

an ART DISCOURSE

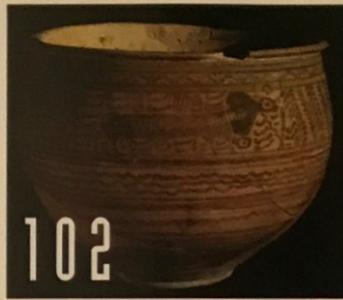
FUTURE



ONE



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NUKTA -E- NAZAR

Nukta in conversation with Nagori



Abul Mansur is a professor of Art History at University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. He has authored and co-authored books on art and related issues in Bengali and English and has published numerous articles in international journals since 1984. He has also written monographs for many renowned artists and art exhibitions in Bangladesh and abroad. Institutions in several countries, including Pakistan, have invited him to present papers, curate shows, and conduct workshops.

Ayub Baloch is a scholar on Balochi culture based in Quetta.

Dorothy Krousie has spent 30 years as a part of Toronto's corporate world. Art is a passion with her. Her diverse art collection includes the work of the First Nations of Canada and Contemporary Art. She has visited a number of galleries around the world.

Elona Lubyte is a professor of Art History and a respected critic of Contemporary Eastern European Art in her country. Elona contributes to local publications and regularly presents papers at various forums. She is also the President of the National Section of AICA in Lithuania.

John Holt is a UK based artist and writer. He has been a lecturer at Bretton Hall College of the University of Leeds. He has contributed to several publications including the *Third Text*, in UK. His present work is in the area of exploring art as therapy for the emotionally disturbed.

Maria Amelia Bulhoes is the Head of History, Theory and Art Criticism of Art in the Visual Arts Dept. of the Federal University of Rio Grande Do Sul in Brazil. She is the author of several monographs and contributes regularly to local publications.

Mukhtar Husain is a practicing architect based in Karachi, Pakistan. He was the Chief Architect for the new terminal building at Jinnah International Airport, Karachi (1985-1992) and Technical Reviewer for two cycles for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (1995 and 1998). He has been teaching, and is a frequent contributor to local and international journals. His book, *Pakistani Architects' own Houses*, will be available shortly.

Naz Ikromullah is a practicing visual artist from Ottawa, Canada. She studied art at the Byam Shaw School, and later lithography at the Slade School in London. She has had a long career as an art educator at Ottawa School of Art. Her work is mostly about memories, and some of it has political undertones. It is displayed in both public and private collections in different countries.

Nusra Latif Qureshi is a practising miniature artist. She did her MFA from Victoria College of Arts, Melbourne Australia, where she is presently based. She has exhibited her work, among other countries, in Australia, India, Singapore, USA and Pakistan.

Rasheed Areeen is a globally acclaimed art critic and founding editor of an internationally accomplished theoretical art journal *Third Text*, published from London by Routledge. He is also a practising artist and his work has been exhibited at prestigious locations around the world.

Samina Asif Shah is an art critic based in Lahore, Pakistan. Freelancing under the name of 'Bibigal' she contributes to *Gallery* (daily Dawn) and other periodicals. She is pursuing a doctorate in History of Art from the Punjab University.

Sangeeta Thapa is a curator and art promoter from Nepal. As the director of the Siddhartha Gallery in Kathmandu, she has curated shows abroad. She is a member of Nepal Heritage Society and contributes art writings to *V/OV* magazine, Nepal.

Shazia Zubari is a ceramist and contributes art reviews to monthly *Nowad*. She has held solo and group shows in Karachi, Islamabad and Dubai, and taught ceramics in Dubai. Presently she is working as the director of an NGO dealing with women's issues.

The NUATA Team

Nillofur Farrukh editor

The many dimensions of Nillofur Farrukh's career in the visual arts include art criticism, art history, curatorial work, art education and art activism.

Her book *Pioneering Perspectives*, has made her the first Pakistani woman to publish a book on art. She contributes to publications like *Newsline*, *ArtIndia* and *Jamini*. She has been invited to present papers at national and international forums. As a curator, she has to her credit, among others, national shows like *The Takhti Exhibition*, *Uraan* (Flight), *Matti Ki Sargoshi* (Whispers of the Clay), *Journeys with Clay*, and the recently initiated *ASNA Clay Triennial*. Last year, Nillofur developed the concept and curated a traveling show *Flags of Peace*, based on works on cloth by Pakistani and Indian artists.

Committed to bridging the gulf between traditional and contemporary arts, she co-founded ASNA in 1998, and has since proactively made visible the clay continuum in Pakistan through shows, workshops and seminars.

Through the 1990s she headed the Department of Communication Design at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and is the former Dean of The Central Institute of Arts and Crafts. Nillofur is on the Advisory Council of the Pakistan National Council of the Arts, and The National Exhibition Committee. She is currently President of AICA Pakistan - the national section of the Paris based International Art Critics Association.

Rumana Husain senior editor

Rumana Husain has been regularly writing on visual and performing arts for the last one decade, contributing to *Dawn*, *Social Pages*, *Star Weekend*, *Zameen*, etc.

Although she trained as a graphic designer, her career has traversed multiple fields, including education and promotion of social awareness and the arts, particularly amongst children and young adults.

During her teaching career, Rumana introduced cutting-edge curriculum and pedagogical innovations that have been emulated widely.

Presently, she is Head, Activism and Outreach at a not-for-profit organization - the Human Rights Education Programme (HREP). She is responsible for various campaigns and activities and for facilitating a children and youth network called Right-On. She has conducted a number of workshops for educators and peace-activists in Pakistan and the region.

Rumana has designed fabric murals and has co-founded The Book Group, a publishing company for children's books. She has authored and/or illustrated over forty children's books for different publishers. In 2002 she curated a traveling poster exhibition, *Women @ Work*, and produced and directed her first documentary film, *Breaking the Mould*, profiling Pakistani professional women.

Amra Ali senior editor

Amra Ali is an art critic based in Karachi. She has a Bachelors (Honours) in studio arts from the University of Ottawa. She studied art criticism with Tim Clark and Thierry De Duve, and apprenticed with painter Leslie Reid, whose work is also part of the collection of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Canada. She was a Nieman Affiliate at Harvard University from 2001-02, where she studied drawing and Art History at the Sackler and Fogg Museums.

Amra began writing art reviews for the *Frontier Post*, and has contributed reviews, essays and interviews to *Gallery* (Dawn), *The News*, *Friday Times*, *Star*, *Newsline* and *ArtIndia*. Apart from commenting on issues related to artistic developments in Pakistan, she has written on the work of artists in the South East Asian diaspora. She has taught Art History at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts. Her curatorial work includes *The Takhti Exhibition* in 2000 and the *Flags of Peace*, a traveling show, which started its journey in December 2003. She is currently the Secretary of the Pakistan section of the International Art Critics Association.

Sabiha Mohammed editorial design

Educated in India and the US, Sabiha Mohammed's freelance design portfolio focuses on editorial design, book design and advertising design.

In the last decade, she has designed magazines like *Zameen*, *Browse* (a children's magazine) and *Art Pakistan*. Her assignments have included book designs for Oxford University Press and the Newsletter for the British Council Pakistan. Catalogue designs for prestigious national art exhibitions like *Uraan* and *The Takhti Exhibition* have also come from her studio.

Responsible for the development of promotional materials for exhibitions like *Pakistan Leather Show 2001*, *Journeys With Clay*, *Matti ki Sargoshi* and *ASNA Clay Triennial*, Sabiha has a keen understanding of the special needs of designing for art publications and exhibitions.

Sabiha has also been involved in design education and has taught at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and coordinated the Department of Communication Design at the Central Institute of Art and Crafts, Karachi.

Holding **NUKTA** in your hand and reading this, you may be curious to know more about this publication. **NUKTA** is the joint endeavor of three writers and a designer who have been linked with the arts in Pakistan for some time. In the beginning when support was thin on the ground, we were stubborn enough not to give up our dream; the proverbial kitchen table became our workplace and we stole time from our careers and families.

I don't know if it was our persistence or gradually evolving marketing skills that convinced people that **NUKTA** was not just a personal project but an important art document that would provide the missing link between art practice and art perception in Pakistan.

As the country's arts come of age, they not only need a voice in print to discuss and inform, but also to look critically and view them in a global context. In **NUKTA** we address these issues through a selection of articles. This publication will place Art at its core and offer an opportunity to art critics, art historians and artists to examine, debate and contextualize the many dimensions of this field. Related disciplines such as archaeology, architecture, design, performing arts and film have also been included in the discourse.

Dr Rasheed Araeen observes in his writings, published here, that a 'dependency syndrome' has kept postcolonial societies from developing critical faculties. One of the primary objectives of **Nukta** is to provide a forum for critical writing and contribute to the critical mass that will propel us out of this comfort zone of dependency.

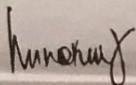
Working without a specific model in mind, **NUKTA** is guided by vital issues that the editorial team feels strongly about bringing to its readers. On a lighter note, *Art@Nukta* serves as a small window to art happenings in the different cities of Pakistan and the world.

The creative dynamics of the city have been explored in four articles: *The Iconography of a City under Siege* investigates a city's visual schizophrenia; while *Awareness and Dissent - Performance in the By-lanes* examines street theatre as a tool of social change. The other two articles focus on interventions in the urban space by artists and architects around the world.

One of **NUKTA's** priorities is to discuss the shared art history of the region. We have invited writers from Nepal and Bangladesh to spotlight new facets of the life and work of Chughtai and Zainul Abedin, two South Asian Masters. In his interview, contemporary painter Nagori reminds us that memories transcend identities as he speaks of how a childhood spent around temple art has influenced his visual references.

In the articles from Brazil and Lithuania, their struggles to meet the challenges of history and geographical location are inspiring and informative. These voices from outside the dominant discourse point to the emerging alternate global history of art where each story adds its own textural richness.

As **NUKTA** draws its readers into a stimulating dialogue on the arts, this engagement will hopefully be a modest step towards a positive change in the way the arts are viewed, recognized and documented in Pakistan.



Nilofur Farrukh
May 2005, Karachi

The **NUKTA** Team would like to acknowledge the magnanimous support of all the persons who have supported **NUKTA** since its inception, particularly the following:

- Mr Farrukh Sheikh of Hub Leather Ms Seema Taher Khan of Interflow Communications
- Mr Jamil Hussain of Fuji Film Pakistan (Pvt) Ltd Mr Amin Gulgee



51 Ways of Looking

Shazia Sikander's show at Brent Sikkema NYC, in March 2005, included *51 ways of Looking*, the artist's most recent animation. According to the monograph, *51 Ways of Looking* is an investigation of translation and its limitations. Using basic structural forms and framing devices - specifically the rectangle and the circle - as the premise, Sikander proposes an inherent continuity within a confined spatial order. 'The rectangle morphs into a floral border from which a form breaks free, leading into a new cycle of variations. The relationship created between the abyss (the black rectangle) and the arabesque (the border as the archetype) serves as a metaphor for binary oppositions, like the center and the margin, the margin and the stylized. The continuous breakdowns suggest a constant and endless flux.'



Zain Mustafa at the Desert Biennial

Pakistani artist Zain Mustafa's art got the personal attention of the ruler of Sharjah when he was requested to add his signature to his works. His entry is a provocative anti-war statement work based on 21 tattered traditional kurtas that bears messages of peace. On display at the 7th Sharjah Biennial, which commenced on 6th April and will continue to June, Zain Mustafa joins other artists to develop a discourse of peace. Art spread over three venues, the Sharjah Art Museum and Expo Center and Heritage Village include the old city and souk. This will for the first time invite the interaction of the people on the street in this small emirate.

Jamil Baloch bags the 2005 Rangoonwala Award

Jamil Baloch is the recipient of *The M.A. Rangoonwala Visual Arts Award 2005*. Born in Nushki in Balochistan, Baloch received his education at the prestigious National College of the Arts (NCA), Lahore. A prolific and versatile artist, he has both sculpture and painting shows to his credit. In 1993, he was also awarded 2nd Prize in painting at Young Artists Exhibition, Lahore. Presently he is a member of the Fine Arts faculty of NCA.

The late Mr. Mohammad Aly Rangoonwala whose family established the VM Gallery was a well know philanthropist of Pakistan. The VM Gallery is the only gallery in the country, which is run by a Trust and its primary aim is to extend support to the career of young artists



A First for Mumbai's National Gallery of Art

Art of Pakistan was showcased in *Beyond Borders*, a month long exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Mumbai, India, in February 2005. Curated by Dr. Saryu Doshi, from India and Quddus Mirza from Pakistan, the exhibition provides visitors a rare opportunity to see the works of pioneers like Sadequain, Shakir Ali, Ahmed Parvez, Bashir Mirza, Ali Imam and Zahoor Al Akhlaq. Along with this, the work of many contemporary artists in the show provided the study of shifts in the vocabulary of art within Pakistan.

A concise and well-illustrated catalogue provides an overview of the show and gives the context in which it was envisioned.

Art of Pakistan

Beyond Borders

National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai
17th February to 17th March 2005

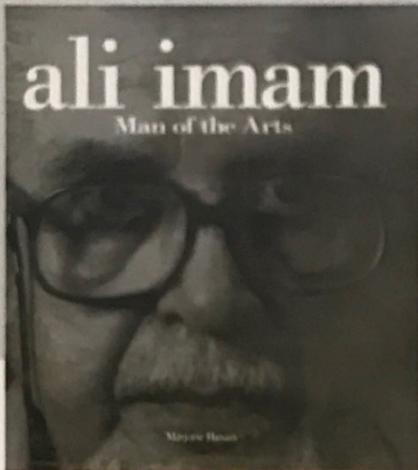
New Art Publications from FOMMA

Due to the pioneering efforts of FOMMA Director General, Jalal Uddin Ahmed, important publications like *Ali Imam; man of the arts* (by Marjorie Hussain) and *Zubeida Agha - A Pioneer of Modern Art in Pakistan* (by Dr. Mussarrat Hasan), have been published in recent years.

The Foundation for Museum of Modern Art (FOMMA) is poised to launch six new publications in 2005 and 2006. Expected to be available in the next few months are *Drawings of Shakir Ali* and a biography of Bashir Mirza along with a comprehensive monograph on Zainul Abedin.

The primary objective of this non-profit Trust is to set up a Museum of Modern Art and Art Library in Karachi and to publish and disseminate suitable monographs, publications and audio-visual material on contemporary art and architecture.

e-mail: fomma@hotmail.com



Organic Measures taken at The Hermitage Museum

The custodians of The Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, Russia, have found a way to control the new menace that threatens their priceless art. They have bred an army of cats in the cellars that is let out after-visitor-hours to keep the rodent population in check and the art from becoming rat-food!

Someone who returned after being absolutely spellbound by the collection showed great concern for the safety of the art on display, as windows in the exhibition hall are often found open. Apparently, the overwhelming musty smell wins over safety. Running on a low budget, The Hermitage cannot afford to turn away visitors and has no choice but to air the rooms in this way. This may be a short-term solution, but has anyone discussed the effects of humidity on the art treasures with them? The decay caused by humidity may cost them millions in restoration.



Travel To Art May Replace Traveling Art

The open-air museums of a cultural site can give art the context that was taken away by the white cube of the gallery space. For a complete experience, an increasing number of art institutions are offering art tours. Deepali Dewan, the Associate Curator of South Asian Art at The Royal Ontario Museum, Canada, recently introduced art enthusiasts to the treasures of Rajasthan, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Varanasi at the actual location. Sotheby's *Institute at Sea* offers art cruises throughout the summer of 2005. *Mysteries of the Orient* conducted by Gordon Lang will introduce visitors to treasures of China and Japan. Other art historians will conduct similar art trips along the coastlines of the Mediterranean, Adriatic and North seas.

www.sothebysinstitutelondon.com

Toronto Suburb gets a South Asian Art Gallery (SAGA)

In March 2005, SAGA opened its doors in Oakville with an exhibition of a few drawings and paintings by South Asian Masters like Sadequain and Hussain. Mixed media works of Mansaram, and sculpture and paintings of Youngo Verma, two established artists based in Canada, were also a part of the inaugural event.

