Chronicling Pakistan's Art Movements from Traditional to Contemporary: 1960–2011

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses modern art in Pakistan by arguing that the artistic discourse in Pakistan has always been in one way or the other influenced by various social and political factors either nationally or internationally. It discusses how the political regimes that preceded each other directed the artistic discourse in the country from which contemporary art works have evolved. This paper divides the Pakistan artistic development into four major phases. The first phase discusses the artists' struggle for identity after independence. The second period shows the censorship in art under General Zia's regime until 1988. The third phase constitutes the 1990s, which can be termed as the transitional period towards contemporary socio-political art and finally the fourth phase reflects the contemporary socio-politically charged imageries in art since 2001. The discussion on the fourth phase will also demonstrate how the role of "contemporary" as a globalised art movement concentrating on regionalism and the Third World, has facilitated the legitimisation of Pakistani artists internationally, who are engaging the political chaos in their country as their artistic concern.

Keywords: *Pakistani art, contemporary art, socio-political art*

INTRODUCTION

With the turn of the 21st century, the international art world is taking Pakistani artists seriously. Owing to the catastrophe of 9/11[1] Pakistan turned into an important geo-political identity not only in terms of international (read: American) agenda but most importantly, in the perspective of this paper, its artistic and aesthetic agenda as well. The media hype or exposure towards Pakistan post 9/11, paralleled with the change in the country's social and cultural policies, created a fertile ground for provocative contemporary socio-political art. Many artists from Pakistan like Imran Qureshi, Rashid Rana, Saira Wasim, Faiza Butt and Aisha Khalid are now very well known and internationally acclaimed.

The road to being recognised and legitimised by the Euro-American art world however, had not been undemanding for Pakistani artists. This paper traces and discusses Pakistan's early modern art and its role towards the development of contemporary socio-political art.[2] Western scholars have asserted that early Pakistani art had no identity or individuality of its own and the modernist movement in art was mostly based on western cubist idioms (Sirhandi 1992). The discussion in this paper will prove otherwise. Modern art in Pakistan has its own history. As this paper will trace, the seed of politically dissident art that flourished right after General Zia's demise in 1988, had also persisted during his regime in less promiscuous forms. It was only after the 9/11 that Pakistani art in the form of socio-political narratives came to the attention of the international media and international art market. It can be stated, however, in the initial years of Pakistan's creation until 1978, the artistic concerns and approaches of Pakistani artists were mainly dealing with the emotional exhilaration caused by the newly formed nation state coupled with the euphoria created by modern world's initial triumph over nature.

This paper aims to trace and categorise the art currents into four major phases that influenced Pakistani art over the years by examining Pakistani art in its historical context that led towards the contemporary practices. In this attempt, it must be noted that no hard lines can

be created to demarcate these four phases as one phase can be influenced by another phase, prior or after. This paper will further seek to argue that the recent phenomena of socio-political imageries produced by Pakistani artists, although welcomed in the art market, is actually to an extent reinforcing the stereo-typical images of Pakistan in the Western art markets. To engage in such discussion, this paper has taken into consideration theoretical vocabularies initiated by Western scholars in critical discourse and yet they are used and customised within the context of discussing arts works according to their local sensibilities instead of using them in terms of the fixed preexisting paradigms. Such an approach is especially important in discussing or contextualising art from the post-colonial countries, where there is a discontinuation in the natural or spontaneous progression in the process of artistic discourse due to colonisation. It must be highlighted that the artistic discourse in the post-colonial societies had not been identical or parallel to the Western one.

THE FIRST PHASE: PAKISTAN'S ARTISTIC SEARCH FOR IDENTITY (1960s AND 1970s)

Realising its independence in 1947, Pakistan can be termed as a young nation state; however, the geographical and cultural history of the region goes back to the dawn of civilisation. The geographical location that came to be known as Pakistan itself comprises of many ancient and historical sites like Mehanjodaro, Harrapa, Ghandhara, Thattha, Chawkandi tomb and Mehergarh in Balochistan (Kenoyer 1991). Pakistan not only obtained its independence from the British but also demanded a separate home land owing to its religious identity that was different from the rest of the sub-continent, namely the Hindus. The Partition of the Sub-Continent into two separate nation states, India and Pakistan resulted in the mass exodus of the population from both sides to their respective allotted nation. This diaspora resulted in the genocide of epic proportions on both sides. The people from two separate religions, Hindus and Muslims who had been partners in business, neighbours and colleagues for 800 years,

turned against each other (Majumdar 1946). With such a historical background regarding the formation of Pakistan as an independent nation-state, the situation for Pakistani artists was more complex than that of the artists from other post-colonial nations. Pakistani painters did not want to be influenced by its mixed Hindu heritage.

