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Mysticism as an indispensable Expression in Sadquain's Calligraphic Paintings

Abstract

The article shows Sadquain's mystic expression having a peaceful existence as a major component in the art of Pakistan, which is based on the mystic expression of Sadquain's calligraphic inscriptions with special reference to the inscriptional paintings. Mysticism, symbolism, aesthetic limitations of the subject, functional relationship, inclusive study of the design patterns of the abstract geometry all are the segments of the article. Several scholars commented on Sadquain's paintings. But nobody writes about his inscriptional calligraphic features in detail with the combination of mystic approach. This paper presents a correlation between abstract expression, colors and geometric patterns by analyzing the realization of emotional content, symbolic and stylistic representation of divine reality. The research process is comprised of a logical expansion to understand the particular subject through analytical study.

Key Words: Mysticism, Symbolism, Calligraphy, Inscriptional painting, Aesthetic, Qurānic Verses.

Introduction

Mysticism earns devotion towards religion or direct connection between God and his followers through meditation and thoughts, which can be developed by sitting and thinking about the holy truth. In art, mysticism is a creative process in which one can paint through his imagination with the permutation of symbolism. It is a modified state of consciousness, which gives a spiritual consequence and also denote to ultimate hidden insight truth. Syed Sadquain Ahmad Naqvi is one of the Pakistani artists who painted through imagination to find out divine reality through lines and colours.

Sadquain was born in June 1932 and died in 1987, throughout his life; he served as an abstract artist and a visionary thinker, created skilled and thematic paintings having accomplished artistic calligraphy. He portrayed his social and personal states and also practiced poetry of Iqbal, Ghalb and Faiz as subject matter of his paintings. His own quotes helped him to produce masterpieces in the form of murals, drawings and paintings. Calligraphy painting is one characteristic of his multifaceted art and diverse themes having symbolic and inscriptional quality. Usually, symbolic representation in calligraphic paintings with Qurānic verses provides strength and meaningful existence to his artwork. Islamic Calligraphy is a strong appearance of subjective expression in Sadquain's Art, which touches upon something spiritual or divine. His basic theme relates Quranic verses with Islamic religious connectivity and victories of historical battles, spread of Islam and presence of Allah and His blessings in every part of the world. Symbolic representation in his inscriptional calligraphic paintings has its own importance. Mysticism in art has direct relation to subjective attitude of the artist approaches spirituality. Hence his painterly compositions indicate mystic interaction.

Calligraphic Inscriptions

Calligraphic inscriptions in the form of painting are one of his thematic and sensitive approaches among distorted figures application. He was a painter of the expression of reality and asserted his conversion into a calligraphic artist revealed by divine stimulation. He developed his own style in calligraphy, which does not match with any traditional style of calligraphy following strict geometric rules. Alongside that, his letters proceed mood and motion generating intense images conveying momentous message to the word. According to Sadequain, his most of the paintings created after seventies were based on calligraphic forms by portraying imageries of forests, buildings, cities, men, and women. After 1970s he concentrated on calligraphic paintings with mystic approach and produced several inscriptions in straight and cursive lines, and painted several large calligraphic paintings for the Islamic Gallery of Lahore Museum and the wooden panel of Sura-e-Yaseen is one of them.