The well lit and spacious display space is located in the basement of a private residence and viewing can be arranged by appointment on weekdays. On weekends the visitors have free access to the gallery. The gallery Director, Ali Adil Khan, is an avid collector and has been active with various South Asian art institutions in Toronto.

At the exhibition, a work by Mansaram was purchased by the Royal Ontario Museum for its South Asian Gallery.

info@southasiangalleryofart.com



Five Eminent Japanese Artists in Islamabad

Offering a window into Contemporary Art from Japan, an exhibition of works by Sugiyama, Itoh, Okuma, Zeniya and Ogawa was inaugurated on 23rd March, 2005, Pakistan Day at Nomad Centre and Art Gallery.

These artists have exhibited extensively all over the world and are in collection of the major museums. A multi-dimensional approach is visible as works range from celebrations of folk and traditional culture to introspective expressions with a conceptual edge.



A Declassified Retro

Canvas Gallery became the venue of Ijazul Hasan's retrospective in mid March 2005. After a hiatus of three decades this is his first show in the 'city by the sea'.

As Ijazul Hasan's charged visual statements from the 1990s were seen by a new generation, the exhibition was also a reminder that here was the artist who first pulled down the barriers and borrowed from the popular cinema iconography.



Dance at the Ellora Caves

The annual dance event at the Ellora caves will once again provide a spectacular setting for this two-day event and transport the audience back through centuries of history and culture. The Ellora Festival of classical Indian music and dance is scheduled for December 2005.

Located 29 kms from Aurangabad, Ellora's 1400-year old Buddhist, Hindu and Jain rock temples are the most important tourist attraction in the state of Maharashtra, India.

The Return of a Scholar of Architecture

Dr. Gulzar Haider, Emeritus Professor of Architecture, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, will be heading the Department of Architecture at Beaconhouse University, Lahore, Pakistan. He will bring a wealth of experience as a practicing architect, scholar and educator to the position. In North America, Dr. Haider has had the honor to design many prestigious projects. Over the years he has been invited to present papers by institutions in Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Spain, USA and Canada. In 2004 he was a visiting scholar for the Program in Architecture and Civilization at Cambridge University, UK. Dr. Haider is a strong advocate of critical discourse as an integral part of curricula and pedagogy in the education of art and architecture.

Diverse Voices in Oman

In early 2005, The Omani Society for Fine Arts invited a group of artists to hold a show of Contemporary Art in their country. Curated by Nayab Shami of Croweaters Gallery in Lahore, the collection included works of 11 artists that represent the creative mosaic of the country. Ahmed Khan's and Gauhar Qalam's works inspired by calligraphy and strong formalistic expressions by Raja Changez Sultan and Qudsia Nisar hung side by side. Included were distinct social and political visual statements from the studio of Salima Hashmi and Akram Dost Baloch. A part of the group were neo-miniaturists Waseem Ahmed and Ayesha Durrani



Karachi's Cultural activists remembered

The inclusion of Aiwan-e-Riffat in the on-going exhibition *Jewel in the Crown* at Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi is a befitting tribute to the city's cultural activists Attiya and Fyzee Rahamin.

Already an established artist in 1947, Fyzee Rahamin's decision to move to Pakistan brought him to Karachi. It was here that he and his wife, Attiya, a firebrand literary critic of her time set up home at Aiwan-e-Riffat, across the road from Hindu Gymkhana.

They began to fully engage in cultural life and soon their 'salon' became the meeting place for all those who were interested in the arts. Attiya wrote a scathing critic review on Zubeida Agha's experiments in modernism. Agha's exhibition in 1949 later became a landmark in Pakistan's art history.

Totally committed to revitalizing the art and literary scene, the couple set up a small museum that housed Fyzee's paintings and their own collection of art and artifacts. Later this museum, perhaps the city's first art museum, was gifted to the citizens of Karachi.

Unfortunately the custodians of the Fyzee Rahamin Museum pulled down the building and placed the collection in storage. All that has survived, from the precious collection of these pioneers after decades of decay and neglect, has been painstakingly restored for temporary display at the Mohatta show.

Now the onus is on the people of Karachi, the heirs of this priceless legacy, to shed their apathy and find a permanent home at the site of Aiwan-e-Riffat in keeping with the wishes of Attiya and Fyzee Rahamin.

Art Dialogue in Print between Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

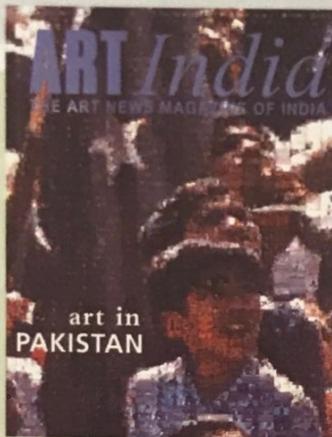
The editors of regional art magazines are increasingly keen to investigate the emergence of the Post-colonial identity in the arts, incubated in socio-political environments in South Asia such as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

'Pakistan has occupied the mind of India for the last fifty odd years. And in spite of the various ups and downs in our relationship with Pakistan, there has always been a great deal of curiosity about its changing socio-political cultural profile', writes Abhay Sardesai, the editor of *Art India*, in the recent 'Art in Pakistan' Issue of his magazine. Jamini from Dhaka is also putting together an issue in May 2005 devoted exclusively to the art and artists of Pakistan.

Among the pioneers of this print dialogue were two eminent Pakistanis, Azra J. Ahmed and Jalaluddin Ahmed of *Arts and the Islamic World*, who in the 1990s published a special volume of *Contemporary Art in Bangladesh* to showcase the art of the young nation.

Shazia Sikander gets an invite from the Venice Biennial

One of the most prestigious International Biennials has invited New York based artist of Pakistani origin, Shazia Sikander to participate in this mega art event. Her entry will combine the traditional and new media. Projected images will visually intervene on a large wall drawing specially created by her for this show. In the late 1990s Zahoorul Akhlaq, Shazia's mentor at NCA, also had the honor to represent Pakistan at the Venice Biennial. The Venice Biennial will be held from 12th June to 6th November, 2005 and will have two independent yet complimentary exhibitions curated by its two artistic directors Maria de Corral and Rosa Martinez. The two shows are titled 'The Experience of Art' and 'Always a little Further'. Among the 19 countries represented by individuals and institutions, there will be a few new entrants, and Afghanistan will be joining this group.



2005 World Congress of Architecture

With **Cities: Grand Bazaar of Architecture**, as the Congress theme, the focus will be on the cities of the world, at the XXII World Congress of the International Union of Architects (UIA) in Istanbul from July 3 to 7, 2005.

As UIA President Jaime Lerner stated earlier in his call for the international meeting for celebrating cities, every architect has a dream about the city that she/he lives in. Discussions will concentrate on the ways and means of making the city a safer, better, and a more comfortable place to live in. A symbolic Grand Bazaar will be set up in Istanbul. Being in Turkey for the architects also means sharing a thousand years of architectural and urban history and witnessing the future being designed, while the values of the past are preserved. All architectural ideas, dreams, and utopias will freely converge, correlate and compete under the roof of this great and mythical 'agora' of the Eastern world.

The Istanbul Convention and Exhibition Center, located in the center of Congress Valley, will be the main venue of UIA 2005 and The Hilton Convention Center is reserved for the UIA 2005 Architecture Fair.

www.uia2005istanbul.org

Rafi Peer host Festival in November

The World Performing & Visual Arts Festival Pakistan 2005, scheduled from November 17 to 27 in Lahore, will celebrate the spirit of artistic expression and exchange. It will feature music, theatre, puppetry, dance and film from all over the world. This year the festival will feature more than 1000 performers hailing from 40 countries. Diverse musical genres such as World Music, African, Rock, Pop, Folk, Jazz, Sufi Soul, and Fusion would be presented at the festival. Theatre traditions from varied cultural origins would be on display. Performances in both classical and modern dance styles along with puppeteers from all over the world will entertain and educate the audience with their skill and creativity. An intensive cinematic experience awaits the audience through a series of feature films, short films and documentaries from different countries.

Over the years, the Rafi Peer Festival has become one of the largest festivals of its kind in South East Asia. Enjoying overwhelming support from diverse audiences, it is also one of the leading events of cultural and artistic exchange between the East and the West.

Seminars on Art Criticism

The Paris based organization International Art Critics Association (AICA) held two major seminars in recent months: In Karachi, Pakistan, in November 2004 and in two cities of Taiwan in December 2004. The ambitious program of holding two back-to-back seminars was hosted by AICA Taiwan at the AICA World Congress. Well attended by the global community of art critics the main theme was *Regionalization of Art Criticism: Its Possibility and Global Positioning*. In Kaohsiung at the city's Fine Arts Museum, papers were presented on *Art Criticism and Intervention in Space*.

AICA Pakistan was represented by its President, Nilofur Farrukh who presented a paper in Taiwan titled '*The Art Critic, Postcolonial Democracy and the Age of Globalization*'. In 2005 two important seminars are scheduled. One in Addis Abba on the Theme '*Art Criticism & Curatorial Practices in Marginal Contexts*' and the other at the AICA Congress in Slovenia, which will focus on art theory

Oration was the title of Samina Mansuri's exhibition held at Offthemap Gallery, Toronto, in March 2005. Sculpture, drawings and mixed-media works on display investigate the human body in various stages of mutation. Informed by the vocabulary of animation graphics, the artist's aim is to create an interesting edge between drawing and painting, mechanical and hand manipulation. Hand drawn and painted works are scanned and digitally altered before they are hand-worked again, this cyclic process helps to blur the rigid borders. The use of the flexible architectural 'paper' too, is deliberate as it allows the acrylic on the surface to appear almost printed and devoid of painterly marks.

Samina's sculpture in paper clay adds another dimension to her theme. In bone white and sometimes tinted blue, the pieces not bigger than 18 inches, sit in a row, complete in themselves and yet in visual and structural relationship with each other like a vertebral column. The artist explains that her inspiration comes from the treatment of the human body today. The way it has become a site of transformation, either for aesthetic enhancement or for productivity and efficiency. Samina's concerns also extend to the widespread silent negative changes within the body by the inescapable toxins absorbed by the seemingly benign medication, convenience products, edibles and the invisible emission that surrounds one like a deadly envelope of pollution.

Samina screened her first feature-length video at Vancouver International Center for Contemporary Asian Art. Titled *DARR: 37 Conversations*, it was based on interviews filmed during the Intra Nation Artist residency at Banff Center for the Arts. In the exhibition monograph, Alice Ming Wai Jim writes, 'many of the speakers - cultural activists, politically engaged artists and writers - critique the construction of fear in society, pointing to the problems of representation that underlie it and implications for understanding social realities'. The aftermath of 9/11 has initiated 'a new discourse of fear' which is central to this work and Samina articulates in her statement '... we live through this time of extreme violence, in a state of perpetual war in which all boundaries between the permissible and taboo are erased, the video attempts to explore the many facets of fear and the possibility of creating a space for resistance. The participants, both through the dialogue and their own work, create a space in which it is possible to ask the questions that remain unexplored in mainstream media'.



Pakistani Women in the Arts @ exhibition in Nottingham

Women @ Work - an exhibition of posters - developed by Human Rights Education Programme (HREP) and the British Council, Pakistan, specifically focuses on over 70 Pakistani women working in less traditional female professions. Among other fields, it also introduces painters, sculptors, art educators, art critics, architects, actors, dancers, directors, writers and poets.

Women @ Work was recently launched at the Galleries of Justice in Nottingham, UK. A national and a regional tour along with the holding of educational workshops will follow this launch. At one level, the exhibition simply aims to acknowledge and honour the contribution women make to their homes and to society through their work. At another level the exhibition pays tribute to Pakistani women who have made their presence felt in varied but largely male-dominated professions. It celebrates the initiative and enthusiasm of all working women in Pakistan.

The portrayal of women as positive role models will help British Pakistani women to aspire for higher goals through improved self-confidence. APNA Arts - a Nottingham based NGO - says in a press release: we believe the exhibition will act as a catalyst to improve educational achievements amongst young people, who traditionally under achieve and as a whole end up in very low-grade jobs. These portrayals of Pakistani women as positive role models will be used to encourage young children as well as their mothers to think about aiming for higher goals, through improved confidence and new insights into other possibilities for future progression and employment.

This exhibition has been conceptualised and curated by Rumana Husain and Riffat Aliani has designed the posters. It is the first ever collaboration between the Human Rights Education Programme, based in Karachi, British Council Pakistan, APNA Arts, Arts Council of England and Nottingham City Council.

www.hrep.com.pk

Artists Association of Punjab

19th Annual

Exhibition, 2005

The 80s left an indelible mark on many aspects of life in Pakistan, more so in some areas; it could have been the outcome of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the birth of neo-Islamists, or years of military rule that did it, but in retrospect, an air of gloom prevailed in general, and the creative mediums in particular. In '85, some artists of Punjab formed an association to give support and solace to a splintering group who wanted to paint and stay aloof from the prevailing changes in the ideological structure. When the concerned public saw the dwindling governmental support to the arts, the need to have a platform for self-expression became imperative. Artists and teachers like Khalid Iqbal, Naseem Qazi, Ijaz Anwar, and Ijaz ul Hassan formed the *Punjab Artists' Association*.

The Association began to hold regular art exhibitions, inclusive of both young art students and practicing artists. For some time, it was a bi-annual event; later, a seminar on related issues was held simultaneously with the shows. Training was also given on how to mount and frame art work. Many artists like Ali Azmat, Mughees Riaz, Rahat Naveed, Naila Aamir, Jamil Baluch and others have been nurtured by the organization. Though the association is predominantly reflective of Punjab artists, it reaches out to all Pakistani artists for its national display.

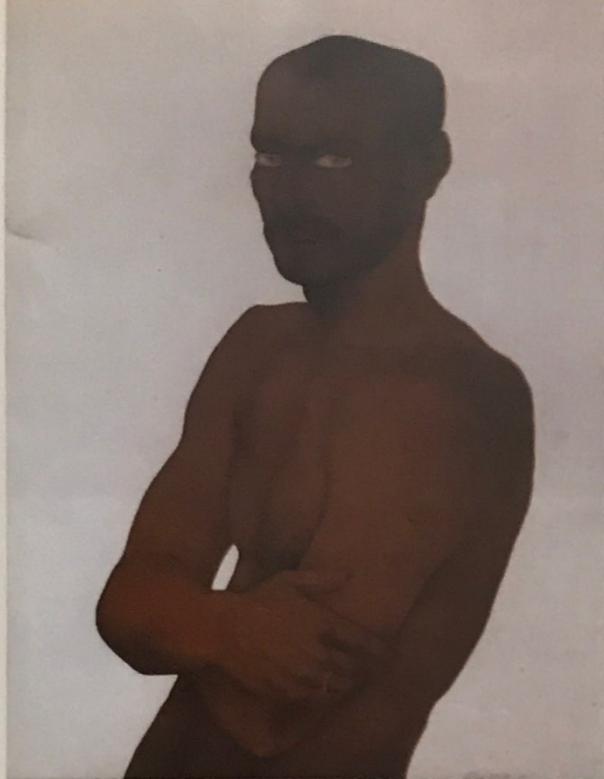
The Nineteenth Annual Exhibition was held in February, at the Alhamra Art Galleries, Lahore. The refurbishment of the gallery facilitated this event to take on a fresh look. The majority of work was two dimensional, conveying the traditional focus on the genre of rural landscape, that continues in the Punjab. The work of Prof. Khalid Iqbal, who is acknowledged as the leading exponent of the



A.J. Gull

Ordinary Souls

Ordinary Souls is the title given by Abdul Jabbar Gull to a body of work, mainly sculptures, held in January 2005 at the recently re-located Ejaz Galleries, Lahore. Selected work from there travelled to the Nomad Gallery in Islamabad. Gull works on wood with a predominantly figurative theme that has diversified and integrated elements of text. The diversity of Gull's concerns is reflected in supporting material such as oils on canvas, and ink and gauche studies on paper. A strong narrative running through the exhibition, Gull's subject is the repeated image of the face of any Ordinary Soul, in relief.



