

## PAK-US ALLIANCE ON WAR OF TERROR: EVOLUTION OF PAKISTANI CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE WAKE OF INCREASED VIOLENT EXTREMISM

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper presents the findings of exploratory research that attempts to establish the relationship between the Pakistan-United States of America alliance in the post-9/11 era and increased violent extremism in Pakistan. Moreover, its efforts to link the rise of violent extremism with the evolution of Pakistani contemporary artwork – demonstrate greater political activism. Pakistan emerged as a frontline state and key non-NATO ally of the US and the West for the War of Terror. The study offers a perspective on changes in the artwork in terms of themes and messages. The study findings suggest that Pakistan's participation in the US-led War on Terror did work to transform the political and religious sentiments, having security implications across Pakistan. The most profound changes are evident in terms of violent extremisms in particular suicide bombing and the State's response in waging military operations against extremist elements. The changing landscape did influence the societal sentiments and heightened skepticism of the Pakistan-US partnership. The mounting skepticism and antagonism worked to influence the artistic expressions with the rise of political activism in contemporary artwork. The artists used the visual artwork (of painting) to express their political ideas, which demonstrates a marked departure from pre-9/11 artwork. The study's findings suggest that the artwork became more critical of the changing realities and questioned both the government and the extremist elements, including Pakistan's relationship with the US. The study concludes that the Pakistan-US partnership did result in hardening the extremist views and as a consequence rise of violent extremism. And in turn, it changed the contemporary artwork in terms of themes and messages and the emergence of political artwork in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** War on Terror, Violent Extremism, Pakistani Contemporary Art, Political Imageries.

### INTRODUCTION

The advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century characterizes a series of events and reactions that transformed the world in the social, economic, and political spheres. The incident of 9/11 is such a big event in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that has brought the world to newer realities, probably unseen and unimagined. The 9/11 event has profound national and international effects that resulted in shaping new alliances and a new global war called War on Terror, a military campaign against eradicating the Al-Qaeda's network based in the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The US-led War has changed the security dynamics, not within the US but affected Pakistan in the same way. As a non-NATO ally, Pakistan played a significant role in supporting the US military strikes against Taliban and al-Qaeda within the country and Afghanistan. However, Pakistan and the US alliance against War on Terror created security implications in terms of violent extremism in Pakistan.

This paper explores how did Pakistan contribute to US-led War on Terror and to what extent Pakistan-US Alliance resulted in the rise of violent extremism in Pakistan. Further, it sheds light on how growing violent extremism influence the Pakistani contemporary art of paintings in terms of themes during two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2001-2020). In this respect, the research intends to explore a link between

change in the internal security context and Pakistani art of paintings in the wake of the Pakistan-US partnership on the War on Terror. Secondary data is used for the study and the paper is organized into two main sections, the first section describes how the post-9/11 Pak-US alliance increased violent extremism in Pakistan, and the second section is further divided into two parts first describes the pre-9/11 artwork (1947 – 2000). The second part explores changes in post-9/11 art of paintings and develops its link with post-9/11 violent extremism.

### **PAK-US Alliance on War of Terror: Emergence of Violent Extremism in Post 9/11 Pakistan**

The United States of America (US) had been attacked on 11 September 2001 by its own four passenger planes, which were hijacked by four men who apparently looked Muslim. However, three planes crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D. C., causing the collapse of both the Twin Towers. The attack caused around three thousand casualties, physical destruction, mental distress, and financial losses (Peek, 2012, pp. 18). As a result in 2001, the US launched a campaign called War on Terror against the al Qaeda network and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan believed to be responsible for the 9/11 attacks. To start this venture the US sought the assistance of other countries including Pakistan (Khan, 2013) because of its strategic location and historical involvement in Afghanistan. This made the Bush administration pressurize Islamabad for its assistance in the US-led war (Akram, 2002).

Pakistan reluctantly joined and became the key strategic partner of the US's War on Terror. Pakistan withdrew its diplomatic relation with the Taliban regime, supported US military strike by providing the base, port, logistics, and intelligence information within and outside the country. "Pakistan also started the crackdown on the home-grown militant groups, which had links with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 212). Moreover, Pakistan tolerated American drone attacks on its territory (Katz, 2011). However, in return for its services, Pakistan was offered few gains including economic and military aid and debt cancellation (Ahmed, 2012). But the losses Pakistan has experienced in the shape of instability, insecurity are much more than what they have received from Washington.

