CHAPTER 8

Imposed, Interrupted and Other Identities: Rupture as Opportunity in the Art History of Pakistan

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This chapter attempts to contextualize two significant moments of discontinuity in the art history of Pakistan which can also be read as moments of opportunity. The first rupture, centered on modernism, created a tension between artists and a society that could not access its seemingly alien esthetic. Modernism however became an important discursive space where new ideas could be tested against existing epistemologies, and this phenomenon, which was common to all postcolonial nations, can be seen as an important period of both departure and embracing the new. The relationship between modernism and socialism and the impact of Cold War politics on the early art scene discussed here for the first time gives art history of Pakistan a new lens to examine the complicated influence of overlapping ideologies. The second rupture was heralded by forces of religious extremism.

These two moments of rupture shifted the axis of entrenched values in art and opened up opportunities of critical reflection through new frameworks. They became sites of negotiation around issues of identity, and

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altered the way art and society engaged in a dialogue of change in political and cultural crises. The debates provoked by art also created an awareness mechanism through a complicated and often repressive postcolonial landscape. The outcome of these ruptures that stand almost half a century apart has created a realization to de-link art from imperialistic ambitions and build a South-South cultural unity of equal partners.

The first separation between art and people took place in the early decades after the independence of Pakistan when the influence of the School of Paris heralded modernism. The new idiom was perceived as a metaphor for freedom and a connection to the world by a group of artists though it found little traction in a society that lacked references to access it intellectually or esthetically. To understand modernism both as a social and political phenomenon, it's crucial to revisit the role of colonial art education in steering artists toward modernism despite a fierce will to be independent. It led to the perception of modernism as a liberating force as opposed to moribund traditionalism which made it attractive to a generation of artists who yearned to connect with the world as free progressive citizens. This chapter also maps the journey of modernism from the early experiments under the strong influence of the School of Paris to an independent phase when the modernists began to confidently assimilate local influences. It must be mentioned here that postcolonial debates point to a problematic legacy of modernism. While it proved to be a crucial discourse to link decolonized nations with similar aspirations and gave artists the idiom to break from tradition, it was also an effective tool used by Eurocentric institutions to exclude subaltern cultures.

The second challenge of the internal divide came from religious extremism in Pakistan after the Soviet-Afghan War was fought by the West with *Mujahedeen*, a global army drawn from orthodox militants trained to defend Islam from Communism. Instead of disbanding after the end of Soviet-Afghan War, this army collaborated with extremists within Pakistan to turn it into its ideological battlefield with violence and intimidation as its preferred modes of operation. A rupture within the collective identity took place when Islam and terrorism became deeply intertwined and the Pakistani nation found itself caught between two polarized positions, the moderate voices that espouse a personal and reformist Islam as opposed to the exclusivist and violent version created by extremists. This catastrophic shift brought upon by the polarization and violence mobilized artists. They joined progressive forces of resistance in a nebulous yet persistent movement that instrumentalizes art to unpack the fundamental narrative

in Pakistan and the media rhetoric that has misrepresented Islam to a global audience. It also forced art into a new relationship with religion that transcends the sanctioned framework of reverence to one of criticality and activism.

Modernism: Disconnect, Discontent and Disillusionment

Pakistan began its history with a focus on one collective identity for the nation, a religious one. This constructed identity soon proved to be more rhetorical than practical in a situation in which a culturally heterogeneous citizenry had yet to learn how to be a nation. Politically fragile after the demise of its founder, the country faced challenges as its democratic freedom came under attack. Repeated authoritarian regimes strangled progressive institutions and set up autocratic ones to serve them. When an organic national identity emerged out of this struggle, it reflected the tensions along class, ideological and economic lines. Art in Pakistan has been shaped by imposed and imagined identities spawned by conflicts and contradictions. In the early decades, the artists keen to make sense of their time could either choose the established path of the New Bengal School or experiment with modernism espoused by the Progressive Artists Group in Mumbai. Shakir Ali, Ali Imam, Sheikh Safdar, Moyene Najmi, Ahmed Perwaz and Anwer Jalal Shemza chose modernism and founded the Lahore Art Circle in 1952 modeled on the Progressive Artists Group. The monumental challenge facing them was to assimilate the new idiom into a personal expression, and develop an audience for their art. Both were equally difficult, as none of the modernists at this stage had formally studied modernism, and as a result, they pooled their knowledge and tried to address esthetic concerns at meetings held regularly at coffee houses. It's not surprising that the reception to modern art was lukewarm and sometimes openly hostile because the context in which they set up their art practice was under the overwhelming influence of Abdur Rehman Chughtai, whose lyrical depictions of Islamic legacy reflected the popular notion of art. Historian Jalaluddin Ahmed in an interview with the author recalled the awe-inspiring spectacle when thousands turned out in Dhaka to welcome Chughtai shortly after 1947. They had come to greet their hero who had created a space for Muslim culture and history in the New Bengal School tradition.