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From his masterpieces, calligraphic painting displayed in the sanctuary of Faisal Mosque Islamabad is an obvious example of his symbolic expression (figure 1). The calligraphic artwork based on inscriptions is dominant from the front elevation of the podium by five wide staircases; respectively every step is one foot three inches high. The structure is nineteen feet three inches high from the sanctuary floor level. The painting is set in a rectangular frame fixed with a wall twenty-one feet wide and eleven feet five inches high. The highest point of the wall is thirty feet eight inches high from the sanctuary's floor level. The painting is eight feet six inches high and eighteen feet six inches in length and its wooden bordered frame is four and a half inches in width. It is settled in two inches recessed white-cemented boundaries. The Inscriptional painting has not similarity with the previously painted artworks by him. Tenth verse from *Sūra al-Hujrāt* "The believers are but a single brotherhood", is center of interest of the painting. It is nine feet two inches long and two feet ten inches high. Alongside it one finds, *Allah-u-Akbar*, *Bismillah al-Rahmāni al-Rahīm*, and *Kalīmā-yī Tawhīd* as a part of the balanced and well composed composition (figure 2). Direct use of acrylic paints on the marble surface enhances the quality of artwork and richness of the colors. Triangular flags in yellow, black, dull pink, and cerulean blue are creating dramatic effect for the background of the composition. Black double lined rectilinear border design surrounded the calligraphic inscriptions and providing frame to the painting. In the presentation of unity and brotherhood Sadquain is more subjective. Sometimes one thinks that he is interpreting definite scenes. The painting is mystic in colors. The word *Allah-u-Akbar* shows unity among Muslim countries. It increases the awareness of peace and unity among the people of the world and expressing the feelings.



Figure 1. Over all structural design of the *Mu'adhhdhin* pew placed in the prayer hall of the Faisal Mosque (Photograph by Author)



Figure 2. Painting by the Pakistani artist Sadequain display in the sanctuary of Faisal Mosque Islamabad. (Photograph by Author)

Painting is like a silent rhyme and emblems, which leads a viewer into the imaginative world of rhythmic harmony. The inscriptional painting by Sadquain shows mystic approach through elements of arts. In this painting, the composition presents the role of cultural and religious factors in peacemaking. This painting is the main magnetism of the upper part of the *muadhhdhin* pew placed in the prayer hall of the Faisal Mosque.

In the Islamic realm, presentation of figurative art for mosques architectural decoration is prohibited. Only floral motives, calligraphic inscriptions, ornamentation of Qurānic verses, *ahādith*, and abstract geometrical designs are pondered appropriate. Hence in this painting different colors and flags are representing different races and unity among them under one umbrella of Islam. Here the flags are the ideology of jihad and symbols of accomplishment in Islam. It shows the appearance of an immense procession of flags approaching from a distance. The existence of such content (flags) in the composition is a cause of great inspiration for mystic cosmology and also for the inscriptional arts. He pervaded the painting with layers of spiritual reality more than exotic meaning.



Figure 3. *Allah-u-Akbar*, flags and inscription - similar to the painting placed in Faisal Mosque

Source: http://sadequainfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/image_1.jpg

In Sadequain's painting, white with cerulean blue represents vastness and depth of Islam. Chrome and olive green is a symbolic representation of growth of the religion in invaded cities and burnt umber color is for land. The colors of the painting are harmonized and balanced with surrounded composition, and the shade of blue color is correlated with the carpeting of the prayer hall. From this painting the selected verse of Qur'ān is conveying a message of unity through representation of poly chrome colors and different shapes. Though, critical analysis of the formation of the inscriptions of the verse presents that they have slight similarity to the traditional calligraphic style. The consonants are interrelated and curvilinear alike cursive script. Calligraphy and writing or inscription have obvious variations between them. As Martin Lings has written, Arabic calligraphy is mathematically statistically balanced with the size of each letter is designed in proportion to the length of the letter "alif".¹ But the proportion and formulation of this artwork is not following any classical style of Islamic calligraphy: specially the 'hā' is extra-large and the form of "alif" and "tā" are not related or have similarity with classical Islamic calligraphic script. Although the end line of "wāw" look like the open ending and broad effect of the "wāw" of *Mūhaqqaq* calligraphy, the style is not a constant implementation of any classical style of calligraphy. Annemarie Schimmel mentioned that, Sadequain's style to compose the Qurānic verses is pictorial, and the letters do not observe any traditional style of calligraphy.² His unique hybrid technique of mingling Nastaliq and Naskh calligraphy with symbolism and abstraction provided an innovative existence to Islamic Calligraphy. The scripts flourished and grow luxuriantly in all directions, offering it the power of volume, strength, and space.

¹ Martin Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and illumination* (England: Robert Maclehose, 1976), 53.

² Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 33.