The first art phase is the period when artists began their initial search for identity as a result of Pakistan's independence in 1947. In the early stage, the prior image vocabulary that portrays or reflects the culture and religion of the Hindus, Muslims and other minorities that have been shared as a result of hundreds of years of co-existence, was shunned by the Muslim artists in search of their own individuality after the onset of Pakistan's independence. This feeling manifested itself initially in the form of traditionalist artists who used Islamic themes although it later developed into what can be termed as regional modernism. As asserted by Marcella Sirhandi:

> Pakistan was created as an Islamic nation. While the artists were a little concerned with religion, Hindu – Muslim difference was the root of their conflict. The Bengal school paintings of gods and goddesses and its Punjabi version, "Lahore Oriental" tradition so popular before partition – became distasteful to Pakistanis (Sirhandi 1992: 16).

The earlier artists dealt with identity issues and shunned almost all the shared imagery that could be traced back to the combined heritage of the former combined Indian sub-continent. They looked for their identity instead of the roots, which were polluted with mixed heritage of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, who shared the same soil, culture and heritage before the separation. No imagery in art work from the initial years can be traced back to the separation and its horrifying repercussions. This search for identity and authentic narratives created a binary among the artistic practice in Pakistan into two separate art movements, which can be termed as "Traditionalism" and "Regional Modernism".[3]

Pioneer traditionalist artists like Abdur Rahman Chughtai, Ustad Allah Bux and Fayzee Rehamin followed a traditionalistic course concerning themes and imagery but followed a different course of techniques after independence. Chughtai's style is known as the "Lahore Oriental Style" and has become the main approach during this time (Photo 1). His favourite themes consisted of Mughal heroes from Islamic history and regional folk stories. "Chughtai devised a Persian-Mughal mannerism in flat romantic style. His horizontal compositions with subordination of certain elements to central idea, and colours are closer to Mughal than Persian paintings" (ul Hassan 1991: 37). Chughtai's claim on Pakistani artistic heritage lies in the reconstruction of the national consciousness and pride over its history and tradition, which later became a legend with his creative skill and aesthetic excellence. As explained by Marcella Sirhandi:

> A consummate draftsman with an innate sense of color and design, he often gave an amusing twist or humorous note to his large water colors. He was the most accomplished printmaker in the subcontinent, having studied this art in London during his two visits to Europe in 1932 and 1936 (Sirhandi 1992: 23).

Traditionalism continued to flourish until the death of Chughtai on the 17th January 1975. However, by the start of the 1960s there was a general trend among developing nations to follow the model of the developed white nation as an archetype and to abandon the traditions. The post colonial societies were regarded as in transition towards modern developed nations based on the archetype model of developed nations; "in the modernization discourses of the Pakistani state, "tradition" and "modernity" became emblems of transitional stages of national cultural development" (Tarar 2008).

Traditionalists were overshadowed by other groups of artists called "Regional Modernists" who composed regional and local themes and yet were inspired by the international art. The pioneer was Shakir Ali (1914–1975). Shakir Ali joined the Mayo School

of Arts in 1954 as a lecturer in the Fine Arts Department. Being the only "foreign qualified" teacher at Mayo School, he was promoted as the principal of the National College of Arts in its early transitional years before being confirmed on the job in 1962 (Tarar and Choonara 2003: 17).[4] Shakir Ali later became the major catalyst in the development of the National College of Arts, the most acclaimed art institution in Pakistan (Ali 2008: 67). Sirhandi in *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan*, however, discredits Shakir Ali's work. She writes:

> Shakir painted in cubist style, using heavy outlines to contain the color. His subjects were still lives and other motifs ranging from boats, bulls and figures to the mask of tragedy and comedy. Still Life with scroll, derived from Picasso or Braque, has flat, unsophisticated use of color and heavy brush work. From the European point of view, there is nothing new, original or noteworthy about these paintings, but for Pakistan, he was the first painter with recent firsthand experience abroad to paint in a "modern" western manner. Cubism became the fashionable mode attempted by the majority of artists in Lahore (Sirhandi 1992: 43).

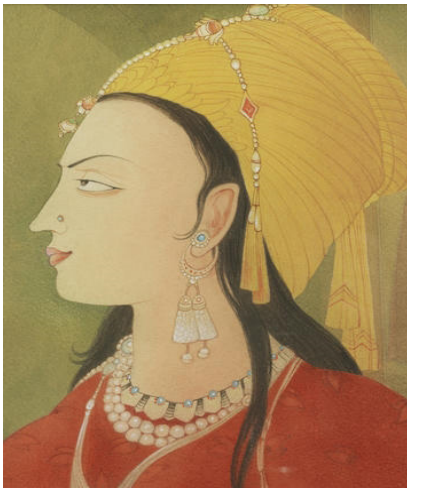

Photo 1 Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *The Mughal Princess* (ca.1959). Watercolor on paper, 55.88 × 45.72 cm.
Source: https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/17362/lot/6/ (accessed 2 May 2013).