> The form on the canvas that I thought was a pineapple
> I was told was a woman in the work of Modern Art
> When I asked what was the right side up of the painting
> I was told it could be viewed from any side, the work of Modern Art—
> S.M. Jafri circa 1960s

These humorous verses from a popular Urdu poem by Jafri, recalled from memory, reflect the dilemma of the audiences; the poem was in demand at *mushairas* (public recital of poetry) and on radio. It sparked general debate on modernism in the public sphere, which was seen as uncomfortable departure from the esthetic continuum. These harsh critiques of modern art were not uncommon, and first surfaced in 1949 when Zubeida Agha held Pakistan's first modern art solo exhibition in Karachi and Attiya Faizi, the leading critic of the time, responded with a scathing review. Though sources of these debates are difficult to locate, it suffices to make a mention here in order to instigate an idea.

The entry of modernism into South Asia can be traced to influential pioneers who are recognized for their individualistic contributions. F.N. Souza, who was one of these influential pioneers, saw modern art as part of his activism against colonialism and did not see adopting Western art as a betrayal of his strong support of the Freedom Movement. Souza, a founder of the Progressive Artists group, in an interview recalled the 1940s as a period of his participation in the anti-colonial protests and was quite impatient with the lyrical style of painting supported by the New Bengal School, which he found was unable to express the turmoil around him.[1] The New Bengal School that began as a reformist art movement in 1850 to reclaim the traditions of Indian painting from the overwhelming Western influence had become somewhat parallel establishment with its patterns of conformity (Guha 1992). Souza was not the first to experience New Bengal School's constraints as Gaganendranath Tagore had already begun to explore cubism and fauvism. Jamini Roy, who is also referred to as an early Indian modernist, looked to the folk tradition of '*patachitra*' (traditional scroll painting from Bengal) for his innovative paintings. Calcutta hosted an exhibition of Bauhaus artists as early as 1922, which must have also given local artists an introduction to radical departures in European art. Souza who grew up in Goa experienced modern art via

[1] F.N. Souza's interview with Niilofur Farrukh for *Newsline*, circa 1990s.

printed reproductions of Picasso two decades later and was excited by its possibilities. At this time, Souza who had been suspended from J.J. School of Art for his political activism found in cubism, the idiom of defiance he had been searching, and explored it through his countless figurative works.

Modern art, particularly cubism, which was an entry point for most pioneers, had grown out of a similar social and political upheaval to respond to a Europe rethinking its history and cultural norms. The artists in Europe had extended their gaze to non-European contexts of Africa, Japan and Arab cultural terrains to assimilate new ideas that led them to challenge rigid frameworks. They too had faced the hostility of the Art Saloon. As such, the pioneer modernists in South Asia could relate to the impulse to question and search beyond their immediate context for inspiration.

Modernism and Socialism: Strange Bedfellows in Art

As Pakistan gained independence in 1947, the dominant ideologies in the country were socialism and modernism. The artists of the Lahore Art Circle were committed to both, and debated them in local coffee and tea houses, often with members of the group, Progressive Writers. These ideological allies were in search of a social and cultural vision for an egalitarian Pakistan. The writers and poets were engaged in social realism to foreground issues of class and economic inequality. The artists' challenge was more complex as their modern art practice along the lines of the 'Art for Art Sake' dogma had created a gap between them and the people. They somehow managed to compartmentalize the difference between their experimental practice and socialist beliefs, and remained equally committed to both. The Progressive Writers were very supportive of the efforts of the artists, and the leading revolutionary poet of the time, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, and others attended their exhibitions regularly and wrote favorable reviews.