His style released innovative scopes in contemporary Qurānic calligraphic style. Which is likely a kind of inscription instead of calligraphy because calligraphy follows accurate proportion but the Sadquain's inscriptions do not follow accuracy. The disciplines of inscription have a spiritual association and the script has divine power. Sadequain combined his ideas, observations, and concepts using numerous colours, contours, lines and forms. In his illustrations use of wavy lines portraying an efficient approach of his art characteristics, which support the subject and struggle to adjust changing times and new environments. The application of border design, which is created through curling and twisting lines all around the conceptual thematic appearance, is providing a frame and form a design by establishing an attractive harmony among other elements of art. The line plays a vital part in the entire composition.

The artist seeks unity and relevance with vastness, power of divine, and sacredness, which are boundless or infinite. As classical expressions of mystic vision, holds an inspiration to the trail of illumination and guide through the opening path of spiritual liberty. "Through his art, Sadequain seeks to share his observations, experiences and interpretations of the truth and his relationship to the world around him and beyond."

Sadequain's painting is increasing the impact of the ambiance of the *muadhdhin* pew composed in the sanctuary of Faisal Mosque is conceptual representation of brotherhood. The selection of the place for this painting is itself a creative thought because the verse related to brotherhood and peace, is appropriate for the sanctuary, where Muslims perform their prayer simultaneously and collectively bow in front of Allah. The structure is a single-storied podium from which the assistant *imām masjid* repeats the ritual postures of the respondent (*imam*) and states the replies for a large congregation. It is a functional and traditional component of the sanctuary of the mosque essential to fulfill the requirement of the large gathering of followers to call for prayer.

Beside this painting there are several other calligraphic paintings composed by him with the amalgamation of Islamic inscriptions and symbolic elements. The painting *Kalma-e-Tauheed* is one of them, which is composed with double lined border around the rectangular composition resemble with the surrounded border of the painting discussed above placed in the prayer hall of Faisal Mosque (figure 2). Lyrical lines on the border of artwork reflect stylistic representation of straight and cursive line pattern similar to the twisted linear distorted figures of his drawings and paintings, which shows his strong nonverbal subjectivity of the artwork and strong connectivity with stylistic development. The painting *Kalma-e-Tauheed* straight and curvilinear lined double border is essential part of the composition, where yellow big stars are painted around *Kalma-e-Tauheed* to show light in the form of blessing of God in the world because of Islamic faith and divine reality (figure 4). Among *Kalma-e-Tauheed*, *Bismillah ar Rahman ni Raheem* Qurānic verses and *Rubaiyaa* in Persian language all are a part of composition. straight lined calligraphy similar to Kufic script and cursive calligraphy both are selected for it. Yellow colour among Black and little touches of blue and orange colours are giving value to the entire composition.

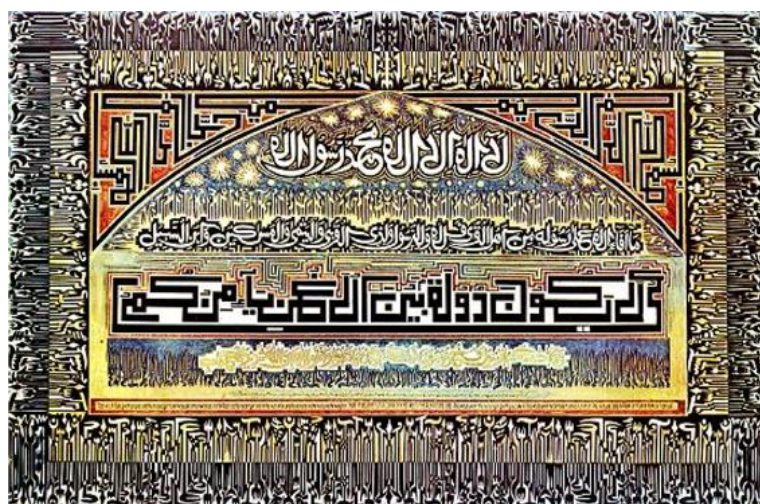


Figure 4. *Bismillah ar Rahman ni Raheem* and *Kalma Tauheed* by Sadquain

Source: <https://thepeopleofpakistan.wordpress.com/2010/02/08/sadequain-is-arguably-responsible-for-the-renaissance-of-islamic-calligraphy-in-pakistan/>