One of the major concerns was US drone strikes in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) that resulted in the loss of thousands of innocent lives (Yousufi & Islam, 2018), infrastructure, and millions were left homeless. These all damages and Pakistan's participation in the US-led war were seen and propagated by a certain segment of the population as a war against Islam and Muslims (Bisit, 2021), given the past skepticism of the Pakistan-US relationship, where the US was marked as an unreliable partner, was uncalled for and unjust. This view triggered a militant backlash that led to a sudden rise in the number of terrorist attacks, resulting in the number of casualties of civilians (The Cost of Conflict in Pakistan, CRSS). However, the sharp increase in suicide bombings made the Pakistani government launch military operations against the Afghan Taliban and their supporters within the country (Yousufi & Islam, 2018), leading to further casualties and economic loss. Overall "70,000 Pakistanis were killed in suicide bombings and other terror attacks in 20 years of US invasion in Afghanistan" (Khan, 2021, para.3). Pakistan also experienced \$150 billion in economic losses and uncountable damage to its reputation around the globe (Bisit, 2021). Moreover, during this period Pakistan's US relations remained under scrutiny and unreliable.

It is observed that the Pakistan-US alliance against the War on Terror increased violent extremism in Pakistan. This violent extremism affected the lives and attitudes of Pakistanis and similarly influenced and motivated a large group of young and established artists to produce social-political imageries.

### **Transformation of Pakistani Contemporary Artwork: Rise of Political Art**

Before getting into the post-9/11 artwork, there is a need to understand pre-9/11 art of paintings. The following section gives a historical perspective of the art of paintings in terms of themes by pointing out the work of selective artists.

#### ***Art of Painting in Pakistan: A Historical Perspective (1947-2000)***

The history of Pakistani art of painting is indeed a fascinating journey that started from its independence, and entails traditional art (includes calligraphy to miniature art) and, modern art (embraces conceptual to

abstract art). The initial years of the newly born state are marked as a struggling phase for Pakistani artists. Because their interest to develop their distinctive style and identity as Pakistani kept them away from the influences of Hindu heritage, both in style and subject matter. Undoubtedly, the desire to create their unique aesthetic expression caused the creation of two separate artistic movements in the early years, the first movement was followed by the orientalist group of artists, including Abdur Rahman Chughtai and Ustad Allah Bux, based on traditional themes and imagery but with different techniques and style. And second artistic movement was named "Regional Modernism", (Syed & Abdullah, 2015) this group of artists was more influenced by western art movements especially cubism, though they opted for regional and local-based themes but with western Art techniques.

The work of Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1894–1975) is known as the "Lahore Oriental Style" (Syed & Abdullah, 2015) and is reflected in his painting *The Mughal Princess* (see figure 1). He was influenced by miniature painting, Mughal art, Art Nouveau, and Islamic art traditions (Grosvenor Gallery, n.d.). He produced paintings on the theme of the Mughal king and queen, heroes from Islamic history, and Mughal architecture and regional folk stories.

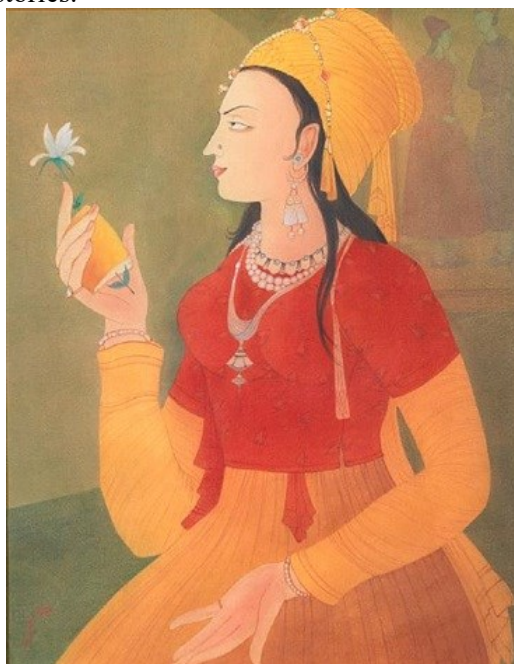


Figure 1. The Mughal princess by Abdur Rehman Chughtai

While another eminent orientalist artist Ustad Allah Baksh (1895-1978) was inspired by classical western paintings. His theme revolved around the landscape, folk culture, rural life, especially in Punjab, and also painted characters from Hindu mythology. His rich and expressive life-size paintings are usually composed of a large group of people and a rural background. Each character of his painting gives a different expression, which can be observed in his masterpiece *Heere Ranja* (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Heere Ranja by Ustad Allah Baksh

The artist from "Regional Modernism" (Syed & Abdullah, 2015) was more influenced by western art movements, particularly cubism. They were more inclined to incorporate modern style into their local themes. The trio of Shakir Ali, Zubeida Agha, and Mansoor Rahi did not take time to move away from A.R Chughtai and Allah Bux's Orientalism and plunged into modernism. They are considered pioneers in introducing modernism in Pakistan. They all come up with their own unique style by mixing local and foreign techniques that define the signature of Pakistani artists. Shakir Ali's (1916-1975) abstract style, simple technique, and indigenous palette of flat shades and textured lines made him a pioneer of modern art in Pakistan. He painted in a cubist style and used abstract figures, calligraphic forms, and symbols, ranging from boats to bulls (Syed & Abdullah, 2015). The painting *Woman and Bull* (see figure 3) is the best example of his cubist-style artwork. Ali was known for the representation of human emotions, thoughts, passion, pain, and pleasures through lines, colors, and paint (Ali, 2017).