The First Manifesto of all Pakistan Progressive Writers in 1949 stated, "we wish to remove the contradictions that exist between our social system and the needs of the ordinary people because these contradictions are responsible for the fact that our society and along with it our arts and crafts have stopped developing in a progressive direction....this is only possible if we break down the existing capitalist and feudal system and establish a people's democratic system based on a socialist economy" (Aslam 2017: 455). A crisis of leadership in the country and a lack of clear

guidelines exacerbated the political struggle between the progressives and the oligarchy. The oligarchy, consisting mainly of the feudal class, aligned itself with the religious right and left Pakistan vulnerable to Cold War politics. Eventually, this group entrenched its power with the help of Western powers, and initiated its own brand of McCathyrism in Pakistan. The Communist Party of Pakistan with its network in all provinces was banned in the early 1950s, and its leaders, workers and sympathizers faced torture and incarceration. Censorship and divisive policies left little space for artists and writers with a people's agenda. Some courageous groups like the Art Circle staged plays penned and acted by workers to stay connected to the ordinary people. But conditions worsened with the ban of literary magazines, theater productions and even companies were instructed not to hire 'communists'. Parallel cultural bodies to expand the rightist agenda were established by the State, and culture became a site of ideological conflict. This problematic relationship continued and successive governments censored, manipulated and exploited visual art, literature, theater, dance and films to suit their political agenda.

Ali Imam, an emerging modernist, was arrested thrice for his political activism, and went into self-exile in the UK, and many of his peers were forced to do the same. When he returned home after 11 years in the mid-1960s, Pakistan was largely 'purged' of Communism, and he was left with little choice but to immerse himself in art. The growing influence of a proactive American Cultural Centre was pushing abstract expressionism with touring exhibitions and a wide circulation of glossy cultural magazines. Alliance Francaise, Goethe Institut and British Council played a very visible role in exposing the local audiences to modern art. Friendship House, the Russian Cultural Centre was all but forgotten in this scheme of things. Only when the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize in the 1960s that it was briefly in the limelight. Even so, very few visited and the rumor that the place was under state surveillance did not help.

Ideas of modernism in general had spread its tentacles in society, and most Pakistanis believed that they were on the global path to development by the 1960s. In the local print media of the time, there were frequent references to a 'modern Pakistan' with infrastructure development, global links, widespread education and a socially emancipated society, while there was a big question mark regarding human rights as one military dictator followed another.

Experiencing Alternative Modernity: Localizing the Idiom

By the mid-1960s, many Pakistani modernists, who in the early stages had confined themselves to narrow formalist experiments, gradually began to assimilate local influences in their oeuvre. This led to Pakistan experiencing an 'alternative modernity' as artists explored the personal and political with pre-Islamic themes, the esthetics of miniature painting, Islamic patterns and calligraphy.

The engagement with calligraphy was the most robust as the modernist had at his/her disposal centuries of techniques and epigraphic forms. Shakir Ali,[2] a leading figure of the Lahore Art Circle, was steeped in the literary tradition, and a frequent contributor of essays on art to Urdu journals. For his first foray into this genre, Shakir Ali chose to interpret Quranic texts in a mural. That is, in a sense, he managed to bring aspects of 'religion' into the midst of modern practices of art.

With textures, marks and floral forms that were intrinsic to his iconography, he chose to be deliberately asymmetrical and opted to work within a loose structure. Shakir Ali's calligraphies are respectful departures in which the painterly skills and a modern sensibility have successfully subverted the rigid protocols of tradition. Hanif Ramay,[3] skilled in traditional calligraphy, came with both a technical advantage and an ingrained respect for the proscribed. This was negotiated by keeping the integrity of the form while destabilizing the optical balance. To accomplish this, Ramay isolated parts of the form, and turned them into color blocks. His ability to manipulate the space within the form to alter the perception with color became more experimental with time and is his unique contribution. Ramay served as the editor of several Urdu journals often printed the works on the covers which had considerable outreach.