Figure 5. *Suād, Kaf and Noon*

Source: <http://www.sadequainfoundation.com/about-calligraphies>

Suād, Kaf and *Noon* showing seascape with romantic expression of sea water waves and hills with inscriptional Arabic words in boat shapes bearing calligraphic meaningful words supporting whole concept of the painting with subtle sea green, black, white, yellow ochre and touches of light orange and pink colours balance the composition representing solid composition in an oval.



Figure 6 *Fabi-Ayyi Ala-I Rabbikuma Tukaziban, Verses of Surah ar-Rahman*
(So which of the favour of your lord would you deny)

Source: <http://www.sadequainfoundation.com/calligraphies/>
www.google.com/search?source=univ&tbm=isch&q=calligraphy+paintings+by+sadequain&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi-

A complete set of four versions of the verse of Sura e Rahman, *Fabi-Ayyi Ala-I Rabbikuma Tukaziban* were painted by him. Two versions consist of thirty-one panels are preserved in Staff College Lahore, the third version in a private collection and the fourth one having forty panels painted on marble slabs were displayed at Sadquain's Gallery in the Frere Hall. However nowadays they are not a part of the hall.

These canvases represent Qurānic verse with painterly strokes. Landscape with symbolic representation, and mystic approach is observed in these series.

The painting *Fabi-Ayyi Ala-I Rabbikuma Tukaziban* is one of the series of thirty-one panels (figure 6). Full of movement showing sea water earth and sky presenting blessings of God all over the world. Calligraphic brush strokes are echoed the artist's visionary approach to relate earth and sky through extended long vertical strokes of the letters of the verse.

Such kind of theme and concept of Qurān magnetize as an inspiration of moral and spiritual guidance, and gives upswing to the school of thought that have been considered as exoteric or esoteric. In Islam there are several artistic expressions for attraction and Qurānic calligraphy presents attractive forms of harmony and splendor. Calligraphy is considered to be a reflection of heavenly mysteries. In a

mystical belief that rotates around the exposed word of Allah, calligraphy links a person to a divine inheritance that comprised of doctrine and esoteric discipline.

In a book "Mystic Expressions by Sadequain" has stated, the verses selected by Sadequain to illustrate in his work reflects numerous situations of consciousness and self-realization. They support an inspiration to the trail of illumination, lead through the doorway of mystical liberty, and offer a channel for psychological reality. In this painting, Sadequain pursues to express his interpretations and observations of reality, his connection to the world around and beyond him. He created mystic environment with his uninhibited and bold use of medium and lines following during his own life.

Conclusion

After intense critical study of Sadquain's calligraphic paintings it is concluded that artistic expression of painterly calligraphy and continuity of rhythmic junction of brush strokes with the fulfillment of all principal and element of arts are the major characteristics of his calligraphic paintings. These paintings have artistic manifestations of Qurānic verses and sometimes the verses are composed with Persian quotations to support the subject and conceptual interpretation. He deliberately created an abstract expression of mysticism and divine reality through symbolic representation of colours and elongated vertical and horizontal constant strokes of self generated calligraphic inscriptional style. It is a break from traditional calligraphic styles, which shows meditative approach and exaggeration of the proportion where directional lines are implemented as suggestive of movement and artist's spiritual longings.

Themes and subjectivity of his art revolves around God and His blessing on the world, provides an additional means of contemplation in his paintings opens the hidden opportunities in the universe. Different landscapes as a background of calligraphic paintings provide meaning and create link between verse and scene through lines, harmonized and contrast colours by developing association between the painterly calligraphy and abstract expressionism appear in the form of subjective expression. He expressed his concept through fluidity of directional lines, use of circular and semicircular forms, which create a feeling of movement in the composition and help to express spiritual truth and divine reality.

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