DISSERTATION

Titel
„Contemporary Miniature Painting in Pakistan: Hair versus Veil. Tracing Two Recurring Metaphors (Zeitgenössische Miniaturmalerei in Pakistan: Haare oder Schleier? Eine kunstgeschichtliche Annäherung an zwei wiederkehrende Metaphern)“

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Abstract

Biography
FOREWORD

My primary interest has always been the contemporary art practice in my environs. After completing my MA thesis on the work of the Austrian artist Franz Felfer (b. 1927), I worked for the Association of Visual Artists Vienna Secession, as an organizer and curator of exhibitions of contemporary art for five years.

A family posting in Pakistan gave me the opportunity to take a break from my job and return to visual studies—with the primary objective of writing a PhD. I soon realized this project posed a considerable challenge, as interaction with Islamic and South Asian culture meant investigating a totally new sphere.

The first inquires were made without any specific expectations. As an art historian educated in Europe, my eyes were trained to view “clinical” Conceptual Art. I was primarily seeking art works that would conform to those concepts of art with which I was familiar, and therefore my initial response towards the “other” aesthetic was that it was sentimental and kitsch.

Almost stereotypically, it was just that “otherness” that later fascinated me. Exploring art works that were so rich in artistic skills and at the same time so socially and politically up-to-date, was an extraordinary discovery.

Contemporary miniature painting, an art practice, still in its infancy, but encompassing great potential, soon captured my complete attention and consequently the decision was made to dedicate my research to that particular art discipline.

Moreover, a long-standing personal passion for subject matters related to women found fulfilment with that decision, as most of the contemporary miniature painters are female and perhaps naturally, they focus on “woman” as a theme.
For that reason and due to my personal circumstances, being an expatriate-woman living in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, “The Visual Representation of Women in Contemporary Art of Pakistan” was initially chosen as a first topic. Even though, the title and objectives were later modified with many alterations, the connection to women remained a main concern throughout the progress of this dissertation.

From the very beginning I was aware of the danger of a distorted perception, which automatically arises, when a European looks at “exotic” art works.

To refrain from the troublesome “Them-and-Us”-discourse I have tried to avoid any comparison between East and West, as it is simplistic and subjective. My approach is to fulfill postcolonial demands to counteract any Eurocentric perspectives. The main aim of achieving a holistic understanding of contemporary miniature painting in its cultural, spiritual and political context is woven like a thread throughout this research work.

The long period of more than four years, I spent living in Pakistan, made not only extensive study in situ possible but also enabled an immersion into local culture. Both were of crucial importance for this study.

Christine Bruckbauer, London, October 2007

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1 The terms “the other,” “the otherness,” and “exotic” are comprehensively analysed by Edward Said in: Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
INTRODUCTION

A refreshing breeze blows. Flowing black locks attract attention. Turquoise water, painted in peculiar swirls, is about to engulf the tresses. Lotus leaves float calmly on the surface. One tiny blushing blossom becomes visible. Underneath a heavy blue curtain, roots creep forth, desperately trying to reach the nourishing stream. A gossamer cloth, so flimsy that it seems it will evaporate at the slightest touch, veils this mysterious scene. Loosely attached to the image’s borderlines, it imparts a great elusiveness (Fig. 1).

Title and Definition

The search for the artist of this intimate, and delicately executed painting leads to Hajrah Khan. As a graduate of the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, Pakistan, she is counted amongst the small group of contemporary artists who were trained in the elaborate techniques of “miniature painting,” an art form that was developed in the Islamic and Hindu courts of the Indian subcontinent between the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The orthodox patriarchal teaching system at the Miniature Department of the NCA today is still headed by the legendary ustad (master) and based on the traditional apprenticeship system of the imperial workshops.

Studies begin with learning to produce the painter’s essential implements, like the qalam, the extremely fine brush made of squirrel hairs, and the wasli, the individually prepared paper. Copying classical paintings from Persia as well as from Mughal, Pahari and Rajastani albums follows, so that rendering specific idioms in traditional composition and form become embedded. Experiments in form and content are allowed only in the third and last academic year.

2 The technical term: “miniature painting” for Persian and Indian court painting has been critically discussed by international art theorists (see 1.1.1).
It is understandable that some graduates are eager to push these traditional boundaries in order to modernize this rigid discipline. But each artist’s individual approach exhibits great diversity:

Hajrah Khan achieves this through her decision to discard with figures and to abandon insignificant details. Instead of relying on traditional narratives to express her view, she concentrates on a few loaded symbols, like the hair, the veil or water with the result that her work excites the viewer’s imagination. Many artists work like her, while others prefer to experiment by expanding the small painting surface or by incorporating more spontaneous techniques (Fig. 2). In this regard it is significant that miniature painters who live abroad or have attended a foreign exchange scholarship programme interact more informally with traditional conventions and are more easily poised to switch to alternative media, considered “du jour,” whereas artists, working and living in Pakistan, prefer to hold on the legendary wasli. Yet, within this average 15 x 20 cm field of composition the experimentation knows no boundaries.

These various tangential directions within the movement pose a great challenge
in the task of defining “contemporary miniature painting.” Besides its actual subject matter, is it then the small scale, the formal elements or the traditional technique that distinguish a contemporary miniature? Where are the boundaries? What are the parameters?

Is it still appropriate to define or categorize an artwork by its technique at all? How is it possible that such an time consuming technique celebrates its renaissance, out of all the eras, in the age of Conceptual Art, where the “idea” involved in the work takes precedence over material and technical execution? What can be the reasons for young people to decide to study a painting style which was at its zenith half a millennium ago? And what makes them use it for the articulation of twenty-first century concerns?

All these questions came to my mind at the very beginning of this investigation and therefore will be discussed in depth in the first part of this dissertation.

Chapter I focuses on the search for possible coinciding parameters and for a sound definition of contemporary miniature painting. Dealing with the polemics of the term “miniature” per se is necessary as international art historians claim that the name “miniature” for Persian and Indian painting is linguistically and technically misleading.

Consequently a research into the history of book and album painting in South Asia as well as the study of traditional techniques becomes relevant.

An analysis of the political and social background and the quest for possible
precursors provide a better understanding for the phoenix-like rise of a discipline generally considered to be extinct.

It is understandable, that the process of contemporizing a five hundred year old tradition has not only received recognition but has also raised some critical voices. The dispute and arguments between the “orthodox revivalists” and the “experimental re-inventors,” will be analysed in the last part of Chapter I.

Contemporary miniature paintings sell like hotcakes to the extent that artists fail to fulfil the demands of their collectors. In Pakistan, works like Hajrah Khan’s *Painting with Lily Pads*, 2005 (Fig. 1) are still sold for very affordable prices, while abroad they are valued at sums far beyond the means of an average collector. For instance, the standard price of drawings by Shahzia Sikander is around US$ 40,000.00. Recently the work *Barbed* (Fig. 3) by Aisha Khalid was auctioned for US$ 10,200.00 at Christie’s in New York.

In order to analyse the success of the phenomenon contemporary miniature painting, I will try to pinpoint the motives for this special interest amongst art collectors and dealers. Additionally I will explore the possibility that economic ambitions determine the career choice of miniature painters.

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4 The *Painting with Lily Pads* was sold for 15,000 Pakistani Rupees in 2005 that is equivalent to US$ 300.


Finally the last point of Chapter I will provide an overview of the various directions the evolution of contemporary miniature painting has taken as well as an appraisal by various art critics.

While the first chapter analyses the phenomenon of miniature painting more from an overall perspective, the second will focus on content and stylistic characteristics based on concrete art works. A primary objective is to recognize a certain approach artists choose to articulate their concerns as well as to explore distinctive characteristics within the recent miniature discipline.

The themes range across a wide terrain. Education, travel and the spread of popular cultures have inspired an extensive range of sophisticated, often critical art practices. The artists observe and comment on political and social subjects, such as neo-imperialism, economical colonialism, the defence policy of the present military regime, feudalism or restrictive traditions practised in their home country. Above all, I have found one recurrent topic: “women’s issues.” One explanation for this trend is the new predominance of female artists in the genre and the present status and circumstances of Pakistani women is another.

In Pakistan, as in other Asian cultures, strong patriarchal traditions have proved to be resistant to “Western-style” feminism for many years. Feminist movements in the arts, heralding woman's political and social consciousness, had hardly any impact on the art scene of Pakistan until the late seventies.

The situation had to worsen before a rebellion against patriarchal oppression took place in the works of woman artists. Thirty years ago, in 1977 the “democratic” government headed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was overthrown and it was claimed that the foundation of a truly Islamic State had been laid. For women the implications of the totalitarian regime of the new ruler General Zia

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7 In contrast to the past, where the genre of miniature painting was clearly dominated by men. see 1.2.2 and 1.3.4.
ul-Haq were critical, as overnight the rights they have struggled for achieved over the previous decades were overruled. In the name of Islam, women were withdrawn from public functions and their legal status drastically diminished. Art production was deemed to be ideologically objectionable and all new artworks were directed to be “Islamic” in form and content. All depictions of humans or animals were banned.

It is understandable, that the ideology of a regime, that was built on “religious fundamentalism” and lasted until the late eighties, left an impact on society and cannot be easily erased from the mind. Therefore the struggle of women to overcome these restrictions on the female population is still extensively reflected in art works. More than ever women artists express their agony and struggle within a society predominated by misogynist customs. Through their art they expose, challenge and undermine religious, cultural and political ideologies that perpetuated the silencing of women and the dominance of male authority for many centuries.

Thesis
Looking through a large number of miniature paintings created in the last two decades\(^8\), I discovered that not only the technical execution but also the formal approach to addressing women’s issues differs from everything I have seen before.

The absence of self-imaging is immediately apparent.