Ismail Gulgee[4] found his inspiration in action painting when he did a large collaborative work with Elaine Hamilton, a visiting action painter

[2] A popular and pictorial rendering of the work and life of Shakir Ali is available at: https://nation.com.pk/12-Jul-2017/shakir-ali-the-maestro

[3] For more information on Hanif Ramay, please visit the following Internet sources: (1) http://blog.chughtaimuseum.com/?p=1781; (2) https://www.revolvy.com/page/Hanif-Ramay

[4] For a brief biographic sketch of Ismail Gulgee, visit: http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/57/IsmailGulgee19262007

from America. This led him to use wide sweeping brush strokes simultaneously loaded with many colors for cursive styles. Soon this was to become his signature style. His large works were sometimes layered with references to classic calligraphic styles punctuated with spheres stamped with what appeared like official seals that emulated Mughal '*farmans*' or royal edicts.

Among all the modernists, Sadequain[5] was the only one to come from a family of professional calligraphers in Amroha, India. He, however, chose to stay away from it till he had established himself as a modern painter. His calligraphic corpus is the largest and most diverse among the modernists and has a lasting influence on popular calligraphy. In his 'Cactus Series' calligraphy entered his practice with a fluid interplay between vertical *Kufic* (Arabic script, also used for Urdu) alphabets, thorny arms of the cactus and human figures. Throughout the series, *Kufic* calligraphy is intertwined with the 'cactus' imagery. In the illustrations of his anthology of *rubaiyats* (short poems), Sadequain invents a free-flowing script that is whimsically guided by the rhythm of a verse.

When he moves from the paper to murals, the leap is both in scale and conceptual development. The two murals at Frere Hall in Karachi and at Lahore Museum are boldly experimental and mark a new threshold in the modern art tradition—synthesis. The *Surah-e-Rehman* Series is his magnum opus in modern calligraphy. Based on hundreds of iterations of the Quranic verse, Sadequain pushed boundaries of materiality and explored leather and slabs of roughly cut marble in fusing countless calligraphic styles to evoke the essence of the spiritual message.

The transition from self-referential experiments to a localized modernism saw artists cross boundaries with ease. At the same time, revisiting tradition with a new sensibility introduced a visual vibrancy that was received with enthusiasm. The 1970s saw the modernists come into their own after a long struggle. This was also the decade when the vision of a future of stability seemed to slip with the breakup of the country that led to the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. The democratically elected Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was hung by General Ziaul Haq, and Pakistan saw the country's longest and most repressive military dictatorship in its wake.

[5] For information on Sadequain and his contribution to calligraphic c modernism, please read Iftikar Dadi's essay, 'Sadequain and Calligraphic Modernism': http://islamic-arts.org/2011/sadequain-and-calligraphic-modernism/

Complicating the Narrative of Extremism

Pakistani poet, Afzal Ahmed Syed in his poem 'Hamain bohat saray phool chaheyen'[6] (we need so many flowers, 2000) writes,

> We need so many flowers
> Many, many flowers
> To lay by the feet of corpses
> We need so many flowers
> To swathe the faces of the cadavers in sacks
> We need so many flowers

Clearly, what he talks about is the extreme levels of political violence that had engulfed Pakistani society that impacted everything from government to public and social life as well as modes of political and cultural expression. As he continues with his poetic narrative, between the lines of this powerful poem, what Syed unveils is a nation living with anxiety and fear in an existence over-shadowed by bullets, bomb blasts and other kinds of killing much of which were undertaken in the name of religious or ethno-cultural identity. Just as much as these forms of violence found poetic expression, they also found similar expression visual culture. These conditions created new metaphors and the flower, long associated with beauty, love and peace acquired a new meaning. A rupture within the collective identity took place when Islam and terrorism became deeply intertwined, and the Pakistani nation found itself caught between two polarized positions, the moderate voices that espouse a personal and reformist Islam as opposed to the exclusivist and violent version created by extremists. Interventions by poets, writers, journalists and artists offer a narrative to re-contextualize religion within a contemporary framework. There was widespread concern among moderate Pakistanis that an alternative narrative was needed to articulate how ideology and geography had drawn Pakistan into a conflict that was being constructed as a religious one. This made it imperative to foreground the historical context that linked the Soviet-Afghan War, 9/11 and the War on Terror to understand the exploitation of religion by global politics. Their efforts took on wider urgency when the press faced threats and dissidents were silenced with death. Pakistan, which was founded on the fault lines of tension between

