eyed indicating that she belongs to the West. It is also a comment on the superpowers of the world who do advocate freedom, liberation and peace for all but rarely address the real problems of the masses, namely poverty and hunger.

Ijazul Hassan has painted *Peace* when the people in the East and specifically West Pakistan were under the oppressive military rule. During all the military governments, Pakistan was presented as a peaceful and free country but it was not the actual position. The local reality was something quite different. The image of the 'fair lady' represents

the elite class of the Pakistani society and the painfully crying dark child represents the common man. Ijaz ul Hassan unveiled the true picture of the situation during Martial Law when only the elite class and their issues were discussed and resolved but the common man was not even granted basic human rights. Similarly, such government cannot and does not grant freedom of expression. According to Virginia Whiles; "freedom of expressions and the spirit of tolerance, are two human rights often denied by military rule and sectarian politics".¹³⁶ This emphasizes what Ijaz ul Hasan highlights, he takes it further by showing the divide in the 'spirit of tolerance'. The spirit of tolerance, in the elitist mentality, does include women's rights, an issue which is in the forefront of international concern, but it does not take into account the problems of poverty and children's rights, which are indigenous problems.

This issue becomes even more important in the light of the western female figure placed in the center who is jubilantly shouting with an expression of success and happiness and the crying child seems to recede into the background behind the female and is almost covered by the leaves. The expressions of both the crying child and the woman are also juxtaposed. The woman is smiling and is at peace while the child is crying and seems anxious. Again, this points to the pseudo-concern of the liberalists with reference to the actual concerns of the people. Virginia whiles further criticized the mishandling of power and uncertainty and unbalance of Pakistani society; and stated, "disorder is creating a more disorder instead of a new order in the right direction of positive growth, of now and the future. We are ruthlessly playing with the purity of the innocence and instead of

¹³⁶Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan*, xxii.

converting into a maturity, making it further abnormal. Perhaps nothing is ordinary and yet our conscious act can make it extra-ordinary”.¹³⁷

The girl is holding a sign if peace in her hand. Ijazul Hassan has used this only as the sign of peace but he but as his personal symbol to show the clear control of Western culture over Pakistani culture. The peace sign was originally developed by western designers and thinkers. Consequently, the peace sign does not reflect the Pakistani culture and society. The peace symbol is quite well known throughout the world. Britain recognized it as the logo of a famous historic Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and in some other countries, specifically in the United States this symbol is known as the Peace symbol. In 1958, Eric Austin developed peace badges to give away to the people. The design of these badges was inspired by Gerald Holtom's original design of the peace sign which was inspired by a painting, *Third of May* (figure 41). Holtom was a graduate of the Royal College of Arts, an artist and a professional designer. Using Goya's painting as the inspiration, Holtom developed this design. He also uses the reference of the flag semaphore which is a telegraphy system for conveying information at a distance by the help of hand-held flags or other visual signals. While explaining his design he wrote to the editor of the paper Peace News, “I was in despair. Deep despair. I drew myself: the representative of an individual in despair, with hands palm outstretched outwards and downwards in the manner of Goya's peasant before the firing squad. I formalized the drawing into a line and put a circle around it”.¹³⁸

¹³⁷Whiles, xxii.

¹³⁸“A Museum In Germany Is Asking Designers To Give Peace A New Sign | HuffPost,” accessed October 15, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/peace-sign-logo-design_us_58e4ea10e4b0f4a923b3dcfa.



Figure 41. Francisco Goya, Third of May, Oil on canvas, 1808

Goya has painted *The Third of May* as a reminder of the massacre of Spaniards by Napoleon and his army. Goya successfully conveys the fear aroused by execution by painting the dead and frightened people who lie at the feet of Napoleon's armed forces. Two major figures are the one standing in a white shirt and the other lying dead on the ground with his hands in the form of a V. Later this V gained the significance of the Peace sign.

Eric Auston changed the peace sign according to his own interpretation as he says, "the gesture of despair had long been associated with the death of Man and the circle with the

unborn child”.¹³⁹ Eric has given a note to the people along with his badges which tell people that in the event of a nuclear war, these fired pottery badges would be among the few human artifacts to survive the nuclear inferno.

The dangling peace sign is again indicative of how peace is being preached rather than practiced. The red gloves on the woman’s hands could indicate that either she doesn’t want to get her hands dirtied by engaging in activities aimed at actually alleviating the child’s conditions such as visiting poor areas of the country or it could symbolize the fact that she is part of the ‘sophisticated and elite’ class who are happy with the status quo which allows them to be the power holders while uttering platitudes of peace and freedom. Ijaz has juxtaposed these two seminude figures i.e. figure of the crying child the symbol of deprived class of Pakistani society and the happy lady as the symbol of the influential and elite class just to show the difference of the needs and the psyche of these two classes. The child's nudity shows his deprived life but the nudity of the white lady shows the fashion, style and the freedom to spend her life according to her whims. The placement of the figures is also important as the liberated, semi-nude female is presented in the foreground whereas the hungry child is in the background. Either the woman is flaunting her independence in front of the child or the woman is presented as the upper class/superpowers of the world who actually hold the power but are not doing anything for the people in the shadows, the less privileged. Again, as in Green Revolution the child is presented monochromatically and the green and red Monstera leaves have the same symbolic value as in the Green Revolution. The color red could be seen as a symbol of awareness on the part of the masses.

¹³⁹Janet Nay Zadina et al., *College Reading: The Science and Strategies of Expert Readers* (Cengage Learning, 2013), 421.

