

## **Creativity is Life and Life is Creativity**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is formal and contextual analysis of Anna Molka Ahamd's saying "Creativity is Life and Life is Creativity." It explores the concept of creativity in relation to art and life in the light of artist's life and aesthetic approach. Although, creativity is not synonymous to art but it is best displayed in a work of art. Anna devoted her life to teach art. For her, relationship between creativity and life is similar to one, one sees between life and soul. It is this relationship between corporeal and non-corporeal which is being explored. It is an attempt to shed light on the aesthetic approach, taken by one of the great artists of Pakistan, Prof. Anna Molka Ahamad.

Anna Molka Ahamd is remembered as the first Pakistani woman artist. She came to Pakistan from England in 1940 and brought with her a whole school of art and art education. Dynamic and bold in every respect, Anna opened new ways of seeing art in Pakistan. She played a pivotal role to introduce art and art education in the newly born country. Her accomplishments were acknowledged by the government of Pakistan by awarding Tamgh-e-Imtiaz in 1963; President's Medal for Pride of Performance in 1979; Quaid-i Azam Award in 1982 and Khudeja tul Kubra Medal 1983. She was an outstanding person, dedicated teacher, vibrant manager, symbolic and true artist. She was the first female

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chairperson in the subcontinent and first female professor emeritus, an honor awarded to her by the Punjab University, Lahore-Pakistan, where she headed the Department of Fine Arts from 1940 to 1977. (1) Her motto: “Creativity is life and life is Creativity,” seems to cover almost every aspect of her professional and domestic life. For her, creativity was synonymous to life. She believed that life is not something static but something which influences its surroundings and keeps on changing under new circumstances. It is this sense of process that prevailed in her every undertaking, to do something vigorously and confidently.

It is suggested that in this statement Anna has incorporated entire vision of art, which she had believed and advocated through out her life. In order to explore the multilayered meanings underneath this phrase, there is a need to look at some of the theoretical concepts, so that a relationship between her theory and practice can be enumerated. Since a person as an individual can not be separated from his/her environment, because it is principally the environment which shapes a person as an individual, therefore it will be appropriate to explore a relationship between theory and practice.

In the phrase “Creativity is Life and Life is Creativity,” she seems to combine her theory with the practice. Generally speaking, theory refers to an act of thinking and practice is an act of doing something. Therefore, exploring the concept of creativity and its relationship with life can actually help to read and understand Anna Molka Ahmad’s own way of looking at art and life.

Creativity is an act which stimulates the imagination and leads an artist to create something that can be called art. Both creativity and life goes through a process of experience which has pattern and structures and if one can trace these patterns and structures one can explore Anna’s concept of “Creativity is Life and Life is Creativity.” Creativity is result of aesthetic experience. An artist gains aesthetic experience from two sources: inward and outward. Inward experience comes from artist’s own intuition, feelings and emotions and outward experience comes from the external world. Dewey(2) and Schiller(3) see aesthetic experience as an enhancement of life and everyday experience. Theodor Lipps suggests that creation is not outcome of the object but the person representing it because aesthetic experience or creative act cannot

be withdrawn from the one creating it. According to him “aesthetic value does not belong to the sensible object, but comes from something human, from life lying behind it.”(4) Hegel also support this notion, “the universal and absolute need out of which art, on its formal side, arises has its source in the fact that man is a *thinking* consciousness, i.e. that he draws out of himself, and makes explicit for *himself*, that which he is, and, generally, whatever is.”(5) Herbert Langfeld traces the psychological implications to creativity. He maintains that there are various sensual attributes involved in the creation of an art work because in the act of creation one’s senses goes through unfelt muscular contractions caused within a person by imagined movements.(6) Consequently, in the process of creation “the mind becomes more highly organized and action becomes more completely systematized....”(7) It is this unification of mind and action, inward and outward, internal and external and particularly unseen and seen that unites creativity with life. Such an amalgamation of creativity and life is possible only through the “unity of experience that can be expressed only as experience.”(8) Explaining the systematic unification of creativity with life Dewey further explains, “The *experience* is of material fraught with suspense and moving towards its own consummation.”(9) In the act of creation ones experience needs to overpower the other and actually in Dewey’s above statement consume the other to find its own existence, which will become ultimate expression of an artwork. Even in this notion of expression, creativity and life stand side by side. They share the idea that an expression is direct omission of an experience which comes from inward and outward both and where “creativity becomes life and life creativity.” It is this relation of inward and outward which dominates the art of Anna Molaka Ahmad. In order to understand and draw a connection between internal and external experiences there is a need to explore the contextual relationship with the formal aspects of her artworks.