We would like to point out here that Shakir Ali was undoubtedly an enormously talented painter. His take on a more casual form of Cubism could actually be his effort to break free of merely French- European hegemony and to incorporate his own cultural and social background to the European modern art (Naqvi 1998). The introduction to Western art through Cubism played a huge role in forming the discourse of art in Pakistan until 1978. According to Hashmi, "Artists nurtured under his unassuming yet effective influence went on to form the core of what is now the face of contemporary art in Pakistan" (Hashmi and Mirza 1997: 18). However, even if we forgo the prejudices Euro-American hegemony creates in the art world towards the periphery regions, the images of stylised females in the "Yellow Woman" (1974) (Photo 2) or "Figures with Cattles" (1972) in cubist idioms had no special content or context to them. It does seem strange that such eye pleasing and stylised forms emerged from a nation that lost so many lives only a decade or two back in a mass exodus that resulted in the killings of almost genocidal proportions.

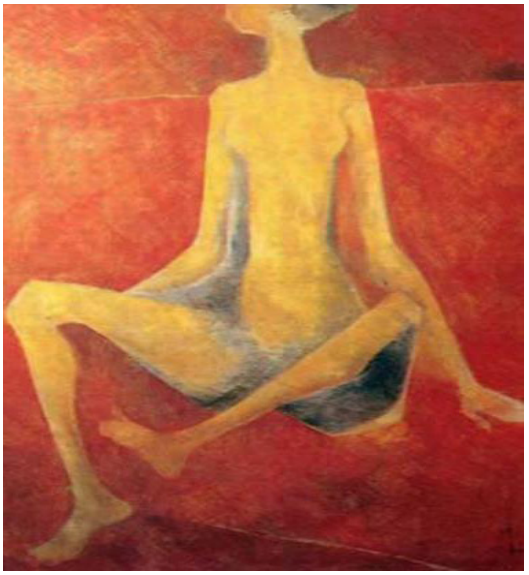

Photo 2 Shakir Ali, *Yellow Woman* (1974).
Oil on canvas, 61 × 65 cm.
Source: Sirhandi (1992).

The reason behind this phenomenon is most articulately expressed by Nadeem Omar Tarar in *Aesthetic Modernism in the Post-Colony: The Making of a National College of Art in Pakistan (1950–1960s)* as an artistic strategy laid down by the state: "A conceptual and physical infrastructure was put in place to modify existing institutions and to create new ones for encouraging modern art and artists in the country" (Tarar 2008). The new attitude was a reaction to the colonial era when all forms of independent thinking and modern art were discouraged in order to produce low-order craftsmen for the economic benefit of the British Raj in the sub-continent (Tarar 2008). Shaker Ali trained a number of Pakistani artists and made "cubism" synonymous with "Modern" and "progressive" and highly influenced the later generation of Pakistani artists.

Another artist with slightly ambiguous background is Sadequain, who is often referred to as a "self-taught" artist in Pakistan. As early as the 1950s, he became recognised as an artist of great potential. One of his patrons was Suhrawardy, the Prime Minster of Pakistan in the late 1950s (Sirhandi 1992: 57). Like most artists from his time, cubist idioms and style formed part of his visual vocabulary. Unlike Chughtai, Sadequain is credited for bringing art out from the confines of art galleries or drawing room walls to public spaces (ul Hassan 1991: 85). His massive public art works of gigantic scale, adorn the wall of Karachi Airport, Mangla Power station, the ceiling of Lahore Museum and Punjab University Library. In 1967, he completed the most ambitious project "Saga of Labor" (1965) (Photo 3) at the Mangla power station. This mural measures two hundred by thirty feet. The enormous project consisted of a series of paintings showing different stages of human existence in history. Basically, it paid respect to all the work forces that contributed to the construction of the multipurpose dam on the river Jhelum, which was at that time, Asia's largest dam, hence the pride and euphoric treatment of the painting.