Figure 3. Woman and Bull by Shakir Ali

Zubeida Agha's (1922- 1997) non-conventional style of painting stirred up a storm of controversy with her debut solo painting exhibition in 1949 at the YMCA Karachi (Ali, 2015). Her painting *Metamorphosis* (see figure 4) is purely an abstraction, deliberately deviated from recognizable forms, yet



provides a sense of spiritual harmony. Over the years she worked on multiple themes including landscapes, and cityscapes, and used human figures, horses, flowers, and geometric patterns, in her work. (Naseer, n.d.).



Figure 4. Metamorphosis by Zubeida Agha, 1948

Mansoor Rahi (b. 1938) the living legend's journey starts with rejecting Orientalist art forms, then mastering the cubist philosophy, and finally divulging into post-cubism. His contribution in the domain of post-cubism surpasses the point of introducing rayonistic philosophy. His gigantism figures are inspired by the hugeness of mountains, which became part of his paintings where the head is very small but the lower part is very broad. This can be visible in his painting *The Thinker* (see figure 5).



Figure 5. The Thinker by Mansoor Rahi, 1968

Another internationally recognized self-taught artist Sadequain (1930-1987), combined cubist idioms and his visual vocabulary with the poetry of many renowned Asian poets including Iqbal and Faiz Ahmed Faiz as a subject in his paintings. His massive public artworks of gigantic scale were showcased at Pakistan's most popular and historical structures. The painting *sunrise* (see figure 6) is the best example of his style.



Figure 6. Sunrise by Sadequain, 1968

In essence, newly independent artists were more inclined towards the presentation of new techniques, and less importance was given to self-expression. For instance, in the initial years, many artists adopted traditional styles and techniques that were inherited from Mughals or Iranian miniature. Similarly, they produce paintings on certain subjects including calligraphy, landscape, portrait, still life, myth and folk stories, and scenes from the Mughal court with a mixed color palette. Though at the same time there were unconventional artists who got inspiration from the western art movements. They tried to present themselves as modern artists according to international standards. However, there were no extraordinary changes witnessed in terms of subject matters, very particular themes were presented in this era.

The late 1970s and 80s witnessed a struggle phase for artists' survival under General Zia's government (1977–1988), he had a harsh censorship policy regarding all forms of visual and performing arts. Any kind of socio-political art was banned and artists were permitted to work within the genres that were approved and encouraged by the Zia government including landscapes, portraiture (mostly of the founding fathers of Pakistan and General Zia himself), and Islamic calligraphy (Syed & Abdullah, 2015). Nonetheless, calligraphy is the art of beautifying Quranic verses or poetry highly appreciated at this time, so the eminent artists of Pakistan, including Ismail Gulgee (1926 –2007) and Sadequain turned into abstract calligraphers under the Zia regime.

Interestingly, the second phase of General Zia's era formed another binary within the prevailing artistic discourse. This division consisted of mainstream art based on formalism and a low profile politically dissident art. Though at times when direct socio-political imagery in art was neither appreciated nor acceptable, few artists tried to work on political art including AR Nagori (1939 –2011) who can be rightly termed as the pioneer socio-political artist in Pakistan. He produced paintings on anti-martial law and anti-dictatorship in the early 80s under the dictatorial government of General Zia (Bokhari, 2012). He raised his voice through his art on Zia's religious biases against minorities and women but not surprisingly, several of his art exhibitions were usually raided and sealed.

Ijaz ul Hassan (b. 1940) is another influential artist of Pakistan, considered a political activist under the General Zia-ul-Haq regime. He has experienced and observed “social and political aggression, oppression, death, authoritarianism” and used art to fight against it. He believes politics is inevitable and inseparable from art (Artleove, 2021). Therefore, political subjects were always been an important element of his abstract and realistic paintings.

The struggle for freedom of expression continued in the 1990s, however, the government policy of censorship towards all sorts of visual and performing arts became more relaxed. The period witnessed two developments in Pakistani artistic trends, along with formalism, one consists of the conceptual style and the second trend was the foundation of the contemporary miniature movement. On the other hand, the relaxed government policy and the existence of human right violation created a contradictory situation in

the society that “played a major role in nurturing the seeds of socio-political imageries in the 1990s” (Artleove, 2021). Salima Hashmi (1942-) is one of them who did work on socio-political themes.