Anna’s personality was unique due to the multi-cultural backgrounds she possessed, from her birth in England (August 13, 1917) to her death in Pakistan (June 21, 1994). She was born to a Polish mother and a Russian father. From her childhood she inquired the fundamentals of life, which led her to the level of dissatisfaction, about her religion, about her belief and relationship

with family and society. Consequently, she embraced Islam at the age of eighteen because she believed that it is the only religion which teaches universalism and it “signifies the brotherhood of mankind without any prejudice against race, color and creed. All believers follow one and the same God, the Divine Power and the Lord of the entire World.”(10)

Anna Molka got her early education at the Godolphin and Latimer Girls High school, Hammersmith, London. It was here that she succeeded to win a scholarship in Fine Arts offered by the county council. Against the wishes of her father who wanted to choose more practical discipline, Anna preferred to study painting, sculpture and design in St. Martin School of Art, Charring Cross, London. Her success in this school encouraged her to apply for a senior scholarship of Fine Arts of the London Council, to study at the Royal College of Art. In order to keep secret from her father she plagiarized his signatures on the application form and joined the Royal College of Art, first as a student and later as an Associate of Royal College of Art and Design. Here she was awarded with certificates in graphic arts techniques such as, Line Engraving, Lithography, Dry Point, Etching, Aquatint and Wood Engraving.(11)

Anna Molka’s restlessness and dissatisfaction kept on growing with her. She found a ray of hope when she met Sheikh Ahmad, an Indian Muslim, who was going back to his country after completing a course in Aeronautical Engineering and staying for thirteen years in the United States. His meeting with Anna Molka not only prolonged his stay in London but also changed his whole plane. Originally, he planned to go back to his country and to continue practicing in Aeronautical engineering but after meeting with Anna he decided to compete for the Senior Scholarship of Fine Arts and became the first Asian to win this award. Sheikh Ahmad not only benefited with this opportunity to study in the Central School of Art and Craft but also taught evening classes there, he was considered one of the best draftsmen of the School. With the passage of time his relationship with Anna Molka got strengthened and she finally decided to embrace Islam and to marry Sheikh Ahmad. After they got married they left for India and landed on the Indian soil on October 3, 1939. Anna Molka’s

process of life continued with vigor and enthusiasm, she lived in Lahore from beginning to the last moment of her life.(12)

The art scene in the subcontinent was quite different than that of England. The base of professional art was extremely restricted, quite a few artists were actually professional and there was no school or college of art with particular emphasis on academics. Anna Molka brought new trends and methods to teach art and art education in which practical and theory were considered equally important. At the age of twenty two in 1940, she was selected art teacher in the Department of Fine Arts, Punjab University, Lahore. Anna designed syllabus first for bachelor and then for master classes. She remained in service almost for four decades. It is such a long duration and such a decisive period in the history of Pakistani art that no one could avoid its consequences. Even today University College of Art and Design follows her footsteps. Although with the changing technology, theory and practice new trends are making its way into the College but foundation stone laid by Anna Molka Ahmad has not been shaken. She is admired and offered tribute every time when any exhibition takes place in the Anna Molka Art Gallery, University College of Art and Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Her dynamism and sole commitment produced many celebrated artists and art teachers, who have acted or still acting as heads or directors of different institutions or art galleries. She also introduced art classes for children at the Lahore Arts Council at Alhamra, which are continuing even today. She also developed syllabus for schools, colleges and universities. Anna Molka's professional career can be analyzed in two different manners, first as a scholar and then as an artist.(13)

Anna Molka's scholarly insight made her a good critic of her time. She was considered one of the most profound critics on art. She wrote vigorously and sincerely. As a head of the Department, she regularly conducted exhibitions and wrote about all the participants. She published several monographs on national and international artists who participated or exhibited their work in the Department. In order to create a scholarly atmosphere she encouraged students and faculty members to write about art. Their writings were published in the first art journal of Pakistan *Vista*. Scholarly writings produced by Anna Molka reflect her

tremendous writing skill, deep insight, keen observation and vital criticism.

As an artist, she has been variously considered an expressionist. Marcella Nesom Sirhandi in the “Contemporary Painting in Pakistan,” considers her, an expressionist artist. Elaborating on her expressionistic tendencies, Sirhandi says, “Anna eschewed a carefully rendered, slick effect. Her instinct made her more comfortable with the palette knife than with the brush and she preferred impasto over thin washes.”(14) Another writer who acknowledges expressionistic tendencies in her art is Salima Hashmi. She maintains: “Anna Molka exhibited her work regularly after her arrival in the subcontinent in 1939. She often acknowledged the influence of Gauguin whom she passionately admired, but her own use of color impasto owed more to the expressionists.”(15) In a brochure published at a retrospective exhibition organized by Pakistan National Council of Arts in May-June 2004, Mussarrat Nahid Imam also highlights some of the expressionistic characteristics in her art. She proposed that “as a painter Anna could be described as an ‘Expressionist,’ applying bold strokes, vibrant colors in thick impasto technique. Use of loud and brilliant palette was her forte.” She further states, “in fact her palette demonstrated the intensity of her emotions and feelings. At times her colors were so strong that they over powered her emotions and feelings.”(16) All of the above statements considered Anna Molka expressionist because of her use of color and the emphasis on thick bold strokes.