A rather softer use of symbolism to express the injustices of political administration can be seen in Rahat Naveed Masud's works. *Aye Arz-e-Watan 1* (figure 42) shows a lady who is lying down under the open sky representing our land Pakistan, which is beautiful and attractive. Masud recalls the time when mangoes scattered on the roads after the bomb blasts (2009-2010) and the running crowd and vehicles walk over them. These mangoes and dates are our treasures which are used as symbols of blessings. These ripped and full of taste mangoes are packed in crates. Dates are mentioned on the crates which reminds the dates of bomb blasts in Pakistan. Here the lady is looking at the spectator with an expression in her eyes that besides every difficulty and mishap, she is still waiting for the good fortune. She reminds us of our duties. Her free style gestures and expressions remind us of the Olympia by Manet who also stares at the eyes of the viewer despite her nakedness and position in society.

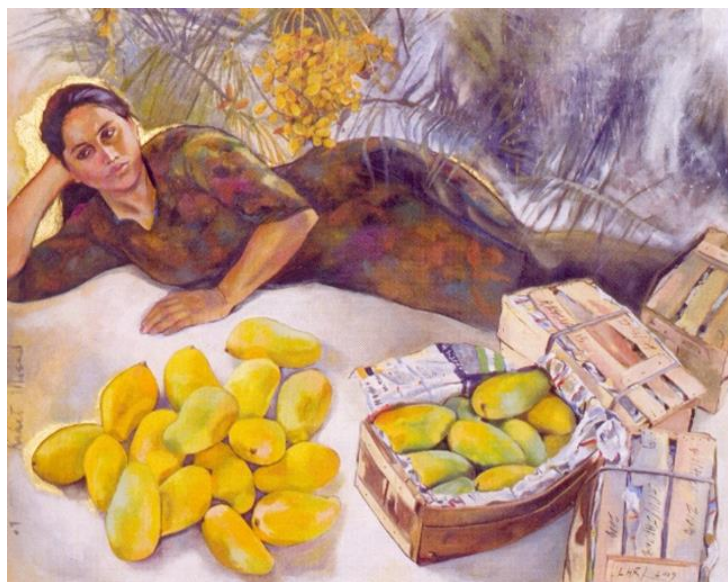


Figure 42. Rahat Naveed Masud, *Aye Arz-e-Watan*, Oil on canvas, 2009

The works of Masud illustrate the basic needs and dreams of a woman and the way she is grown up. Her innate sweetness and strength prevent her from disorders of society. “The postures that the figures are shown in are mostly of the private, contemplative moments each and every one of us is inclined to steal from the humdrum of life.”¹⁴⁰

Nisar Teri Galyon Pe (figure 43) shows a lady who is representing the map of Pakistan. She is holding the flag and is trying to save it from the upcoming miseries and their effects. She is beating her head with one hand in misery but retains the dignity of the flag by holding it high and above her head. The head and hand are placed on the area of Jammu and Kashmir and tells the condition of the people there. It is a disputed territory because both India and Pakistan are considering it a part of their country besides the fact that Muslims are large in number there, the contradiction has not yet solved. Leaders of both India and Pakistan speak a lot in favor of Kashmir but no one is taking fruitful steps to control the situation. The instinct of the other countries has been shown in the painting by their resemblance with dog, vulture, wolf and giant like humans. The land of Pakistan is shown imprisoned with strings and is mourning at its own fate. The people around are speaking nonsense and uselessly. The painting shows sharp and long teeth of people which are ready to drink the blood. Their tongues are coming out of their mouths as they have seen the victim in front of them. They are ready to bite. Some blood is shown on the sides also. She captures people in worst situation. The lady presented in form of the map of Pakistan is held by strings which are stretched and go beyond the limits of the canvas. They are held by other countries who want to move Pakistan according to their own desire. They are trying to decide the fortune of our country and make it helpless in their

¹⁴⁰ Hawra Harianwala, “Contemplative Canvas”, *Newsline Magazine* (April 20, 2011).

hands. The crying woman is indicating not only the women of Pakistan and Jammu but the women of every region, who is suffering. Masud maintains her hope for rescue by the flag at height. She wants to see her land better and higher than all other countries.



Figure 43. Rahat Naveed Masud, Nisar Teri Galiyon Pe, Oil on canvas, 1995

Just like A.R Nagori and Ijazul Hassan, R.M.Naeem is also presents a mirror image of the political scenario of Pakistan. He is a renowned contemporary painter who has painted recent political issues of Pakistan, specifically Lahore. He is currently teaching at the National College of Arts. His paintings mostly revolve around political, social and spiritual subjects. According to him art and politics are corresponding to each other, art is a reaction against the socio political action of our times. Because every sensitive being is

reactive to its surrounding and a painter being a very sensitive part of the society is very much motivated by any political move. Just like the writers react through their words and an actor reacts through his physical expressions the painter reacts against any action through his colors, and a symbolist presents his emotional and psychological reaction by converting it into the symbolic images of his own choice. R.M. Naeem in his painting *Let's Talk About Politics* (figure 44) presents his thoughts and emotions on the ongoing political situation amongst Pakistan, America and Afghanistan. In this painting he has satirically commented upon the political relation between the leaders of these three countries and their peace talks through his personal symbol of tea cup.