This is in clear contradiction of the trend in international feminist art works where the artist’s self portrait has played a crucial role in the emancipation movement, as it progressed from the idealization and mystification of the

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\(^8\) Miniature painting is a very young discipline. The pioneer is Shahzia Sikander, when she depicted her own daily schedule in her thesis painting, instead of copying traditional miniatures, in 1992.
woman to the deconstruction of female heteronomy. Here for example the works by Frida Kahlo, Cindy Sherman, Maria Lassnig, and Elke Krystufek come to mind.

The use of elements to achieve a shock effect is missing, as well as the depiction of stark reality, such as the aging process or pornographic poses—themes that generate attention and are chosen by artists to express their grievances in contemporary artworks.

Instead a tendency to obscure and to paraphrase the female figure becomes evident, if indeed the physical form does not vanish altogether. An idea than rather an absolute physicality is portrayed and signs, symbols and metaphors are highly favoured.

Flowers, birds or daily accessories not only announce the physicality of a woman’s presence but also serve as a means to visualize her inner feelings and unspoken desires. Amongst the wide range of female motifs, two that recur most frequently caught my attention: “the veil” and “the hair.” Aware of the ongoing controversy in the West surrounding the veil, a synonym for Islamic fundamentalism and loaded with diverse implications, I found it especially interesting to investigate its employment and meanings in the art that is exclusively produced in an almost “homogenous” Muslim environment, in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The female hair’s reputation might be politically less explosive in the global discourse on religion, but it is special because of its contradictory relationship with the veil,—considering that hair is the actual cause of the whole issue of veiling. Women of different cultures are required to cover their hair because of its devastatingly seductive beauty.

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10 For the understanding of the complex concept of a painting other metaphors will also keep flowing in the discussion.
Questioning

Through these two, hotly disputed metaphors for female presence, I will investigate the phenomenon of obscuring the image of women in contemporary miniature painting and will question why artists like Hajrah Khan choose to use a stream of black hair to replace the female figure? What are the objectives in using symbols? Are there spiritual reasons? Are there discernable trends the artists gravitate towards? Are there other aspects, which speak for the depiction of the veil and the hair in miniature painting? I would like to find out if there is any reciprocal dependence between the depiction of the veil and the female hair or if a certain sequence in their appearance with reference to content or time is traceable? Or have the artists just become bolder in their artistic approach, considering that first one has to discard the veil to reveal the hair?

I will analyse the artist’s concerns according the ongoing debate on the veil. What are the messages and what do they want to accomplish? And finally how does the audience perceive their works?

Methodology

In answering these questions I consider an investigation of the symbols’ cultural and spiritual context as relevant, as well as the examination of local and regional customs. In order to comprehend the starting point of the contemporary artists I will also observe the utilization of veil and hair in the art history of South Asia. It is necessary to investigate the meaning of other symbols reoccurring in these particular art works, as well.

The discussion of concrete miniature paintings will take place artist by artist, which allows more attention to be paid to the artists’ individuality. For a better reading and understanding of an artwork I found it extremely instructive to learn each one’s personal story. The great advantage of contemporary art is that one can ask the artist her/himself.

The observation of a body of work produced within a longer time frame makes a documentation of stylistic changes possible. The sources, which inspire the
artists in their visual compositions are of special interest here. How much is left of the traditional concept? How far do the artists dare to go? I will continually look for stylistic references to traditional court painting as well as to European art history and will try to find out about possible preferences for specific traditional modes and iconographies. Any other connections or reciprocal stimuli will be analysed by comparing contemporary miniature paintings with works produced by Pakistani artists in various media using the same symbolism. That will also prove whether the theses mentioned above refer just to this distinctive art discipline or whether they are reflective of general art production in Pakistan.

The selection of the artists as well as of their works has to be limited within the framework of a dissertation. The choice of artists for the present discussion was not done arbitrarily, but corresponds with the exclusive focus of investigation. The main goal is not so much to make a quality evaluation, but to define a distinctive attitude and to bring to light the characteristics and the potential. I am conscious about the dilemmas associated with this task as contemporary miniature painting encompasses a wide range of different developments and as it is, a recent phenomenon it is still in evolution. Therefore this investigation refers to a small but representative group of paintings chosen first of all to meet the specific targets and to provide a significant insight into the problems of miniature painting today.

State of Research
The two existing books on contemporary painting of Pakistan by Ijaz Ul Hassan and by Marcella Nesom Sirhandi, were published in the early nineties, so that the young discipline was not mentioned.\(^ 11\) Even Akbar Naqvi’s book, printed in 1998, *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculptures in Pakistan*\(^ 12\)

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pays no attention to the new movement at all. However, all three publications are valuable sources for studying the art history of Pakistan.

With his book *Indian Art*\(^3\) of 2001, Partha Mitter provides an excellent overview of the development of South Asian Art and Architecture from 300 BC until 2000 AD. The last chapter, devoted to “The Contemporary Scene,” commendably concentrates on “Women Artists of the Subcontinent,” and the art scenarios of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are discussed separately. “The most visible and critical presence has been that of women artists and art critics, and perhaps in them lies the future development […].”\(^4\) he explains his focus. However it seems that for him the new movement at the Lahore Miniature Department was not significant enough to be featured in his book.

The first publication where contemporary miniature painting found its deserved attention is the catalogue of the exhibition *Pakistan: Another Vision* in 2000, when the curator Timothy Wilcrox assigns a prominent place to the works of Shahzia Sikander, Nusra Latif Qureshi, Talha Rathore, Muhammad Imran Qureshi and Aisha Khalid in his display on “Modern Art in Pakistan.”\(^5\) In her contribution to the same catalogue, the Karachi based art critic Niilofur Farrukh names the steps, taken by miniature painting students to detach the discipline from the “moribund practices of faithful reproduction” and its “iconoclastic” traditional content. She refers to the movement by young Lahore painters as “neominiaturism,”\(^6\) a term that never really got established.

The British/French anthropologist Virginia Whiles is the international pioneer of the investigation of contemporary miniature painting. Her essay on behalf of the exhibition *Manoeuvering Miniatures* in 2001 was ground-breaking. There she already calls miniature painting “the most radical contemporary art work


\(^4\) Partha Mitter 239.


in Pakistan today.” Later publications, such as the catalogue *Contemporary Miniature Paintings from Pakistan* for the survey show at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in 2004, along with the recent and first hardcover publication on miniature painting, the *Karkhana: A Contemporary Collaboration* project are major contributions to the international establishment of this particular discipline. In her profound essays and papers like “Miniature Painting in Pakistan Today: Authenticity for Whom” or “Karkhana: Revival or Re-Invention” she investigates the genesis of contemporary miniature painting, by questioning its cultural and socio-political context, rather than by exploring its iconography. At present Virginia Whiles is completing her PhD on “The Birth of the Contemporary Miniature as an Anthropological Phenomenon” at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

In the meantime my fellow student Simone Wille has also finished her Master’s thesis with the title “Contemporary Art in Pakistan: A Balance of Old and New.” She has done an excellent job of investigating the conditions leading to the revival of miniature painting.

The most brilliant figure in the current art scene of Pakistan is Salima Hashmi. As an artist, curator, writer, educator and activist for women’s rights, she has had great influence on the development of art in the country. In her roles as a teacher and later principal of the NCA she was a great supporter of the new movement in the Miniature Department. Her art gallery Rohtas II, attached to her home in Lahore, has become a show case for emerging new talent. She makes a tremendous effort to mentor and promote the works of younger artists. Due to her reputation and contacts not

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only in Pakistan but also abroad, for many artists, over the years, she has come
to symbolize the “gateway,” to international success.
In her book *Unveiling the Visible*\(^2\), published in 2002, she describes the life and
work of thirty-eight women artists, who have all contributed to the art history of
Pakistan in the last sixty years. Five of them are miniature painters.\(^2\)
Today almost every publication produced on contemporary art in Pakistan
includes her textual contribution. The hallmark of her essays are her empathetic
interpretation of the works’ content and its correlation with the actual life of the
artists.
With much anticipation I am looking forward to get her new publication, *Memory,
Metaphor, Mutations: The Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan*\(^2\), co-written
with the Indian art critic Yashodhara Dalmia. The book will be released in 2007.

Credit for the success and high profile of miniature painting abroad in the
last two years must go to Hammad Nasar, a former investment consultant.
Based in London he founded Green Cardamom, an international platform
for Pakistani artists, together with his wife Anita Dawood. The organisation
develops visual arts projects in collaboration with public museums and galleries
and runs a separate gallery programme representing contemporary art mainly
from Pakistan. Hammad Nassar is responsible for the international success
of the *Karkhana* project and is the editor of the homonymous and first-ever
hardcover publication on contemporary miniature painting.\(^2\) The book compiles
remarkable theoretical contributions by John Seyller, Salima Hashmi, Virginia
Whiles, and Anna Sloan. The latter two also wrote essays for Hammad Nasar’s
subsequent publication, the catalogue *Beyond the Page*\(^2\), for the eponymous

\(^2\) Sumaira Tazeen, Shahzia Sikander, Talha Rathore, Tazeen Qayyum, Aisha Khalid.
exhibition, showcasing the “attitude” of traditional miniatures transformed into alternative media at the Asia House in London in October 2006.

The Aim of this Research
The survey of the research above suggests that current literature on the subject of contemporary miniature painting is rather limited and mostly based on articles in magazines or essays in catalogues accompanying exhibitions. The existing academic research concentrates on the socio-political and cultural premises for the rebirth of the art form.

My PhD, represents the first attempt to investigate the phenomenal evolution of contemporary miniature painting since its advent in 1992. Herein I will not only try to provide an evaluation of formal and stylistic changes but also to bring to light the problems that have arisen due to a radical contemporizing progress in the last fifteen years. An investigation of the possible reasons for the national and international success of this movement will be juxtaposed with a critical analysis of the relevance of contemporary miniature painting for art practice in the twenty-first century.