[6]While these are my translation of the poem (reproduced here in part), another version exists in the compilation of Urdu poems available at http://urdustudies.com/pdf/24/16AfzalPoems.pdf (accessed on 13 October 2018).

conservative religious groups and the moderate Muslim population of the Indian sub-continent, has for long experienced the impact of local politics on religion. The independence of the new country was opposed by leading seminaries for they distrusted Mohamed Ali Jinnah, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan, who as a secularist lawyer was not in favor of a theocratic Pakistan. More importantly, they feared being relegated to the political fringe. Their fears were realized when the biggest political party, *Jamat-e-Islami*, was rejected at the ballot box several times. The popular verdict of the Pakistani voter was discarded in 1980s when the frustrated zealots of *Jamat-e-Islami* were entrusted by Western powers to recruit the Mujahideen army, which was the ideological genesis of Al Qaida and the Taliban.

Throughout the 1980s, Pakistanis suffered under General Ziaul Haq's military dictatorship and his forced Islamization drive that introduced laws against human rights, freedom of expression and tampered with the National Constitution to strengthen control. Western powers supported the dictator and gave *Jamat-e-Islami* a carte blanche to transform *madrassahs*, the traditional religious schools affectively into nurseries for the *Mujahideen*. According to Tariq Ali, the well-known author and social commentator, "symbiotic and perfidious relationships between many Islamic groups were spawned and indulged by CIA and Imperialism .... for decades the United States had clandestinely helped jihadi groups squash pro-communist and nationalist Muslims inside the Muslim world. By the end of the 1970s, this covert practice was visible and US had become a covert supporter of international Jihad" (Fateh 2008: 272).

This historical chapter is aptly documented in the film, *Charlie Wilson's War*. A bi-product of this intervention, which is lesser known, is how the forced introduction of the orthodox interpretation of Islam through the national school curricula, a parallel religious judiciary and religion-based constitutional amendments undermined human rights. The religious politics of General Ziaul Haq were rejected and actively resisted by writers, artists, journalists and civil society activists in a movement that was brutally crushed. National College of the Arts, Lahore, became a site of resistance where the faculty and students protested against state laws particularly the Hudood Ordinance.[7] In Sindh, Nagori[8] was the first to critique the

[7] The ordinance was the controversial law, which was enacted in 1979 as a part of the forced Islamization during the period of General Ziaul Haq's military regime in Pakistan. There were critical reactions against forced Islamization.

[8] For more information on the work of Abdul Rahim Nagori, visit the website, *Welcome to My World*: http://welc0m2myworld.blogspot.com/2009/11/abdul-rahim-nagori-painter-known-for.html

Pakistani army for its violence against the people. In his powerful painting of a totem pole, the new power structure is decided by the dictator. Nagori's small paintings, the size of a child's primer, phonetically connect the alphabet to instruments of violence and allude to grassroots pedagogic change and erasure of history, introduced by the Ziaul Haq regime via textbooks and curricula. In the *madrassahs* (traditional schools), the lessons of violence started early and "even the textbooks for the Jihadi madrassah's came from United States. In these books, the Urdu alphabet consisted of *jeem* for jihad, *kaaf* for Kalashnikov, and *tay* for tope (cannon)" (Fateh 2008: 273).

Years later, Khadim Ali, who escaped the Soviet-Afghan War as a child and grew up in Quetta while living among the subsequent waves of refugees from his country, created in a neo-miniature style an idealized page of a primary reader. Here, the *Alif*, the first letter of the Urdu-language alphabet, which traditionally stood for *anar*, the Urdu/Persian word for the pomegranate, mutates into a grenade, which the children after the Afghan War had become more familiar with as their gardens of pomegranate were being destroyed by 'daisy cutters' and cluster bombs.