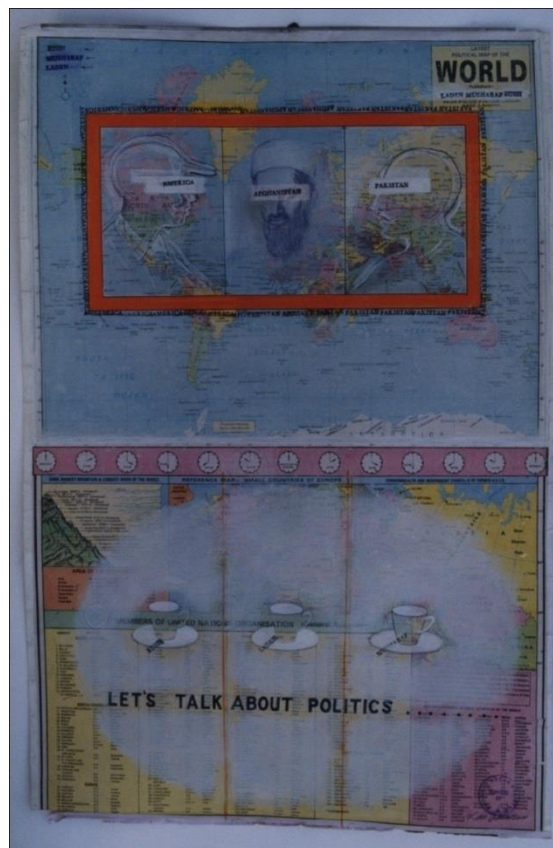


Figure 44. R. M. Naeem, *Lets Talk About Politics*, Oil on canvas

The relations between all three of these countries have been strained. The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been strained since Pakistan's inception as there is conflict concerning the Durand line. Pakistan believes that the Durand Line issue has been resolved even before the Pakistani state was officially established. Afghanistan, on the other hand, claims that the Durand Line Agreement has been violated in the past. This, in conjunction, with the Taliban issues has led to strife and uneasiness over the years. These problems further intensified when Pakistan supported rebels against Communist Afghani government in the 1970s and 1980s. Afghanistan also accused Pakistan of employing its ISI network to support the Taliban. The American government's use of drone attacks in Afghanistan has further impacted the relations negatively. The American government also has complicated ties with the Pakistani government. America has criticized Pakistan in its War on Terror claiming that Pakistan harbors members of the Afghani Taliban. Nevertheless, America has provided Pakistan with a great deal of financial and military aid over the years. Coming to the relations between Afghanistan and the United States, the major problem started with the Taliban establishment in Afghanistan and the subsequent attack on American soil, masterminded by Usama bin Laden, in 2011. Nevertheless, similar to the relations between America and Pakistan, the relations between Afghanistan and America are mending.

In the above context, the upper part of the painting shows the three leaders of America, Afghanistan and Pakistan against the backdrop of the map of the world. An important aspect of this painting is that Naeem has painted the leaders of three countries, America, Pakistan and Afghanistan but their eyes are not visible as they are covered with a white patch on which the name of their country has been written. These figures are framed by a

red rectangle. There is a prominent border of stamps that indicates the names of these three countries, Pakistan, Afghanistan and America. The upper left corner shows the names of these leaders: American President George Bush, Pakistani president Gen Musharraf and the Political leader of Afghanistan and the head of their fighting organization, *Al Qaeda*, Usama Bin Laden. The right corner of the painting has been labelled 'The Latest Map of the World', and the publishers are Laden, Musharraf and Bush. The address mentioned under these names is Near Police Station, Lahori Gate, Lahore.

The lower part of the painting consists of three tea cups, placed again against the world map. These cups are placed on that portion of the world map which indicates the list of the names of the Members of United Nation Organization. This heading, Members of United Nation Organization, is overlapped by the tea cups bearing the names of these three leaders. Each cup carries the stamp of each leader; Bush, Laden and Musharraf.

These three countries have inimical ties with one another. Ironically, the one thing that these countries share in common is that because of their leaders, Bush, Usama Bin Laden and Musharraf, the countries are suffering economically and politically as well. Bush and Usama Bin Laden with their agenda of warfare, have adversely affected the economies of their respective countries. Another very important aspect of the painting is that the three leaders are blindfolded, signifying that they are too engrossed in their own intentions and desires without paying heed to the consequences. Their actions are affecting the whole world at large but they are ignorant of this aspect. Their self-involvement is why they have been highlighted with the red border to show that all three of these leaders are

together but they are not working in collusion to fix problems. The red border could also be indicative of the war that has ensued because of these leaders and the amount of bloodshed caused because of them.

A point to note is that both the American and Pakistani leaders are showed according to their profiles but Usama Bin Laden has been painted from the front and is also placed in the middle. This could point to one of two aspects: 1) Both America and Pakistan are waiting to see the steps that Usama Bin Laden will take, 2) Usama Bin Laden is the connecting figure of dissension between these two countries and without him there may not be any need for so called 'peace talks'. He is also the main connecting factor both geographically and politically. It is because of him that Pakistan has had chaotic relations with America and vice versa. Thus, he is the central point of this convoluted triangle between the three countries.

The tea cups also represent a sense of camaraderie, in this case that of friendly discussions and finding solutions. It is something of a great importance that all three of these countries are the members of the United Nations Organization. However, the supposed 'peace talks' between these three countries have yet to yield any viable results. The use of the teacups is also symbolic with reference to the locale, in Pakistan teacups represent acquaintance and relaxation; however, the ties between these three countries are anything but relaxing. As the painter himself commented, "In our country, the custom

of drinking tea is a commendable one. Usually, issues are lightly discussed over cups of tea. This spirit of non-seriousness and camaraderie is what I have tried to capture”.¹⁴¹

The incorporation of the stamps on the tea cups indicates that the respective countries are being controlled by their leaders and the image of the countries is entwined with the leaders. They cannot be separated from their leaders. For instance, whenever Afghanistan is mentioned Usama Bin Laden comes to mind and vice versa. Similarly, when George Bush is mentioned it refers to America. This is why in the image, the list of countries that are members of the United Nations Organization are written by name but America, Afghanistan and Pakistan are represented through leaders.

It is interesting to note that Naeem has juxtaposed the non-serious with the serious. He has shown the enjoyable pastime of tea with that of serious discussions, which is why he has presented the leaders of three nations as blindfolded. On another level, the teacups could also symbolize that the leaders are outwardly happy with one another and their real intentions are hidden behind a façade of congeniality, depicted by the teacups. The impression of the teacups on a list of the countries around the world depicts this as something as trivial and ordinary as tea drinking. Another thing to point out is that again Laden is written in the middle and Bush and Musharraf are written on the two sides, this like the former painting points towards the central position of Laden both geographically as well as politically. The title of the painting is quite satirical rather being a direct criticism over the political situation of these three countries, in a sense, the title is also symbolic.