A primary aim is also to provide a detailed iconographical discussion of a group of representative works. For the first time, an attempt is made to define common characteristics in the artistic approach of certain subject matters. Patterns followed by contemporary miniature painters, like the trend of paraphrasing the female figure, shall be identified and examined for feasible motivations due to the social and cultural environment. The search for sources of inspiration as well as an in depth exploration of the rich symbolic of South Asia was found to be essential.
1 CHAPTER I: CONTEMPORARY MINIATURE PAINTING

1.1 DEFINITION AND PARAMETER

1.1.1 Contemporary Miniature Painting a Modern-Day Curiosity?

Art critics and historians tend to point to the unique position of contemporary miniature painting and like to describe it as a “curiosity” or “phenomenon” in international art practice.

“It is probably a ‘curious’ fact that the very tradition of miniature painting, particularly the Mughal style which is promoted as Pakistan’s cultural heritage, has become inspiration for some of the most radical contemporary art work in Pakistan today,” Virginia Whiles introduces the exhibition *Manoeuvering Miniatures* in 2001.26

Hammad Nasar concurs in his contribution to *Art of Pakistan: Beyond Borders*, “as ‘contemporary miniature’ from Pakistan continues to meet enthusiastic critical response internationally—just this year museums in the US, Europe, Japan and South Asia have held exhibitions exploring this theme—there is no shortage of artists, academics, writers and curators scrambling to add to the general mythology on how this ‘phenomenon’ came about.”27

In her thesis on “Contemporary Art in Pakistan”28 Simone Wille alludes to the danger of labelling something a “curiosity.” She writes, “those [Eastern] positions that finally succeed and find acceptance in the eye of Western critics

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and art markets are usually the ones that refer to a tradition or can be drawn back to a traditional function within the respective society. If some of the success of Pakistan’s miniature painters abroad can be explained by this theory, then the acceptance is misleading, because the West tends to see not so much an autonomous art work in miniature painting, but rather a curiosity which is not appreciated for its own artistic value.”

So if an art practice is denoted as a “phenomenon” or “curiosity” it is automatically perceived as unusual and excites people’s interest more because of its “otherness” rather than due to its artistic quality.

Edward Said’s influential critique of Western constructions of the Orient refers to a similar perception. In Orientalism he explains the interest for the “other” with the urge to empathize with one’s own distinctive position. In Said’s opinion “the construction of identity […] involves the construction of opposites and ‘others’ whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of the differences from ‘us’. Each age and society re-creates its ‘Others’.”

But how phenomenal and curious is the imbuing of a contemporary vision into an ancient art form in global art practice?

According to the modernist concept of the “Tradition of the New”31, which is widely taken for granted in contemporary art32, only the uncompromising rejection of conventional techniques can produce something “new.” The conceptual art movement in the seventies emphasized “artistic idea” over the art object, which resulted in the loss of importance of the artist’s technical skills. As a result the so-called new media have conquered international art spaces.

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The adherence of an artist to one specific medium has become obsolete. Conventionally executed art works like graphics, paintings or sculptures have become a rarity, while the majority of artists hop between installation, photo, video and computer techniques. In this context, the readiness of young art students to adopt a craft such as traditional “book and album painting,” which demands extremely sophisticated skills and includes a very time-intensive procedure, is quite extraordinary, when viewed in the fast-moving global arena.

However, the attribute of “novelty” was already undermined by advocates of post-modernism in 1987, as described in the editorial of the *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne.*

“The symptoms of a post-modern period are not difficult to perceive. The menacing cubes of modern suburban housing projects tend to transform themselves into constructions, which may be cubes, but are now covered with stylized ornaments. The puritan or simply boring asceticism of the various forms abstract painting […] has been replaced by allegorical or mannerist paintings, frequently figurative … full of allusions to tradition and mythology.”

The expressions like “stylized ornaments,” “allegorical” and “frequently figurative” concur exactly with the characteristics of miniature painting. Does this mean that the turn to tradition by Pakistani artists represents not a national but a global phenomenon?

Geeta Kapur writes in her essays on contemporary cultural practice in India, “celebratory neo-traditionalism is based not so much on material practice as on the appearance of simulacra.”

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33 The term “Post-Modernism” was introduced by the architect Charles Jencks who was tired of the doctrine of functionalism.


An even clearer explanation for the revival of an almost obsolete technique can be seen within the post-colonial context. The impact of British colonialism swept indigenous art forms aside and demoted them to “minor” disciplines in favour of newly introduced European art practices, such as printmaking and oil-painting.

In their search for identity after Independence and as a post-colonial reaction Pakistani artists explored their cultural roots. During the seventies “nationalism” was propagated, and Mughal Art was officially sanctioned as cultural heritage. In 1977 a political upheaval led to a government with religious fundamentalist principles. Art was censored. Landscape painting, calligraphy and miniature painting were declared as the appropriate Islamic art disciplines. These circumstances can be seen as the ideal environment for the “Revival of Traditional Miniature Paintings”.

However, there is the risk of fetishism if traditional art is used in a nationalist discourse. When with “neo-traditionalism” nostalgia for past glories arises then creativity gets lost in the reproduction by denying its fruitful progress. “But mimicry can be used as a device of resistance,” writes Virginia Whiles in her essay for Berlin.

And this is exactly what Pakistani miniature painters do. By basing their method on classical techniques and styles, they systematise the tradition as a conduit for expressing their reactionary concerns.

The renaissance of miniature painting seen in the postcolonial context

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37 Title of the brochure published on the occasion of the 125 years celebration of the National College of Arts, Lahore, in 2000.

may therefore be valued less as a phenomenon and more as a predictable
development due to the existing political circumstances.
In the global context, the discipline of contemporary miniature painting has a
unique status due to the fact that this complex technique is taught only at the
National College of Arts in Pakistan and nowhere else in the world.

Basing their work on technical skills and on a traditional formal language these
young miniature painters create most exciting art pieces. The composition and
content compares favourably to works in other, probably, more modern media.
In an era when video-works and installations embellish the stages of
international art institutions, something so small, inconspicuous and time-
consuming in production is truly unique.

1.1.2 Parameters

“Intimate little pictures that nevertheless fill the entire scope of one’s vision”\(^{39}\),
Stuart Cary Welch, one of the great scholars on Mughal Art, describes the
distinctive discipline of miniature painting.

Syed Amjad and Munir Alam define the parameters of miniature as the
following; “first: coloured drawings, second: either portraits, figure studies or
compositions that tell a story, third: figurative, fourth: depict figures with highly
stylised postures, fifth: done in opaque water colour, sixth: detail oriented with
particular emphasis on ornaments like jewellery and seventh: characterised
by the laborious application of colour in small dots—a technique referred to as
\(\text{pardakht}\).”\(^{40}\)

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\(^{39}\) Stuart Cary Welch, *The Emperor’s Album: Images of Mughal India* (New York: Metropolitan

\(^{40}\) Syed Amjad and Munir Alam, *Ustad Bashir ud Din: The last master of Lahore School of
The primary function of miniatures as illustrations of imperial manuscripts limited their size. Bound in a book format or collected as individual folios in muraqqas (albums), they were easily moved and transported rather than framed and fixed on the wall. The measurements vary from very small to bigger illustrations. Accordingly, a folio from the Minto Album with the depiction of Shah Jahan with his son on horses measures 22.3 x 14.1 cm while the Hamzanama is known as an extraordinarily large example, with page dimensions up to 70 x 58 cm.

Beside the scale, a further feature in common is the narrative and figurative character of images with various minute details. The paintings are represented in small windows framed by borders, beautifully illuminated with calligraphic, floral and faunal motifs.

Miniature painters today like to experiment with these traditional formalities by introducing new techniques and imageries. The complete list of the parameters mentioned above is rarely observed.

"Alongside the evident homage paid to their lineage of masters, the current practice seeks to push the limits of miniature painting, literally and metaphorically, beyond the margins," writes Virginia Whiles. However, the small format and the meticulous execution of minute details may be seen as the most common parameters found in the works, under discussion in this PhD.

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41 The latter more European habit was occasionally practised by the Great Mughal Jahangir, who had a special favour for European art. However, wall painting or textiles as interior decoration were preferred.

42 The “Minto Album” was brought by Lord Minto to England and sold by Sotheby’s to the Victoria and Albert Museum. The very high quality of the pages let experts assume, that they were part of the royal collections in India. Susan Stronge, Painting for the Mughal Emperor, The Art of the Book 1560-1660 (London: Victoria & Albert Publications, 2002) 148.

1.1.3 Definition and Polemics of Nomenclature

The following definitions for the word “miniature” have been gleaned from different dictionaries. According to High Beam Encyclopedia the term “miniature,” describes an artwork, especially manuscript initial letters, done with the red lead pigment ‘minium’; the word originally had no implication as to size. In a general sense the term denotes any small, detailed kind of painting, including medieval illumination and much of the finest painting of India and Persia. It is also used to refer to diminutive portraits. Among the earliest European masters of this latter art were Holbein the Younger, Jean Clouet, and Jean Fouquet. English masters famous for their miniatures in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were Nicholas Hillard, Isaac Oliver, Samuel Cooper, and Richard Cosway. The early portrait miniatures were executed in a precise, sometimes precious style. […] Watercolour on parchment, paper, porcelain, or ivory was the most frequently employed medium for miniatures. The art virtually died with the advent of photography.”

Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms explains “miniature” as an appellation that “originated in the early eighteenth century as an Anglicization of the Italian ‘miniatura,’ which in turn derived from the medieval Latin ‘minare,’ ‘to rubricate, illuminate,’ adapted from Latin ‘minium,’ the ‘red lead’ used to mark or rubricate particular words in manuscripts. Due to a mistaken etymology, ‘miniature’ has now become associated with ‘minute,’ and is used to describe small paintings, usually portraits, the vogue for which enjoyed wide popularity in Europe from the early 16th to the early 19th centuries,” and here again, Nicolas Hillard (1547-1619) is mentioned as one of the most famous miniaturists. Beside water

colours, gouache is also described as a possible technique, while vellum\textsuperscript{46} is explained as the earliest painting subsurface until it was superseded by other materials like thin sheets of ivory or card from the fourteenth century onwards. It is interesting that in this definition there is no reference to Persian and Indian painting and instead, the concentration lies on Europe.