Ali Kazim

Punjab School of landscape painting, is featured prominently. Mian Ijaz ul Hassan's paintings represent multiple symbols of the human, animal and bird form, and scrutinize signs in the changing social order. Kaleem Khan's realistic paintings of the Balochistan terrain make a comparison of the arid mountains against the verdant vegetation. Ghulam Rasul's work shows his continued search for the simplicity of form; his subject being the interplay of changing light on the exterior of mud homes. Other painters like Shahid Jalal, Kehkeshan Jaferi, Riffat Chughtai, Rukhsana Gull, Imtiaz Hussain, Mazhar Hayat Noon, Naseeruddin Mohammad, and Sadia Mustafa explore facets of rural life in the Punjab; similarly, Jahanzeb Malik's paintings explore the dark and foreboding mountains and the blooms that glisten, in the Peshawar valley.

The art of miniature painting is represented by the work of Ustad Bashir and Saima. Ustad Bashir's new paintings show a relative shift

in direction from the more traditional to a subjective approach to his medium. For example, a seated figure is treated with a floral and a geometric decorativeness that gradually dissolves into a more mottled play of form. Ali Kazim, Salman Ahmed, Rahat Naveed, Mohammed Asif, Adnan Yunus, and Sumera Jawad use portraiture as subject. Tariq Javed, a ceramist, has experimented with calligraphy, as has Arif Khan. Established names like Iqbal Hussain, Nahid Raza, along with these artists gives a welcome sense of inclusivity and non-hierarchy to the overall exhibition.

Like most exhibitions in Pakistan, sculpture remains in the periphery. In the Central hall, however, stands Michu's huge structure inspired by the artist's curiosity for ancient Egypt; while Jamil Baluch's free-standing statue of a heavily cloaked unknown figure has a strong presence at the entrance. This genderless form, devoid of status and identity, with its raised forefinger in a gesture of defiance or protest is an imposing form.

Mounting an exhibition with such a varying approach to aesthetics is an arduous task, but the regularity of the event has provided a platform for artists of varied viewpoints and levels of maturity.

On the occasion of the event a day long National Seminar was also held and speakers from all over the country were invited to present papers. A well-illustrated catalogue commemorated the event. *Samina Shah (Bibigul)*

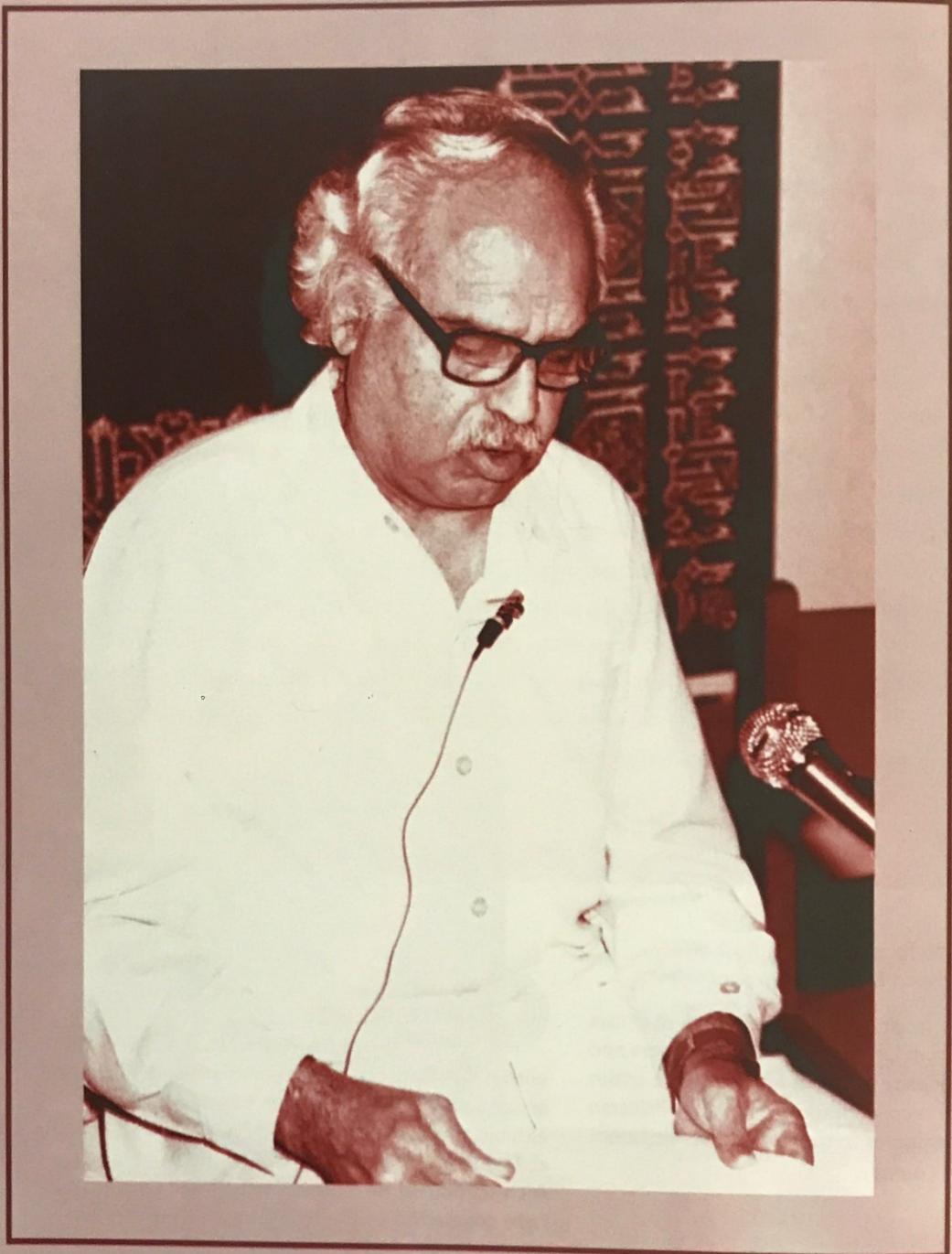


Eliciting a meditative stillness, the work seems also to be about human bonding and suffering, with titles such as, *divided souls, prisoner, the abnormal*, etc. *Most Unwanted* (2003), is a particularly interesting work in wood, in which about thirty faces are sculpted in relief, all with their eyes shut. The work, points the artist, is also meant to be a pun on the much hyped 'Most Wanted' lists. While the narration may be literal, Gull's surface manipulation works in favour of a strong aesthetic statement. The three dimensionality of the wood that is used to a minimized form has a strong physical

presence. The surface of the wood is manipulated, in other work, by a charring and scratching that brings it closer to a two dimensional *painterlines*. The interplay between the sculpted form and flatness of surface gives the work a humbleness and childlike naivety.

A modest, but well illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition. An introductory forward by Marjorie Husain, and a personal and touching note by Gull's mentor through his N.C.A. years, Ahmed Khan, provide the context to his evolution as an artist.

by Dr. Rasheed Araeen



Modernism, Postcolonial Nation States

→ too sweeping

I

Let me begin with a question: what is art criticism and its function? This question is not as impertinent as it may appear, and the answer to it is not as obvious as most people assume.

I will go even further and say that in most postcolonial nation states the discourse of art criticism does not exist. It is often confused with art writing, the writing which appears in daily newspapers, popular magazines, and even in so-called art magazines. The function of this writing is to inform and create an interest about art among the public, as well as to promote the career of the artist. This is a legitimate and justified activity, and it is not my aim to denigrate it. But its confusion with art criticism often wears a mask of ignorance, mediocrity and complacency, a mask that is a common hallmark of the intelligentsia of most Third World nation states today. What is actually hidden behind this mask is an intellectual underdevelopment and incompetence that have affected both the making of art and its mediation through the language of writing. As a result, we are unable to understand and evaluate the true significance of both what is recognised and what is not recognised as art by or within post-independent nation states. What is important here is not only art's social conditions but also the relationship of artistic production to art history. However, national histories of art cannot be perceived, constructed and narrated independent of or separate from the mainstream modern art history, since the very formation of these nation states is based on their adoption of modernity and its developmental models. In other words, we cannot answer the question 'what is art criticism?' without and outside the historical context

of progress on all cultures, what it produces as a result cannot be understood outside this context. In other words, the scientific, technological, economic and social changes that have been taking place in the postcolonial global society, affecting everyday life, is fundamental to both the art production and the tools needed to measure and evaluate its significance.

Of course, what constitutes the basic tool must be an efficiency of writing skill. But, that is not enough as is commonly assumed. The significance of art lies in its many layers - formal, social, historical, and so on. A writing skill that is unaware of these layers, let alone its inability to penetrate them, cannot recognise or reveal the true content of art. Of course art criticism requires a writing skill, but it is more important to have a discourse or discipline informed and constituted by a body of ideas that can penetrate the various layers of art and bring out its true significance. Only then it can mediate between art and its audience, so that its true significance is revealed, but also in so doing it can situate art within the genealogy of both national and what constitutes humanity's universal histories. As the true significance of art lies in its transgression from individual and national expressions, the art criticism that cannot deal with this aspect is basically deficient.

II

Let me now proceed to illustrate what I mean by all this, by looking at the work of two Pakistani artists: Hanif Ramay

Art Criticism

a Reflection on the Work of Hanif Ramay and Sadequain

of modernity and what it has produced both within its mainstream and what is considered to be its margins.)

Moreover, with modernity becoming a global phenomenon, penetrating every corner of the world and imposing its ideas

and Sadequain. My attempt here is only within a national context, in order to avoid the difficulty of their being considered within the mainstream discourse and/or history of modernism. In order for them to enter this discourse and

claim a place in it, they must proceed from the culture in which their work is produced and first understood. It seems that there has been no serious attempt to examine and analyse their works critically, not even in the context of a national space they occupy, so that their true significance to it is revealed. Both the artists are recognised and celebrated within the history of art in Pakistan, but their critical and historical importance is fogged by the mere fact of their being Pakistani. This is, in my view, not only not enough but obstructive. If we want to understand their importance, then we ought to subject their works to a critical scrutiny that goes beyond a petty and facile nationalism.

There is something common to both the artists, even when they approach their subject differently. Although both the artists are committed to what is considered to be a Pakistan's own tradition - Islamic calligraphy - and they carry the baggage of this tradition on their shoulders, they use this tradition not merely to reinvent or rejuvenate it. Recognising this tradition as part of their being, and then encountering and experiencing inspiring modernity at the same time, they find themselves in a situation that demands a creative imagination which can deal with this complexity. They must find a way that would make sense of their being in the modern world. What they actually achieve in this respect is remarkable. The tradition that they carry with them is not only transformed in their works, but what as a result is produced are modernist works that are unique. However, it is not the tradition but the modernity of these works which is fundamental to their achievements.

When Hanif Ramay approaches his work through Islamic calligraphy, what is important for him is not merely the use of calligraphy to establish his identity but what he adopts in the construction of a modern painting. Unlike other artists who use Islamic calligraphy in their work, including Sadequain, Ramay does not always treat calligraphy as calligraphy. In fact, he does not do calligraphy at all in the work I am considering. He abandons the position of a calligrapher and becomes a painter - a modern painter. The first job of art criticism here should therefore be to recognise the distinction between calligraphy and painting as two different mediums; and only then we can proceed to deal with the content of Ramay's work entitled *Kalima*. Even then not everything is

resolved easily. When we approach the actual work and look at it, what is in fact there is a form of calligraphy. If Ramay is not actually doing or producing calligraphy here, as I suggest, why is then calligraphy there? This may be a puzzling question, but this puzzlement lies in one's inability not to grasp the true nature of the tradition of calligraphy and its difference from the work under consideration.

What is fundamental to calligraphy is its spatial configuration: there is a background surface - paper or canvas - on which words are written calligraphically, so that the space is divided between the background surface and what is calligraphed on it. In the painting *Kalima*, this spatial division is totally changed so that there is no background or foreground. Instead, the space is divided across the plane of the surface into different colour areas, and this division is carried out by the linearity of the words used. In other words, words are used as dividers in order to produce a space that is different from the calligraphic space. The result is a *pictorial* - not calligraphic - space that alludes to its being within a modernistic space. This is fundamental to the understanding of Ramay's this work.

Ramay's early work, to which this painting belongs to, was part of a modernism that emerged soon after the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. It was not a peaceful separation, as we all know, but for which almost a million people gave their lives. When I look at this work and locate it in this historical context, its calligraphic lines remind me of the dividing lines that partitioned the subcontinent into separate spaces. This may be an illusion, unconnected with the work. But if we are confronted with a pictorial space that is the result of dividing lines of a religious nature, how else should we interpret it? Of course, there is no other indication that should allow us to look at the work in this way. There is no indication of any human tragedy; no signs of a lament or melancholy. Instead, the mode of the work is sensuously cheerful and celebratory, like that of colourful kites flying over Lahore during the spring festival of *basant*, perhaps indicating the kind of optimism that was then necessary for a new country.

My allusion to the partition of the subcontinent may be completely misplaced or unnecessary. We can of course interpret the work in some other way, but even then it would

The Karachi
tribe

Calligraphy
is a complex
art. to
↑ intellectual
difficult

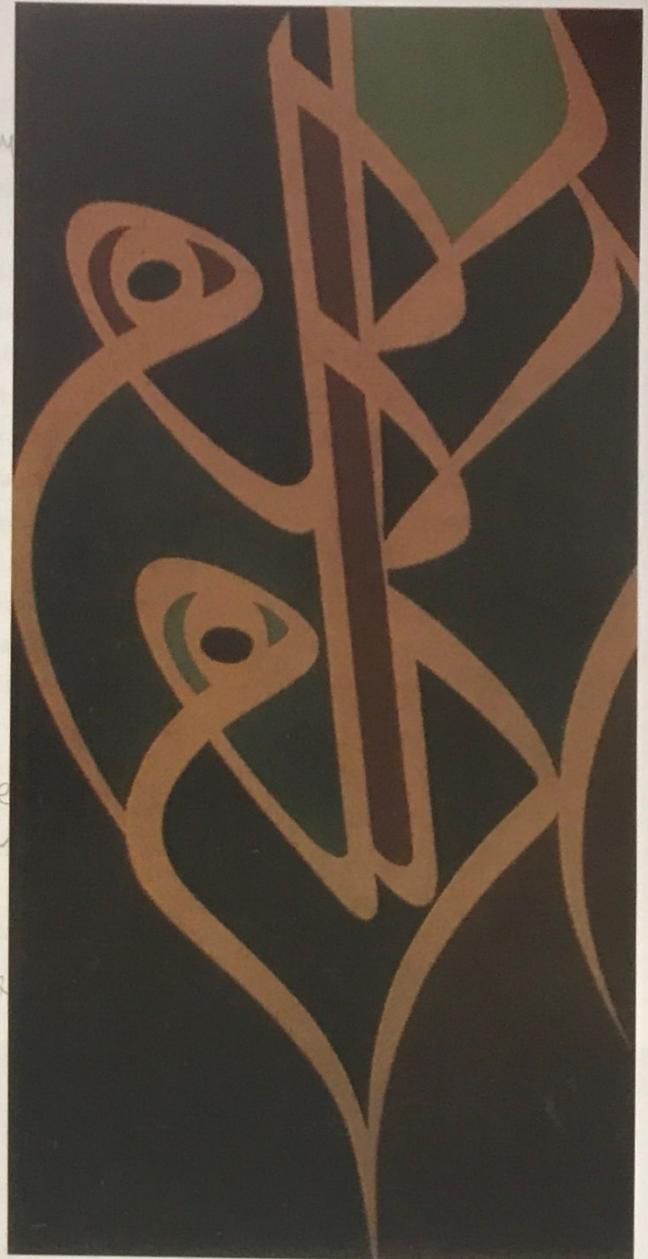
reveal a complexity beyond its being merely a calligraphic work. This is its significance. I am therefore tempted to go beyond its formal space and push the metaphor further. It may then suggest that although any division created on a religious basis shatters the unity of humanity, this unity cannot be achieved by reducing the world or humanity to a singular homogenous state, religious or secular. We must not only reconcile with its divisions and differences but also celebrate them. That may be the significance of this work of Ramay's.