¹⁴¹Naeem, R. M. Interview by Aqsa Malik, Lahore, September 2012.

In the same series, R.M. Naeem depicts a thumb impression in a painting, which has been made by the repetition of the stamps of Pakistan, Afghanistan and America and their leaders' names. The side by side presentation of the countries emphasizes the fact that they have gained notoriety because of the way in which they are continuously resisting and fighting one another. This is probably why R.M. Naeem has shown the images as overlapping since all three countries want to present opposition to the others and defeat the others.

An important aspect of the image is that of the image of the countries' stamps. Naeem has used the Stamp as a symbol of authority. A stamp is considered the final authority over any legal document. A stamp is also something which is used to attest any document right or wrong. In this painting this stamp is creating political ambiguity between these three countries. Political ambiguity in the sense that it cannot be clearly said which country is actually pulling the strings. Apparently, it seems that America is controlling both Pakistan and Afghanistan but Afghanistan in its turn is making both Pakistan and America dance to its tune. According to R.M. Naeem, "I don't think of any of these countries individually. I think that all three of these countries have lost their individual identities. We cannot differentiate that which one is more brutal or cruel than the other."¹⁴²

To put into perspective, Pakistan has had its hands dirty in not only collaborating with Afghanistan and its political leaders but also with leading air strikes in its own county. Similarly, Afghanistan has been waging a war within its confines for quite a long time. One which is supposedly lead against the terrorist organization, Al Qaeda, but it affected

¹⁴²Naeem, R. M. Interview by Aqsa Malik, Lahore, September 2012.

the citizens on a number of levels. The Western counterpart is America which has been at war with country or another at any period of its existence. All three countries have been waging cruel wars which have resulted in a great deal of bloodshed and political imbalance. The citizens of these countries do not clearly comprehend why such measures have taken place. Ironically they are the ones most affected by such wars.

Just as R.M. Naeem has satirically depicted the conversation between the 3 leaders of Pakistan, Afghanistan and America on the tea table, Saira Waseem has presented the same issue with slightly different imagery. The subject matter is the same as both the painters are satirizing the useless albeit seemingly friendly discussions about peace. In Saira's painting two chefs are cooking a dish and they are peeling potatoes to cook (figure 45). There are animals: bulls, cows and donkeys behind these chefs and there is a fat man dressed in Mughal costume holding the dish ready to serve.



Figure 45. Saira Waseem, Peace Talks, Ink and Silver Leaf on Wasli, 2004

This painting is highly symbolic. Each and every image is indirectly telling a story. The two chefs dressed in Western costumes are representing the foreign political leaders, it is also worth noticing that both the chefs look the same which indicates that no matter who the foreign political leaders are, they are all the same in the way that they deal with Pakistan. They are peeling potatoes, if seen minutely there is some kind of scribbling on the peel, which indicates the record of promises, treatise and agreements between them. Body language of these chefs indicates the disappointment and frustration as they are used to this kind of monotonous work every day and it is a part of their routine work to

peel and cook. The animals behind them represents the nations or the general public who is looking towards them for some visible result. However, the leaders are not even acknowledging them. Saira Waseem is of the view that the general public is a silent creature for our political leaders which echoes the metaphor of the blind leading the sheep. They only can see and follow what their leaders are saying and doing.¹⁴³

Another interesting character is a man holding the dish ready to serve. He is wearing a Mughal dress which shows that he is Muslim. He is taking the dish cooked by the foreigners to serve. There is a radar on the head of this fat man which indicates the presence of media. The whole story is that that each and every policy for friendship and peace in Pakistan is made under the foreign influence of outsiders who are not interested in creating peace in Pakistan and can't understand the internal issues. Pakistani leaders are merely playing just the role of a waiter who is serving the ready dish to the media to be presented to the whole world. The man dressed in Mughal robe also has a spoon in his belt showing that he might also partake of the dish. In other words, the Pakistani leaders may also try to do exactly what the foreign leaders are doing i.e. ignore the public for their own benefit.

Saira is very much moved by the political situations and tensions of Pakistan.

Therefore, she mostly painted political wrongs in a very ironic and satirical manner.

Another satire set by Saira is *Buzakashi* (figure 46) which is a popular sport played in Afghanistan and also the North Western areas of Pakistan. It is an old traditional game and tends to become quite unruly. In this game there are several horse riders who have to grab a goat one by one with their spear. The one who grab it in less attempts and time is

¹⁴³Waseem, Saira. Interview by Aqsa Malik, Lahore, June 2012.

considered to be a winner. In this instance, the goat game can be easily replaced by the games played by the Pakistani government and army. The army and government were the same at the time that Saira Waseem presented the painting. COAS, General Pervaiz Musharraf, was the president of Pakistan. Waseem wants to highlight the situation of the country which is based around the fact that every soul no matter if he is a politician or an army person is desirous of gaining control (government) of Pakistan. They are not grabbing a goat per say rather they are grasping for control of Pakistan. It is important to note that the person who seems to be seated in the seat of prominence is Pervez Musharraf. There are two significant aspects of Musharraf's inclusion into the painting. The first is related to his allegiance to the military. There have been a number of military dictatorships in Pakistan and the military has been trying to become involved in the governance of Pakistan since the past 20 years. Satirical representation of the political situation in Pakistan through her painting skill is Waseem's forte. Despite the Afghani influence of this painting, Waseem mostly focuses on Mughal miniature painting.