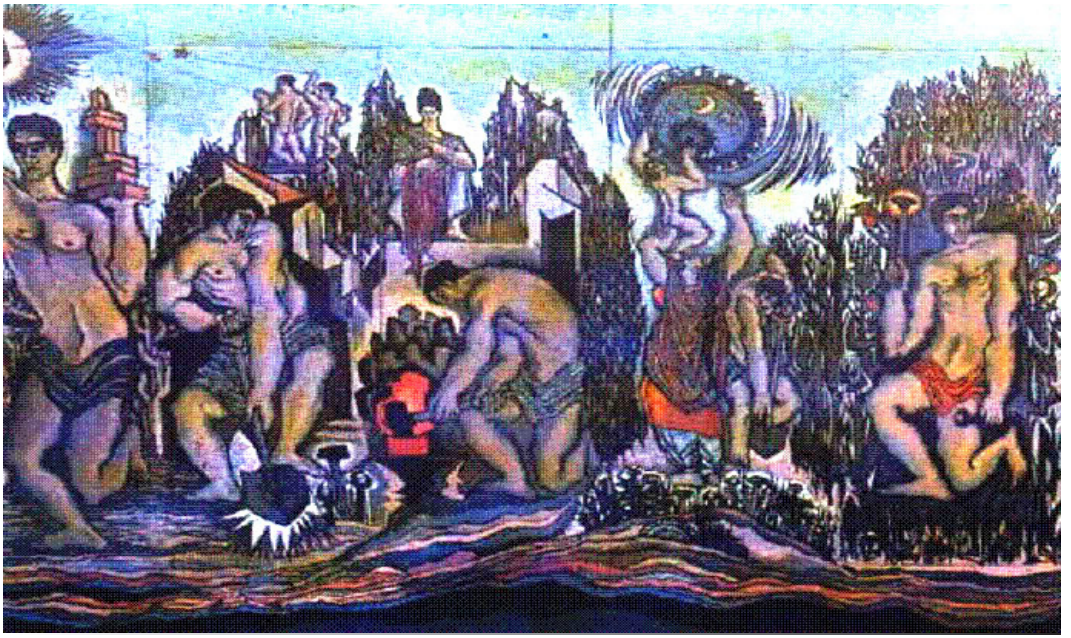

Photo 3 Sadequain, *Saga of Labor* (1965). Mural, 3048 × 380 cm.
Source: http://www.thelovelyplanet.net/sadequain-the-master-of-calligraphic-art/ (accessed 15 February 2013).

The "Regional Modernist" trend with strong influences from cubist idioms continued to flourish till 1978. If the public mural commissions like Sadequain's paintings at Mangla Dam and Karachi Airport and Shakir Ali's mural painting at the auditorium at the nuclear power plant at Islamabad in 1968 (Hashmi 2005) had continued, they would have contributed immensely to educating the masses aesthetically, owing to the nature of the placement of these public art works.

THE SECOND PHASE: ART UNDER GENERAL ZIA'S REGIME (1977–1988)

The dictatorial government of General Zia in 1977 that overthrew the democratically elected government of Zulifikar Ali Bhutto initiated the second important period in Pakistani art. General Zia's dictatorial regime enforced strict Islamic mores. General Zia's Islamization of the society is seen through the cold war polices and the part Pakistan played as the US partner in war against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

General Zia's government had a strict policy regarding all forms of visual and performing arts. Any form of figurative or conceptual art with any hidden agenda was censored and forbidden during his regime. This policy served two purposes for his dictatorial regime. Firstly, it coincided with the religion on the pretext of being un-Islamic and secondly it also served as the censorship tool, discouraging artists to indulge in any form of art regarding socio-political themes, as General Zia's government was based on various human right violations within the country. However, General Zia's policy of censorship regarding visual arts formed another binary within the second phase of Pakistan's artistic discourse. This division consisted of mainstream art based on formalism and a low profile politically dissident art.

The 11 years of General Zia's theocratic-authoritarian regime (1977–1988) was one of the darkest periods of Pakistan's artistic history. The whole society was reconstructed and modified into General Zia's own Islamic interpretation. It was the time of complete censorship

and Pakistan went through rigid and extreme religious and political change. The censorship of the government was based mainly on moral issues and curbing of female rights (Hashmi 2002: 11). "Faith was reduced to decrees relating to the representation of the female body, for which state-enforced conditions were in effect for the female presence in print media, film, theatre, television (which at that time was only the state-run channel) and in the visual arts" (Mirza 2009). The state politics stressed mainly on morality issues connected with female sexuality.

General Zia ul Haq (1977–1988) followed strict policies of censorship in the visual and performing arts. Every kind of art that referred to any kind of political or social issue was censored. Works of artists that had political undertones with themes such as female oppression, religious fundamentalism or dictatorship were banned from state sponsored exhibitions. General Zia's regime rooted in "religious extremism" had inherent distaste for any kind of figurative and sculptural art and it was strongly discouraged by the state (Hashmi 2002: 91).

General Zia'a policy of compliance during the United States' proxy war against the USSR from 1979 to 1988, created an unimaginable impact on Pakistani society; the creation of religious extremists (Taliban) in Pakistan and Afghanistan has its roots in this period (Coll 1992). The process of art and public interaction halted in its tracks. This regime gave birth to what can be called the era of "Enforced Formalism." The term "Enforced Formalism" is used here to describe General Zia's policy towards visual art during his regime. Artists were bound to work within the genres that were permissible by the government. The government sponsored and encouraged art that was based on totally benign themes and formalistic concerns for example landscapes, portraitures and Islamic calligraphy, hence the use of the term "Enforced Formalism."

This enforcement of controlled artistic expression resulted in most of the famous artists complying with these policies for example, the "The Punjab Landscape School"—a group of painters during the 1980s and 1990s that created politically safe imageries by

adopting formalistic European and American semi-impressionistic style of landscapes. The second genre included the portraitures and torsos, mostly of the founding fathers of Pakistan and General Zia himself. The third form of artist genre that flourished during the 1980's and was a preferred form of state sanctioned artistic expression was calligraphy, the art of beautifying Quranic verses or poetry. Hanif Ramey, Gul Gee and Sadequain (who later in his life under general Zia regime turned into a calligrapher), are the finest examples. The artists adhering correct imageries were awarded with government projects, which usually consisted of painting or portraits for official buildings and army establishments.