However, there is a serious difficulty in pursuing this line of analysis and establishing this significance. If we look at the whole body of Ramay's work to which this single work belongs to, *Kalima* turns out to be an exception. He seemed not to have realised its significance, in the sense that the work had moved beyond the tradition of calligraphy and had created a pictorial space with its own modern significance. It is not unusual for a new artistic idea to emerge in one's work, but to grasp its significance and take it further one needs a critical sensibility to isolate it from rest of the work. This did not seem to happen. So, the significance of the work remains hidden behind a veil of ignorance and complacency.

Could it have been read like this in 1940s. Cultural tools changed. Context of time & sensibility

Sadequain of course became a highly celebrated artist after he won a prize at the Paris Biennale of 1962. But do we understand the real significance of the work that brought him so much fame and fortune? In Pakistan, there were two views at the time. Some believed he deserved the prize for an achievement, but others who were cynical about it thought he got the prize only for the title of the work. However, none of them were able to say anything about the work itself, let alone analyse it, as there was no critical tool to look at the work. In fact, after he attained the status of a celebrity in Pakistan, Sadequain was never subjected to a critical scrutiny. It was taken for granted that he was a 'great' Pakistani artist, and therefore every work he did was great.

Why is difficult to critique the work of a highly celebrity.



Hanif Ramay

* Was the artist conscious of this complexity - was it intrinsic?

I am of course referring to the work whose title *The Last Supper* puzzled and confused so many people. In my view this work was not only Sadequain's highest achievement, but it was one of the greatest works produced in the subcontinent at the time. However, despite all this, the work could not escape a paradox. This work became, in terms of his further artistic development, his own last supper. But no one

imp

vertical forms arranged symmetrically? Although, for me, its symmetry is extremely important, it may be incidental as Sadequain himself did not pursue it in his subsequent works. The question that really emerges from the work is about its form. How did the artist arrive at this form and what is its significance? In fact, when we look at Sadequain's work of the previous eight years, what we begin to see in this work is what seems to be what in Urdu is called *nichore*; a *nichore* or synthesis of all earlier works. The significance of *nichore* or synthesis is recognised both philosophically and historically. Historically, art arrives at its various syntheses - such as Cubism, Neo-plasticism, Abstract Expressionism, etc. - through a process in which things from earlier periods enter the artist's intense awareness of his or her own time and are transformed into something new. This process is both physical and intellectual. While the physical process - i.e., artistic skill - deals with things materially, the intellect helps the artist's sensibility to grasp its significance within the historical time the work is being produced. In other words, this sense of history allows the artist to move from one stage to another until he or she finds something new - often a synthesis.

Sadequain began his artistic career in the early fifties by looking into a mirror. What he saw in the mirror was not only his body but also what this body was carrying with it as a tradition now located within the consciousness of a new place and time. He then saw his body being transformed into kufi calligraphy, and other times into a cactus. Sometimes later, he enters Picasso's studio riding a bull, as if to smash whatever was there. It is difficult to say what exactly he gained from this gate-crashing, except that his work subsequently does take a new direction resulting in what we see in *The Last Supper*.

Sadequain began his artistic pursuit with three preoccupations. First, it was his own body with what it had inherited as a tradition, and with what the body could identify. It was then that the cactus, both its physicality and its harsh conditions of existence and survival, which became a metaphor for Sadequain's own existence and survival - and perhaps for his society as a whole. While contemplating all these three things for eight years, he arrives at a table of the last supper, placing himself at the centre. This Last Supper does not depict Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, or is its modern

by R H



Mapping the Change:

Art Critics Global Discourse

AICA Pakistan, the national chapter of the Paris-based International Art Critics Association (AICA), organized the first ever international seminar on art criticism in Karachi, in November 2004. The theme, *Mapping the Change*, brought together scholars from ten countries, including Henry Meyric-Hughes, President of AICA International, and the local art community representing Karachi, Quetta, Hyderabad, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad and Muzaffarabad.

Four major themes of the seminar were:

- **Art Criticism and Nation** - addressed how art criticism has embraced social issues like feminism, human rights and political activism as well as the role of criticism, in developing an identity and social cohesion in young democracies.
- **Strategies in Art Criticism** - underlined the formal aspects, such as the role of pedagogy in art criticism, and



version. It is Sadequain's own last supper. He arranges this supper himself for himself in which he is both the host and the chief guest. It is at its table, surrounded by others, that Sadequain transforms himself into something different from his own body. There is now no cactus or calligraphy either. They all have been merged together and transformed into something different and new, a synthesis whose full comprehension perhaps even escaped Sadequain's own Self. What is the significance of this transformation for Sadequain himself, for the society in which he finds himself and with which he identifies, and for art history? It is not possible to answer this question here, because it would involve an analysis of his whole career, as well as of the society that celebrates him but never tries to understand his work, both critically and historically.

to speak about. Whatever may be the case, the significance of the work lies within the inter-relationships of its layers. There may emerge many and contradictory meanings, but that is what makes a work complex. In fact, the purpose of rigorous critical scrutiny, or art criticism, is to explore this complexity without reducing the artwork to a single meaning. An artwork that is reduced to fit a particular meaning or national celebration loses its significance. In fact, in the absence of a methodological critical approach we are still without any profound understanding of both Ramay's and Sadequain's achievements. All we instead do is to merely celebrate them in the same way we celebrate complacently, the vulgarity of the heroes of popular media as part of the intellectual emptiness of national spectacle.)

I may be wrong in my approach to both of these artists' work, but that should not be the point. The point here is not about being right or wrong but a critical methodology to interpret a work whose FORM comprises many layers - * personal, social, traditional, modern and historical. This FORM may be a veil to hide what the artist does not want

III

In fact, without a methodology that questions, interrogates and radically shakes the established assumptions, it is not possible to develop a discourse of art criticism. But such a rigorous questioning or critical interrogation cannot take

For better need?

* is being done but perhaps with not so much clarity & depth.

the relationship between the art critic and the viewer.

- **Urban Energies** - investigated the role of the public space in the popularization of art and the subversion of elitist icons.
- **Globalization of Art- inclusive or exclusive?** - highlighted the gap between theory and practice of pluralism.



The Keynote Address, presented by the UK-based Dr. Rasheed Araeen, prominent artist, art critic, and founding editor of the *Third Text*, provided a strong context to the approach of art criticism in Pakistan.

Dr. Gulzar Haider, Emeritus Professor of Architecture at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, presented his paper on the *Globalization of Art*, calling it: *For the Crossed Eyes of the Beholder, Some Critical Care*, distinguishing dimensions among art history, art theory, art pedagogy, art politics, art valuation, art collection, marketing and enterprise. He also demonstrated the value of a multidimensional formulation of art criticism, arguing, "such

a formulation will characteristically enhance intellectual fidelity and resonant amplification in criticism of arts (fine, performing and design) in an economically globalized, informatically internetted, yet culturally diverse and increasingly identity conscious humanity."

Lahore-based architect, Kamil Khan Mumtaz, took up the theme of *Urban Energies* in his paper, *Impact of Social, Political and Cultural Change on Art and Art Writings*. His paper, read in Urdu, discussed issues of tradition and modernity. He stressed the "physical and philosophical moorings of art and art writing, demonstrating that Art and art writing are a

place in a society in which there are no institutions that guarantee the basic rights of all its citizens, and provide them at least some facilities to acquire knowledge so that they can think and reflect themselves. However, human nature cannot be always trapped in whatever difficulties there are. An individual can transcend the barriers and produce miracles, so long as one has a faith in oneself and in one's creative imagination and uses this imagination with courage and determination. People who are instead dependent on others' creativity, and look towards others to provide them a way to follow cannot use their own imagination or realise their full creative potentials. Unfortunately, most people of the former colonies are still suffering from this dependency syndrome. It is this syndrome which has prevented the development of self-critical faculties in most Third World countries. When we cannot achieve anything ourselves we turn to our former masters and blame them for everything, demanding that the West should open the doors of its institutions to receive and recognise whatever good or bad we produce as art.

I hope I have made it obvious that the discourse of art criticism is fundamental to the understanding of art and its

place in society as well as in human history. While it takes a place in the history of a nation state, it must also signify its universality. However, it is important here to emphasise again the

difference between art writing and art criticism. While the former is useful in publicising an artist's work, it is only the analytic tool of the latter that brings out the true meaning and understanding of art. Although the writing about art is now universal, as almost all countries of the world have a print media, not all societies have yet developed the language and discipline of art criticism, with their own theoretical or



Sadequain, detail, *Judgement in Paris*; 1963; 30"x48" oil on canvas

Space
art history
to document
my
letter

part of the Euro-centric modernity project."

Angelica Bäumer, the Austrian art critic who is also Treasurer, AICA International, spoke on *Globalization: sense or non-sense*, discussing how "after decades of indiscriminately following the US, Europe has returned to its own roots, and - in the course of the discussion about a possible EU integration of Turkey, a country with an Islamic majority - has discovered, that all Europe has not descended from the West but from the East."

The art critic from Azerbaijan, Dr. Dilara Vagabova, introduced *Features of Azerbaijanian Culture of the Post-Soviet Period*: "During the 70 years while the Soviet Union existed, there was an unceasing process of unification and mutual assimilation between the national cultures in the Soviet republics. This should lead to formation of the unified Soviet culture. From the other side, the national traditions were outwardly supported. In the extent that would be enough to keep the national color and to stress the multinational character of the Soviet culture. As a whole the national identity was suppressed at all the levels of life, especially in the Muslim republics (Azerbaijan is a republic of Middle Asia)." She argued how the situation in Azerbaijan has changed with Perestroika, raising questions of identity and values but leading towards a somewhat mythological type of mentality, which became the most obvious in post-Soviet period.

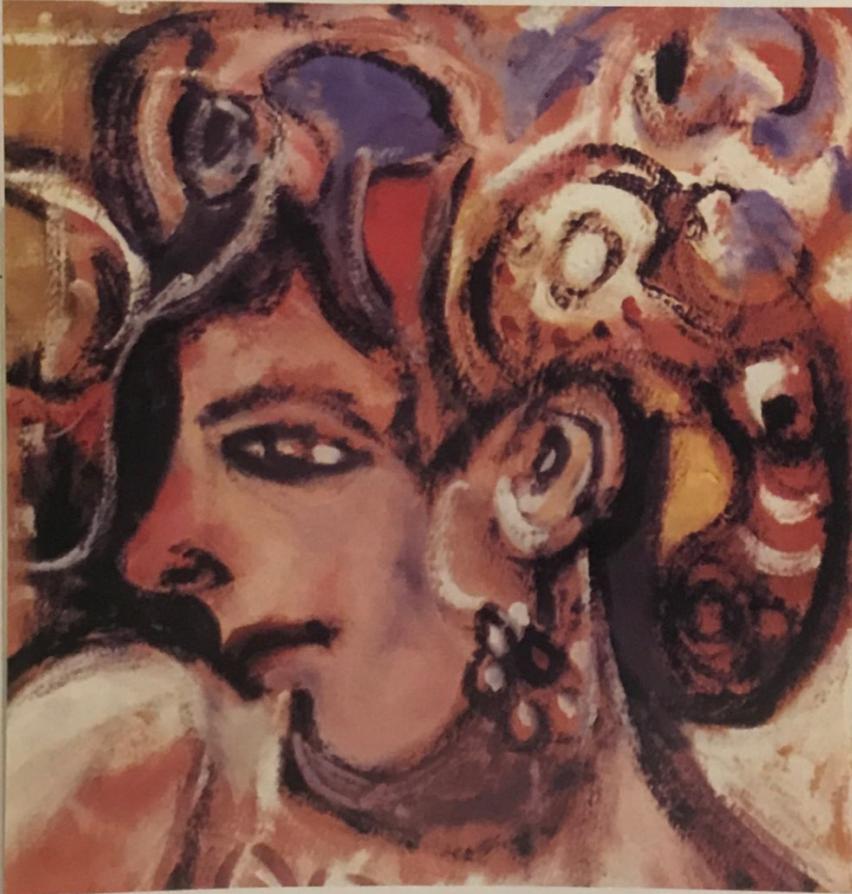
UK-based Dr. Leon Roy Wainwright presented a paper on *Art Criticism and Nation*, called *Canon: Futurology of Britain's Diaspora Presence*, and examined British artists of diasporic identities who did not realize that their "access to national art spaces - of promotion, collection, display and criticism - would be so slow and so illusory." He also looked briefly at the style in which artists have imagined their affinities, prompted by concerns with exclusion in the meta-text of national cultural value, and community and heritage that shapes the country's art history."

Art Criticism and Nation was also discussed by Ludovico Pratesi from Italy in his *Identity of Women in New Generations of Italian Art*, with specific examples how in the last two decades, young women artists such as Vanessa Beecroft, Grazia Toderi, Eva Marisaldi, Paola Pivi and Luisa Lambri have played an important role in the international art scene.

(A) I (A)

by Nilofur Farrukh

Sensibility, the DNA of Creativity



Detail, Ahmed Parvez

Dictionaries are unanimous in the definition of sensibility as the ability to feel and perceive. It can also be read as the behavioral blueprint on the matrix of the mind. In the vast uncharted universe of creativity, this intuitive response appears as the subconscious beam that guides the process of selection. This in turn contributes to the evolution of a color and texture sensibility, and the distinctive way spatial conundrums are solved.

The term sensibility is an integral part of the nomenclature of art criticism and this article is an attempt to provoke a debate on the dimensions of sensibility and discuss its implications on contemporary culture and creativity.

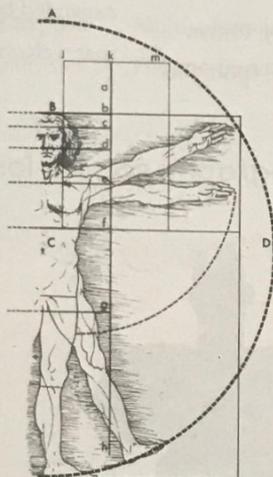
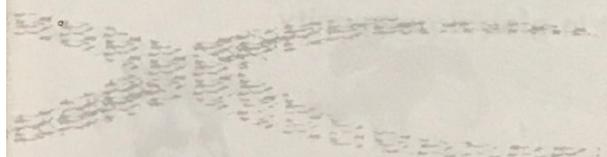
It is in creative endeavors like visual, musical and written compositions that we find a tangible

manifestation of sensibility. A closer look at the oeuvre of an artist makes it visible in the signature style. Pakistan's eminent painters, Bashir Mirza and Ahmed Parvez, both brilliant colorists, were driven by some inner compulsion to color- saturate the canvas, yet each had a distinct color sensibility. One looked at flora, as a point of departure for his abstract compositions, while the other could never banish the memory of the human figure from his canvas - his palette resonant with the jewel colors of South Asian miniature painting.

Not dissimilar to genetic tissue, experience can be seen as the major building block of sensibility. As affinity and

artist's reading and interpretation of the figure underwent constant change from the 'Persianized' idiom expressed in flat wooden figures to a synthesis of fluid and well molded figures of the *Ragmala*.