Figure 46. Saira Waseem, Buzkashi, Ink and Silver Leaf on Wasli, 2004

Mughal miniature painting is the greatest influence over Saira Waseem's work. This painting is also inspired by the typical setting of Mughal miniatures. General Pervez Musharraf in his army uniform is sitting like a Mughal king on a throne. Instead of a real elephant this portrayal of the king Musharraf is sitting on a throne which has decorative elephant heads on both sides. The other thing to note is that Musharraf has been depicted as having numerous arms like a Hindu god, Shiva who has 4 different things in his four hands. One arm is clad in a military uniform and is holding a balloon, the second seems

to be the muscular arm of a local wrestler called *Pehalwaan* holding a club, the third arm is depicted as wearing a clown costume and is saluting, fourth hand is making the sign of V for victory.

Shiva is known as the destroyer of the world just as Musharraf has created havoc in Pakistan. Musharraf is sitting on a throne and his profile is not showing his whole face, so his expression is not clearly visible, this indicates that the expression of the leader is not as important as the presence of the leader in a place of prominence. There are figures in army uniform who have their faces painted like clowns dancing and acting stupidly. They are carrying a dead goat but the picture does not show the origin or destination of the dead goat's corpse. There are two curtains on both sides of the painting which are similar to the curtains of a stage. These curtains are hold by two clown faced army men. There is a sun in the upper center of the painting and it seems to be placed on the head of Musharraf.

The figures drawn below Pervez Musharraf are also important because they appear to be related to the military as can be seen from their uniforms and military berets. They are celebrating the military rule by dancing about. An important thing about these figures is that their faces are painted like clowns. The paint is of the pattern of mimes who silently convey their meaning through gestures rather than direct words. Similarly, the military works silently in the shadows of the Pakistani government. Just like the mimes who do not need words to convey their actual intent, the military can work without proclaiming themselves. In fact, Pervez Musharraf very silently carried out his military coup against Nawaz Sharif the previous prime minister and rose to power. His posture in which he is sitting is the same as found in miniature paintings in which a ruler holding a flower bows

in a very humble manner by sitting on his knees. Instead of the flower there is a balloon in his one hand which shows the hollowness and transient power of the ruler. Saira Waseem wants to show how power is similar to a balloon as it looks big but can burst any time through a little prick of fate.

The second hand has a club which shows that Musharraf considering himself a man of great power and he is always ready to fight which is very obvious from his exposed muscular arm. The third saluting arm in clown uniform is the most interesting part because Waseem has presented all the army men with clown like faces except General Pervaiz Musharraf. Waseem seems to downplay while simultaneously emphasizing the ambiguity surrounding these figures; are they army men with clown like faces or are they clowns wearing army uniforms. In either case she has left the conclusion to the viewer and the conclusion leads to the same statement. If these are army men with clown like faces, it shows that the army is quite literally clowning about instead of paying attention to the important issues. On the other hand, if it clowns who are wearing the army uniform it portrays the emptiness of the army which is composed of clowns. The army personnel are there only for the entertainment of the public rather than alleviating the suffering of the public. She is successful in creating doubt in the viewer's mind by highlighting the question that in these dual character figures which characteristic is more dominant; the power, discipline and the faithfulness of an army or the humorous, and non-serious behavior of a clown? Saira Waseem has not painted Musharraf's face as a clown but she has conveyed to the viewer that although he is an officer of a higher rank or sitting on a throne he belongs to the army, which indicates that he also has the same funny and brainless characteristics. Although not exactly obvious, Waseem has hinted at

this internal brainlessness/clownishness by painting one of his arms in a clown's costume.

Mime like figures are dancing about with the goat in their arms, the goat carries a strong symbolic meaning. It represents seems to be the fate of the Pakistani public which cannot help itself rather it is just considered to be a thing to be 'captured' and carried wherever it is deemed beneficial to the government. The public is helpless at the hands of the government and there is not much it can do to help itself. Infact, the Pakistani public is like a basic device used in a game to make it playable and enjoyable just like a goat in *Buzakashi*. Not only does the public seem to be helpless but the clownish figures in the painting seem to be least concerned with the plight of the public.

There are two clowns in proper clown costumes which are painted on the left and right side at the top of the painting and they are also looking towards the leader rather than the public. The clowns also seem to be significant as they lend a grotesque air to the seriousness of the situation. The throne itself is a medley of odd objects such as the wearing of sandals beneath a formal military uniform. Musharraf is holding a balloon while at the same time he is sitting on a throne with a missile and a cannon. Also, the curtain like cloth is imprinted with missiles. Therefore, for the leader there is nothing to be taken seriously. The victory sign V made by one of Musharraf's many arms seems ironic since he came into power through a military coup, not peaceful means, and he is presiding over the usage of cannons and missiles. During Musharraf's regime two painful and violent incidents took place: first the Lal Masjid incident which was visually depicted by A.R Nagori and is already mentioned and interpreted, and the second is

Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan which was once the favorite topic of R.M Naeem's. *Let's Talk About Peace*.

Another aspect to note is that one of the clowns at the top of the painting is pulling a star patterned curtain: stars are used as a map or tool of navigation in military actions or to get guidance while traveling. At the same time, they are symbolic of destiny, it as if to point out that Pakistan's destiny is fraught with violence and helplessness on the part of the public. Or he is the one who can start and end up the show by drawing and undrawing the curtain. Under the painting there are two other prominent political figures, namely Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan and Qazi Hussain Ahmad. Both of these people posed a problem for Pervez Musharraf. Qadeer Khan was accused of nuclear proliferation and Qazi Hussain Ahmad opposed America's involvement in Afghanistan. This may be the reason that both of the political figures have disguised themselves with animal skins.

The use of clown as a symbol of moral decadence is also obvious in the work of Western symbolist James Ensor (figure 47). James Ensor was trained in traditional painting of his time, however, it was much early that he took a new course and introduced a new style depicting his perspective on modern life. He drew inspiration from carnival culture and was particularly fascinated by the use of the masks. These masks were used in his painting symbolizing the dual nature of people of his society. His paintings using these masks are mocking for a society that apparently opted for material pursuits but deep down remained dissatisfied. He masked his figures, giving them faces that would express their inner selves rather than their outer, anatomical ones. In this way he was able to dig beneath the surface and reveal the "true face" of society. His exploration of society unmasked eventually caused his rejection by many, even the local avant-garde artists.