Figure 7. Salima Hashmi, 'Poem For Zainab', 1994

The artwork of Salima Hashmi reflects delicacy and at the same time forcefully focuses on the suffering of women in a highly male-controlled society, especially under Zia-ul-Haq. Hashmi usually paints abstract figures of struggling women, which reflects her thoughts and feelings regarding the political and social uncertainties of Pakistan (Kazmi, 2009). This can be seen in her painting *Poem For Zainab* (see figure 7). Hashmi is a peace, anti-nuclear-weapon campaigner, and women's rights activist (Alam, 2016). She encouraged more conceptual forms of art with the help of Zahoor ul Akhlaq, (1941-1999) who lived and “worked in an almost indefinable space between modernism and post-modernism and grappled with concepts that traversed tradition and modernism” (Rizvi, 2015, P ara.1).

It is viewed that the period under General Zia-ul-Haq is characterized by mixed artistic trends. Calligraphy and abstract art made significant contributions to the development of Pakistani art and an extent provided security for artists' survival. The restrictions on visual art under the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq not only marginalized artists from freedom of expression but positively this vulnerability motivated few artists to work on political issues. However, the 1990s era was considered the time when conceptual concerns were introduced into mainstream Pakistani art. It is observed that politically dissent art of the 1980s and conceptual art of the 1990s influenced the future generation of artists especially those after 9/11.

### ***Pakistani Contemporary Artwork: Rise of Political Art (2001-2020)***

It is observed that the incident of 9/11 not only affected millions of people but artists across the globe also influenced and provided their perspectives and consequences of the event. However, Pakistani artists were no exception to this influence, they also experienced the repercussion of the War on Terror in their homeland. Therefore, their majority of creative work deals with the issues faced by post 9/11 Pakistan (Saqlain & Khan, 2016). Such as if we examine Pakistan's domestic environment after 9/11, it can be claimed that the period is marked by significant social and political change and a rise in violent extremism. Drone attacks, military operations, extremism, and suicide bombings created discontentment and hopelessness among Pakistani people. Ultimately this turbulent environment influenced the thinking of Pakistanis towards the government, Taliban, and America and sometimes shaped an angry reaction.

However, this uncertainty was also felt across the art scene and triggered mostly young and even acclaimed artists to come up with their socio-political imageries. Aisha Khalid, Imran Qureshi, Saira Wasim, Faiza Butt, Shahzia Sikander, Syed Faraz Ali, Waseem Ahmed, Irfan Hasan, Sobia Ahmed, and



Ambreen Butt are among those who were tremendously affected by the wave of post-9/11 violence and has responded to it in their respective way. They have used their creativity to criticize, appreciate and describe their fear, anxiety, and distress. It is observed that the majority of young contemporary artists reacted to these socio-political conditions, which resulted in the emergence of new art forms based on socio-political narratives.

The first contribution immediately after 9/11 was made by Pakistani artists Imran Qureshi and Aisha Khalid who conducted a workshop, titled Darmiyaan at the Rothas Art Gallery. It was an effort to document the response of local artists to the political situation that Pakistan faced in the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, remarkably, this workshop changed the mindset of many artists towards the socio-political theme.

One of the major themes in post-9/11 Pakistani visual art was to present the violence and destruction caused by drones and suicidal attacks between state machinery and militant organizations. Since violence become a daily occurrence in Pakistan that resulted in massive casualties from both sides where mostly innocent humans were targeted. Therefore, significant artists including Imran Qurashi (1972), manifested violent extremism in their artwork. The element of bloodshed and destruction can be seen in Qureshi's solo show, *All are the Colour of My Heart*, 2010 (see figure 8) in which the artist showed imprints of hands, feet, and limbs on paper in red strokes of paint that covered the surfaces (Mirza, 2017).



Figure 8. All Are the Colour of My Heart by Imran Qurashi, 2010

Qurashi's majority of work is highly concerned with the violence and distress in Pakistan caused by the War on Terror. For instance, one of the Installation *Blessings Upon the Land of My Love* showcased an impression of a bomb explosion on a busy plaza that the artist also experienced in his neighborhood in 2010. However, Qureshi's art expresses grief and horror but also provides the reason for hope (ArtMag, n.d.).

Nazia Khan (1968 ) is another artist who believes that the date of 9/11 has significance in terms of a shift in Pakistan's larger political and social discourse, and also a turning point in artists' careers. Pakistani artists started to think about themselves, the reality they faced, and their role as image-makers in this society (Chughtai, 2013). Khan's creative practice highlights the violence in Pakistan's daily life, and the painting *The Streets are Rising* (see figure 9) is one of the examples best of her work.