In recent years a polemic arose around the use of the term “miniature” for paintings originating in the Middle and South East. During her lecture at the University of Vienna, Professor Ebba Koch refers to an on-going discourse within international Historians of the Islamic Art circle,\textsuperscript{47} here the spearhead Eleanor Sims, whose reasons for objecting to its use are both technical and linguistic. The British scholar points out that “the technical manner of painting a small image on paper, in the East, does not in the least involve the use of the red clay called ‘minium,’ as a support for gold, as is used almost always in Western painting, European, Byzantine and Greek, even Armenian and Georgian; and in any case the East mostly does not use parchment as a support for the minium+gold.”

Her second objection is to the word itself, since “miniature has come to have two meanings, in art-historical language, but the earlier one was derived from Latin, and then other romance languages: ‘miniato’ as a past participle of something painted with ‘minium,’ which—per force—came to be the English ‘miniature’ and was thus confused and conflated with the word ‘miniature’ having the meaning ‘small’. Small these pictures may be, but they are not ‘miniato’—that is, prepared with minium (red bole or ‘Armenian’ bole).”\textsuperscript{48} She emphasizes this again, when she explains in a later email, “European book-illuminations, when they have gold skies or grounds, have that red stuff [Armenian bole] under the gold, to provide a bond; they are worked with ‘minium’ and are, therefore, ‘miniatus,’ the past participle of the verb

\textsuperscript{46} vellum: a writing material, kind of parchment made from delicate skins of young animals. During the Renaissance entirely superseded by paper.
\textsuperscript{47} Ebba Koch, “Kunst und Kultur des Islams,” University of Vienna, Vienna, 17 June 2003.
\textsuperscript{48} Eleanor Sims, email to the author, 22 May 2004.
‘miniare;’ [...] the word, somehow, became confused with the notion of small size, somewhere in the past six centuries or so. European book illustrations therefore are often called ‘miniatures’ (as they are also called ‘illuminations’): But they do have a foundation of ‘minium,’ so there is some logic to the nomenclature.

However, Muslim, and other Eastern non-Muslim paintings on paper in small scale do not use ‘minium’ to bond the gold to paper (as opposed to animal-skins parchment, of whatever may be the beast).”

Consequently, in the effort to verbally distinguish Eastern from Western works, Eleanor Sims states that, “just as we do not use ‘illumination’ in Islamic art as do the practitioners of European manuscript studies but make a distinction between ‘illumination’—for abstract, non-figural ornament with much gold—and ‘illustration’—pictures—just so should we delete the word ‘miniature’ from our vocabulary when we speak of Eastern book or album-painting and use instead the words: painting, illustration (if that applies), picture. There are surely others as well: but not ‘miniature!’”

Relevant literature refers to different “minerals” for “minium,” commonly known as “red lead.” The expert in Persian and South Asian painting techniques, Yves Porter describes the Latin expression “minium” as an oxide of lead and points to its etymology from the Minius River (Menjo) in Spain, where it was first mined.

Eleanor Sims calls it “red bole” or “Armenian bole,” which is known as a coloured clay consisting of “natural, ferruginous aluminum silicate and originally found in Armenia but now elsewhere in Europe.” Furthermore, the name “minium” has also been applied to “cinnabar,” a red mercury sulphide.

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49 Eleanor Sims 26 July 2005.
50 Eleanor Sims, email to the author, 22 May 2004.
53 Yves Porter 82.
It is interesting that “red lead” was also found in Persian and Indian paintings, with the big difference that there it was used exclusively as a red pigment. When Sheila R. Canby writes about “Materials and Tools of the Persian Artists,” she states that “the bright orange-red of many Persian paintings came from red lead” and adds, “despite the dangers of lead-poisoning, red lead and its cousin white lead, […] enjoyed continuous use from classical times until at least the seventeenth century.”

Anjan Chakraverty, who writes on Indian painting, explains that “the warm and dense Indian red (geru), the purplish red ochre from Hormuz (hormuzi), the commonly used orange lead (sindura) and vermilion (ingur) or the sulphide of mercury were the main shades of red used.”

Whereas the gum of the kiker tree (acacia nilotica), known as gum arabic, serves as a binder for gold-applications on the wasli surface in South Asia.

The description by Virginia Whiles of a contemporary miniature painting by Nilima Sheikh is romantic but perhaps misleading; “The pictorial space is seeped in colour, her surfaces soak up in redness of carmine, vermilion, and madder as if the pigments can soothe or work a cure. How significant suddenly the verb ‘to miniate’ means to redden and that the word miniature is derived from ‘minimum,’ a red pigment used in Elizabethan miniatures and brought back over the Silk route.”

Further linguistic complications occur due to the non-existence of an indigenous equivalent for “miniature” in the Arabic, Persian, Urdu or Hindi languages. Some scholars refer to the Persian expression musawwiri as the possible original term, which stands more general for “the art (or the act) of painting, or


Though, it is assured that the term “miniature” has been introduced by the British in colonial India. Probably the desire to categorize everything alien, as a means of control, and some superficial resemblance to medieval illuminations caused it to be confused with European works of art. During this time European techniques like oil painting and printmaking were introduced in newly founded art schools in South Asia. The distinction between arts and crafts unknown at that time, created a big divide between the local and modern “academic” art production. The traditional “small format painting” was shifted to the “minor sector,” located more in the field of Applied Arts. It had to stay there until it was upgraded to a “major” in 1982, placed on a par with printmaking, painting and sculptures in the Fine Arts Department of NCA.

Not accidentally, that change in perception coincides with the deliberate political agenda of creating a national identity, legitimized by a glorious past at once heroic and artistic; the Mughal Empire.

It is characteristic that this discourse originates again in the West. Scholars and authors seem united in avoiding the expression “miniature,” especially in relation to a publication’s title. Milo Cleveland Beach, for example, does not mention the word “miniature” in \textit{Mughal and Rajput Painting}\footnote{Cleveland Milo Beach, \textit{Mughal and Rajput Painting} (1992; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).}, 1992. Instead he names the paintings according to their origin and patrons or just as illustrations and folios.


On the other hand, the Indian author Anjan Chakraverty impartially entitles his book \textit{Indian Miniature Painting}\footnote{Anjan Chakraverty, \textit{Miniature Painting} (New Delhi: Lustre Press, 1996).}, 1996, and Partha Mitter also does not hesitate
to use the expression in his standard work *Indian Art*\textsuperscript{62}, 2001.

Some scholars solve the dilemma by clearly explaining their adherence to the expression "miniature" in a footnote.\textsuperscript{63}

The publications mentioned above all refer to paintings commissioned in the past by the Mughal and Rajput court between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the album/manuscript painting (beside wall painting and architectonic sculpture) was the major art discipline.

The terminology has completely different connotations in modern art practice. The term "contemporary miniature painting" or "neo-miniature painting" is used to refer to that movement of young artists, in particular, who use the historical art form as an inspiration for the creation of modern art works, manifestly reflecting contemporary culture and reacting to prevailing social trends.

The term "miniature painting" is appreciably integrated in the art lingo of South Asia today. In accordance with the designation of their training institute, the "Department for Miniature Painting," its graduates proudly accept their title "Miniature Painters."

And as Simone Wille states in her thesis, actually it’s they, who should “be the first, who apply the adequate term for this art form.”\textsuperscript{64}

In order to avoid any misunderstanding and to differentiate from other modern approaches, the word “miniature painting” will be used for this research, especially, if referring to the contemporary art form, while for “traditional miniatures” also other expressions like “album or book painting” and more specifically, "Mughal or Pahari style” will be employed.


\textsuperscript{64} Simone Wille, “Contemporary Art in Pakistan: A Balance of Old and New,” 65.
1.2 ORIGIN, HISTORY AND THE TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUE

1.2.1 The Imperial Workshops and the Sophisticated Technique

The tradition of miniature painting in South Asia dates back to Buddhist and Jain manuscript illuminations, painted on the slender, rectangular leaves of the talipot palm, c. 800-1200. Islam arrived in the eighth century and the Muslim love of books, especially skilfully illustrated manuscripts may have inspired Hindu patrons and artists to be more inventive.

Indian book painting reached its zenith under the extraordinary artistic activity of the Mughals, who ruled the territories of present-day India and Pakistan between the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. The Muslim rulers founded *kitabkhana* (houses of books), where books were prepared and collected. Returning from his exile in Tabriz in Persia, Humayun (r. 1530-1540, 1554-1556) brought two of the finest court painters with him to Hindustan, Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd-as-Samad. These together with hired artists of Hindu and Jain origin formed the basis of the famous imperial *naqqashkhana* (painting house), which was an integral part of the royal library.

Consequently, the knowledge of Persian crafts fused with the indigenous style. This together with the later influence of European naturalism gave birth to the distinctive, brilliant Mughal style, which has influenced succeeding generations in South Asia to the present day.

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According to the contemporary chronicler Abul Fazl Allami, officials called “daroghahs and clerks”\(^67\) oversaw the routine work at the naqqashkhana. They distributed the work according to the required task. Like in “collaborative enterprises”\(^68\) each step of production was executed by a particular class of artists.

Such as, wasligars fabricated the wasli, a pasteboard of multiple sheets of paper\(^69\) fused together with bookbinder’s paste. After that it was burnished with a seashell until perfectly smooth. Sitting on the ground with knees drawn up the musawwir (artist) would rest the wasli on the thighs while painting. Before applying the paint, he would draw the initial structure of the composition with a charred tamarind twig.\(^70\) Sometimes details or whole sections were borrowed from existing works and then transferred to the wasli by perforating the outlines with a needle and pouncing them with powdered charcoal.\(^71\) Once the rough contours of the tarh (drawing) were established, a thin coat of white lead treated by gum arabic was applied, through which the drawing was faintly visible.