Anna’s creative impulse cannot be fully admired without discussing her sculpture pieces. She executed a number of busts in clay and cast them in plaster. One of them is life size bust of Prof. Khalid Iqbal. The vehemence of the facial expression reveals in the most vivid and astonishing fashion the state of mind. The strongly individualized features may leave no doubt in our minds that this is indeed a faithful likeness of the subject. However, it is chiefly the state of mind of the sitter she aimed to accomplish.

Besides painting and sculpture, she executed a large number of drawings in pencil, charcoal and pastel. *Boy With a Ring* is a pastel drawing. The spontaneous act and motion of the boy is drawn against a dark background, which is also full of exuberance. A range of cool blue and green is complemented with white pure

light adding a dramatic touch to it. Theatrical in every manner, reflects an extraordinary skill of draftsmanship. It suggests that nothing is static but forwarding movement as the life goes on and the cycle of life never ends. Physiological reading of this drawing shows that there is nothing that can stop the vigor and dynamic movement. Emphasis on the curved and angular lines suggest a state of transition, a quick shift and move in which life is rolling and rolling in a form of process. It is this sense of process which she found in life and creativity. Almost in every art work she attempted to capture this vigor of life. She was bold and passionate; this is what each of her stroke stand for. Anna Molka Ahamad's artworks are not a mere copy of nature. They represent nature not in a manner a person sees but in a manner an artist's creativity endures.

She created and expressed what she saw and experienced. She recorded the social and political turmoil, specifically the Partition, religious events, festivals. Besides such critical subject matter she also painted several portraits of leaders, friends and other members of the society. Her panoramic landscapes with bright sunny sky, with beautiful dawn and dusk colors and with a strong emphasis on the essential details have historical significance. She often described her feelings about Pakistan and its people in these words: "Pakistan is an independent country and its people are custodian of variety of cultures and civilizations which must be preserved and enriched. Sincere study and creative understanding can help evolving characteristic art which can make us feel proud among other nations."(17)

She was a true observer, her portraits of young age to old age tell the pains she had gone through after getting divorce from her husband and taking care of her two daughters. Another period of turmoil came into her life after her daughter was divorced by her Christian husband Colin David. Despite all of these upheavals she remained confident and bold. She was always close to Allah and the holy Qur'an and remained stick to her belief in Tauheed in all circumstances. Ultimately she got peace after painting several large panels, depicting *Day of Judgment* and *Heaven and Hell*. All of these paintings were painted in the University College of Art and Design, Punjab University, (formerly, Department of Fine Arts) where she had her permanent office. It was surprising the

way she vigorously applied paint to these panels in order to acquire motion and movement in the picture. Sometime she squeezed the whole tube on the canvas and spread it over with her fingers. Standing on a ladder, completely absorbed in her work, she was unaware the fact that how keenly students were watching her technique. Preserving the spirit of her age, she made every effort to reach out to the masses. She believed that art is one of the most effective tools of education. According to Anna Molka, “a country cannot progress without art which expresses feelings, opinion and taste of a society and its people.” Some critics believe that Anna Molka was not aware of abstract art which is not true. As a matter of fact she never believed that abstract art can represent true spirit of Islam and the people of Pakistan. She always enforced the idea that true people should be represented in a truthful and symbolic manner. It is this symbolic enterprise she nurtured throughout her life. Moreover, it is this truthfulness which she believed is true to life and it is symbolic manner which became her motto, “Creativity is Life and Life is Creativity.”

According to F. E. Sparshot, “... it is the function of artistic activity simply to express the personality of the artist, and of works of art to be images or replicas of their creators.”(18) German poetic dramatist, Wolfgang Goethe expresses his experiences through which he goes in a process of creativity. He says:

I could not deviate my whole life through; namely, the tendency to turn into an image, into poem, everything that delighted or troubled me, or otherwise occupied me, and to come to some certain understanding with myself upon it, that might both rectify my conceptions of external things, and set myself inwardly at rest about them. The faculty of doing this was necessary to no more than me, for my natural disposition whirled me constantly from one extreme to the other. All that has since been published by me consists of fragments of a great confession.(19)

Creativity therefore is blend of life, and outcome of these two is aesthetic value, which is depicted in a beautiful work of art. An aesthetic value is synthesis of creativity and life. It is basically the combination of two realms: seen and unseen, physical and non-physical, permanent nature of creative impulse and ephemeral life.

With the passage of time physical dissolves into eternal creative impulse and forms a shape of an artwork, which speaks truth of inward and outward of the one creating it. Life reaches to its end but creativity becomes a ceremonial enterprise for the generations to come.

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