Figure 9. The Streets are Rising by Naiza Khan 2013

Senior artist Rahat Naveed Masud also responded to socio-political chaos that upraised after Pakistan's engagement in the US so-called War on Terror. The most challenging issue was extremism and the massacre of the Army Public Schools children in Peshawar (2014). In her painting *Untitled* (see figure 10) she expressed the hidden and unspoken sentiments of families about the carnage of the Army Public School. Masud took the inspiration for this painting from the images of Madonna and Christ. She painted the character of Madonna as a common woman of the society, holding the dead body of a school-going boy in her lap. Similarly, Madonna is displayed holding Christ in many biblical paintings (Alam, 2015).



Figure 10. Untitled by Rahat Naveed Masud, 2015

Contrary to Masud, Mian Ijaz ul Hassan's approach to reminding the audience about the brutal attack at APS in 2014 is more intense (Alvares, 2019). In *Massacre of Innocents* (see figure 11) Hassan painted the figure of a crying mother and portraits of victimized children at the APS attack (Alam, 2015). Which resurfaces the pain and grievances of the victims' families on the atrocious event.



Figure 11. Massacre of Innocents by Mian Ijaz ul Hassan 2015

Drone strikes launched by the US in Afghanistan and the northwest region of Pakistan, which was another issue of concern for the number of artists. For instance, Prof. Abdul Rahim Nagori (1939 – January 14, 2011) in his painting *Untitled* (see figure 12) showcased the pain and death due to drone attacks with stressful colors and composition. To relate the suffering and socio-political turbulence in Pakistan Nagori follow the influential style of *Guernica* by Picasso. This painting also documents and highlights the loss of a common man in the so-called War of Terror. The image of a crying mother of a victim, holding the dead body of her child creates a melancholy atmosphere and shows her pain as a result of the drone attacks (Khan, 2018). Nagori feels that art is needed to educate and aware the masses regarding unjust. Moreover, art is required for a better society “as long as there are socio-political wrongs to be righted” (Jaine, 2012).



Figure 12. *Untitled* by A.R Nagori

A collage painting series *Say My Name* by Ambreen Butt (1969) is dedicated to the youngest victims of US drone strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Butt wanted to explore the relationship between power and vulnerability and expose the influences of political violence on individual lives. Each painting

in this series incorporates the name and age of a single Afghan or Pakistani child killed in a US drone strike (Gallery Wendi Norris, 2020). The painting *Razi Mohammad (16)* (see figure 13) is the best example of this series.

It is observed that Pakistani artists experienced violence, death, and destruction, in the shape of drone attacks, suicide bombing, and military operations. Rather to use the art for art's sake, Pakistani artists painted what they have seen in their surroundings. It is obvious that the insecurity and suffering, that Pakistani artists have experienced over the two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in their daily lives, are reflected in their work.



Figure 13. *Razi Mohammad (16)*, by Ambreen Butt 2020

The second theme Pakistani artists touch upon was a critical outlook toward American intervention in Afghanistan. One of Pakistani-American most influential artists Shahzia Sikander expressed an environment of chaos, fear, and confusion brought by American imperialism in the wake of 9/11 in her painting *No Fly Zone* (see figure 14). The painting interprets how the wise king, an important figure in Abrahamic religions, “disappears from his seat of power, which rises unoccupied on heavenly clouds” (D’ Souza, 2021). Now the throne is surrounded by angels who have red, white, and blue wings, monstrous beings, and fighter jets. The artist wanted to expose “how exaltation and happiness are transformed into one of chaos and threat, presided over by American aggression” (D’ Souza, 2021).





Figure 14.No Fly Zone by Shahzia Sikander 2002

On the other side, Aisha Khalid (1972) is inclined to point out the political interest behind US intervention in Afghanistan in her painting “West Looks East” (see figure 15). Through this painting, Khalid comments that East and West represent entirely two different cultures that cannot meet together. Even for centuries, “the West has been looking at the East with vested political and economic interests and it has always been accompanied with war” (Behiery, 2013). However, after 9/11, she did work on socio-political issues (Aziz, 2021) uncertainty, violence, and pain in the region. For this, she uses bullet holes, and blood-splattered marks in her work (Asian Art Archive,n.d.).