Brushes were made of hairs from the squirrel’s tail, tied into little bunches and fixed in pigeon feather straws. They varied from thick to extra fine, the latter made up of a minimum of three single hairs.

Ready to begin the painting, the Mughal artist would choose between three different painting styles: siyah qalam (black brush) a monochrome painting with one transparent colour, mostly grey or brown; neem rang (semi colour) a combination of transparent colours with ten percent opaque colours and guch rang\(^72\) (opaque colour) the most colourful one, which can include different


\(^{69}\) The paper, initially imported from Iran and perhaps Samarkand since the thirteenth century, began to be manufactured in South Asia from the fifteenth century. The major paper producing centres of Mughal India were: Dowlatabad, Ahmadabad, Sialkot, Kashmir and Bihar; Yves Porter, *Peinture et arts du livre: Essai sur la littérature technique indo-persane* (1957; Leuven: Peeters, 1992) 26-30.


\(^{71}\) This technique is called suikari.

\(^{72}\) Instead of “guch rang” the term “gudd rung” is also used for this technique. Since the knowledge was communicated orally, there is no written evidence of the exact spelling.
kinds of hues, made opaque by admixing safeida. The first two techniques were invented by Mughal painters to recapture the grisaille effect of European engravings, while guch rang was the more common style. The outlines were filled with a stippling method, called tapai. After that the surface was finished again with pardakht, a more refined mottling. With the finest qalam, a single or two-hair brush, the artists would apply, dana pardakht (little dots), jaliyar pardakht (crossed lines) or khat pardakht (small parallel lines) to create the finest shades. Between the different layers of paint the surface was burnished repeatedly, which provided the legendary jewel-like brilliance of colours, for which Mughal paintings are so admired.

The pigments for the paint were derived from two main sources: minerals or organic materials. Among the minerals were gold, silver and precious and semiprecious stones. Through the energetic trading activities and immense financial resources of the imperial patrons the finest quality could be obtained. The binding material with which the pulverized pigments were tempered was gum arabic. The safeida, a white pigment, responsible for the opaque effect of watercolours, was imported from Persia for the Mughal ateliers and contained carbonates of lead or zinc. Talc was used as well. For blue, the semiprecious stone lapis lazuli was ground, while indigo, from the indigo plant was known as a cheaper substitute. Red was derived from the red ochre of Hormuz, or from red lead and sulphides of mercury. Organic dyestuff made of dried insects produced carmine, whereas yellow chalk/colour is “said to be obtained from the urine of cows, fed in the flowers of Butea frondosa, or on the leaves of mango trees.” Verdegris, acetate of copper, yielded the bluish emerald green, which was favourably used for the backgrounds of portraits. Later green earth was the hue chosen by the Mughal painters to apply generous washes to colour the surroundings.

73 Yves Porter 78-79.
For finer ornamentation, the decorative areas were treated with needles (*suikari*). To obtain a raised effect (*munavvat*), seen for example, in the jewellery, pottery pieces were rubbed to form a smooth paste, which was applied bit by bit to the painting. Basholi painters even fixed minute cuttings of beetle wings to parts of the painted jewellery to create the effect of glimmering gems.\(^{75}\)

The compositions were usually surrounded by tight linear frames in both bright and monochrome colours, referred to as *jadwal*.\(^{76}\)

These were very often amplified by the *hashia*, a more decorative frame, patterned with inscriptions (often written on golden backdrops) or daedal garlands. During some periods so much effort was made in the execution of the borders that they sometimes attained larger dimensions than the composition itself. Exquisite studies of flowers, birds and fabulous creatures are found in those areas, which served mainly for the enhancement of the central image.\(^ {77}\)

Executed by yet again a different class of artists, the illuminators, borders were often composed in *neem rang*, but a broader colour spectrum was also used, where gold applications were quite frequent (Fig. 4).

Decorative borders were not only painted on the same page but also added later on, just like a passe-partout. Deriving from another period their content bears no relation to the main composition.

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\(^{76}\) For different varieties of *jadwals* see: Yves Porter, *Peinture et arts du livre: Essai sur la littérature technique indo-persane* (1957; Leuven: Peeters, 1992) 64.

\(^{77}\) Sometimes the image is displaced from the centre (Fig. 4).
1.2.2 Female Miniature Painters in the Past

The structure of the *kitabkhanas* has always been patriarchal and knowledge was transmitted orally and mechanically through apprenticeship from generation to generation. Generally the son followed the craft of his father. Specific techniques were kept a family secret. Since daughters were married off and to avoid the leakage of this knowledge, female family members were excluded from the mystery of miniature painting. Therefore the female involvement in the workshops was limited to pigment grinding.

After all, the literature reports of a few woman painter:

Asok Kumar Das reveals that girls were trained and produced “delightful miniatures, some of which are preserved in the *muraqqas* [lit.: collection].”\(^{78}\)

Here he refers to Wilkinson and Gray\(^ {79}\), “Female names appearing in the Minto album are Shafi’a Banu who painted a picture of Shah Tahmasp (Fig. 5) and Nini, and in the Gulshan album, Raqiya Banu (Fig. 6).”\(^ {80}\)

“Woman painters were rare,” writes Som Prakash Verma, who queries the fact that the inscription “Nini” on the Mughal copy of the Martyrdom Cecilia (Fig. 6) after an engraving by Jerome Hieronimus Werix is of a female.\(^ {81}\) He adds to Das’ list of women painters, Nadare Banu, about whom an inscription on a painting in the Gulshan Album observes that Aqa Reza was her teacher and that she is the “daughter of Mir Taqi.”\(^ {82}\)

Robert Skelton refers most likely to the same artist, spelling her name as

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\(^{80}\) Das 66; Robert Skelton corrected this paragraph, when he points out a spelling discrepancy: The signature on the painting representing Shah Tahmasp is clearly spelled as “Sahifa,” the Persian script allows no doubt. Furthermore he notes that this painting does not belong to the famous Minto album but was bequeathed to the V&A Museum by Lady Wantage; Robert Skelton, personal interview, 19 Nov. 2006.

\(^{81}\) Prakash Verma 25.

“Nadira” Banu, and equates her with Anarkali\textsuperscript{83}, the legendary concubine of Jahangir.

Moreover it is known, that Mughal noble women not only influenced the development of Mughal style, but were also involved in painting themselves.

Ustad Bashir Ahmed refers to one of Babur’s (r. 1526-1530) wives who in

\textsuperscript{83} Anarkali (literally: Pomegranate blossom) is the most mysterious and multi-faceted personality of Mughal history.

Robert Skelton conjectures that not only was she one of the few female Mughal painters but also that she was involved in a plot by Prince Salim against his father, the Mughal emperor Akbar. He points to the date of her death sentence for treason 1599, which correlates with the historical year of Salim’s rebellion and the inscription on her tomb proves their romantic alliance. Whereas Ustad Bashir sees in Anarkali none other than the most favourite and powerful wife of Jahanghir, Empress Nur Jahan. After falling from Akbar’s grace, due to her illicit affair with crown prince Salim, the dancing girl was buried alive. Up until here Bashir Ahmed’s version conforms with the tale of Anarkali popularized in the sixties and seventies by the film \textit{Mughal-I-Azam}, but then he develops the story further by speculating that Anarkali was secretly saved to become later Empress of Hindustan; Robert Skelton, personal interview 19 Nov. 2006; Bashir Ahmed, personal interview, 29 April 2004; \textit{Mughal-I-Azam}, musical, K. Asif, dir., New Delhi, 1960.
his opinion was a painter herself and who founded her own painting workshop together with Chinese artists. Virginia Whiles claims that Nur Jahan, Jahangir’s (r. 1605-1627) most favourite wife, was a practitioner of painting too.

Visual evidence of female artists are in a Mughal painting from 1595, preserved in the British Library in London, which shows a princess painting a self-portrait and a neem rang (semi, transparent colour) named Chitheri or the Lady Painter Painting a Portrait, c. 1630, of the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Varanasi, India (Fig. 7).

1.2.3 Development of the Mughal Style

In the imperial ateliers artistic individuality was encouraged, so that experts of different genres, such as portraiture or natural history studies, could evolve. Many folios carry the signatures of their creators. Beside the different cultural inspirations, the secure status in the imperial workshops as well as access to the best quality materials through international trading created the ideal conditions for high standards of artistry. The direction of artistic development was always determined by the patron, closely related to the interests of each emperor, who ensured the quality control

84 Bashir Ahmed 29 April 2004.
himself. Mughals received instructions in painting as a part of their education and were therefore consummate art-connoisseurs.

"His majesty, from his earliest youth, has shown a great predilection for this art, and gives it every encouragement, as he looks upon it as a means, both of study and amusement. [...] The work of all painters are weekly laid before His Majesty by the daroghahs and the clerks; he then confers rewards according to excellence of workmanship, or increases the monthly salaries,"88 the royal chronicler Abul Fazl Allami records in *Ain-i-Akbari*. In his memoirs Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) boasts that in a work set before him, he could identify the hand of any of the court artists, no matter how small the contribution was.89 Shah Jahan’s personal involvement in the work of his painters is not only mentioned by his first court historian Qazwini in the *Padshahnama*90 but gets also manifested by the pictorial evidence of the artists’ direct access to the ruler, when for instance their self-portraits appear in the darbar scenes together with the grandees of the empire.91

The number of painters peaked during the reign of Akbar (r. 1556-1605), never to be matched by his successors. Many important manuscripts, dealing with historical and mythical events, were produced. Works like the *Akbarnamas* function as the best chronicles of his reign, while others like the *Hamzanama* or *Baburnama* pay homage to Muslim heroes and ancestors. As Akbar’s policy of religious tolerance is legendary, his openness for “the other” is reflected in the stylistic eclecticism of the works produced under his patronage.

In contrast to these ambitious manuscript projects Akbar’s son, Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), preferred smaller, but highly finished single works. Due to the new emperor’s fascination with nature, the imperial workshop developed

a sophisticated realistic style through adopting European techniques like *chiaroscuro* or the aerial perspective. Striking natural studies of animals and plants were produced and the protagonists depicted display distinct features.

