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Visual Rhymes: A Study of Similarities in the Paintings of two Pakistani Artists, Khalid Iqbal and Zulqarnain Haider

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ABSTRACT

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The domain of Pakistani art has observed an enchanting fusion of tradition and modernity through the works of Khalid Iqbal and Zulqarnain Haider. Both artists, born in the vigorous cultural landscape of Pakistan, carved distinctive niches within the contemporary art scene. In the vibrant landscape of Pakistani contemporary art, two artists, Iqbal and Haider, have etched their names with a shared commitment to cultural expression, novelty, and chronicle depth. Although their styles show individuality and differences, a closer examination reveals a fascinating array of similarities that weave through the canvases of both artists. This study examines the shared creative language, cultural resonances, and thematic echoes that define the similarities between the paintings of two artists. This study aims to delve into the profound intricacies of their artistic expressions, exploring the unique elements that define Khalid Iqbal and Zulqarnain Haider's contributions to Pakistani art.

INTRODUCTION

Beyond language and society, art has the power to convey feelings and viewpoints. Two modern artists' remarkably similar yet different styles have drawn attention to their respective fields of art. Both Iqbal and Zulqarnain Haider were praised for their powerful and stirring works of art, which were contrasted in terms of their subjects and creative methods. The similarities between these two artists' works will be investigated in an investigative illustrated report, which will also explore the impact that art has on spectators.

Khalid Iqbal was born in Dehradun and attended St Joseph's Academy before moving to Lahore because that locality did not have an institute of higher education. Iqbal enrolled in the prestigious Forman Christian College in Lahore. The Punjab University Fine Arts Department was originally intended primarily for female students, and it only opened its doors to male students in 1956. Consequently, Iqbal started his studies at the Mayo School, where he met his greatest influencer, Sheikh Ahmed. Khalid Iqbal, being the native of Pakistan, is renowned for his stimulating interpretations of human emotions and societal themes in his artwork. Using sparkling colors and bold brushstrokes, he infuses a sense of dynamism ¹and depth into his creations.

On the other hand, Zulqarnain Haider, originating from India, is recognized for his introspective and emotive pieces that delve into the intricate aspects of human existence. Zulqarnain Haider is an eminent painter of the Punjab School of Landscape Painting Initiated by Professor Khalid Iqbal in 1955. ("Arte de Pakistan," n.d.). Haider's paintings often blend realism with symbolic elements, encouraging viewers to reflect upon the deeper meanings conveyed through the imagery. Zulqarnain Haider is a renowned painter associated with the Punjab School of Landscape Painting, which was founded by Professor Khalid Iqbal in 1955. In 1964, after completing his Master's Degree in Fine Arts from Punjab University, Haider was awarded a scholarship from Beaux Arts Paris. He travelled to France and focused on studying Fresco painting and Mosaic. Along with that, he obtained a diploma in Plastic Arts. In 1977, Haider organized his first solo exhibition at the Pakistan Embassy in Paris, which received high praise and recognition.

Iqbal skillfully depicts barren lands with narrow, meandering water courses flowing amidst *kekar*

¹ Expressing approval of the fact that they are full of energy or full of new and exciting ideas.

trees². Within the dry and rugged terrain of the Punjab plains, his cheerful fields and blooming trees stand out. Khalid Iqbal employs the architectural style of the local villages to structure his paintings, showcasing a remarkable blend of geometric naturalism and rural Punjab culture. According to Cézanne's philosophy, this representation of rural life in the paintings can be considered a theory developed and applied through direct interaction with nature. Iqbal utilizes geometry and adheres to time-honored principles as pervasive as those used by Renaissance artists such as the renowned German painter, Dürer. In fact, he breathes new life into the concept of design, the Renaissance term for drawing and composition, by combining the conventional academic use of geometry with lessons learned from Cézanne ³and the rural Punjab region.