There is actually an immense paradox in the term "Enforced Formalism" introduced earlier. The term "Formalism" is synonymous with artistic freedom of expression, to be appraised on its formal qualities, and celebrates the freedom of the artist's detachment from any political or religious pressures during modern times (Bradley and Esche 2007). General Zia's regime, however, used the very concept of art for art's sake to manipulate and curb artistic expressions. His regime forcefully censored art of any content or context and turned artistic practice into a benign activity in a society that was going through harsh human rights violation, hence, the paradox.

During this second phase, we can already trace the early works that started to have the socio-political nuances. The works of female artists began to serve as a commentary on the ferocity of the 1980s regime against female self expression. Female artists on many levels were struggling to contest the new mindsets of the male oriented society that was being trained to resent the female presence in public. The female artists created many artworks that served as reactions to General Zia's policies of gender marginalisation, however, most of these artworks were not and actually could not have been too direct in its socio-political imagery for security and safety reasons; "since there was limited precedence of art that dealt with socio-political concerns, they had to invent ways to deal with these issues" (Ali 2008: 49).

In Naazish Attaullah's *Chadar Series,* (1987) (Photo 4), she uses the image of a "shawl" torn in pieces. Hashmi describes Attaullah's use the "shawl" as a metaphor for

Photo 4 Naazish Attaullah, *Chadar* (1987). Print, 27 × 42 cm.
Source: Hashmi (2002).

claustrophobic, shroud-like, savage attributes that stood for women during General Zia's misogynistic regime instead of its actual protective, comforting secretive presence (Hashmi 2002: 98).

Salima Hashmi states in *Art of Pakistan; Traditions and Trends,* "… there was never a question of art for art's sake in my work, there's always been a purpose, whether it was performing arts or visual arts. For me, communication was the name of the game" (Raseed 2010: 86). Her socio-political messages are guised in her usual poetic way that she inherits from her father. She uses metaphors and symbols to depict harsh realities and disturbing facts. One of her paintings, "Year of the Drought" (1980) (Photo 5) criticises the regressive and oppressive nature of the dictatorship under General Zia in her typical non-direct poetic way. She uses windows metaphors, which opens view to an austere orange and white barren landscape, a green branch of leaves is seen near the window, representing hope "for change of seasons and for an end to drought" (Sirhandi 1992: 122). The small green branch brings the message of spring

after a long and dry autumn. The painting shows General Zia's regime as hard times for the nation similar to the droughts, a metaphor well versed in an agricultural Pakistani society. It also points at the dry spell or sterile creative landscape that Pakistani art and media were subjected to.

Quddus Mirza, created at least one art work that was directly a critique of General Zia ul Haq in a painting entitled "Portrait of a Shah" (1986) (Photo 6). The image of the Mughal Emperor or king was with a tongue in cheek expression used as the metaphor for the absolute, totalitarian rule of General Zia. The thick paint covers the face of the "King" which could be the metaphor for dirt, (Ali 2008: 43). However, according to Naqvi in *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan*, knowing well the consequences of such political critique the paint was used to hide the face. Making the painting rather ambiguous can be suggested as a way to save the artist from the political wrath (Naqvi 1998).

Even at times when direct socio-political imagery in art was neither appreciated nor acceptable, AR Nagori can be rightly termed as the pioneer socio-political artist in Pakistan. His paintings depicted the atrocities of the dictatorial government of General Zia and its religious bias against minorities and women. He was not intimidated by censorship or worldly prestige and his art exhibitions were usually raided and sealed (Himaladmin 2011). His most powerful painting *Tower of Power* (1985) reflects the political drama of the 1980s. Painted against rich red background, signifying violence, the painting is treated in flat colours in which he describes the distribution of power in the society in his usual witty visual style. It is a satirical statement on Pakistan's hierarchical control. In it, the military is positioned wearing a cap of American influence. At the bottom, the common people are ridden over rough shod by bureaucrats, who profit from the clergy and collusion with the forces at the top (Sirhandi 1992).

Photo 5 Salima Hashmi, *The Year of Drought* (1980). Oil on board, 60 × 91.44 cm.
Source: Sirhandi (1992).

Photo 6 Quddus Mirza, *Portrait of a Shah*. 1986. Oil on canvas, 55.88 × 76.2 cm.
Source: Ali (2008).

THE THIRD PHASE: A TRANSITION TO THE CONTEMPORARY (1990–2000)

The 1990s is often dismissed as a kind of a lost decade within Pakistan's recent history; at best, the anti-climatic follow-up to the tumultuous politics of Zia's period and at worst, the period of disillusionment (Toor 2013). Owing to the anti-progressive policies of General Zia toward any form of freedom of expression, especially in the visual and performing arts, art regressed and slowly disappeared from the lives of the ordinary people. This created anti-art sentiments in the masses towards any figurative or conceptual art. However, after General Zia's demise in a plane crash and the change of Pakistani politics towards democracy, the future seemed to be better for the artists. The government policy of censorship towards all sorts of visual and performing arts became more relaxed. However, the regression in the society continued and the transgression of minority rights and sexual violence against women gained momentum (Toor 2013). This contradictory outcome in the society played a major role in nurturing the seeds of socio-political imageries in the 1990s. Another reason for this transformation can be credited to the fact that Salima Hashmi, an eminent socio-political artist took over as principal of the National College of Arts (NCA). She encouraged more conceptual forms of art with the help of Zahoor ul Aklaq, the most celebrated conceptual artist in Pakistan. There are three major artistic trends that can be traced during the 1990s in which the practicing formalist artists from General Zia's era still produced their works.