Beyond the Sanctioned Framework

In the socio-political context outlined above, contemporary art practice engages the controversies facing Islam with interventions that are personal, experiential and activist and treads into a territory previously closed by religious scholars that have discouraged critical ideas and debates in Islam, which would prevent it into petrifying into an orthodox tradition. These visual expressions of resistance transcended the historical frames of reference that previously connected art and Islam only through a precise and sanctioned format. These new works address both the personal questioning that tries to make sense of the multiple interpretations of religious injunctions and also challenges the extremist readings to extend social control. An attempt is also made by these critical artworks to deconstruct reductionist stereotypes constructed by the global media.

Post-9/11, the shootings and bomb blasts throughout Pakistan have claimed some 50,000 civilian lives carried out by non-state actors. Their virulent hate propaganda from the pulpit and on websites has attempted to justify the violence. Muslim youth indoctrinated with de-contextualized Quranic quotations on *Jihad* were conscripted to fight in Soviet-Afghan War, and later they regrouped to form the nucleus of the suicide squads

for the Taliban and the Al Qaida. "The death cult of the jihadis evolved into a form of a death cult where the highest level of Islamic worship is to die and leave this world to its satanic existence", explains Tarek Fateh (2008: 272).

Tariq Ali goes on to add that these terrorists have no social vision as "their goal is to seek paradise, not in life but in death" (Fateh 2008: 280). Artists who have been a witness to this bloodstained history of bomb blasts and terror attacks have begun to challenge the extremist rhetoric with esthetic strategies that addressed issues of gender, social freedom and secular knowledge, and have brought into discussion the human cost of the War on Terror.

Mahbub Jokhio's[9] installation of child-size graves at the first Karachi Biennale found people standing quietly around it. The bubblegum pink, yellow and blue small graves point to the 134 childhoods that were lost in a terrorist attack on Peshawar Army Public School in 2014. This work relives a tragedy that left a nation in mourning. Another work that draws attention to loss of empathy as the daily news of tragic deaths on the media becomes as routine as serving bread and invites the audience to introspect the brutalizing effects of violence is, Nausheen Saeed's[10] 'Baked Delicacies'. The piece with its life-size truncated body made from baked dough served in wooden bakers trays is a haunting reminder of dismembered limbs collected from blast victims. Similarly, designed to discomfort, Abdullah Syed's 'Flying Carpet' with drone-like forms crafted from menacing box-cutter blades invites visitors to walk under it, and brings alive the experience of villagers who live in constant threat of hovering un-manned predators. Syed's aim is to bring into discussion both the psychological and physical impact of drone attacks on a civilian population, which the world only knows through media images of a target and a rising plume, without any human references.

The *madrassahs*, run by charitable organizations, have long been a source of affordable education to impoverished millions in South Asia, which today have been demonized by the Western media, not unlike the

[9] For more information on Mahbub Jokhio's work, visit: (1) https://mahbubjokhio.weebly.com/about%2D%2Dbio.html and (2) https://www.gasworks.org.uk/residencies/mahbub-jokhio-2017-10-02/

[10] For more information on Nausheen Saeed, visit, http://vaslart.org/nausheen-saeed/

exoticization of the harem by Orientalists. Hamra Abbas[11] in her installation 'God Grows on Trees' demystifies the *madrassah* with 99 portraits of *madrassah* students with whom the artist spent time. Presently an alternative narrative, the pre-teen school children in their uniforms smile at the visitor through their individual portraits. Amin Rehman[12] who lives in Toronto focuses on global perceptions of the war on terrorism. He communicates the double speak of what has been called the 'rhetoric of aggression' in the media. The works deal with 'looking both ways', which is also the title of one of his works. A suicide bomber's claim that his act is a ticket to heaven is over-laid with the Quranic verse that states, 'the killing of a soul is equivalent to the killing of entire mankind', in one of Rehman's encaustic paintings. Rehman emphasizes how contradictory messages make truth a victim in the propaganda of war. Perhaps the most telling of his work is a sign stridently claiming in neon, 'God is on our side – Allah on your side'. This body of work unpacks cultural, religious and political dichotomies quoted by extremists and media to support their agenda, and calls attention to the power of language, its presentation and accessibility.