The genre of landscape painting finds its origins in the wall paintings of ancient Greece and Rome, however, classical landscape was born in the 17th century when the French artists Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain introduced a new set of rules for this category of painting. In the Pakistan the father of landscape painting Khalid Iqbal an expert in portraying landscapes, challenges viewers to rediscover nature through his seemingly unpromising subject matter and detached approach (Kureshi, 2016). Like the poet who removes the veil of familiarity from people's eyes, Iqbal's paintings evoke a sense of wonder and uncover the true essence of nature. He focused on two types of landscapes: the first capturing the beauty of nature itself, and the second depicting rural scenes from Punjab villages, including animals, fields, wastelands, trees, and irrigation systems. Interestingly, he chose not to depict peasants directly in his rural scenes, instead opting to create their portraits. The second type of landscape paintings showcased the various seasons and the passage of time in nature. Khalid Iqbal developed his artistic style by combining elements of Impressionism⁴ with the influences he gained from studying the works of Cézanne. In Khalid Iqbal's brushwork, you can see the influence of that Old Master, Cezanne, great post-Impressionist and precursor of modern art. ("old master," 2021). He was particularly intrigued by the way Cézanne depicted shimmering surfaces in his paintings, but it was the solidity and permanence of objects under the Mediterranean light that left the greatest

² Kikar is the small thorny tree. It grows to the height of 7 – 12 meter. It has yellow round head flowers which are nectar less.

³ Paul Cézanne was a French Post-Impressionist painter whose work introduced new modes of representation and influenced avant-garde artistic movements.

⁴ Impressionism was a 19th-century art movement characterized by relatively small, thin, yet visible brush strokes, open composition, emphasis on accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities.

impression on him. In Cézanne's Arles, Iqbal found a confirmation of the unique light in his own homeland, where the sun's movement in the sky from early morning to late afternoon creates ever-changing landscapes.

“The love and penchant for landscape could have been because of his association with Iqbal or it could be that the love for the commonality of subject brought him close to Iqbal” (Sarwat, 2017)

Zulqarnain Haider's paintings are not mere visual spectacles⁵, they are narratives waiting to be explored. Each stroke, color, and symbol contributes to a story, inviting viewers to delve into the intricacies of his artistic tales. The beauty in his work emerges from the storytelling capacity that goes beyond the canvas, engaging the audience on a deeper intellectual and emotional level. The beauty found in Haider's paintings is deeply rooted in the celebration of Pakistani culture. Through a harmonious blend of traditional elements and contemporary expression, he creates a visual feast that pays homage to the richness of his cultural heritage. The vibrant colors, intricate patterns, and symbolic motifs become conduits for cultural appreciation and understanding. Haider's approach to art is marked by innovation and experimentation. The beauty in his paintings emerges from the artist's willingness to push boundaries, blend genres, and incorporate diverse elements. This innovative spirit creates a dynamic and ever-evolving beauty that reflects the artist's commitment to artistic exploration.

DISCUSSION / INTERPRETATION

In the area of modern Pakistani art, the works of Khalid Iqbal and Zulqarnain Haider have activated debate among art experts and critics alike due to their startling similarities. This investigational study seeks to dive into the similarities discovered in the paintings of these two brilliant painters, investigating topics, techniques, and influences that may contribute to the apparent parallels in their creative expressions.

Some noteworthy similarities between the paintings of Iqbal and Haider are their exploration of thematic elements. Both artists deeply delve into the human experience, observing the emotions, struggles, and triumphs that surround the essence of being human. Iqbal's artwork often portrays extreme emotions, noticing the core of joy, sorrow, hope, and despair within his subjects. Similarly, the artworks of Haider reflects a profound exploration of the human mind, frequently depicting individuals in thoughtful or self-reflective poses, suggesting to a rich inner

⁵ The word is used to describe something that has a particularly exciting visual element to it — like an acrobatic display or a magic trick.

world beneath the surface.

EMOTIONAL DEPTH: The emotional beauty in Iqbal's paintings is appreciable. Whether conveying a sense of tranquility⁶, introspection, or excitement, his artworks have the power to elicit a range of emotions from the viewer. The paintings of Iqbal facilitate different ways, in visual aesthetics and also in emotional journey.