The first form of artistic expression that prevailed in the decade of the 1990s was by the mainstream artists who were known as the established artists by General Zia's regime. These artists, throughout the 1990s, were working on popular imagery, based on formalistic concerns in the genre of landscape, calligraphy and portraiture. These artists include Kalid Iqbal, Ajaz Anwar, Muhammad Asif, Zubaida Javed, Saeed Akhter, Gul Jee, Sadequain and many more.

The second trend during the 1990s was the foundation of the Neo-Miniature/ Contemporary Miniature Movement. The legend left by Chughtai by deriving inspiration

from Mughal miniatures to form his own style was further approached in a very different way. During this period, miniature art was in the process of being evolved from an ancient illustrative art to a tool for dynamic contemporary socio-political visual commentary. In the 1990s, miniature art from Pakistan made a mark in the international market as an ethnic form of art easily recognisable from South Asian art. However, the introduction of conceptual concerns by senior painters like Zahoor ul Aklaq and Quddus Mirza influenced the future generation of miniaturists especially those after 9/11. The 1990s era was the time when conceptual concerns were introduced in the main stream Pakistani art. Quddus Mirza, for example, produced an installation of six panels of mirrors hung horizontally on the wall during an exhibition at Alhamra Arts Gallery, Lahore in 1996. The mirrors were hung right on the level where an average female could look at her face. The title was written on the mirrors in a red lipstick – "Homage to the Woman who is Looking at Her Self".

The third trend was the influence of post modernism that manifested itself in what is termed as "Karachi pop". It was based mainly on popular cultural visual narratives of the cosmopolitan city of Karachi. The most well-known installation was created by Iftikhar Dadi, Elizabeth Dadi, David Alesworth and Durya Kazi in collaboration with truck artists and decorators titled "Heart Mahal" (1996), this led many artists to further scrutinise popular art and stereotypes with wit and satire.

THE FOURTH PHASE: THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIO-POLITICAL ART POST 9/11 (2001–2013) AND ITS INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

The art of Pakistan projected by General Zia's government was to reinforce the new image of his own interpretation of an Islamic state. As already mentioned in the second phase, forced formalism is a paradox in itself; it was against the very essence of the concept behind formalisation in art, that is, the freedom of expression. During General Zia's time, the concept of art for art's sake was used for self-interpreted nationalism, glorifying political personalities

and calligraphy as the preferred symbol of the Islamic state; the idealistic landscapes were considered permissible at the official level but they were also economically viable intellectual investments.

It can be argued, however, if the introduction of enforced formalisation during General Zia's time had not occurred, Pakistan would not have witnessed the emergence of art that is conceived as contemporary today. It seems that adversity has brought out the best art works today. The oppression in visual art practice during General Zia's time generated the seed of a politically dissident art and an aversion towards the pure formalist aspect of artistic practice. The 1990s as we have discussed in the previous phase, can be credited as the incubating period of this new attitude towards a more socio-politically charged artistic practice that is known in Pakistani art.

With the start of the 21st century, the world art current had started moving towards regionalism and the wave of globalisation seems to be searching out the otherness from the periphery regions. But undoubtedly the incident of 9/11 and the change of the local cultural policy acted as a catalyst in the flourishing of socio-political imageries in Pakistan after 2001.

Describing the influence of critical theory on contemporary art, Leonard Koscianski in "The Emergence of Critical Postmodern Art", writes that pop art presented postmodernism as a concept in art during the 1960s, which was an act of engaging with the mass culture imageries in a playful manner as a reaction to high modernism that catered only to the elite class. The postmodern artists were not detached from the society like the modernist artists, but rather were part of it. However, in the 1980s, it was with the advent of critical postmodernism that the artists turned critical of the commercialised world around them. The artists did not only employ the images of mass cultural appeal like the pop artists but also, "acted as independent lenses onto the troubled world" (Koscianski 2003: 81). Therefore it can be argued that contemporary art has turned the artists more critical towards their society and

their surrounding and turned artistic practice into a visual documentation of socio-political commentary of the contemporary times (Koscianski 2003).