Figure 47. James Ensor, The Intrigue, Oil on canvas

Ensor developed an entirely new method for communicating with the masses. He experimented with the visual presentation of the subjects in a way as if they are entering into the space between the viewer and the canvas. He achieved this by using volumes of colors used in patches over the canvas. As a result, the patches lifted the figures towards viewer's space according to the intensity of the color used. Moreover, he filled his canvas with figural presence that made his works rushing towards the viewer.

Most of Ensor's works are a social commentary, which initially had subtle mocking but with time evolved into a furious and cynical disposition. Since, he was also familiar with the tradition of caricature, he used this element to make his depictions appear more satirical. He worked with a bright palette and often preferred lighter tones but with rough and textural paint making his works subtle and bold at once. In a sense, 'he called upon raw color and savage texture to strip down to the layers of the human psyche, plumbing

its depths, in addition to supplementing his Symbolic vocabulary with subtle political overtones'.¹⁴⁴

Christ's Entry into Brussels (figure 48) is a pertinent example of Ensor's position before a morally decadent society. The painting depicts a scene of carnival where Christ is shown sitting on a donkey. The foreground is filled with grotesque faces, painted as masks showing the inner reality of people. The enormous crowd is painted using the technique of volumetric patches of color giving an illusion of filling viewer's space. The crowd seems to rush towards the viewer in a haphazard fashion. Ensor has shown the anarchy of a society that is emotionally corrupted and is directionless. The people depicted in the crowd are deformed and are viewed from multiple angles adding an element of disorganization to the effect that the overall impact has become more pressing on the viewer. By the late 1880s Belgium struggled with economic and political oppression that Ensor captures by transforming Brussels into a sea of disorder and chaos. The chaotic spectacle of crowd is a mixture of bourgeoisie, clergy, and the military - basically the ruling class. The serious religious event is overshadowed by the chaotic crowd suggesting the moral bankruptcy of a society and the failure of authorities.

¹⁴⁴“Symbolism Movement, Artists and Major Works.”



Figure 48. James Ensor, Chrst's Entry into Brussles, Oil on canvas, 1888

From Ensor's standpoint his grotesque realism was symbolic of society and therefore had a cleansing effect, therefore, this kind of treatment of such themes remained a characteristic of his whole career. He shows an avant-garde impulse toward social, formal, and libidinal rebellion and anticipates many modern movements from Fauvism to Surrealism, and even Abstract Expressionism.

Saira Waseem produced another painting titled "Tomorrow?" (figure 49) is an alarming image for the Pakistani nation. The title "Tomorrow?" is not a statement but a question that where will Pakistan stand tomorrow? What will be the future of Pakistan? Waseem is successful in raising this philosophical but genuine question in the mind of her viewer through a strong image representing the past and future of Pakistan.



Figure 49. Saira Waseem, Tomorrow?, Ink and Silver Leaf on Wasli, 2000

Prominent Pakistani figures have been depicted with the public. Waseem has painted all the figures in the context of a framed picture like an old and big family photograph which became a pleasant memory and one wants to hang it somewhere around him. The figures belong to all spheres of Pakistan starting from the foundation of Pakistan (Quaid-e-Azam) to sports (Imran Khan) to arts (Noor Jehan) and even philanthropists such as Abdul Sattar Edhi. In other words, myriad aspects of Pakistani life and culture have been represented in this painting, which have unfortunately become the past. Waseem highlights the internationally famous personalities of Pakistan who symbolize the glorious past of this country. Along with several renowned personalities Waseem has

painted some ordinary people with them. All of the personas are standing side by side showing their acceptance and respect for each other. It seems as if they want to adjust each and every one within the frame which is giving the impression of unity and discipline. There are three big Pakistani flags and a number of smaller ones held by the people in the painting which highlights the fact that this painting is centered around Pakistan. It also lends a patriotic air to the painting.

Some children have been depicted in the main part of the painting, they are clothed and they seem to be older than the infants at the bottom of the painting. This shows a slight tendency towards a gap in ages. The children at the top have books, flowers, the Pakistani flag etc. in their hands which indicates that they are pursuing a happy and meaningful life whereas the infants at the bottom of the painting are playing with missiles which shows the fate of their childhood which is full of violence and war. The children at the top are fully clothed whereas the infants on the front are naked which further highlights their vulnerability.

Another aspect to note is that the painting seems to be made up of two parts. One of the parts is that of the framed portion which is made up of prominent figures as if to indicate that that was a bygone era, one which has nothing to do with the present era of children who are playing around with dangerous things such as missiles. It also points to the fact that these children will not come into contact with such lofty personages, Pakistan is no more capable of producing such personalities.

A very important feature of this painting is that the figures in the painting are looking towards the viewer with expressions of curiosity as if to show curiosity about the future

of Pakistan and what Pakistan will become. Another interesting aspect of this painting is the juxtaposition of the clouds and the painting at the bottom of the picture. The important personalities are standing above the clouds which emphasizes their loftiness and seems to point towards their angelic characteristics, ironically the infants (the real children) are shown to be at the bottom. This symbolizes not only that they are grounded and living in the present reality but also that they will probably never reach the loft status of their predecessors. It also may point to the loss of innocence and recalls to mind the banishment of Adam and Eve from heaven. The infants can no longer occupy the same space as their elders.