The paintings of Haider evoke a range of emotions, from introspection to awe. The beauty in his work is not only visual but emotional—and investigation of the human experience. The artist's ability to elicit an emotional response from the viewer adds a profound layer to the overall aesthetic experience.

Iqbal's "The Weary Soul" and Haider's "Eternal Reflection" both exhibit a depth of feeling that can be compared side by side. In "The Weary Soul," Iqbal presents a moving portrayal of a tired figure with slumped shoulders and eyes reflecting a profound sense of exhaustion. Similarly, Haider's "Eternal Reflection" features a thoughtful individual gazing into the distance, bringing a sense of inner tumult and introspection. Both artworks utilize a subdued color palette and subtle facial expressions to effectively convey the emotional burden experienced by their subjects.

SYMBOLISM AND METAPHOR

A fascinating component of both artists' works is their use of metaphor and symbolism. Iqbal includes symbolic elements like soaring birds or solitary trees to invoke feelings of freedom, isolation or endurance within his pieces. Similarly, Haider's paintings often showcase visually striking symbols such as trees, ground, sky, natural reflections, which serve as metaphors for the complexities of human identity and perception.

Beyond literal representation, Haider's paintings appeals metaphorical beauty that invites contemplation. Natural elements, such as landscapes, become metaphors for broader themes, time, change, identity. The use of symbolism by the artist adds a layer of depth, prompting viewers to interpret and find personal meaning in the metaphors embedded in the artwork.

The works Haider often features beautiful compositions that, paradoxically, exude a sense of harmony. The different layers of symbols, textures, and forms come together in a symphony of complexity, demonstrating the mastery of artist in orchestrating⁷ diverse elements into a

⁶ Tranquillity is a sense of peace and quiet.

⁷ An orchestra is a large group of classical musicians led by a conductor: it consists of many people playing together

unified whole. The beauty lies in the balance achieved amidst the intricate details.

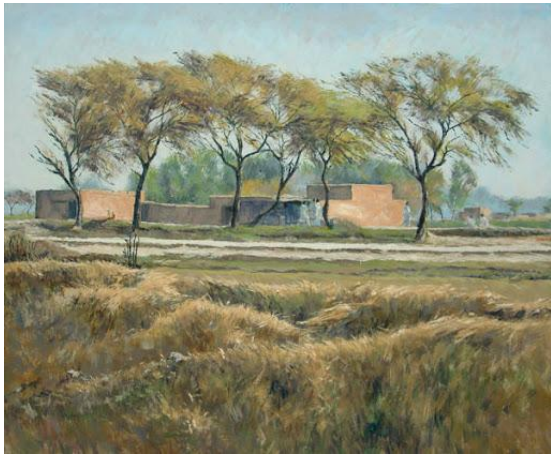


Figure No1: Painting by Zulkarnain Haider

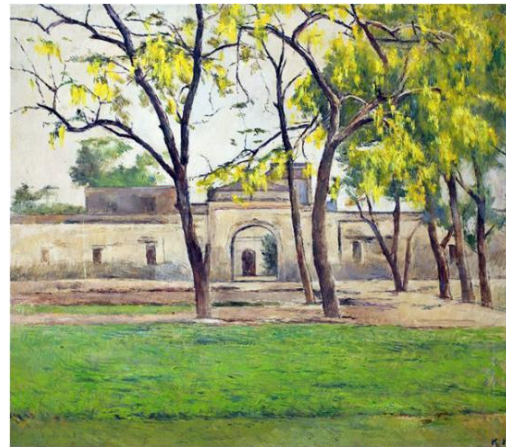


Figure no 2: Painting by Khalid Iqbal

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FUSIONS

Iqbal and Haider both subtly engage cultural and social commentary in their works of art, offering viewers a lens through which they can examine broader societal issues. Iqbal's paintings often explore topics of displacement, resilience, and the human capacity for hope in challenging circumstances. Similarly, the artworks of Haider delve into the convolutions of cultural identity, the interplay between tradition and modernity, and the impact of social constructs on individual experiences. In both artists' works, cultural fusion serves as a bridge connecting different aspects of Pakistani culture. This connectivity fosters a sense of continuity and common identity, reinforcing the idea that culture is a dynamic, evolving entity. In essence, Khalid Iqbal and Zukqarnain Haider masterfully navigate the intricate terrain of cultural fusion, infusing their paintings with a sense of continuity, dialogue between past and present, and a celebration of the multifaceted beauty⁸ inherent in Pakistani culture.