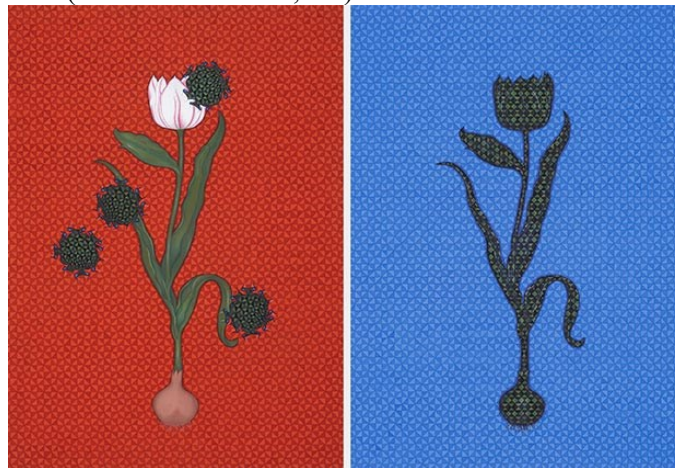


Figure 15.West Looks East by Aisha Khalid 2013

The third theme that emerged in the post 9/11 contemporary art is distrust around the American political leaders. US-led War on Terror and violent extremism made the Pakistani general public more suspicious of American leaders. In the same way, artists could not hide their feeling and expressed their hatred through their creative pieces. For example, Irfan Hasan’s (1982) painting *Untitled* (see figure 16) showcases the image of US President Obama. To convey the painter's distress at the political personality



the artist painted Obama's image in a surreal style and suspicion is obvious in the portrayal of the double faces. The image of Obama with a two-headed entity, a shimmering gold tooth that shines threateningly, and a bizarre smile (The Dawn, 2010) gives the feeling of disgust and distrust.



Figure 16. Untitled by Irfan Hasan

Like Hasan, Faiza Butt (b.1973) is another of Pakistan's foremost contemporary artists, who work on controversial themes and is interested to paint hidden political messages that need to be decoded (Hassan, 2013). Similar to Hassan, she picked a surreal style to unearth the curiosity and complexity of subjects. Such as in her painting *Moderate fantasy violence* (see figure 17), she painted the portrait of Rudy Giuliani – the mayor of New York City during 9/11 with another image of bomb explosions that replaced his eyes. However, with the artificial and sinister smile, the portrait and the event of 9/11 have some links which Butt tried to decode (Art Radar, 2015).

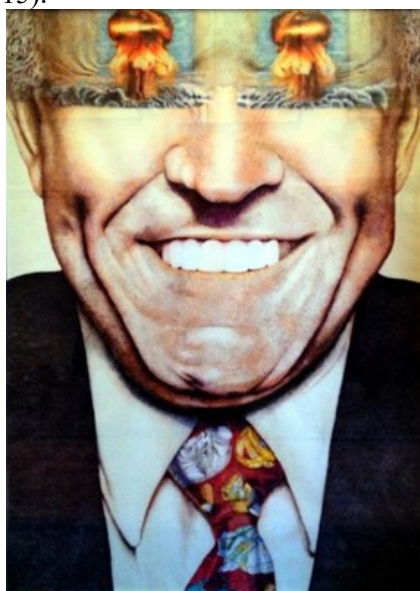


Figure 17. Moderate Fantasy Violence by Faiza Butt

Post 9/11 alliance between the US and Pakistan made many artists uncomfortable and aggravated critical questions about their relationship. In one of the painting series, Sobia Ahmed describes the "US-Pakistan relationship as one where Pakistan is not only being hung up to dry but is being used as bait at the same time" (Artnow, 2014, para 2). Her views towards the Pak-US relationship can be seen in her painting *Untitled* (see figure 18), where she portrays an unconscious man hanging upside-down, his hands, neck, and ankles tied with red and white striped rope. His green dress with white stars is symbolic of Pakistan

while the other man held the fishing rope. Whose outfit indicates him as American and whose right leg is noticeable with military camouflage and boots (Artnow, 2014).



Figure 18. Untitled by Sobia Ahmed 2018

Saira Wasim's (1975) paintings *The Kiss* satirize the close relationship between Pakistan and the US as a key ally in the US War on Terror (Wasim, Artist's Website). Her painting *History till 11 September* (see figure 19) reinterprets Raphael's painting "school of Athens, wherein ancient world philosophers gathered and welcome president Bush in the school of Athens. Almost in the center, Socrates's conversation with president bush made them prominent figures in the painting. While President Bush holding a gun and listening to Socrates, who is describing him about the new rules of engagement in the war against terrorism. Other philosophers are also busy making diagrams of missiles. The painting "is a satire on America's imperial power, nation's obsession with weapons and it's a start of making new history (Wasim, Artist's website). Musharaf is also there, wearing a tiger mask and his saluting position showed his inclination to support America in its mission on the war against terrorism.