Pakistan is a lucky country to have such visual historians who record almost every important political move in this country which produces any kind of query in their minds. Sometimes they use very simple symbols which are very easy to comprehend for a general viewer and sometimes they use very tricky symbols. Saira Waseem has admired the potential of the Pakistani nation and criticized the political upheaval of Pakistan," It is a land created according to the needs and wishes of its people who struggled a lot for this homeland and finally got freedom. It is a land of God-gifted blessings and culture, heritage, and vast history... and a land of innocent people who don't know about their own cultural history...vast heritage...and their own identity. More than half of our country is illiterate. The image of our country is spoiled in the whole world because of the extremists.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵Ellen Pearlman, “American Effect = Death Threat: The Art of Saira Wasim,” accessed October 15, 2017, <http://brooklynrail.org/2003/10/art/american-effect-death-threat-the-art-of-saira-wasim>.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

From a bird's eye view, the initial phase of Pakistani art was an off-shoot of individual freedom and fusion of East and West. We find a diversity which is extremely individualized. At one hand we had, Ustad Allah Bux, who was a painter of the land and its people, and on the other, we had Shakir Ali, who, although connected with the roots but incorporated Western stylistic features. We had Chughtai, who drew inspiration from Islamic history and mysticism, his depictions narrated a fantasy world with strong spiritual undertones. There are interesting parallels that can be drawn between Chughtai and Symbolist artists of the West. Then we had Sadequain, who also drew from Western and Eastern sources but in terms of subject matter introduced a unique use of symbols to convey deeply spiritual and intensely satirical meanings. The art produced under Martial Law was a result of oppression and had to survive censorship, therefore had a greater and varied use of symbols, often linked to political reality of the time as sensed by artists. The artists such as A. R. Nagori and Ijaz-ul Hasan used symbols in their own ways to communicate their rejection of dictatorship. The work of artists who came up with a variety of contrary ideas under political suppression carry an intense emotional appeal and in many respects can be labelled as works under the movement of Symbolism. It was also the time when feminist perspectives made their way into visual representation. The art of past two decades developed in the wake of globalization, identity crisis and political instability and therefore displays a tremendous variety in the use of symbols. The dissertation puts forth the idea that the symbolist painters of Pakistan has contributed in developing spiritual awareness amongst the masses and have also furnished a foundation for a much required social transformation. However, the development of

symbolism in the West and the use of symbols in the East followed different lines, which, in some aspects intersect but nevertheless follow different courses. In order to develop a clear picture of the use of symbolism by Pakistani artists, we may compare and contrast with the basic tenets of symbolism in the West. There are certain commonalities and then there are certain differences. For instance, both in the West and East, the artists who used symbols reacted against the irrational and immoral trends of their time and in doing so they somewhat prioritized their subjectivity over objectivity.

In the case of West, symbolist subjectivity was a resurgence of romanticism in so far as it endorsed individualism. Individualism is basically an anti-social rebellion wherein the individual was preferred over society. In romanticism however it was characterized by passion, imagination and a spiritual connection with Nature. This characterization applies to symbolist subjectivity but only partially. Symbolist subjectivity was characterized by imagination and spirituality found in romanticism, but it was not marked by the romantic passion and connection with Nature. Symbolist subjectivity was concerned with individual only as a counterpoint to society instead of a subordinate to natural forces. The subject matter of symbolist imagination was completely different from that in romantic imagination. However, in Pakistani artists, the connection with the spiritual is much more obvious; it can be clearly witnessed in the works of Sadequain, Shahida Manzoor and R. M. Naeem as a direct portrayal and in cases of others, it is observable indirectly. In both cases, the spiritual connection remained operative and visible due to the local aesthetic sensibility rooted in a culture that preferred symbolism in not only arts but also in religion, folklore, narratives and discourses related to mystic ideologies.

It would not be farfetched to state that the Subcontinental mindset had a general orientation towards symbolic imagery. As mentioned in the first chapter, the age old Vedic culture that developed into Hinduism and Buddhism heavily relied on symbols to conceptualize the divine and communicate the essence of religious doctrines.¹⁴⁶ The arrival of Islam in the Subcontinent, and subsequent development of Sufi doctrines added to the prevailing mindset that responded to symbols with greater rigor. The Sufis had to use a symbolic language since the content they addressed belonged to the intangible features of reality which could not be narrated in simple verbal discourse. They were focused on devising methods of union with ultimate reality, and this process could not be discussed in ordinary language, they had to rely on strong symbolism.¹⁴⁷ The understanding of the divine in Islam and even the discourse in Qur'an uses symbolism and metaphors to explain complex realities. The Sufis explained the whole Qur'an as a symbol of Divine presence.¹⁴⁸ Given this mindset, the Pakistani artists knew the power of symbols and therefore used it to communicate their feelings and ideas in relation to content that was not expressible otherwise.

Through abstraction Western symbolists incorporated disparate elements into their works. The elements could either be real or imaginative, but the finished product was certainly imaginative. In this regard they followed the art of music. Music is based on compositions, which contain unrealistically repeatable elements. In real world two objects are never identical, but in an art form they can be so. The repeatable elements in an artwork, be it a musical composition, are called leitmotifs. They add meaning to the

¹⁴⁶Lynne Gibson, *Hinduism* (Heinemann, 2002), 28.

¹⁴⁷N. Ross Reat and Edmund F. Perry, *A World Theology: The Central Spiritual Reality of Humankind* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 293.

¹⁴⁸Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (Routledge, 2013), 26.

overall work and unify the apparently disparate parts into an understandable whole. This method of combining disparate elements into an apprehensible form is called synthetism. Symbolists used in their works in order to create meaning, which would then elaborate their subjective standpoint.