Jahangir’s successor, Shah Jahan (r. 1627-1659), succeeded in instrumentalising these new artistic achievements for his own imperial ideology. Painting served mainly as an affirmation of wealth and as legitimacy of his power over the huge Mughal realm. Different painting styles were manipulatively applied to make programmatic statements of order and hierarchy. His joy in perfection and the strong control over the artists resulted in the highest level of painting, both technically and innovatively.  

And during the reign of his son Aurangzeb (r. 1659-1707) the quantity as well as the quality of imperial painting declined. The representation of figures did not agree with his moral convictions and contradicted his goal of transforming the Mughal realm into an orthodox Muslim state.

As a result of the diminishing demand by the imperial court, the artists looked elsewhere for new patronage and found it with the rulers of small kingdoms and regional principalities in Rajasthan, in the Punjab Hills and Central Asia, and again they had to cater to different tastes. Unsurprisingly traditional Hindu subjects, like illustrations of the *Bhagavata Purana* (Ancient Stories of Lord Vishnu), were popular themes, but “standard Mughal themes,” such as portraits of the ruler, were introduced, with the only difference that the impressive imperial mood of manuscripts as in the reign of Akbar and Shah Jahan is missing. To the contrary, the Rajput Rajas are shown in everyday scenes, “smoking the hookah,” within “palace genres” or “enjoying their favourite blood sport, the hunt.”


1.2.4 The British Impact

A new era of Indian art began with the capture of power by the British. The colonial rulers not only put their executive stamp on South Asia but also imposed their artistic taste. The Indian nobility started to collect works painted in the illusionist Victorian style. New subjects became en vogue: “Naturalistic Landscapes” or “Academic Nudes” decorated the walls of palaces in the principalities all over the country. However, the main competition, that artists had to face, was the introduction of photography and portrait painting in oil. Both media slowly replaced the historic and genre painting, practised in the indigenous court workshops until then.

After the loss of Indian court patronage, artists adopted a mixed Indo-European style, which would appeal to the Europeans who were employed by the various East India companies.

“When British men and women went to India, many of them were at once fascinated by everything they saw around,” describes Mildred Archer the time. Natural history, architectural and ethnographic subjects were chosen as suitable themes for the so-called Company painting. Topics like the representation of various caste members in their colourful costumes, different local professions, religious figures and domestic servants, were especially in much demand.

The foundation of art schools, art societies and art museums changed the awareness of art as well as the social status of artists, who became respected academic professionals.

Differing from the imperial workshop (see 1.2.1) where a apprenticeship system was practised and a craftsman’s knowledge was passed on orally to sons, and

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95 Mildred Archer 16.
failing these, to the sons of near relatives, here members of other castes could also join in.

1.2.5 The Mayo School

In 1875 the British Colonial administration established the Mayo Memorial School of Industrial Art in Lahore under the direction of John Lockwood Kipling. Charged “to foster Indian arts and crafts and relate them to new age,” his initial policy was oriented towards an Arts&Crafts pedagogy, “which encouraged indigenous craft industries, and reflected the orientalist view of Indian society as being in harmony with nature and spiritual values.”

Still, in the “official” chronicles of the Mayo School of Art, referring to the formative years under J.L. Kipling the subject of “miniature painting” is not found in the syllabus.

Only in the report, on the international Calcutta Exhibition 1883 to the Punjab Court, “miniature painting” is mentioned as largely represented—not by the Mayo school—but by the “interesting school of Delhi,” with the following comments: “There can be no question as to the delicacy of handling of these works; but they have but little of the freedom, force and variety looked for in the modern European Art. They are perhaps indeed at their best when strictly

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96 The school was named after Richard Southwell Bourke, the sixth Earl of Mayo and Governor General of India from 1869 to 1872, when he was assassinated by a Pathan life prisoner. “Official” Chronicle of Mayo School of Art. Formative Years under J. L. Kipling [1874-94], ed. Samina Choonara (Lahore National College of Arts, 2003) 13.

97 “Official” Chronicle of Mayo School of Art 21.

98 Father of Rudyard Kipling, the author of “Kim.” Kipling was also curator of the Lahore Museum positioned alongside the Mayo School. “Official” Chronicle of Mayo School of Art 15.


100 According to the reports of the Director of Public Instructions of Punjab in 1882 the curriculum included the following subjects: drawing, geometry, carpentry, moulding, wood engraving, lithography, gesso work, and decoration. “Official” Chronicle of Mayo School of Art 45.
decorative in character.”

The neglected position of miniature painting in the curriculum of Mayo School, in the formative years is evident. Later dealt with as a “minor” along with other indigenous crafts, its status is explained in the report by Kipling’s successor, Percy Brown who notes that in Mughal imperial workshops “painting was taught in the same way as woodcarving, sculptures, and metal work, and all other Indian art Industries by a modified application of the apprenticeship system.” All knowledge was imparted “by constant repetition so that the students’ mind was saturated with elements of his subject so that it became a part of his nature.” Therefore he describes the traditional art training as a “rigid and apparently mechanical system,” which does not compare favourably with the [British] method of art instruction, “which is a model of flexibility.”

Nevertheless the archives reveal that under Percy Brown’s principal-ship, the Mayo School offered the following courses: lithography, modelling, perspective drawing, freehand in painting, freehand in brush, freehand from memory, sculpture, gold-smithing, silver-smithing, woodworking, drafting, needlework and finally miniature painting.

According to Bashir Ahmed (see 1.2.5) there is no documentation regarding the existence of “miniature painting” from 1911 to 1952. After the partition in 1947 the Mayo School was renamed the National College of Arts (NCA) and it is a commonly known fact that Haji Mohammed Sharif was teaching there from 1947 to 1968. His successor, Sheikh Shujaullah continued as devotedly as his predecessor and remained at the school until his death in 1980.

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102 “Official” Chronicle of Mayo School of Art 113.
103 “Official” Chronicle of Mayo School of Art 23.
105 Bashir Ahmed, “Reviving Islam Traditions.”
Both were important ustads, whose family histories are directly linked with the Mughal workshops and they “seem to be all that was left of the grand tradition of miniature painting that Pakistan inherited at the time of partition.”

Haji Mohammed Sharif learned Mughal painting from his father Ustad Basharatullah, a well-known court painter in Patiala and Sheikh Shujaullah was the descendant of a famous miniature painting family. His ancestors are said to have travelled with the Mughal Emperor Humayun (r. 1530-1550) from Persia to the Indian subcontinent in 1556. They were both “essentially copyists” and their teaching method followed that of the traditional workshop, the ustad-shagird (master-apprentice) legacy.

Bashir Ahmed, the last doyen, to whom this heavy heritage was passed on in the traditional way, describes those years of apprenticeship as great hardship and does not even hesitate to compare it with slavery, where abuse was seen as part of the educational system. Nonetheless, he speaks with great reverence about Sheikh Shujaullah, “his teacher and master.”

Now himself a respected ustad, he is still looking for a suitable successor, who first, of course, must serve as his shagird.

It was Bashir Ahmed, who finally succeeded in retrieving miniature painting from its realm in the shadows, to establish it as an academic discipline with its own department, within the Fine Arts Institute of NCA. But much more than knowledge of the techniques and ambition were necessary for this change. The actual political situation and a visionary pioneer created the conducive conditions for converting this discipline neglected for so long into an academic subject.

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107 Revival of Traditional Miniature Paintings (Islamabad: Pakistan National Council of the Arts, 2000)
1.3  FIFTEEN YEARS OF CONTEMPORARY MINIATURE PAINTING

1.3.1 Foundation of the Miniature Department at the NCA in 1982

In 1947 Pakistan, literally the land of the “pure,” separated from India to form an independent state. The search for a distinct identity was understandable in order to be distinguished from the bigger “motherland.” The young state obviously had reservations about a shared heritage with India. To avoid the issue of indigenous traditions, many artists choose to express themselves through modern Western art forms, while others align themselves with the Mughal style, which has waned for many decades. Nevertheless, the glorified Muslim past in South Asia, that grand Mughal heritage was predestined to be the ideal focal point in the pursuit of identity.

In the formative years of the nation it was primarily Abdur Rahman Chughtai, who absorbed Mughal aspects into his work due to his ambition to create an art that rejoiced in the Persian and Mughal heritage of South Asian Muslims.\(^\text{10}\)

In the seventies within the Islamic socialist orientation of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto the Mughal tradition became the ideal national cultural policy. Miniature painting found its place in everyday life, printed on postcards, calendars, cushion covers, and advertisements. The tawdry depiction of the imperial miniature images could not be curbed.

Miniature painting became bazaar painting. Many copies of Mughal originals of varying qualities flooded the markets.

Shahzia Sikander, born in 1969, reveals her introduction to miniature painting, “I grew up with them they were standard ‘drawing room’ aesthetic. Images taken from the Mughal School were abundant on gift items everywhere, saturating the

tourist market.”

On the other hand the value of painted miniatures, preferably exquisite replicas of court originals, clearly increased. It became the perfect welcome gift for foreign delegations and a highly marketable commodity to the West.

“Ironically it was at precisely the same time as its transformation into tourist cultural curio, that miniature painting’s ‘re-invention’ took off in fine art teaching,” writes Virginia Whiles and Quddus Mirza writes, “its resurrection is not a phenomenon limited to art but related to society in multiple ways—it is in fact an effort to establish a link with the glorious Muslim tradition in the subcontinent.”

Bhutto’s politics of national awareness and the official sanction of miniature painting along with calligraphy and landscape painting, and its promotion as an appropriate Islamic art form under the subsequent military dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq, paved the way politically for the re-awakening of the “sleeping beauty.” So it finally broke out from its marginal status to become a “major art discipline” at the National College of Arts in Lahore.