Created under different circumstances, art through the ages bears the imprint of the collective and personal sensibility of the people of its time. The intertwining strands of the personal and the collective sensibility have enjoyed a symbiotic kinship and they co-exist in the larger organic structure of geography and culture. It would not be inaccurate to say that it is through the prism of personal sensibility that every thing is first felt and perceived.



Leonardo da Vinci search of the perfect male body to Picasso's cubist women

association, physical and intangible stimuli pile up in layers; osmotic action in the memory zone fuses it into something permanent. Experiences of a lifetime and even before birth are intuitively processed through filters to shape perceptive skills that inform responses. It is interesting to note that both personal and collective sensibility may share a cultural watershed, but are seen to evolve independently.

If an extra-terrestrial visitor was exposed to the human race exclusively through the artist's interpretation of the human race: from the pre-historic stick figures of the Alta Mira to the highly stylized Egyptian art, Leonardo da Vinci's search of the perfect male body, to Picasso's cubist women, Chughtai's graceful figures to Van Gogh's human angst, art history offers a bewildering array of figural and facial portrayals.

Even the scrutiny of a microcosm of South Asian art history like Miniature Painting reveals a progressive change. The

At the show *The Electronic Social Culture* in Toronto, organized by the South Asian Visual Artists

Collective, ten artists of Asian origin in their early twenties to late thirties were handpicked for a workshop that initiated them into digital art. While Asian sensibility and their newly acquired electronic expertise was their shared experience, it could not override a deep personal sensibility with which they engaged with issues of displacement. This was apparent in the diversity of their creative statement.

Gary Wang's untitled installation with digital prints of icons like Madonna and Jackie Chang looked at the pervasive influence of global entertainment media. It was in the translation of the names of these mega stars in Chinese,



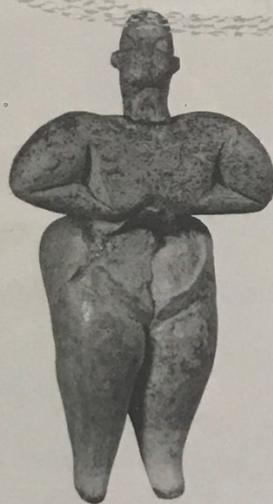
Japanese and Korean that brought in geography and introduced local sensibilities as an active player.

My Father Was an Astronaut by Roselina Hung, alludes to the immigrant family of absent fathers that have to stay in their own country to pursue career commitments. In her web design project, *Samarakoon*, the duality in the global perception of Sri Lanka is evident. A Sri Lanka that exists as a lush paradise in the mind of the tourist, and the other seen by its people: a country locked in a fight for economic and political survival.

Borrowed from the digital advertising vocabulary, Pravin Pillay's billboard that dominates the gallery space spotlights

lines of the pre-PC and the PC generation. Perhaps for the first time, technology, since the invention of the printing press, has created such a 'sensibility' gap between artists. The ones 'born with a mouse in their hand' navigate the cyber world with as much ease as they would their own neighborhood. Existing in a parallel universe that allows communication through its own encrypted language and where one can be immersed in a virtual world with a digital engagement that defines the physical, emotional and intellectual space. Cognitive development of this generation has been expanded by possibilities offered by the versatile digital matrix that welcomes intervention, appropriation and a dialogue-

The imperative of geography can be lost in global anonymity



history. Through a heavily pixilated family group-photo taken in Africa during the early 1900s, the artist as the curator Sylvia Borda puts it, 'Investigates the nature of colonialism as a conditioning agent in contemporary boundaries of class, gender and race'.

The digital dimension of the show makes one keenly aware of the external cultural/historical location beyond the computer and the project can also be read as an exercise in the expansion of the artist's existing sensibility through a new experience.

Since the 1990s, when the PC began to make inroads as a creative tool, the art community has been divided along the

based interface. Freed from hierarchical systems like museums and galleries, this art exists in the PC and travels round the world in nine seconds. The imperative of geography can be lost in global anonymity, if the artist so desires, as the architecture of a borderless world of art goes up in cyber space.

With the fundamentals of conventions being challenged on this scale, how can sensibility be constant? Yet as the *Electronic Social Culture Exhibition* was quick to point out, electronic intervention in the creative process enters as a facilitator but not as a replacement of core sensibilities. The computer can

offer countless options, but the choice is still in the hands of humans who help birth the defining moment.

The synthesis of ideas, either through new experiences or intellectual discourse, has been the catalyst of change. The artists who embraced the enterprise of Modernism made a conscious choice to follow a new worldview. In this nihilistic drive to shun earlier artistic sources like nature, religion and culture, the modernists opened their parachute over an unknown terrain, which to them symbolized a new age vastly different from failed traditionalism of Europe after the first World War.

Modernism was an existentialist choice that remained trapped in an artificially constructed experiment that eventually ran

out of steam within several decades and gave way to Postmodernism.

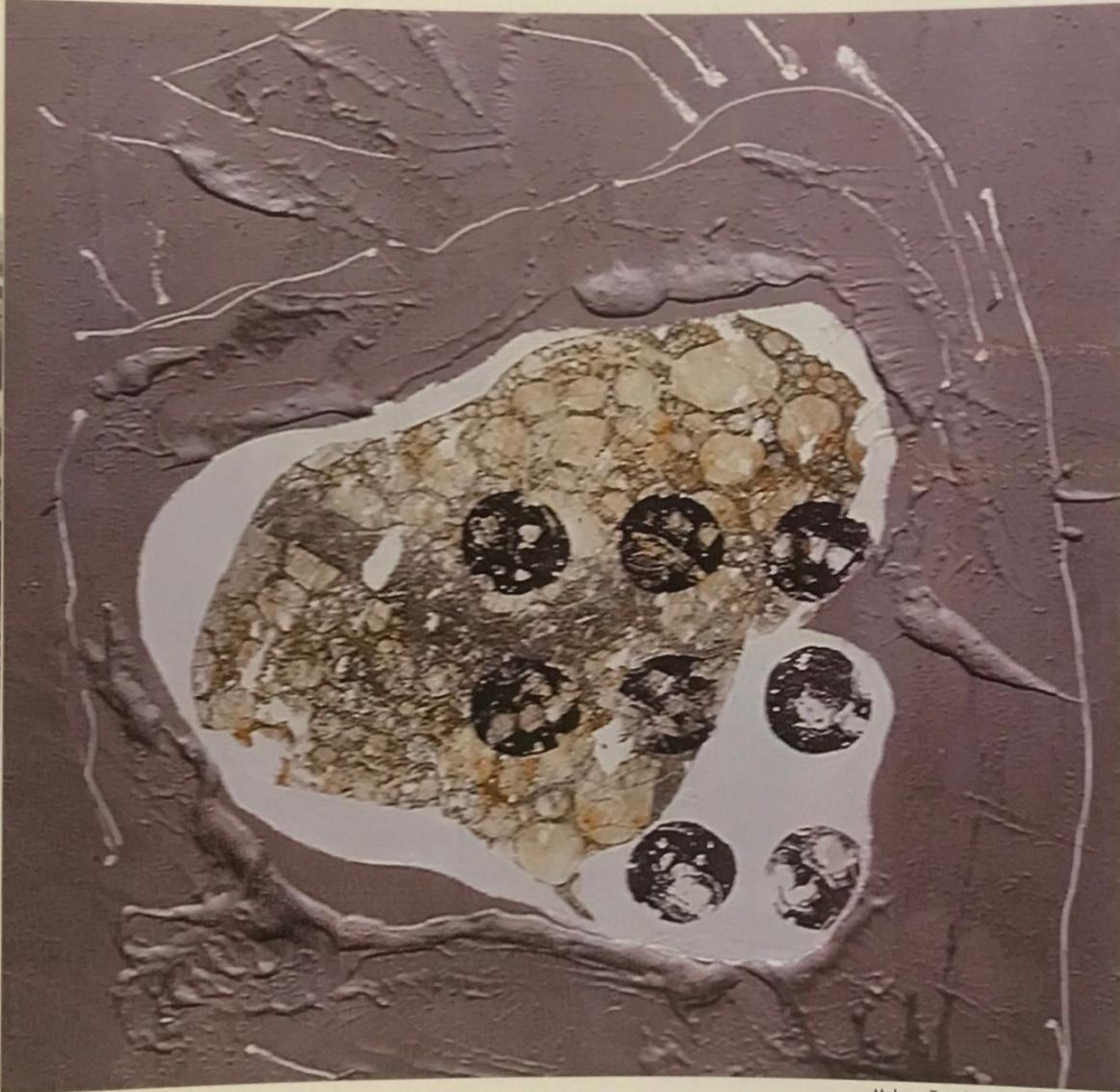
The idea of postmodernism is being met with cynicism in many traditional societies whose age old experience in multiculturalism shows that postmodernism is nothing more than a face-saving theory that merely labels the logical end of an age that had a short self-life. The past experience, with the hegemonic dynamics of euro centric art theories are still fresh in their mind in which modernism, despite its universal claims, became a mechanism of western domination of global artistic expression.

Multiculturalism and diversity, the cornerstones of Postmodernism, are no strangers to older cultures where

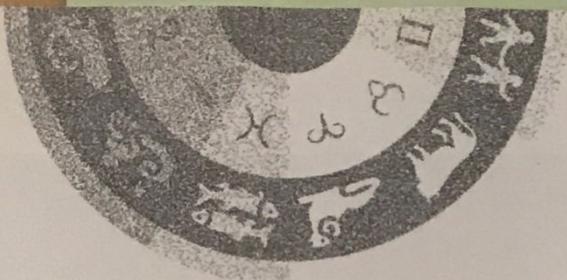


diversity is a part of the indigenous mosaic. A Mughal Emperor ordered the translation of the Bible and Hindu scriptures, which were then created into illustrated manuscripts titled *Ramznama* and *Dastan-e-Masih*, something that was not seen in the court of any European ruler of that time or later. Geeta Kapur claims in her book, *When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, that artists of South Asia created their own hybrid form of modernism. This is a valid claim, as the modern art vocabulary became the vehicle to communicate issues of indigenous concern. So what we saw emerge was a parallel modernism guided by a different sensibility. This modernism was used as a loose framework to articulate personal narratives. This is clearly seen in the work of Francis Newton Souza who imposed his own brute interpretation on the established iconography of Catholic icons, seen through the prism of his childhood in Goa.

Sensibility is never static. Its evolutionary trajectory traverses



Mehnaz Tapal, c.2000, mixed media



the political as well as the social terrain. The genesis of modernist sensibility in Pakistan can be found in the South Asian dialogue with Western ideas.

This paradigm shift led to a debate no less intense and polarizing than Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. Traditionalism in its fatalistic mode had been declared retrogressive by the national poet laureate Iqbal, yet the abstract dogma of modernism was culturally alien to the people. As creative adventurers like the Lahore Artist group and loners like Zubeida Agha began to chip away at the monolith of traditional art, modernism began to take a foothold as an alternate sensibility.

Geographical and political space in which the artist lives has been seen to influence art both at the subconscious and conscious level. The physical environment sometimes leaves a more permanent stamp on the psyche. I remember a discussion with Mahbulul Haq, a well-known modernist and educator from Bangladesh in the 1990s. We talked about the re-curring diffused imagery in the work of many of his countrymen and their affinity to watercolor as a pigment. He traced it back to the profound experience of the monsoon season. Long months when mist and rain-washed images entered the soul through their retinas from childhood to death. This experience was intrinsic to their lives and it was not surprising that it found its way on the canvases.

The same is true of the tradition of landscape painting in the Punjab. How can the vast tract of productive land with its long history of political cultural impact on the people be separated from their sensibility? It was only after I traveled through rural Punjab in different seasons, that I was able to understand the hundreds of shades between gold and green of planted fields and the rustic architectonics of the adobe hamlets that was always portrayed with such reverence and mystic insight by painters like Khalid Iqbal.

An anomaly, is the color sensibility of the people of the Thar desert whose crafts do not project the barren monochrome of the sandy desert but the memory of spring, when after every three years the desert blooms in a myriad of colors.

Is sensibility pre-programmed and determined by the time and year of our birth? Zodiac groupings would have us believe that way. Born under the fire, earth, air and water signs, every human born on this planet has a certain personality that influences responses. Ancient cultures like the Chinese and Indian have fine-tuned it to a science and it has gained currency in the global culture. Almost every Hindu child and some Muslim ones born in

India, have their *janam patri* or astrological chart drawn to determine their personality traits and the course of their destiny. This is looked upon mainly as a 'preventive' practice, like reading the future to avert discord and disaster. Even marriages and business mergers have to be validated by the astrological compatibility of the partners. In the West, where astrology was grouped with witchcraft and magic in the medieval ages and purged during the Age of Enlightenment, has become increasingly visible in the print and electronic media.

Just like chromosomes determine the genetic makeup, in astrology time, date and place, according to these ancient systems, impact the child's birth personality. The jury is still out on how much of our ability to perceive and feel is genetically pre-engineered at birth. One cannot but help wonder if this is some primordial software introduced to ensure the diversity of the human race?

Social engineering has been man's attempt to play god. The last most systematic attempt was by the Third Reich, when indoctrination overrode the natural moral impulses and an intelligent people became tools of genocide. Colonial powers have had centuries to carry out such socio-cultural experiments to prevent rebellions. Trevalyan, a loyal British civil servant in 1853, defended the institutionalization of culture dominance as 'necessary instrument of imperial policy'. This heralded a full-scale attempt to create the hybrid pro-colonial identity of brown sahibs, a phenomenon, extensively studied by scholars like Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.

In his essay, *Postmodernism/Postcolonialism*, Bhabha writes 'the enduring political lesson of postmodernism is to think of social agency without the mastery or sovereignty of an author. And in the indeterminate relationship between actor and author we are served the aesthetic and ethical challenge to live in disjunctive temporal landscape that leads us to restructure the past, so that the history of present - of our late modernity and/or post-modernity - can entertain the possibilities of the future as an open question, a negotiation with the passions and the pitfalls of freedom.'

In many of these postcolonial democracies where the leaders perpetuate the authoritarianism of the colonizers, abuse of

civil liberties has replaced freedom. Decades of a constant exposure to violence and lawlessness can brutalize the sensibility of a society. Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy in his speech in a seminar on *War as an Institution* spoke on how citizens, in long confrontational war-like conditions can become cynical, defeatist and despondent. This mutation of the sensibility creates unnatural aggression born out of a sense of inadequacy and anxiety. While selecting the works for *Pakistan, Another Vision*, a show of art from Pakistan in London, the curator, Tim Wilcox commented that he found the work unusually intense and serious. Where is the humor he asked? As someone who had lived in Pakistan all her life and grown up seeing the art evolve as a commentary on the social and political struggle of a post-colonial society, it took me a long time to understand how difficult it was for an outsider to truly understand a sensibility born out of these times.

A new phenomenon to emerge out of the industrial age is the urban sensibility that responds to the fast paced, stress packed existence. Not ruled by seasons or daylight hours, they work and play by man-made rules. The art that comes out of this frenzied environment is informed by the aesthetic of this wired existence.

The urgency and anxiety of this sensibility is translated through industrial material. The millennium wheel in London, through its size, construction and dwarfing impact is an ode to man's development just as the titanium shell of Guggenheim at Bilbao. The latest of these is the *Cloud Gate* sculpture of Anish Kapoor in Chicago. Made of a highly reflective metal in a twisted balloon form, the people walking below it can see their whimsical distortions in the concave and convex surfaces.

Sensibility and identity are twin engines that drive human actions. Sensibility is purely intuitive that evolves in the recesses of the mind that deal with perception and emotion, while identity is a social and political construct. It is a badge of belonging that resonates with the desire to live and work in groups. If sensibility can be defined as a skin that is wired to the inner person; identity is more like the costume we wear.





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Tina Hung, digital print (detail, installation) ; c.2004

An outspoken, robust kid may prefer to identify with outgoing peers, so in some ways our sensibility may determine our identity. There is however a fine line that separates conscious and unconscious decisions.