Khalid Iqbal emerged as only noteworthy realist in Lahore during city's embrace of modern art. His paintings depicted rural scenes on the outskirts of Model Town, capturing the sights and landscapes that would soon be transformed into urbanized areas. Despite their inevitable fate, Khalid Iqbal stoically painted to bear witness to nature's struggle against the encroaching urban culture. The paintings possess a distinctive knowledge and experience, conveying both pathos and pleasure.

⁸ Multifaceted means "many aspects, sides, or faces." This can apply to jewels or other physical objects, like the eyes of a dragonfly.



Figure no 3: Punjab Landscape by Khalid Iqbal Figure no 4: Painting by Zulkarnain Haider

NATURE AND LANDSCAPE: The representation of nature and landscapes serves as a recurrent motif in Iqbal and Haider's works. Iqbal's depictions of Pakistan's picturesque landscapes, particularly the mountains and valleys, have been celebrated for their authenticity (Yousaf, 2020). The representation of nature and landscape serves as a common motif in the paintings of Iqbal and Haider. Whether inspired by the majestic lands of Pakistan or the bustling urban landscapes, both artists convey a connection to the environment through their brushstrokes, albeit with individualistic interpretations. Khalid Iqbal's landscapes provided a true guideline and encouragement toward outdoor paintings for a new generation of landscape painters. (Arshad, 2016, p.67). Iqbal serves as a reminder of the rural character and essence of Punjab. The houses he portrays are a collection of flat-topped cubes situated near water channels or village ponds. He skillfully depicts barren lands with narrow, meandering water courses flowing amidst kekar trees. Within the dry and rugged terrain of the Punjab plains, his cheerful fields and blooming trees stand out. This profile is similar to the plains of the southern part of the country, which are nourished by the River Indus after it merges with the waters of the five rivers of Punjab. He could also be rightly called the painter of Sindh. Every landscape, no matter how realistic, serves as a personal testimony of the artist similarly, the trees are clustered closely together, adding a touch of picturesque beauty to the scene. Zulkarnain seems to have grown weary of integrating the foreground and middle ground horizontally, a technique skillfully utilized by Khalid Iqbal, and instead opted for a gestural path that deviates from strict observation and accuracy.

NARRATIVE DEPTH: Both artists infuse narrative depth into their works, inviting viewers to explore stories beyond the visual elements. Whether through metaphorical imagery or storytelling compositions, Iqbal and Haider share a commitment to engaging their audience

intellectually and emotionally. Zulqarnain Haider strongly influenced by Khalid Iqbal's early morning mists, the sun flooded after noons, deep evening shadows and mood or atmosphere in the nature. (Arshad, 2016)

Zulqarnain's signature is evident in the sharply angled and ascending⁹ path. The trees are clustered closely together, adding a touch of picturesque beauty to the scene. Zulqarnain seems to have grown weary of integrating the foreground and middle ground horizontally, a technique skillfully utilized by Khalid Iqbal, and instead opted for a gestural path that deviates from strict observation and accuracy.