For the academic establishment of miniature painting in its own department at the National College of Arts, one person has played a crucial role; Zahoor ul Akhlaq, who was at that time, the head of the Visual Arts department. He had the vision that Mughal painting represented an untapped critical potential for the creation of something new.

Ironically, it was during his studies abroad in England, that Zahoor ul Akhlaq discovered his fascination for the imperial album painting.

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114 Roger Connah, Zahooor ul Akhlaq (Toronto: LAAL, 2000) 94.
The reason for this anomaly was that hardly any original Mughal paintings were found in Lahore anymore. "Its own heritage has been depleted by systematic deconstruction on the part of the British Colonial rule,"\textsuperscript{115} writes Virginia Whiles in 2001.

Some of the finest imperial folios were taken with the booty of the Afghani conqueror Nadir Shah in 1738 and are still in Iran. But most of the paintings went with the “collections” of British officials to England. Today they can be admired in showcases of esteemed museums like the Victoria & Albert or British Museum. “This makes London a particularly good place to study Mughal Art,”\textsuperscript{116} notes J.M. Roger.

Returning to Pakistan and taking up a teaching position at the National College of Arts in Lahore, Zahoor ul Akhlaq’s aim was to open a dialogue between traditional Mughal painting and the contemporary modernism, he experienced studying art in Europe. His post-modern progression was not only manifested in his own work but also in the encouragement he gave to his students to delve into their own rich heritage, but with great diligence. Furthermore, he asked them to search for their real objective by concentrating on their own roots and encouraged “self discovery” instead of copying from the West or from past glory.\textsuperscript{117}

“Zahoor’s commitment to art education in Pakistan can be seen throughout his career. He was instrumental in the revival of miniature painting at NCA, which led to the flowering of the neo-miniature school of Pakistani art," writes Niiloofur Farrukh in her “Tribute to a Master.”\textsuperscript{118}

Shahzia Sikander in *Conversations with Traditions* says about Zahoor ul Akhlaq


\textsuperscript{117} Jamal Shah, personal interview, 20 April 2005.

that he “came to appreciate the tradition in a conscious cerebral manner […].” and moreover she explains that “if Ahmed provided the technical knowledge and the discipline, ul Akhlaq contributed to the intellectual framework around the study.”

It was also Zahoor ul Akhlaq, who persuaded Bashir Ahmed, the reputed last custodian of the Mughal Style and at that time his most passionate student, to take over miniature painting and to update the teaching methods after Sheikh Shujaullah’s death in 1980.

“In my efforts to further enhance my successor and ustad’s practices I revised the curriculum and teaching methodology of the miniature painting courses and got it established as a major. It was a challenging task to convert this traditional art into an academic syllabus. The task entailed numerous months devoted to collecting historical, visual, and philosophical data and designing exercises based on tradition, but which could be applied to contemporary themes,” Bashir Ahmed describes his efforts on “Reviving Islam Traditions.”

And after a quarter of a century, he is the one who still literally occupies the highest position in the Miniature Department, residing for more than two decades in the mezzanine floor of the classroom.

Despite his revolutionary ambitions quoted above, today his teaching style is seen as orthodox and hierarchical, a constant endeavour to preserve his authoritarian ustad-position.

In Bashir Ahmed’s opinion “only the technique makes a miniature painting a miniature painting”\(^{122}\), which explains his relentless adherence to the traditional technique (see 1.2.1). Later on, he adds that beside the technique, the perspective arrangement of the composition, with various different viewpoints, also embodies a compulsory requirement of miniature painting.

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\(^{120}\) Shahzia Sikander, *Conversations with Traditions* 14.
\(^{121}\) Bashir Ahmed, “Reviving Islam Traditions.”
\(^{122}\) Bashir Ahmed, personal interview, 29 April 2004.
He believes the acquisition of the skill takes place through repetitive exercises, and incorporates the age-old practice of copying as an essential part of his pedagogic principles. While in the traditional workshops the apprentices reputedly spent more than eight\textsuperscript{23} years copying, Bashir’s students attend a four-year long training programme at NCA.\textsuperscript{24} Starting with copying from Persian and Mughal paintings, they later move on to works of the Rajput and Pahari schools. Only in the last few months for the thesis preparations, modern vocabulary and technical experiments are allowed.

Shahzia Sikander, who still includes the technique of copying in her recent works, disclaims the common notion of people that it is mechanical and non-creative, since “it comes with a lot of responsibility. I’m not interested in simply copying something and changing it. On one level, copying can mean understanding. You have to look at someone else’s work very carefully and then relate to it in a personal way.”\textsuperscript{25}

\subsection*{1.3.2 Deviation from the Tradition: A Loss of Quality?}

Bashir Ahmed’s students use black and white photocopies as templates, and this fact causes their technical understanding to be questionable. An inevitable loss of the typically vibrating Mughal surface fails to fulfil Zahoor ul Akhlaq’s demands to look carefully at originals for inspiration (see above). The mysterious alchemy of Mughal artists, the complexity of the brilliant coloured layers in Mughal paintings, made of ground precious stones as well as the use of collage or the incorporation of insect wings for depicting jewellery (see 1.2.1) can hardly be comprehended from the flat black and white copy,

\textsuperscript{24} The first year all students do a foundation course which covers different disciplines, the second year courses build up towards the future options that may make for any choice for a major in the last two years.
\textsuperscript{25} Shahzia Sikander, \textit{Conversations with Traditions} 74.
which again is only a copy of another copy, such as from an art book illustration. Confronted with the reproach of various art critics, who claim a loss of quality, such as the characteristic brilliant surfaces of *Mughal paintings*, Ustad Bashir Ahmad bases his defence on the changed situation of artists. While the *mussawir* at the imperial workshops could draw on plentiful and almost unlimited resources (see 1.2.1) the “free lance” artist of today, who depends on him/herself, faces economic restrictions. Commercial pressure and the fear of not having enough to live on may cause them to use less precious materials as well as work with more haste.\(^{127}\)

Bashir Ahmed also confesses to other short cuts; the colours come from paint boxes of watercolours and *safeida*, which is applied to achieve the desired opaqueness, gets imported from Germany. These together with the brushes are easily purchased at the markets in Lahore. One exception is the extra-fine *qalam*, which the students still have to make themselves from squirrel hair (see 1.2.1).

To prepare the *wasli*, the appropriate painting subsurface, the modern artist glues three of four sheets of paper together with a cooked paste of flour, water and a pinch of pesticide, such as copper sulphate, to prevent unwanted invaders. Today even hand-made *wasli* is sold by proficient art students at the NCA campus.

Instead of the tamarind twig, Bashir Ahmed lets his students draw with a soft pencil. The line is supposed to be drawn uninterrupted, sketching is not allowed, and the line is erased later on.

The miniature painter Nusra Latif, a former assistant to Bashir Ahmed, scrutinizes the custom of mounting and framing modern miniatures. She refers to the conventional way of looking at miniatures by holding them in the hands, which allowed an intimate viewing experience. She points out the unfortunate

\(^{126}\) Quddus Mirza, personal interview, 2 May 2003.

\(^{127}\) Bashir Ahmed, personal interview, 29 April 2004.
loss of this experience through the display behind glass, on a wall, a method, originally introduced by Europeans in South Asia.\textsuperscript{128}

Due to a back problem the miniature painter Aisha Khalid developed a special seat for miniature painters, who traditionally sit on the floor, while painting. The wooden construction allows a more relaxed sitting position, since the \textit{wasli} can be fixed to a flexible wooden support instead of resting on the artist’s lap (Fig. 8). Aisha Khalid’s invention has proved to be very successful, and some other miniature painters have started to utilize it as well.

1.3.3 The Genesis of Contemporary Miniature Painting

At the beginning the number of miniature painting students was rather low. For the first ten years, Bashir Ahmed had not more than two students per class. “Miniature painting wasn’t seen as a very active way of developing self-expression so one naturally wasn’t inclined to go in that direction.”\textsuperscript{129} Eventually, the success of one student, who is celebrated today as the most famous graduate, caused an influx of young people to the Miniature Department. Shahzia Sikander was the first student of Bashir Ahmed, who succeeded in blurring the boundaries of this rather restrictive discipline. The \textit{Scroll}, 1992 (Fig. 9) her large-scale thesis painting, shows herself involved in different activities at her family home in Lahore. This was the first miniature painting that incorporated a vision of the twentieth century and brought personal expression to a thematic structure.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{128} Nursra Latif, email to the author, 21 Nov. 2005.
\textsuperscript{130} Shahzia Sikander, “SpiNN” 69.
After this incident, the subject of miniature painting has continually increased in popularity. Contradicting history and in spite of Bashir Ahmed’s patriarchal regime, the majority of students enrolled in the course is female (see 1.2.2). Finally, the number of students increased to the extent, that Bashir Ahmed was forced to look for teaching assistance. “Progressively over the years I continued to fine tune the rough edges in lieu of teaching methodology as problems arise with the increasing number of interested miniature students.”

Bashir Ahmed did his best to search amongst the circle of his most talented students. Initially assistance came from Muhammad Imran Qureshi, Nusra Latif and Usman Saeed. However, both the latter left Pakistan to live abroad. Today, Muhammad Imran Qureshi, who is addressed with a respectful “Sir Imran” by his students, is seen as the second great authority in the Miniature Department. He and Bashir Ahmed teach alternating student intakes. Being one of the most radical miniature painters himself, with an insatiable desire for experimentation, Muhammad Imran Qureshi’s dynamic teaching style has split the department into two factions: the orthodox and the experimental.