Western symbolists were able to adopt such groundbreaking techniques because of their exposure to different art forms. Unlike other art traditions of its time symbolism incorporated many elements from other art forms. They wanted to move beyond the material categories of shape, color and form. Their heightened subjectivity pushed them to discover their own truth, which they could communicate through imagination and abstraction. It is only by reflecting and imagining, beyond materialistic constraints, that they were able to impart meaning to their abstractions. In themselves abstractions are material categories, like color and shape, but it is their arrangements in certain manners which add to them an idealistic component of meaning. This feat can only be achieved if the artist has formulated an idea or emotion beforehand, after which he tries to depict it in a scene which would be objectively impossible. In this way artist goes beyond the material reality. The vehicle of this transcendence however is symbol – an object with a meaning attached to it. It was thus the meaning, rather than the object itself, which became the central focus of Western symbolists.

The Pakistani symbolists share the end result, which is centrality of meaning instead of object, however, it was not met through the route taken by Western symbolists. The Pakistani symbolist artists had a prior vocabulary of symbols and a historical continuity of its usage. It was not something that they invented; it was something already there and was only put to new use by Pakistani artists. This aspect by no means, undermines the

creativity of the artists, in fact it actually validates it. The Pakistani artists were able to use symbolism to communicate the political and moral decadence that they witnessed in individuals and society and this demanded an entirely new use of symbols which had a different connotation. We observe that the Pakistani artists through their thought out compositions encapsulated their responses in relation to political injustices and social stigmas and encouraged the viewer to go beyond personal dimension. They in fact, through such communication, helped the viewer to go beyond personal dimension and integrate to the larger dimension of life.

One of the common characteristics between Symbolists of West and East is that they painted taboo realities. Until symbolist tradition Western artists focused mainly on what is beautiful rather than what is ugly, in order to portray a counterpoint to the societal ills. But the symbolists broke away from this approach of reformation. They maintained the reformatory spirit, but applied it to different method. Instead of painting an idealistic picture of human life they chose to paint an ugly picture. They did not try to depict an inexistent happiness but an existing misery. The main rationale of this approach is that only a better understanding of the problem will lead to a solution. Symbolists tried to elaborate their psychological and spiritual condition in such a way that the problems therein become manifest. This method obviously involves a certain degree of exaggeration, but that amplification was a direct product of a subjectivist standpoint.

The intellectual process of symbolists in the West was basically idealist, but their ethical viewpoint was not idealistic. That is, they did not hold some moral ideals in the manner of realists and romantics. In this regard they are similar to impressionists and existentialists. They thought only about existing reality rather than an idealized

inexistence. Symbolists did not hold a dualist view of humanity, wherein human thought and action is coupled with a supernatural essence. Hence their works concerned solely with their existing psychological and spiritual realities. They covered those aspects of their psychological realm which were seldom depicted in Western art tradition. Even romantics, whose art and literature concerned with the individual, largely bypassed those aspects in favor of lofty ideals.

In case of Pakistani symbolists, we again find a clear difference of approach in relation to above. Both the intellectual orientation and ethical viewpoint relied on the contemplation of Divine and was connected to a universal and intangible existence. The Western symbolists did not seek a direct and intelligible spirituality. Instead they opted for an occultist and esoteric method of divine contact. They did not maintain a single divine entity with which they could establish a contact. Rather they sought a subjectivist route to such contact, wherein an individual can discover his own spiritual tendency without relying on an external mystical code. It is this characteristic indeed which differentiated symbolists from Pakistani symbolists.

Symbolists embraced their internal disorder in the effort of understanding their inner lives. Their works often verged on depicting insanity and unrest. In absence of ethics they often delved into chaos and anarchy. But they embraced it truthfully and contently. Their works therefore often proved to be disturbing. They depicted anxiety, dread and melancholy. Their subject matters did not exhibit resolve or heroism. Instead they pointed towards the ephemerality of life itself. A signature of symbolist works was morbidity and wretchedness of human existence. Symbolism dealt with those symbols which were most relevant to its period. While the period was marked with progress and

stability, symbolism tried to subvert its nature by introducing the inevitability of doom and death. The subject matters of symbolist works were often marked with evil and macabre. As symbolists understood, it by depicting death and evil qualities of human nature that they can oppose the superficiality and moral righteousness of their establishment. This thread of symbolism finds its Eastern counterpart in the work of Sadequain, the rest of the symbolists, in fact, responded to the current sociopolitical situations and highlighted their injustices.

Symbolism in the West relates the written work or painted canvas with certain ideals which the writer or painter intends to communicate. And the ideals of symbolists were at many times mystical in nature. They transcended the psychological and worldly matters, and reached a higher plane of existence. Without idealism, which manifested more clearly in its spiritual and mystical content, symbolism could have emerged as an aesthete or decadent tendency in art history. It is only by appealing to the higher dimensions of human mind thus that it became a consolidated and consequential movement in modern history. The feature of exploring the higher dimensions of human existence is most notable in Shahida Manzoor's work. She depicted the spiritual realities with a focus on highly imaginative framework.

We may conclude that both Western and Eastern symbolist painters produced their main body of work in a time period characterized by a crisis in emotional and intellectual attitudes, particularly, it was manifest in the morality of the culture they lived in. It was a time when the world was expanding, there was an insurgence of ideas that was challenging established paradigms.

Spirituality became the dominant theme due to its anti-materialist stance in the West and due to its central significance in culture in the case of East. The painters preferred anti-materialist positions and therefore philosophies and ideologies that did not abide by material pursuits were incorporated. However, since, in the West, there was no all-encompassing spiritual ideology therefore an interest in the occult was the only refuge. In Pakistani scenario, spirituality was a historical force that could provide solutions to human misery, and artists used it to highlight a solution, and it had an acceptance since the viewer also shared a subjectivity that valued spiritual depth.

In view of notable art historians, symbolism that apparently seems to be focused on form was actually more concerned with the content. In this sense, it was not a movement in terms of style but an attitude towards exploring and expressing a certain kind of subject matter. As a matter of fact, the artists of late nineteenth century, lived a life that was affected by the socio-political and socio-cultural upheavals. As a result, the artists used symbols to convey powerful ideas that could address the decadence.

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