Identity is the important socializing factor and gives the gratification of engagement and belonging. With lives becoming more complex in the last century, how identity is perceived has radically changed. Previously, the main identities were religious and ethnic. Today it has expanded with a greater awareness of racial, political, and economic differences. Two important identities to emerge are geographical in terms of urban and rural which are vastly different despite other similarities. The second is the transient 'time identity' that changes with the fast paced global evolution. Someone born in a pre-industrial South Asia has in a span of six decades negotiated several benchmarks of development. People of a shared sensibility can be divided by their religious identity like the Punjabis of West and East Punjab had everything in common but their religion at the time of the 1947 Partition. People are called homogenous when they share a large number of identities but sometimes a single strong identity can be a unifying factor. Separatist movements are spawned by a strong common identity wanting to assert itself. This is true of the Jewish Diaspora, that after World War II were determined to settle in a separate homeland. All their cultural and national identities took a back seat at this crucial time in their history.

With a large world population listening to the same popular music via TV, and the websites, and thanks to the billion-dollar music industry, watching the same Hollywood films and TV serials, and consuming the staple BBC and CNN version of global news, theoretically this shared experience would lead to a global sensibility. Yet there has been a resurgence of local identity reinforced by nationalism and regionalism. Maybe this is due to a political awareness created from a strong sense of the 'other' by the media. The sensibility of the deprived and the oppressed cannot be outsmarted by the strategies of simulation. The electronic experience recognized as simulacrum that mimics reality but is not reality makes spin and double speak resonate with unrealized promises and double standards, injustice and hegemonic designs thinly disguised under slogans of high morality. The numbers simply do not tally.

Reality and simulation have become the two visual references that inform the sensibility of the artist.

by Sangeeta Thapa

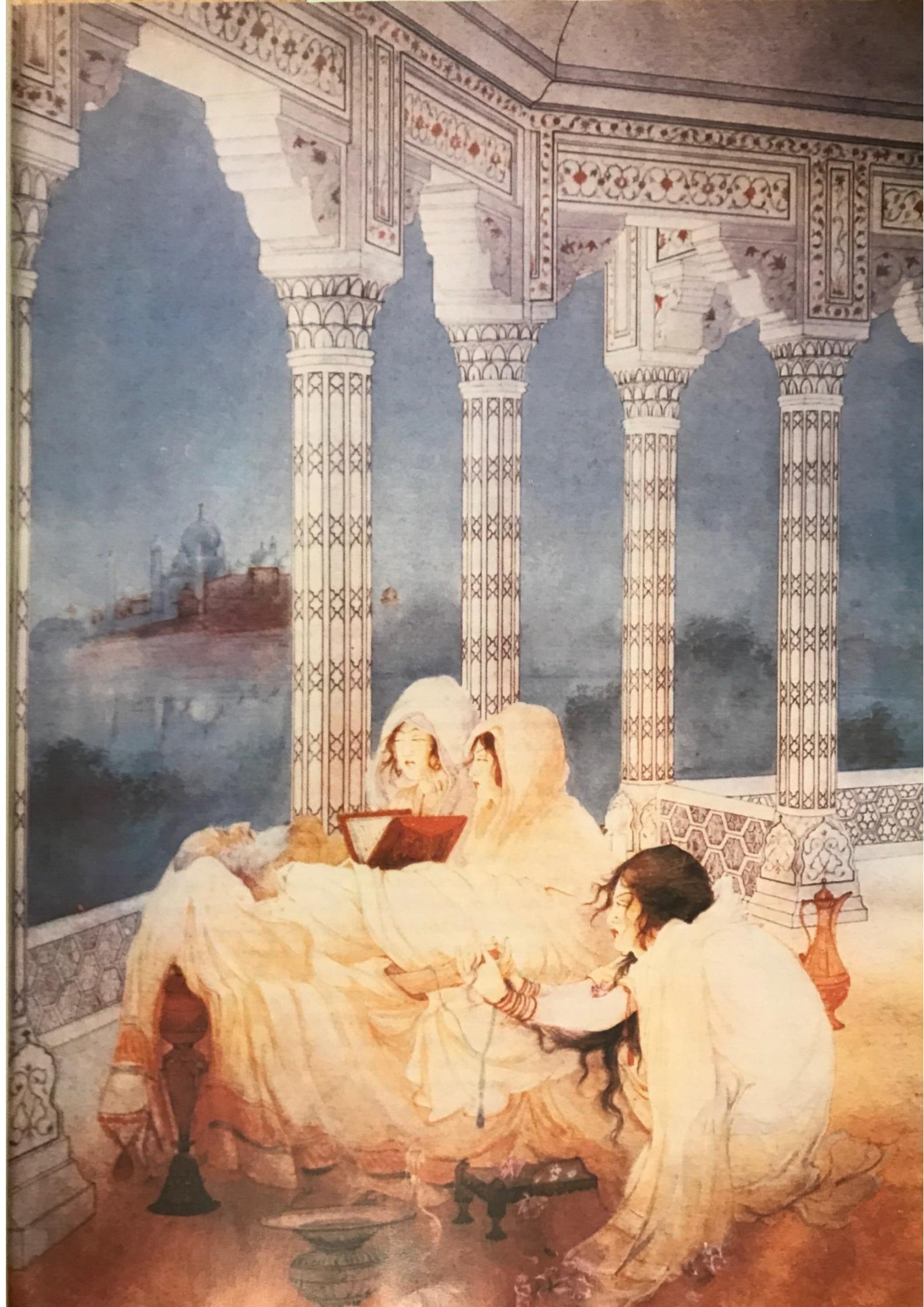
Chughtai

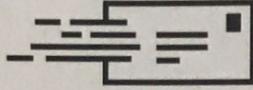
- REVISITED



A month before I was preparing to leave for an exhibition at the Alhamra Gallery in Pakistan, Gautam Rana of *Baber Mahal Revisited* called me on the phone saying that we had to meet at his office as there was some important news that he wanted to share. He also asked me if I had heard of Chughtai, the artist from Pakistan. I confirmed that I had. After all, living in South Asia, who hasn't heard of Chughtai?

At his office, Gautam pulled out a book on Chughtai from his selection of treasured books. It was a book that I was familiar with, having lived in Pakistan for two years. In his conversation he revealed that this book was sent to him by Chughtai's son. That he has a Museum in Lahore and that I must meet him when I go there. It was welcome news as I adore Chughtai's paintings. I enquired if he knew Chughtai. "I didn't", he said "read this correspondence and you will understand."





Subject: Descendents of Rana Chandra Shamsheer Jang Bahadur
PM of Nepal 1922

Date: Mon, 18 Oct 2004 15:57:16 -0700

From: "g2" <g2@mail.com.np>

To: "Arif Chughtai" <chughtaimuseumlahore@yahoo.co.uk>

CC: "Sangeeta Thapa" <sthapa@mos.com.np>

Dear Gautam Sahib: This is an enquiry out of the blue and concerns your Prime Minister in 1922, Rana Shamsheer Jang Bahadur. Your Prime Minister had lost his wife and was visiting Mussorie in India at that time and went to an exhibition of paintings. There he saw the works of M.A Rahman Chughtai or Abdur Rahman Chughtai, and fell in love with them. He bought a few paintings and established contact with the artist in Lahore. We have his letters in our archives.

The painting was on paper and watercolour wash and approx. size 20 inches by 28 inches. It depicted a king on his deathbed surrounded by his three daughters. We have photograph of it as it was made in 1920. In the 1960s a Pakistani in Nepal came across a sale of household effects by a family and the things were the belongings of Rana Shamsheer Jang. He bought three or four paintings and brought them here for the artist to see. This was in the lifetime of Chughtai who was astonished to see them after 40 years. However the family who sold most of his things kept a painting to hang in some library or college or auditorium or something. They said that work was very dear to Rana Sahib. The descendents of Rana Sahib know of possible places where the painting may be hanging. This concerns research on our part and we are very eager to find the location of the work. If you cannot do it yourself, get us in touch with someone who can, and we will gladly assist. I am the son of the artist and founder of his museum here in Lahore. We think the work may be in Tri Chandra College library or so or even somewhere else. Could you possibly tell us the name of the present administrator, and I will pay all charges involved in the same. This is not to sound petty but to give our minds away that our heart is in the matter and we do not want to lose contact with any possibilities. If you need more details, please ask me. I will be very grateful and have already sent you a letter by post with more details. Let us revive the relations of our elders.

Best wishes

ARIF RAHMAN CHUGHTAI

CHUGHTAI MUSEUM TRUST LAHORE PAKISTAN



M.A. Rahman Chughtai



This was major news. Two important questions came to mind: where were the Chughtai paintings and what was their value on the art market? Judging from the date 1922, it was easy to conclude that the "Shamsher Jung Bahadur" was actually the Prime Minister Shree Teen Chandra Shamsher Maharaj. This indicated that the paintings were in the collection of the descendents of Chandra Shamsher 's family.

The sale described above is a tragic testament of the type of fate shared by so many Ranas who were ignorant about the value of their inheritance and even more about the art, artifacts and jewelry that came into their possession in the form of inheritance from ancestors who were known to be discerning collectors. I promised my cousin Gautam Rana that I would investigate. I also told him that Chughtai had influenced a few painters in Nepal, namely Karna Narsing Rana, Kesab Duwadi, Uttam Nepali and Govind Dongol.

After a few days of inquiry, I learnt about the existence of some very valuable Chughtais in Nepal, in private collections that date back to 1922 and in the family of Chandra Shumsher. Quite by coincidence, an old dealer of antiques had come by to show me two old works that looked like they were by Chughtai. I called Gautam, informing him about this development and asked him to correspond with Chughtai Junior again.



Gautam Rana wrote:

Dear Mr. Chughtai,

How are you? I would like to inform you that my cousin Sangeeta Thapa (her father is Himalaya SJB Rana who is the only Nepali to receive The Star of Pakistan) has been invited to Pakistan on 20th Nov. 2004. She is an art curator & owns the finest Art Gallery in Kathmandu called Siddhartha Art Gallery, web site: www.siddharthaartgallery.com

She will be in Lahore for 4 days at The Alhamra Art Gallery from 20th to 24th Nov. 2004. I'm taking the liberty of giving her your e-mail address so that she can directly fix appointment with you. She knows of 2 Chughtai paintings which are currently on the Nepalese market. Though there is no signature, they have been identified as Chughtai's works, it is 20"x28" in size. Please expect her e-mail any day. Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,

Gautam SJB Rana



From: Arif Chughtai to: g2
Sent: Thursday, October 21, 2004 10:22 AM

Dear Gautum Sahib,

She will be welcome a million times. I will wait to meet her. By the way Alhamra was founded by my father and even the name was given by him.

Best Wishes

Arif Rahman Chughtai

More exciting news, as I was on my way to the Alhamra in Lahore. I needed to learn more, so I logged on to Chughtai on the internet but ended up viewing the website of the Delhi based Vadhera Art Gallery which probably has a link up with the name Chughtai. From the website I learnt that Vadhera was selling Chughtai paintings on the internet, along with many Indian masters. I wrote to Arif Chughtai informing him of my arrival, the show at the Alhamra, and my desire to see the Chughtai Museum.



Arif Chughtai wrote:

Dear Ms Sangeeta,

Thanks for your information. The Art world at present is allergic to Chughtai and fearful of Chughtai Museum. We are an independent people, loving our country and very proud of our Ideology. The present set up does not like the word Ideology. Ever since my father died in 1975, the Culture people are trying to bankrupt us, or move us out of existence. That is why deliberately M A Rahman Chughtai is neglected by the Governments. It is my efforts, internationally which upset them.

The people here love Chughtai and he is the father of Art in Pakistan. He founded Alhamra, the insignia designed by him, the name was also given by him, and the same was inaugurated by his show by the Governor General of Pakistan Khwaja Nazimuddin. Prime Ministers and Presidents have visited our home.

Thirty years of struggle on the part of a young boy at that time is phenomenal but of no interest to these people. We love Pakistan, otherwise we would have left Pakistan. I get people from all over the world. A new gallery building has been added and waiting to be inaugurated. I am not trying to discourage you. We will talk more when we meet. You must see our establishment. You will love our efforts and you will love us.

Best wishes

ARIF RAHMAN CHUGHTAI

This was strangely informative. It gave me a clear indication that artists in Pakistan were divided into camps for whatever reasons, like it is everywhere else. I decided to keep politics out of my conversation when I visited Arif on the second day of my trip to Lahore. Shashi Shah, my "Old Master" was keen to meet him too. The Chughtai Museum is in the middle of a rapidly expanding city. It has a large holding of land, many old trees, and a Museum complex that is still being built.

Arif took us to his office, where he generously showed us many paintings by his Father. I fell in love with the Chughtai paintings all over again. Chughtai was born in Lahore on September 21, 1897. Like many others, I have found Chughtai's paintings to be truly oriental, an exquisite synthesis of Persian and Mughal styles. His love for women, beauty and nature are expressed dramatically with sensitive and sensuous lines and colours. Some one described Chughtai's work as being "sumptuously decorative". His compositions are amazingly varied and reveal a remarkable eye for detail.

Arif told us that the Museum Trust possessed over ten thousand works by his father in the form of 2000 water-color paintings, pencil drawings, 300 aquatints and etchings, block prints, naqashi, calligraphy, stamp designs, coin designs, national and international insignias and illustrations. As we looked at Chughtai's work, we realized that we were coming face to face with the works of a great artist, whose artistic career spanned a good sixty years. His works were in the collection of the British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Peace Palace, Hague, UN Headquarters, New York, Kennedy Memorial Boston, US State Department Washington DC, President's House Bonn, Nizam of Hyderabad, Queen Julianna's Palace in the Netherlands, Emperor's Palace Bangkok, President House Islamabad and in the Governors' Houses in Lahore and Karachi. It came as no surprise that he was declared National Artist of Pakistan and bestowed many honors like Khan Bahadur, Hilal e-Imtiaz and Pride of Performance by his country. He was also the Founding Member of the Alhamra Art Center and the people of Pakistan gave him the title "Mussavir-e-Mashriq".

The range and repertoire of his genius encompassed literature too and he wrote several short stories, research books and articles on art. I was glad that my ancestor had somehow acknowledged this genius and bought his work. When I asked Arif about the works Chandra Shumsher had bought, he shared the intimate circumstances that resulted in the series of paintings that were exhibited in Mussorie.

M A Chughtai met Abindranath Tagore in Calcutta. This is also where he saw Tagore's painting *The Last Days of Shah Jehan* which was a famous work at that time, but Chughtai was not impressed. According to Arif, his father wrote to Tagore and expressed his reservations on the painting. It felt artificial. He felt that Tagore had not done enough research. In the painting the palace looked bleak and the grieving daughters of Shah Jehan did not look that they were





Rana Chandra Shumsher Jung Bhadur
Courtesy, Arif Rahman Chughtai

grieving or that they were of noble lineage. Chughtai also felt Shah Jahan looked like a mendicant in the painting! He wrote to Tagore and informed him that he would make a better painting on the same subject.

In 1919, Chughtai visited Agra to research for the imagery he needed to make his own painting on the death of Shah Jahan. He spent time at the Taj Mahal and at Mussamanbagh where Shah Jahan actually died, to research architectural, physiognomic and costume details before he embarked on his painting. When the painting was ready Chughtai titled it *The Passing of Shah Jahan* it was exhibited in Mussorie, India, along with his other works, and Chughtai deliberately priced it five times more than Abindranath Tagore's painting.