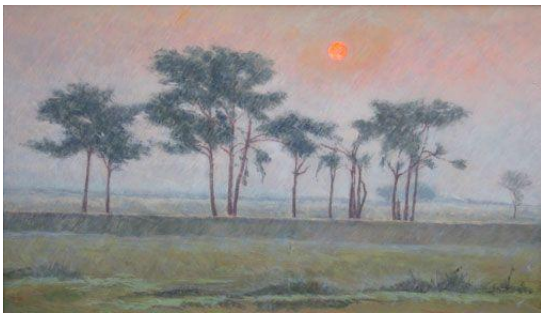


Figure No 5: Painting by Zulkarnain Haider

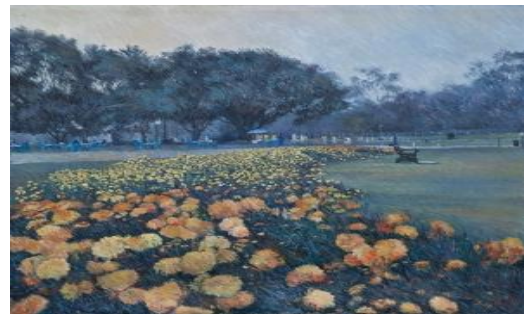


Figure No 6: Painting by Khalid Iqbal

COLOR PALETTE: A shared affinity for bold and vibrant colors is a notable characteristic in the paintings of Iqbal and Haider. Their canvases come alive with a rich spectrum of hues¹⁰, contributing to a dynamic and visually captivating experience. This commonality speaks to a shared appreciation for the emotive power of color in conveying the essence of their narratives. The dryness of the gray and ochre-yellow terrain, along with the color of the village houses, finds relief in water. Khalid Iqbal's art represents the revelation of the obscure, the humble, the unnoticed, and the ordinary. The landscape, as an art form, appeals to urban dwellers¹¹ who seek to appreciate the beauty of nature with the guidance of the artist. Haider's color palette has also similar, becoming more fanciful. His skilled use of texture gives his depiction of earth a resemblance to cheesecake. The green tones in Zulqarnain's work are darker, not out of realism, but to provide a vivid contrast to the colors of the land. As a result, Zulqarnain's landscapes have departed from the rugged and ordinary aesthetic¹² of Khalid Iqbal's, adopting a more cosmetically pleasing appearance. "Khalid Iqbal's colour scheme is generally muted and

⁹ Mounting or sloping upward.

¹⁰ A hue which is present in the spectrum of colours produced by splitting white light with a prism.

¹¹ A person who lives in a city, town.

¹² Relating to the enjoyment or study of beauty, or showing great beauty

mostly hazy. But his yellow summer Amaltas or Flame of the Forest set the viewer's soul on fire” (“Painter of entire moments,” 2021)

IMPACT OF ART: The impact of both Iqbal and Haider's art on viewers is profound, prompting contemplation, introspection, and empathy. They are both skilled at evoking raw emotions and deep introspection through their artwork, which has resonated with audiences from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds. In addition, the universal themes explored in their paintings have sparked conversations and reflections on the shared human experience, transcending boundaries and fostering a sense of connection among viewers. Zulkarnain Haider said there was hardly a day over the past fifty years when he did not meet Iqbal. “Pakistan was fortunate enough to have such an artist. He was a caring teacher as well and gave individual attention to each of his pupils.” (Ahmed, 2014).

We are captivated by the artist's immense respect for the familiar in his first type of landscapes, which is a form of love. Iqbal displayed this sentiment subtly, using natural light to illuminate his paintings. In the other type of landscapes, light imbues the scenes with a serene and divine grace. His love for his subject matter became a disciplined ritual of adoration, as he repeatedly observed and depicted the same features. This commitment formed the foundation of his realism. Haider's art is characterized by understatement, which gives rise to extreme shyness that can sometimes repel viewers. To truly appreciate his paintings, we must see through this facade and admire the stylistic intricacies of his artistry. The ruse and subtlety employed by Khalid Iqbal reveal the presence of a keen and perceptive observer.

CONCLUSION

In summary, Khalid Iqbal's and Zulkarnain Haider's artwork exhibits remarkable similarities in terms of their exploration of themes, use of artistic techniques, and the powerful emotions they evoke. Both artists take viewers on a thought-provoking journey into the depths of human emotions, struggles, and resilience, inviting reflection and empathy. As their artworks continue to captivate global audiences, it is evident that the impact of their art testifies to the potency of visual storytelling and the universal nature of human experiences expressed through art.

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