There is an argument that the transition of modern and developed countries to postmodernism has first started at the economic and social levels. The arrival of postmodernism in art could not be legitimised in countries that never went through the modernising process properly or are still going through modernisation at the social and economic level (Sarena 2010). Keeping the above mentioned argument in mind, it can be claimed that no other place in the world embraced the "contemporary art current" as the Third World did. The term "Contemporary" that is almost synonymous with globalisation and pluralism, was the perfect solution for legitimisation and ultimate recognition of the Third World art. The recognition of their "otherness", if not as authentic as the Euro-American art legacy, was accepted as original. However, Arthur Danto credits the end of art as referred to the end of main stream modernism to Warhol's Brillo Box. He claims in *Beyond the Brillo Box*:

> Once art ended you could be an abstractionist, a realist, an allegorist, a metaphysical painter, a realist, an allegorist Meta physical painter, a surrealist a landscapist, or a painter of still lifes and nudes. You could be a decorative artist, a literary artist, an anecdotalist, a religious painter, a pornographer. Everything was permitted since nothing was historically mandated (Danto 1992: 9)

General Pervez Musharraf's military government overthrew democratically elected Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif in 1999 in a coup d'état. In 2001, after the incident of 9/11, the "Global War on Terror" in Afghanistan and Pakistan's periphery areas gave this dictatorship in the country a legitimacy it needed. General Pervez Musharraf's regime was probably the most congenial period for art in Pakistan. For an outsider, this might seem superfluous but the people especially the highly sensitive artists who went through the turmoil

of an oppressive regime appreciated the fruits of freedom no matter how limited they actually were. The proliferation of the socio-political imageries in Pakistani art undoubtedly was a result of the introduction of these internal liberal policies and the focus of media towards Pakistan after 9/11 and the war on terror that still rages the borders of Pakistan with many drone attacks and massacre of civilians in the name of collateral damage.

However, the incident of 9/11 created a chain reaction of many important events in the art scene of Pakistan that manifested itself in various ways. Immediately after 9/11 and the War on Terror that followed, the artist couple Imran Qureshi and Aisha Khalid conducted a workshop which was based on 9/11 at the Rothas Art Gallery, titled "Darmiyaan".[5] The workshop was an attempt to document the response of local artists to the situation that Pakistan endures – the country is caught between religious militancy and the American imperialistic aggression on its borders as part of the War on Terror, in particular after the horrific attack on the World Trade Center. This workshop lasted for seven days and seven artists were invited to express in their own ways what this war meant to them. They included Quddus Mirza, Risham Syed, Masooma Syed, Aisha Khalid, Imran Qureshi, Sania Samad and Sofia Ans. Ans was in Berlin and participated through the Internet. Aisha recalls that the workshop and its theme changed the works of many artists. It must be noted that there is another connotation to the word "Darmiyaan," – as "middle ground" – referring to the impartial position of the artists in the political situation that Pakistan found itself after 9/11.[6]

The whole phenomena of 9/11 coupled with General Musharraf's moderate enlightenment policy initiated the course of Pakistani art. The exposure from international media further produced many well known contemporary artists with phenomenal successes in the international art market, further reinforcing the direction of Pakistan's artistic discourse. Artist Saira Wasim was invited by Whitney Museum in 2003 for her notorious exhibition "The American Effect" that was later added to the permanent collection of Whitney Museum, New York and Albert Victoria Museum, London. Rashid Rana was the first contemporary Asian artist whose work was integrated in Musee Guimet, France's National Museum of

Asian art. One edition of his work titled the "Red Carpet," was auctioned at Sotheby's New York Museum for a record price of $623,000, the highest price ever paid for the work art produced by a Pakistani artist. In 2003, Rashid Rana was also awarded the international Artist of the Year Award, South Asian Visual Arts Centre (SAVAC) in Toronto. Besides that, Huma Mulji's taxidermy camel in a trunk "Arabian Delight" (2008) (Photo 7) was bought at the Dubai Art Fair for $8,000 in 2008. Recently, Imran Qureshi has also won the top prize at Sharjah Biennial in 2011 and he was awarded artist of the year in 2013 based on the recommendation of the Deutsche Bank Global Art Advisory Council, which includes internationally renowned curators Okwui Enwezor, Hou Hanru, Udo Kittelmann, and Victoria Noorthoorn. Later in 2013, Imran was awarded with a commission to paint the roof top 8,000-square-foot terrace space of metropolitan museum of Arts, New York (Photo 8). These are just a few examples of important activities generated in art scene from Pakistan after 9/11.

Photo 7 Huma Mulji, *Arabian Delights* (2008). Rexine suitcase, taxidermy camel and fabric, 105 × 144 × 155 cm (with open lid).
Source: http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/huma_mulji.htm (accessed 8 June 2014).

Photo 8 Imran Qureshi, *Blessings Upon the Land of My Love* (2011).
Paint on tile, site-specific.
Source: http://www.sharjahart.org/projects/projects-by-date/2011/
blessings-upon-the-land-of-my-love-qureshi (accessed 9 July 2013).

Since its conception, art in Pakistan has been socio-politically motivated in one way or the other. The works of earlier artists dealt with complex identity issues faced by the newly independent nation state. The dictatorial regime during the second phase was responsible for the creation of a binary in the Pakistani artistic practice that consists of mainstream politically conformist art and a subtle movement of politically dissident art. The 1990s or what has been termed as the third phase of the Pakistani artistic practice, was yet again influenced by the change in infrastructure of the government and relaxed policies towards visual arts.