Figure 19. History till 11 September by Saira Wasim 2001

Contrary to Wasim, the work of Syed Faraz Ali strays away from the general satirical depictions and critically viewed Pakistan's role in the War on Terror such as Syed Faraz Ali's painting *All Rights Reserved III* (see figure 20), describing how Pakistan getting economic favors as a key ally and another side how it experienced repercussions in the shape of violence. In this painting, Ali shows the young man's head completely enveloped by a Pakistani flag, representing an expression of his thorough feelings of suffocation and agitation. On the top, kettles are covered with American dollars and seem to float above the victim's head. According to Faraz, his work is directly related to what is happening in Pakistan, he showed amazement on the news about bombs and at the same time about money that is entering and flowing out of the country. He tries to capture all those issues through his art (Ali, 2012).



Figure 20. All Rights Reserved III by Syed Faraz Ali

It is viewed from the work of contemporary artists that post-9/11 political engagement changed the content of Pakistani contemporary artwork. Artists became confident to see and visually comment on US interest and Pakistan's role in the War on Terror and the relationship between the two countries. It is observed that the post-9/11 scenario in Pakistan made artists interpret their surroundings and see and explain things that are invisible and unnoticed. Artists commented on the issues that are urgent and critical to them.

Pakistani artists did not ignore the third actor Taliban and other fundamentalist groups in the representation of their artwork. However, this controversial theme was not mostly a central subject but few artists took a bold step and provide their perspectives. As the visual statement of Waseem Ahmed (1976) in one of his extraordinary series of miniatures *Silver Bullet*, (see figure 21) in 2010 treats this traditional taboo in a very subtle way. In this series, Ahmed painted Mullah figures in a very sophisticated and delicate manner like saints or princes. Their figures are harmonized and face expressions are filled with inner peace. Around the mullah figures, a spiritual world of paradise is created, which is symbolized and enriched by the Garden and delicate calligraphy. While one part of the painting is made of mud and blood, wherein Ahmed tried to present the clash of two contradicting worlds. Here artists wanted to show “the current compost of atrocities as a parallel psychological landscape to the Paradise that is so violently desired” (UK Contemporary Art Magazine, n.d.).





Figure 21. Untitled by Waseem Ahmed

International news on terrorism, political conflict, intolerance, extremism, and religious fanaticism has developed negative imagery of Pakistan. As a result, a new generation of artists came out to provide a positive image of Pakistani culture, and its people's particular religion. For instance, Imran Qureshi's *Moderate Enlightenment* (see figure 22) represents Muslims as simple, normal, and innocent by doing ordinary activities. This painting is an effort to change the negative image of "fundamental" Islam with a moderate one (City Hall, 2006). It seems artists as responsible citizens express their social and political views and counter the negative stereotypes around Muslim identity and post-9/11 Islamophobia around the world.

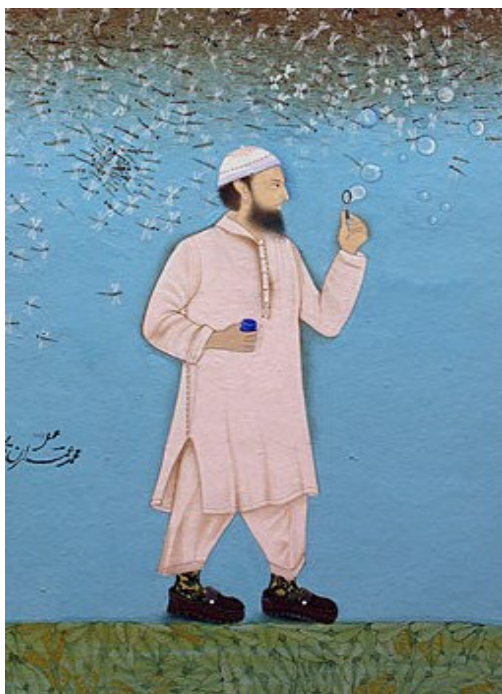


Figure 22. Moderate Enlightenment by Imran Qureshi in 2006

Another popular theme that emerged in the post 9/11 art of painting was the representation of the shuttlecock burqa (veil). It resurfaced as a symbol of suppression, backwardness, and part of uncultured society in the western world immediately after 9/11. However, contemporary Pakistani artists did not miss the opportunity to provide their point of view on this. Kausar Iqbal (b 1980) is one of them who answered the stereotypes around Muslim women who wear the burqa. His burqa series with nostalgic pottery motifs and kaleidoscopic designs highlights the people and culture of Pakistan. He symbolizes the burqa as the strength and resilience of Pakistani women. According to the artist, the burqa remains a strong symbol of subjugation. But at the same time, “some people see the burqa as a form of oppression whereas for many women it offers a sense of security in a male-dominated society”(Abbasi, 2020).



Figure 23.Untitled by Kausar Iqbal in 2014

Similarly, *Birth of Venus* (see figure 24) by Aisha Khalid (b 1972), portrays two contrasting concepts regarding the burqa as a means of oppression and a means of shelter or security.