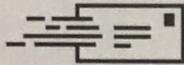
Destiny somehow brought the grieving Chandra Shumsher to this exhibition and as soon as he saw the Shah Jahan painting, he was mesmerized. The painting seemed to reflect his own personal grief. He purchased the painting along with a few others. This purchase was very important for Chughtai as it created a stir in the art market. He was not a well-known artist yet, the purchase by the Prime Minister Shree Teen Chandra Shumsher Maharaj validated the artist's worth and soon his work began to be bought by other Indian Maharajas and important collectors in India and abroad. I was keen to see the exchange of letters between Chughtai and Abindranath Tagore and also between Chandra Shumsher and Chughtai which are in Arif's possession. However, as time was running short, we needed to get back to the Alhamra.

I was touched by how Arif greeted me, "Today, history repeats itself, I stand here instead of my father and you in the place of Shumsher Jung of Nepal. You are Shumsher Jung himself, as far as I am concerned".

Chughtai died on the 17th of January, 1975. The record sale of a Chughtai painting has been £ 40,000 on the international market. Today, the market is shaky as there are many fake Chughtais cropping up. Sotheby's and Christie's still refer to Arif for authentication of his father's work.

Arif also shared the difficulties he faced being the trustee of the Chughtai Museum.

I was moved by Arif's devotion to his father's memory and his service to the nation in maintaining the works. However, I was even more moved to learn that Chughtai, the national artist of Pakistan, lay buried on the premises of this proposed Museum, awaiting a final "befitting mausoleum".



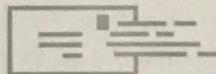
Arif Chughtai wrote:

Dear Ms Sangeeta,

I was really disappointed in not meeting you again, for I think we have the potential for making not only the relations between Pakistan and Nepal stronger, but also living up to the tradition of Rana Chandra and MARC's relation in the Past. You surprised me for I saw no signs of what I thought I could expect, but a vibrant personality with humility which is surprising - with your background. You are a very nice person and we will not only remain good friends, we will better our friendship with time. You have now a Pakistani access here with no hypocrisy and simple goodwill. Keep the contact alive. I had so many other things planned to give to you. We will do it in the future. My best wishes to Gautam Sahib and Lok Bhakta Rana Sahib. Thanks for your greetings. Our cards are being printed and I will send some to you soon. The theme is NEPAL. And it carries a photo of your ancestor. We are going to go a long way.

Best wishes

ARIF RAHMAN CHUGHTAI



Sangeeta Thapa wrote:

Dear Arif,

Back home in Kathmandu where the weather is much cooler! I feel the exhibition went off very well. The arrangements made by the Chief Minister's Task Force was exceptional. I wish we had such a task force here and would like to duplicate that energy or synergy. In Karachi, I gave a presentation on the impact of conflict on art in Nepal, at the AICA Pakistan Seminar, on the 26th, and returned to Nepal on the 27th. Whirlwind..whirlwind. I am so pleased we met, and I know this won't be our last meeting. My connection with Pakistan goes back to the 80s and I know I will be back soon to strengthen our friendship. I will be writing on our meeting in two magazines. They have already called me. Need some more info from you. I have already read what you gave me in Lahore. I laud your noble efforts on being the trustee of your father's incredible work.

Warmest regards

Sangeeta



by Rumana Husain

Awareness and Dissent- performance in the by-lanes

"I think we should reinforce some barriers instead of collapsing them. Build new walls against racism, which is one of the horrible things that exist in the world. A wall against intolerance - which is a form of racism, not accepting the existence of the other one. The wall against sexism which enslaves half of humanity - women. A wall against globalization, which makes all of us become clones of ourselves. So build barriers, build walls and fight against intolerance, against racism, sexism and globalization, fight vigorously, and re-unite people."

- Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal

As I set to work on this article, I realized that my first memories of street theatre go back to *Raas Leela* enacted on the occasion of *Janmashtami*, the birth of Lord Krishna, by ordinary people, rather than trained, professional actors. As a child I had witnessed these in my father's town in Madhya Pradesh, India, where we visited my grandmother almost every year. The loud make-up, deafening drums, call of the conch shells followed with the tinkling of temple bells, people prostrating in veneration in front of the couple assuming the roles of Lord Krishna and his consort Radha, devotional sentiments - actors and audience both overwhelmed with emotion, were reminiscent of the tenth of Moharram *tazija* processions back home in Karachi, Pakistan. The *Raas Leela* pantomime on the streets brought home, at an early age, the realization of an art form that combined an array of various other art mediums.

Traditionally, theatre in the Indian subcontinent, has its roots in folk tales. Nautanki was a popular form of theatre that traveled from one place to another, and was interspersed with song and dance. In Pakistan though, 'drama' or 'theatre' has been confined to halls and auditoriums, and the 'street theatre' genre has not really been practiced in its pure form - spontaneous, *on the street* performances, as started by bands

of roving artists during military rules in Latin America. Street theatre originated there for a purpose: political agitation, and the need to get across strong messages without getting caught by the authorities. Nevertheless, let us try to explore the origins of theatre in the pre-partition/pre-independence era in India, and the more contemporary genre of street theatre or parallel theatre as practiced in Pakistan.

It is pertinent to recall that due to a complex network of socio-political changes, such as the October Revolution of Russia in 1917, a new significance was brought to theatre all over the world. In the Indian subcontinent, the National Movement against British Imperialism was gaining momentum. Meanwhile, an actor-director at Moscow Art Theatre, Konstantin Stanislavsky, had revolutionized not only Russian theatre but also the theatre of the world. Founder of "Method Acting," Stanislavsky was born in 1868. He directed Chekhov's most important plays. Before him, no one had devised a method of achieving believability. This gave rise to a new crop of playwrights, including Gorky and Tolstoy, who influenced both Indian writing and Indian thought. The Communist Party of India was formed, and in 1936, writers and intellectuals such as Sajjad Zaheer and Munshi Prem Chand got together at Lucknow and organized

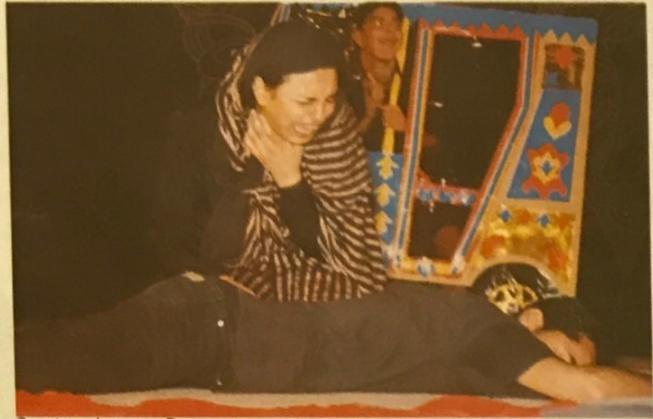
the Progressive Writers Association (later, the Progressive Writers' Movement and the Lahore Art Circle were the break-away factions on this side of the border).

The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) was formed soon after, which involved top-ranking musicians, dancers, writers and artists. Uday Shankar led the choreography.

IPTA, from its inception, had gathered some of the best Urdu writers, all writing plays. There was Ismat Chughtai, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, Krishen Chander, Ali Sardar Jafri and Rajinder Singh Bedi, amongst others. Uzra Bhatt was at the time the leading actress of Prithvi Theatre that ran to full houses at the Opera House, Bombay. Another leading actress of Prithvi Theatre was her older sister Zohra Sehgal, who is a film actress of international repute, and who also acted for IPTA occasionally. Later, the famed Urdu poet Kaifi Azmi's wife Shaukat and their gifted daughter Shabana, also worked for IPTA.

A very significant aspect of theatre in the subcontinent was the Parsi Theatre. Popular love stories such as *Shirin Farhad* and *Laila Majnoon* were performed regularly. A whole batch of young Muslim playwrights cropped up around Parsi Theatre companies and many others were also doing successful plays, which were often based on the two epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. But the most successful playwright of Parsi Theatre was Agha Hashar Kashmiri, who owned a theatre company called the Shakespeare Theatrical Company. He wrote *Rustom-o-Sohrab*, *Aankh Ka Nasha*, *Masbriqui Hoor* and romances such as *Yebudi Ki Larki*.

Soon after Partition, theatre continued in Pakistan with the efforts of stalwarts like Rafi Peer, Khwaja Moinuddin, Imtiaz Ali Taj and others. Back in the early sixties, in the biggest city of Pakistan, Katrak and Theosophical Halls were popular venues for theatre. At times, the Metropole and Beach Luxury Hotels also put up performances. Later, the Arts Councils, in Lahore and then in Karachi, became popular locations for a whole range of performances: from Russian circus to Chinese acrobats to local plays



Courtesy Images, Dawn



Image: Atif Badar

was Ali Ahmed, who formed *Natak* (National Academy of Theatre) performing for the middle class at venues such as the Adamjee Auditorium and also for the working classes in factories and public grounds. Khwaja Moinuddin wrote witty satires and biting humour around the themes of migration and disparity between the rich and the poor. Later, Zia Mohyeddin, Aslam Azhar, Mansoor Saeed and Shoaib Hashmi came into prominence and continued to work in the late seventies.

This article will be incomplete without the mention of the man across the border that completed the IPTA cycle - Safdar Hashmi. Uncle of Sania Saeed - one of the most talented theatre and television actors of Pakistan, Hashmi's career was nipped in the bud at the age of 34. He was brutally murdered in 1989, in broad daylight during the performance of one of his plays, *Halla Bol*, on the outskirts of

for a national daily. He made street theatre an important tool of mass communication and expression of political ideology. A day after his funeral, his wife went to Sahibabad with the troupe and completed the play. The Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust is now carrying on his legacy.

Hashmi was involved in building ties with progressive groups in Pakistan. In 1987 and 1988, he and Badal Sircar, a prominent playwright and director from India (whose group is called *Satabdi*), held a series of workshops for Pakistani political theatre groups in Karachi and Lahore.

Safdar Hashmi wrote the popular *Tebrik-e-Niswan* (Women's Movement) play, *Aurat* (Woman) whereas Badal Sircar's *Juloos*



Courtesy Images, Dawn

Delhi. People had poured in to see the thought provoking play, which was about factory workers in Sahibabad who were on strike to protest against their employers and the government. In the crowd were henchmen of the ruling elite, who were targeted in the play.

Hashmi had carried on the Peoples Theatre work for *Jan Natya Manch* (JANAM), an organization he had founded. He was an activist, playwright, actor, poet, singer, teacher, member of the Communist Party of India-Marxist, and a columnist

(Procession) was *Ajoka Theatre's* first performance.

Tebrik-e-Niswan's Sheema Kermani, a dancer and activist, has been performing and teaching *Bharatanatyam* and *Odissi* dances in Karachi since the early 1980s. She has extended the classical dance genre into theatre productions under the banner of the *Tebrik*, which was established in 1980. Its performances, including street theatre, are filled with music and dance.

Despite facing a number of hurdles from the martial law regime of the eighties, Sheema continued as an actor, dancer and teacher. Referring to classical dances and theatre, she says, "Unless these arts are institutionalized, they cannot continue. They will perish with the few individuals who practice them. Personally, as far as I am concerned, I will continue performing and teaching, no matter what the odds."

Sheema further explains that the British colonizers had promulgated the No Objection Certificate (NOC) laws according to an Act in 1857 - the landmark year for the struggle for independence - to suppress the people of the Indian subcontinent. Unfortunately, the same laws are being followed to date.

"We perform in a park or a *mairaan* (an open ground), or in a school, but not on the streets as such," says Sheema. In the Orangi squatter settlement in Karachi - the largest in Pakistan, with approximately one million inhabitants, the *Tebrik* group has performed in various locations. Sheema declares, "I always have this fear that in a volatile society such as ours, anything that we perform could trigger off an aggressive response from the audience."

She cites a couple of instances when she and her group had felt threatened, "In the early years of our performances; in 1984, to be precise, the Girls Action Forum was formed at

Again, despite the ubiquitous presence of those men, the actors continued with the play and ended it as per program. The men sat through it and then left peacefully. So perhaps the fears are unfounded and people are more receptive and tolerant (at least regarding some issues) than they are made out to be?

The *Tebrik's* play, *Ab Jang Nabi Ho Gi* (There will be no war now), based on Aristophane's Greek classic, *Lysistrata*, written in 411 BC, is adapted and translated by well-known poet and writer Fehmida Riaz and is directed by Sheema. The play has been criticized for its bold theme. Sexual innuendos and sensuality are not easy subjects to be digested by the Pakistani society, often adopting double standards when it comes to issues of morality.

Tebrik-e-Niswan has staged *Meri Zindagi Ka Safar* (My Life's Journey) in a ward at Qatar General Hospital in Karachi. Doctors, midwives, staff nurses and patients sat in the corridors watching the play with its strong feminist message. Based on a true story by feminist poet Attiya Dawood, the play is "extremely effective, as it touches people emotionally. With such active provocation of thinking and debate, transformation of some inane ideas is bound to take place," says Sheema about this play in particular, and the other *Tebrik* plays in general. So far, the *Tebrik* has a repertoire of ten

Hundreds of defiant-looking men were sitting on all three sides of the 'stage'.

We were to perform *Aurat*

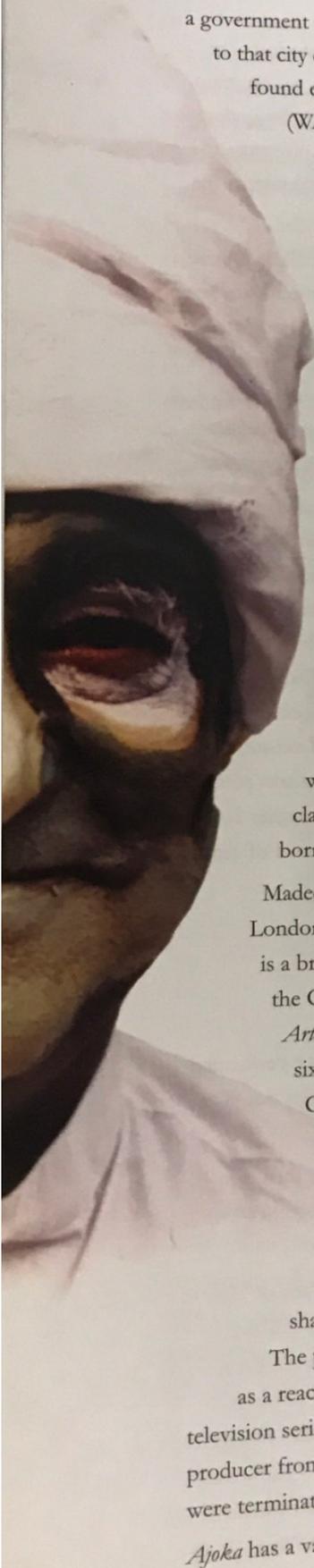
the Karachi University. I was directing a play in which Samina Peerzada was acting. We received numerous warnings from young men belonging to a certain political party. These warnings were sent to us on bits of paper. We were scared, but we continued...and nothing happened!"

"Similarly, in 1999," Sheema continues, "we were putting up a performance in a school in Orangi. It was a predominantly Pathan area where dead bodies of men were coming in from the borders. The entire atmosphere was charged. Hundreds of defiant-looking men were sitting on all three sides of the 'stage'. We were to perform *Aurat*. The play urges, and in turn energizes and motivates women to take control of their lives. We feared an assault from the orthodox Pathan community..."

mobile theatre productions. These plays have been performed in other cities and small towns, as well as in a few South Asian countries.

If *Tebrik's* stronghold is Karachi, *Ajoka Theatre* thrives in Lahore and its surrounds. Madeeha Gauhar, together with some other colleagues, founded *Ajoka* in 1983.

Its first play, *Juloos*, could not be performed at any of the public halls or auditoriums available in Lahore, as a 'no objection certificate' was required from the government, which scrutinized every script thoroughly. The play was therefore enacted on the lawns of Madeeha's parents' house. The agencies caught up with it and harassed the performers as well as the audience, but this came about after the show had been on for a few evenings. Madeeha started to teach at



a government women's college in Gujranwala, commuting to that city on a daily basis. Soon afterwards, her activism found expression with the Women's Action Forum (WAF). Those were the days, during General Zia ul Haq's military rule, when MRD - the Movement for Restoration of Democracy - had been launched and was gaining momentum.