However, the incident of 9/11 heightened the presence of socio political art themes in Pakistani art and made Pakistani artists and their art well known globally; it must be noted that 9/11 is not the only factor that contributed towards the promulgation of socio-political art works by Pakistani artists. It can be argued that after the freedom from any fixed art movements and preexisting art currents in contemporary times, this is the time in which South Asian artists especially those from Pakistan play on their own turf and familiar grounds.

Globalisation has also played a major part in helping third world contemporary artists to become recognised. It is, however, at the cost of burdening them with the weight of their own culture. These artists need to carry the identity signs of ethnicism or orientalism from their respective regions to be recognised and legitimated. On the other hand, the white artists owe no obligation to multiculturalism or the need to hold a specific identity sign to be legitimised (Araeen 2011).

In parallel to that, Pakistan's burgeoning art market indirectly encourages imagery that reinforces international media policies and imagery containing stereotypes expected from Pakistani artists. This phenomenon is appropriately written by Bourdieu in *The Market of Symbolic Goods*;

> The ending of dependence on a patron or collector and, more generally, the ending of dependence upon direct commissions, with the development of an impersonal market, tends to increase the liberty of writers and artists. They can hardly fail to notice, however, that this liberty is purely formal; it constitutes no more than the condition of their submission to the laws of the market of symbolic goods, that is, to a form of demand which necessarily lags behind the supply of the commodity (Bourdieu 1985).

Art has always been used for political, social or physiological gains over the masses. Media and the art market are the new controlling factors in contemporary art. One of the

most celebrated contemporary Pakistani artists Rashid Rana, however, discredits the role of international media attention as the sole reason for the change in Pakistan's artistic discourse.

> I feel that the global interest in art from Pakistan is a relatively recent phenomenon which has greatly been fuelled by the curiosity derived from the attention that the country has gained under the media spotlight over the last decade – however, this could be only one of the reasons. Generally, this is a time where there is slightly more focus than before on art from developing countries – a shift from the Euro-America centric focus which had primarily dominated the art world. While it is true that we might be of merely temporary interest, it is an opportune time for contemporary artists from Pakistan to take one's practice to a level where it transcends time and region.[7]

The recognition of artistic practice from Pakistan in the international art world came with a huge price for the nation in the form of War on Terror in Afghanistan and Pakistan's periphery areas. However, the contemporary artists from Pakistan seized the opportunity to wrestle the right to self-representation in the form of thoughtful and very articulate socio-political imageries, responding to the international media's hype towards Pakistan as a rogue nation. These artists are finally creating an artistic individuality out of their confused colonial past and trying to create an order among the political chaos.

Globalisation, the art market and the 9/11 catastrophe played an immense role in the recognition of contemporary Pakistani artists at an international level and artists too have seized this opportunity by using the popular imagery, cliché and stereotype to generate mass appeal and to indulge the audience into conveying strong messages. Ultimately, we would like to point out however, that a strong subject matter or a socio-political issue does not make an

art good or bad; it only operates just as a catalyst. It is a combination of formal qualities and conceptual approach that makes an art good. As Rashid states;

> 9/11 was also a global phenomenon. If you see the larger picture of the whole world, artists are engaging in political contents. It is how people responded to trauma back then and this how the art current is to respond to trauma now by engaging or responding in social or political commentary with political content. Having said that artists are responding to their environment, I don't mean it guarantees the making of a good art. There is a tendency to get on the band wagon that is happening in Pakistan too.[8]

Rashid explains that the subject matter or content of an art piece does not necessarily guarantee great art work even in contemporary times, where content is as important as the artwork's formal qualities. However, the contemporary art from Pakistan will have to go through the test of time and the artwork that transcends this test will survive and prove whether it is just a temporary interest created by Euro-American policies after 9/11 or one that possesses real substance.

NOTES

1. In an interview, Rashid Rana uses this term for the Pakistani artists from ca.1965–1978.

2. The September 11 attacks (also referred to 9/11) were a series of four synchronised attacks launched by the terrorist group al-Qaeda by proceeding to fly three of the four jets into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in the city of New York and the Washington on Tuesday, 11 September 2001. The attacks killed almost 3,000 people and caused at least $10 billion in property and infrastructure damage.

3. Socio-political art can be termed as an interactive art in which the participation of the audience is needed. If a message conveyed by the artist on human conditions or against some political ideology, is not understood by its viewers in the context to which it was conceived, then the purpose is not served.

4. National College of Arts formally known as "Mayo School of Arts" was founded in 1875, in Punjab, Lahore. It was named in the memory of the late "Earl Mayo" and was initiated by the donation of the "Mayo Memorial Fund". John Lockwood Kipling, Professor of School of Art in Bombay was designated as the first principal. The art college was basically being used to generate Indian arts and crafts which had a lot of demand in the European market. The Mayo School was officially upgraded to National College of Arts on October 1958.

5. "Darmiyaan" is a word from Urdu language meaning "in the middle". The word used here is with the meaning "caught in the middle".

6. Aisha Khalid, skype interview with author, 13 August 2013.

7. An interview with Rashid Rana by Amna R. Ali (Assistant Editor at Newsline) in 2013.

8. Ibid.

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