Many artists, by subverting the veil, the very garment used by the orthodox clergy to objectify and control women, transformed it into a potent symbol of autonomy and insubordination. Mediating the space between perception and reality and the way this is stereotyped is brought out in 'Woman in Black' by Hamra Abbas. Her larger-than-life black cast-veiled figure in an aggressive posture with a stick deconstructs the myth of the modest veiled woman. This work is inspired by the women students of the Lal Masjid seminary who took over a children's library by force.[13] When confronted by the state, hundreds appeared in black veils with sticks on the seminary roof. Later, many of them died when their seminary was attacked by the army in a bid to close it down.

Mariam Agha's installation, '72 Virgins for my Suicide Lover' deals with the link between sexuality and extremism. The installation based on 72 swatches of cloth bear stitched line drawings of the vagina. Embellished with beads and sequins, they evoke the garments in a bride's trousseau.

[11] More information on the biography and work of Hamra Abbas is available at: http://www.hamraabbas.info/category/news/

[12] For more information on Amin Rehman, visit: http://www.aminrehman.com/cv.php

[13] Women students of the Lal Masjid seminary occupied the children's library building in Islamabad in 2007 to protest against the official demolition of unauthorized mosques in the capital.

Agha, a young woman who works with textile embellishments, often destabilizes the familiar fashion vocabulary with instrumentalist content. This objectification of her body underscores the message in training videos that brainwash suicide bombers with the promise of financial support to their impoverished families and a place in heaven, where according to a myth, 72 virgins await the martyr.

Yet, another law under the extremist interpretation of the Sharia[14] framework against blasphemy has fueled violence and bigotry putting both Muslims and non-Muslims at risk. Salman Taseer, the Governor of Punjab Province, after he publically declared support for a poor peasant woman on death row convicted under the controversial Blasphemy Law, was gunned down by his own police guard, a self-confessed religious fanatic. Amean J created a temporary memorial site with metal plates etched with bullets to convey the violence of his death, which resulted from 29 bullet wounds. It was shaped like a coffin and reflected its shape in mirrors. The visitor's reflection in the mirror suggests a sense of everyday vulnerability when death threatened everyone who spoke out against the blasphemy law.

Imran Qureshi's site-specific work at the Sharjah Biennale, 'Blessings Upon the Land of My Love', covers the brick-paved courtyard with red pigment stains and splashes that seem to emerge from chrysanthemum-like flowers painted in the same blood red pigment. Standing over the painted surface, one is not sure if blood has drowned the flowers or flowers are emerging from the blood. Bizarrely evocative of a bomb blast site, it invites refection on the reality of public carnage sites. 'Blessings Upon the Land of My Love' was recreated years later on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and has now acquired an iconic status in Pakistani art that memorialize the victims of global terrorism.

The societal rupture caused by religious extremism has also created an opportunity for art to develop a new relationship with religion that transcends the sanctioned framework of reverence to one of criticality and activism. Previously, art was created in celebration of the religious message and called upon the believer to pay homage. This new discourse with the same fervor contests fundamentalism and militancy that has polarized Muslims, and put them in conflict with the world.

[14] Sharia is the code of Islamic law.

Conclusion

Art has persistently underscored the need to re-negotiate the narrow ideological identity of Pakistan by extending the conversations on multiple identities. This has expanded the space for a nuanced expression of the collective self and an inclusive discourse of a pluralistic society. This chapter tried to elucidate that over the last seven decades, new linkages have been forged between art and people, the early disconnect caused by modernism was subverted by localizing the idiom to make it more accessible to a larger spectrum of people. As a social discourse, it complicated the rhetoric of modernity as an optimistic and inclusive vision of freedom and development in Pakistan. Resistance to General Ziaul Haq's dictatorship and the rise of religious extremism created a common platform of dissidence for art. Contemporary artists that had been largely aloof from religious subjects because of the ambivalent relationship between visual art and Islam outside the proscribed space were left with no choice but to unpack distorted claims of the extremists and their sanctioned violence. This initiated a seminal interface between art and religion beyond reverence to one of criticality and activism. In this de-centered space where identities are constantly being re-negotiated, rupture and conflict can be plotted as turning points in Pakistan's art history where interventions by artists subverted the narratives from within.

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