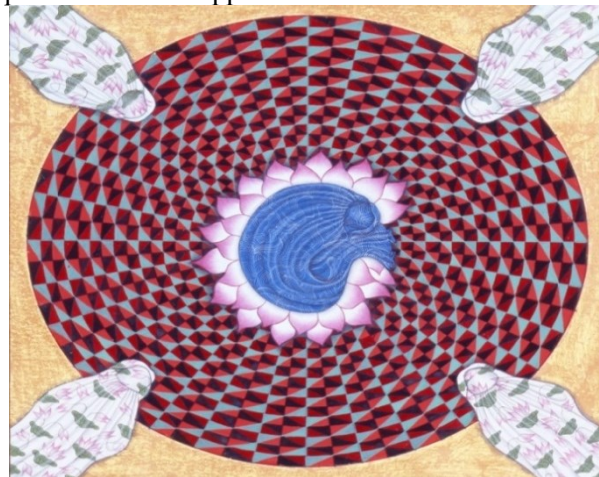


Figure 24.Birth of Venus by Aisha Khalid in 2001

The title “Birth of Venus” is inspiration taken from the famous painting by Italian painter “Botticelli” of the same name. However, rather than a nude classical figure, the artist portrayed a veiled woman in the center around the lotus leaf, which is accompanied by four other women delicately rendered in each corner of the painting. For Khalid, the burqa is related to traditional clothing to protect women from becoming objects of lust. “This piece explores this debate and it is up to the viewer to decide whether or not “Venus” is being liberated or confined”(Fukuoka Asian Art Museum,n.d.).



Figure 25.1wa db12 by Waseem Ahmad in 2010

Ahmed takes this subject differently, perhaps he utilizes his work *1wa db12* (see figure 25) to discuss Islamic fundamentalist activities. This painting sees that the burqa for some time became a camouflage for the suicide bomber (UK Contemporary Art Magazine). This painting personifies fear, as a veiled woman and gun gives the idea that all is being done in the name of faith (Peerzada, 2015). It is viewed that the Pakistani artists took this controversial subject in a much more nuanced manner. Burqa appeared both as a symbol of oppression but at the same time, the majority assured this Muslim women’s identity.

Undoubtedly, the socio-political transformation after 9/11 turned the artists more critical of their society and pushed them to prefer political themes in their artwork. Therefore, the period acted as a catalyst in the flourishing of socio-political imageries in Pakistan. It seems the event of 9/11 and its aftermath events provided Pakistani contemporary artists the opportunity to indicate or question the drawbacks and injustices of the War on Terror.



## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that there is an evident relationship between Pakistan's joining the War on Terror (as a frontline partner with the US and non-NATO partner) did have ideological and security ramifications in terms of the emergence of violent extremism across Pakistan. These changes in turn influenced contemporary Pakistan's artwork of painting, as over time the themes became more political. This becomes even more apparent if compared to pre-9/11 artwork.

The study puts together evidence on the emergence of violent extremism in the wake of the Pakistan-US alliance against the War on Terror. The invasion of Afghanistan followed by dethroning the Taliban, and later the security operations in Pakistan-Afghanistan bordering regions (including the US drone strikes) did influence the sentiments of a certain segment of the population (with stronger religious orientation). To them, this was an unjust war against Islam and Muslims, resulting in the loss of innocent civilians, displacing hundreds of thousands of people from their land, and ruining them in the economic sphere. This all leads to a violent response from the religious segments of the population, who felt that the war was unjust and that they have been pushed against the wall.

For the last two decades, the country is in the midst of violent extremism, resulting in the loss of lives, displacement of millions, and economic misery. The violent extremism touched everyone in the country in one way or the other, including the artists. The influenced the transformative changes in the subject matter that artists started to paint. Post 9/11 artists highlighted the destruction, violence, and suffering caused by drone attacks and suicide bombings. They criticized Pakistan-US Alliance against the War on Terror and American intervention in Afghanistan. Even contemporary paintings showcased chaos, fear, and confusion brought by American aggression in the post-9/11 world. Distrust toward American leaders is also visible in their work. Moreover, contemporary artists tried to counter negative images of Pakistan in the representation of the burqa as the strength and resilience of Pakistani women and the portrayal of a religious person in an innocent and moderate manner. This is a major departure from the predominant artwork subject in the pre-war times (before 9/11) which showcased the life of the Mughal court, myth and regional folk stories, landscape, portraits calligraphy, still-life, and others.

In view of the above, the study concludes that there is a direct correlation between Pakistan's participation in the US-led War on Terror and the emergence of religious segments that led to violent extremism. The counter-terrorism operations by the military fueled these further. This in turn influenced the contemporary artwork (of painting) which became more politically motivated in terms of the subject matter.

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