"More than twenty thousand people had been arrested. No channels or outlets for expression of outrage against the 'amended' laws or the dictatorial rule of the General were available. WAF had been organizing protests and rallies in the streets against the law of evidence. I, along with my sister Faryal Gauhar, human rights activists and lawyers - sisters Asma Jahangir and Hina Jilani, and Rubina Saigol, were all baton-charged for participating in those rallies," Madeeha recalls. She was arrested and twice jailed at Kot Lakhpat, where although the barracks were quite spacious, she says a mental claustrophobia enveloped her. *Ajoka Theatre* was born in this environment.

Madeeha earned her second Master's in Drama from London University. Her husband, Shahid Nadeem, is a brilliant playwright. His Punjabi adaptation of the German writer Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* has become *Bala King*. Written almost sixty years ago, *Arturo Ui* was as relevant to Germany and Europe of the 1940s, as *Bala King* is to Pakistan today. It is a story of a small-time gangster's rise to become a self-acclaimed 'protector' of innocent citizens. In return for his 'protection', they had to either pay heavy monthly premiums, or suffer heavily in the shape of violence carried out by his muscle men.

The play was first performed in March 1998, and as a reaction to this bold play, as well as to his earlier television serial, *Zard Dopeber*, Shahid Nadeem's services as producer from the state-owned television channel, the PTV, were terminated.

Ajoka has a vast repertoire of stage performances, and its

street plays include *Gardan Ki Talaash*, *Sharm Di Gul* and *Dbee Rani*. It has had long-standing relations with theatre groups in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the Philippines, while additionally; it has participated in theatre festivals and conferences in Thailand, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Australia and the UK.

Ajoka recently toured India to stage its famous play *Bullab*. It tells the life story of Baba Bulleh Shah, the Punjabi Sufi poet revered equally by the Indians and Pakistanis for his message of love, peace and justice. *Ajoka* is Pakistan's first theatre group to perform in the Indian Punjab. According to Madeeha, allowing the theatre company to cross the border on foot was a positive sign from both the countries.

Shahid Nadeem's Punjabi play *Lapar* has been included in the post-graduate Punjabi course at the Patiala University in India, and his two books of plays *Kahsman nu Kahanian* and *Teesri Dastak* were translated in Gurmukhi language.

Under the ACT banner (Ajoka Children's Theatre), *Ajoka* has performed *Bund Gali Kay Bacchay*, *Kaali Ghata* and *Bhola*. Children who are admitted as cancer patients at the Shaukat Khanum Cancer Hospital in Lahore, performed the latter play inside the hospital itself. Written by Shahid Nadeem, *Bhola* is a funny, spirited play that helps the children to combat their unfortunate illness with a smiling face.

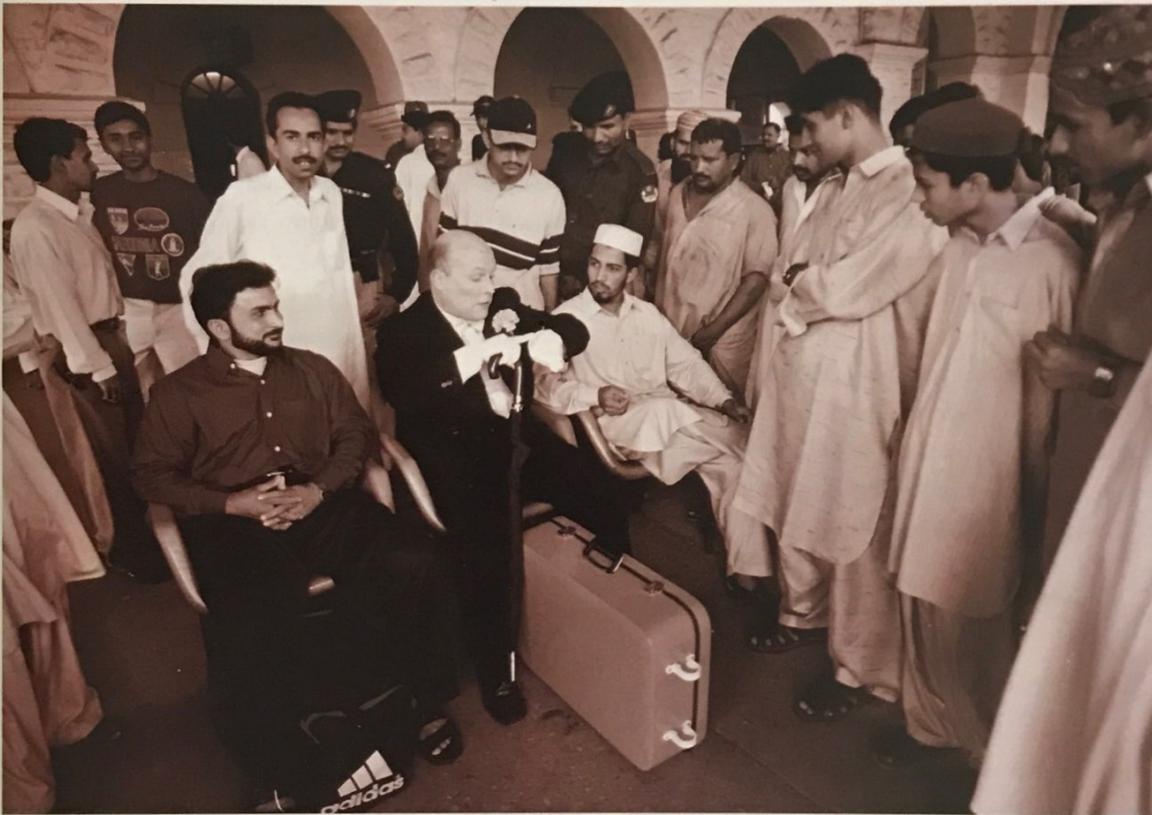
Madeeha Gauhar has been awarded the *Tamgha-i-Imtiaz* by President Musharraf's government.

Samiya Mumtaz, one of *Ajoka's* star performers, says she has been totally enamored by the way dance and music are entwined with play-acting, as well as the issues of social justice assiduously projected in their plays. "Theatre is a great addiction. When I began working with *Ajoka*, I also learnt to speak Punjabi and Seraiki. Although I have always lived in Lahore, these languages did not come naturally to me. Now I do entire plays in Punjabi and Seraiki. It is just wonderful how some great relationships that cut across class have been formed within the *Ajoka* community," she says. While the *Tebrik-e-Niswan* activities are urban-based, *Action Aid* works mainly in the rural areas. With its slogan "Cultural Action for Change" it professes to look at the causes of poverty, focusing on attitudinal change, social mobilization and reflection on issues.

Actor and director Khalid Ahmad, who was an active associate of the *Tebrik* right from its inception, has now been carried

out theatre activities through Action Aid Pakistan, which is one of UK's largest development charities, working in Pakistan since 1992. Using Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal's interactive theatre as a medium for the process of social change, the Action Aid team trains a group of villagers during which they decide to take on certain issues in a participatory manner. Local partner organizations prepare the groundwork and a cluster of villages is targeted, in order to engage in issues of honor killings, violence against women, early

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Photography: Fahim Siddiqi, courtesy Images, Dawn

marriages and barriers to women's public participation.

It may be recalled that Boal developed the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) during the 1950s and 1960s in an effort to transform theatre from the "monologue" of traditional performance into a "dialogue" between the audience and the stage.

"This has been a successful cultural intervention with encouraging results. The strength of this theatre to me is that it is definitely of the people, for the people, and by

the people," says Khalid. "However, there has been a problem to either engage in theatre activities or to increase their frequency in some rural areas," he adds.

For a brief period, Musaddiq Sanwal, a man of many talents, also worked actively with Khalid Ahmad. Besides being a theatre director, Sanwal is an artist of the fine arts/ graphic design genre, as well as a singer. Sanwal, Mohammed Hanif, Rashid Farooqi and Ali Hasnain founded the *Baang Theatre Workshop* in 1990. Unfortunately, the group has now dispersed, but Sanwal's contribution to theatre, using the improvisation technique must be acknowledged, which he learnt from his experience with South-East Asian Cultural Caravan (SEACC). Sanwal was chosen to represent Pakistan for his combined skills as a music/singing/theatre/fine-arts artist. The group worked together for three months, and prepared a play, in no less than seventeen different languages.

Sanwal returned to Lahore after his yearlong stint, and was soon directing his first play called *Raat*. "I applied an interesting technique of improvisations in order to evolve a script. I had learnt this at the SEACC. The idea was to begin with only the outline of a story. Since we spoke different languages, it helped us to speak from the heart, rather than to memorize predetermined lines. I could claim that it was the first time such an experiment was carried out in Pakistan. Eventually, several theatre groups here adopted the improvisation technique." Sanwal then continued with his theatre activities

effort on the part of the state and society," reported Razeshta Sethna a few years ago in an interview with Khalid Ahmad. Popular television actor, Rahat Kazmi started his *Theatrewalas* that struggled for some years before dying out, using venues such as the Taj Mahal Hotel auditorium and the Hashoo auditorium. In Karachi, Sania Saeed and her husband Shahid Shafaat have been involved with theatre and street theatre through *Dastak*, whereas in Lahore, *Lok Rehas* and *Sanjib* also took to the stage with performances that attempted to awaken the masses with their liberal approach towards freedom and humanism.

If Ali Ahmed is to be credited for the first children's theatre in Lahore way back in the early 50s, perhaps the Gripps Theatre could be acknowledged as the first children's theatre in Karachi, which, since the 80s, put up plays regularly for almost two decades. This sustained activity, therefore, placed the Gripps Theatre in the unique position of being the only children's theatre in the country. The Goethe Institut presented these witty, entertaining plays, written by Imran Aslam and directed by the talented Yasmeen Ismail, whose untimely death put an end to the children's theatre...albeit temporarily.

In order to promote a more just and humane society in the country through socially meaningful theatre, a few theatre activists have taken it to the masses and to smaller towns and villages. Theirs has been a story of resilience and personal

If not...let there be more power to street power!

in Karachi, including working with *Tebrik-e-Niswan* and Action Aid.

Theatre activities in Pakistan have depended largely on certain personalities, as there has been no proper institutionalization of this art form. Besides, the hot and cold air breathed towards it by the ruling government of the time has not helped matters either.

"It may bring an onslaught if it is a repressive regime or it will liberalize and show a degree of commitment towards the promotion of such activities. Third World countries such as Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka have managed to retain their theatre traditions in the past fifty years, whereas the same has not happened in Pakistan. What unfolded here is another story steeped in dismay and the lack of concerted

sacrifices. But despite these few efforts, for a population of 140 million people, the theatre scene on the whole has remained dismal. In a big city like Karachi, one cannot find even one theatre activity on a daily basis. What are the reasons for this, one might ask.

According to Asma Mundrawala, a part time actor working with *Tebrik-e-Niswan*, the theatre scene lacks serious commitment, as there are only a few individuals who are involved with theatre on a full-time basis. For most others it is not a bread and butter issue. If theatre is to be put on the map in Pakistan - just as other vocations are learnt and practiced - if the art and craft of theatre too is learnt at college by investing four to six years, at the end of which actors, directors are produced; the outcome would be

conceivably different.

On this account a recent development in Karachi is encouraging, as at last an institution for the performing arts is in the making. With Zia Mohyeddin at its helm - as Chairman of the National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA) - it promises to be all set to improve the current situation. Mohyeddin agrees that a venture such as NAPA can only happen when there is a body of professionals who are dedicated and committed to make it happen. "We want to remove this sense of guilt that the performers here have. They should look the other person in the eye and be able to say, "Yes, I am a singer/I am an actor/I am a dancer. You cannot perform unless you have professional training coupled with professional pride."

A quarter of a century ago, Madeeha Gauhar obtained a Master's degree in Drama from the London University, and presently, Asma Mundrawala is perhaps the only woman in Pakistan who has acquired an MA in Contemporary Art and Performance Theory with a dissertation on Developmental Theatre, from the Wimbledon School of Art, UK.

Asma talks with conviction about the role played by her theatre company in fulfilling the agendas of the various community-based organizations (CBOs) in semi-urban areas with which it liaises. "Creating a play around an issue for a particular community, and later discussing that issue with the audience is, in my opinion, a gratifying interaction with the common people. Their responses are real and in tune with their real experiences," she says.

But all said and done, there has been criticism of some of the well-known theatre practitioners of the country on two accounts. While some people believe that a certain formula has crept into the performances (particularly those meant for the masses) and that the conceptual as well as visual aesthetics is far from innovative or exciting, some others disapprove of these personalities getting involved in practices done solely for materialistic gains. On the one hand, the artists defy the establishment in their texts and on stage, while on the other, in their real life, they submit themselves to the corporate, worldly and opportunistic mode of life in every form.

In 1948, Bertolt Brecht criticized the mode of drama which sought to transform human beings into "a cowed, credulous,

hypnotized mass" who become not only incapable of social thought and action, but who also believed that life takes place on the proscenium stage and that their own existence is unimportant. Brecht said, "How much longer are our souls, leaving our 'mere' bodies under cover of the darkness, to plunge into those dreamlike figures up on the stage, there to take part in the crescendos and climaxes which 'normal' life denies us?"

One might ask if in Pakistan enough lessons of peaceful coexistence and solidarity, the value of dissent in a democratic system, appreciation and tolerance of diverse faiths - as the foundations of a civil society - been learnt through various mediums of art, be it theatre, street theatre, mobile theatre, interactive theatre...

If not...let there be more power to street power!

Notes

This article is based on interviews, over the years, with the following:

Sbeema Kermani

Madeeha Gaubar

Khalid Ahmad

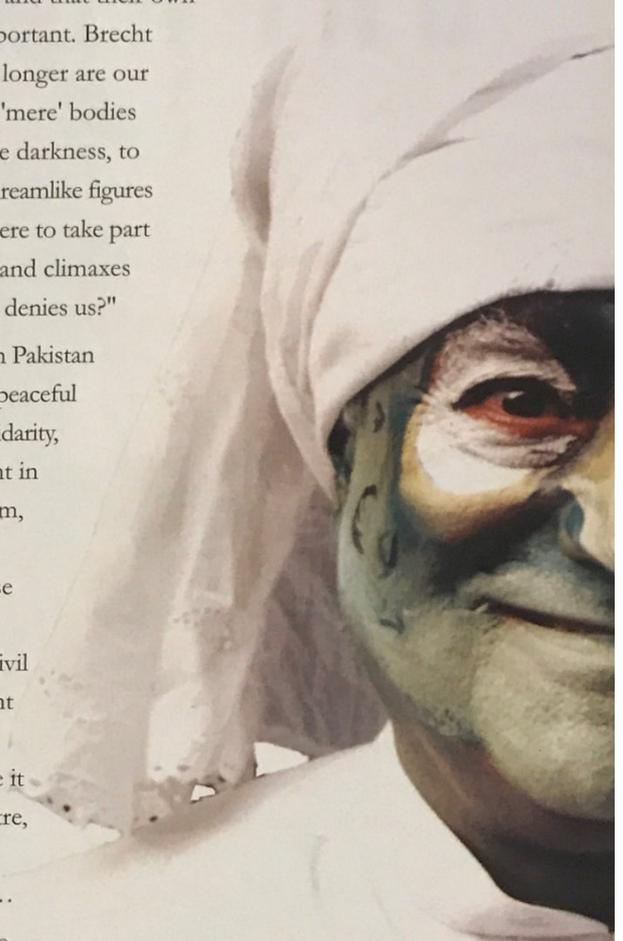
Sania Saeed

Zia Mohyeddin

Musaddiq Sanwal

Samiya Mumtaz

Asma Mundrawala



Courtesy Images, Dawn