Bashir Ahmed, whose first aim is to “continue to engage in ways of enhancing awareness of this endangered Islamic tradition of miniature art,” and in whose opinion “a McDonald has nothing to do in a miniature” (Fig. 10) blames those students who employ Western elements in their paintings to “mess up the

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131 Bashir Ahmed, “Reviving Islam Traditions.”
132 Bashir Ahmed, “Reviving Islam Traditions.”
In reply to the objection, that the Mughals also incorporated motifs from foreign cultures in their compositions, see here in particular the European putti (Fig. 11), he shrugs them off as fakes.\textsuperscript{135}

And one almost feels like being part of Orhan Pamuk’s criminal scenario in My Name is Red, where just the same controversy over the mingling pure Islamic methods with those of the “Frankish” (European) masters has caused dreadful incidents amongst the painters.\textsuperscript{136}

The polarity between Bashir Ahmed’s philosophy and the approach of his counterpart, Muhammad Imran Qureshi is obvious when the latter states in an interview with Qudsia Ali “we had to bring it [miniature painting] to a contemporary level because if you completely cut off miniature painting from all the other forms of painting, you are limiting yourself as an artist. You have to experiment with subject matter, strokes, techniques, et cetera. It is important not to be strict about rules and to not completely delineate one form of painting from another.”\textsuperscript{137}

A perfect manifestation for the two different

\textsuperscript{134} Bashir Ahmed 29 April 2004.
\textsuperscript{135} Bashir Ahmed 29 April 2004.
\textsuperscript{136} Orhan Pamuk, Rot ist mein Name, trans. Ingrid Iren (1998; Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2001) 216 ff.
visions is the annual thesis show, which is held at the end of each year. If it is the turn of Bashir Ahmed’s group, one is sure to find excellent copies of paintings from the Mughal, Persian, and Rajput schools; sceneries of college life, portraits of family members and friends, as well as some abstract compositions, mostly based on geometric patterns, may be exhibited. All of these works represent excellent technical skill. The composition form, as well as the narrative and decorative aspects conform perfectly to the traditional *Mughal style* and for that, these paintings are greatly admired.

The following year, the thesis exhibition of Muhammad Imran Qureshi’s students is awaited with eager anticipation. As opposed to “Ustad” Bashir, “Sir” Imran encourages them to try out new ideas, not only technically but also in form and content.

Muhammad Imran Qureshi, to the grief of his teacher, as a student already had “drilled holes into the *wasli* and dared to use a Rapido pen instead of the traditional brush”\(^{139}\). By experimenting with spontaneous application forms Muhammad Imran Qureshi introduced the aspect of “coincidence” into miniature painting, which was a reflection of the Surrealist theories of automatism, flourishing in Europe between World War I and II, and which describes the unconscious as the wellspring of imagination.

Muhammad Imran Qureshi also re-introduces the practice of collage (see 1.2.1), when he glues pages of script from old books, such as tailoring manuals and Urdu-English exercises, on his *wasli*, to use it later as the ground for his paintings. He applies Letra-set products, transferring readymade motifs by rubbing them onto his paintings. He widens the limitations of traditional imagery with icons from modern life.

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\(^{138}\) The different attitudes are already manifest in the respectful form of address the students use to approach their teachers; the traditional “Ustad” for Bashir Ahmed and the English “Sir” for Imran Qureshi.

Referring to this, Quddus Mirza writes, “his miniatures [are] full of painterly marks, expressive lines and objects, which are not associated with miniatures, such as missiles, scissors, thumb impressions and tailoring patterns. All these blended with the traditional elements of Rajput and Pahari miniatures.”

Remarkably recurrent are ovals made of leaves, deriving from historical paintings as of Basohli and Kangra school, where they function such as a “love nest” for Krishna and Radha (Fig. 12, 12a). In Muhammad Imran Qureshi’s work, these leaves, always executed in a meticulous style, juxtapose with accidentally emerging blots and marks.

Naiza H. Khan notes “a dramatic shift in the treatment of the [so far rather flat] pictorial space; […] in Qureshi’s work marks and underpainting that would normally be concealed along the edge of miniature now overlap to create the

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141 These leaves appear the first time in Imran Qureshi’s series of paintings called “Love Story,” 1999/2000, which he dedicated to his beloved wife Aisha Khalid.
sense that disparate realities are co-existent.”

Liberation from the strict schematics of this historic genre has created many adherents and followers, so that today Muhammad Imran Qureshi’s influence is highly visible amongst his pupils at NCA.

A change has taken place not only in technique and composition but also in theme. The works are issue based and address political and social topics in both the local and the international arena. The artists comment on military rule, nuclear politics, violence or corruption and react to global affairs. However, one theme tops the list of favoured topics for both sexes: “women’s issues.” The new majority of females in the genre may be one explanation. However, the present position of women in a country, where traditionally the female population is supposed to live a life in concealment (purdah), 75% of the women are illiterate, and child marriage, honour killing or rape are not considered serious crimes (see 2.1.2.4) may have galvanized female artists to verbalize their feelings and struggles within a society predominated by misogynist customs. While their male counterparts appear to prefer visualizing the sexual tension and attraction between the two genders (see 2.1.2.2 and 2.2.2.3).

1.3.4 Contemporary Miniature Painting: A Feminine Domain?

Questioning the reasons for today’s popularity within the female fraction both sexes explain: “men didn’t have the necessary patience, and women

liked working on a small scale.”

Nancy Adjana states that “the use of the decorative aspects of the miniature tradition often denigrated as ‘feminine’ or ‘sentimental’.”

The general attitude towards studying Fine Arts in Pakistani society may also play a crucial role in the choice of a particular professional career. On the one hand, Fine Arts were always considered more of a girl’s domain until recently. Traditionally not required to support her family, a girl, it is often said, will take up painting to fill up her spare time. The fact that miniature painting does not require a huge studio and can easily be undertaken at home, perfectly fulfils the cultural requirements of the future housewife and mother.

On the other hand, boys even those coming from the ostensibly liberal and well-educated families are actively encouraged to aim for monetarily more lucrative jobs rather than to study Fine Arts.

Rebelling against society’s preconceived notion that art is a feminine domain Khadim Ali Changezi, one of the few male miniature painters, argues that “any individual possessing an aesthetic sense has the right to art. Art has nothing to do with gender. It is a creative expression and a man is just as capable, if not better when it comes to creative expression.”

1.3.5 Contemporary Miniature Painting: A Formula for Certain (Commercial) Success?

Contemporary miniature painting has emerged to become one of Pakistan’s export successes, Simone Wille writes in her thesis already in 2002.

Today contemporary miniature paintings are effectively exhibited with favour not

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only in art galleries in Pakistan but are also shown and collected by museums and institutions all over the world from Japan to Jakarta, from Morocco to Berlin, from London and Amsterdam to New York and Chicago; And in renowned auction houses, like Christie’s, they are auctioned at a high profit.

But what are the reasons? Why do national but also international curators tend to choose works with “ethnic style-elements” for their shows?

Contemporary miniature painting “represents everything that is considered taboo in Modern art, its decorative, narrative, symbolic and technical skill and its non-European origin,” elucidate the Singh twins, two miniature painters based in the United Kingdom. But perhaps this “‘otherness’ offers an appropriate challenge to how art has come to be evaluated and dictated by an art establishment which preaches freedom of expression as the ‘be all and end all,’ yet excludes anyone who does not comply with its narrow definition of art.”

“Miniature is appreciated, purchased and collected by expatriates as well as foreign buyers because: it reminds expatriates of history, heritage and culture; and it is a distinct art form, not practiced in other parts of the world. Therefore, the sense of identity combined with exclusiveness makes this unique art form ever so popular. For an outside art connoisseur, miniature fits well in his picture of the Orient, cultivated during the years of colonial rule. It offers refinement, skill, craft and themes which are unusual thus exotic for an outsider […] There is another, more practical aspect for the popularity of miniature painting. The miniature being small and on paper is easy to view, store, ship, and exhibit in a gallery of any dimension. It can easily adorn the walls of a tiny flat in a western

148 A recent exhibition (September 2005) of Aisha Khalid and Imran Qureshi at Chawkandi Gallery in Karachi created much discontentment among collectors, since it was already sold out before the first preview.
city.”¹⁵¹ Quddus Mirza, himself a curator of various exhibitions based “Around the Miniature”¹⁵², explains the reasons for the popularity of this art form.

Referring to the popular practice of “tea wash” (see 2.1.2.2) Quddus Mirza writes, “a majority of painters prefer to work on a brown tea-stained paper usually with some part this tinted paper exposed and exhibited in the final/state of the miniature. It is selected to match with the colour of the manuscript that has turned brown with the passage of time. It is basically romanticism with the past” and he cynically continues, “interestingly, there is an uncanny relationship between tea and miniature: Pakistan is rich in the export of miniature art to the mainstream art market and at the top of the list of countries that imports tea. We might soon see multinationals dealing in tea sponsoring miniature shows.”¹⁵³

Aasim Akhtar sarcastically writes in an article for the daily newspaper *Dawn*, “The shortest route that leads to the upper echelons of the art market cuts through the by-lanes of miniature painting. Almost priced per square inch of *wasi*, these intimate masterpieces of traditional import and contemporary appeal guarantee instant success and quick bucks. The annual degree show at the NCA is an eponymous showcase of agitated market activity where rich Aunt(ie)s and loaded Begum(at) converge to bid for ‘the best’ and ‘the second best,’ as if they were crabbing apples and persimmons.”¹⁵⁴

And Durriya Kazi, an artist and an art educator in Karachi, criticizes contemporary miniature painting as “too sweet and too nice.” In her opinion Pakistani artists are champions in veiling and in embellishing the most terrible topics. The absence of disturbing images and shocking reality, might be another explanation for their popularity, since a pleasant and non-distressing display on

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¹⁵² In this connection he curated the following exhibitions: *Exotic Bodies* at the Harris Museum, in Preston, 11 July-14 September 2002 or *Around the Miniature, too* at the Royaat Gallery in Lahore, 5-7 June 2003.
drawing room walls is guaranteed.

For the enhancement of the miniature genre’s international value and renown, most of the credit indisputably goes to Shahzia Sikander, Pakistan’s best-known international artist, who trained as a miniaturist at the National College of Arts in Lahore. Her work, which has gone through many transitions, has been featured in numerous solo exhibitions at museums and galleries around the United States of America, including: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC and the Brent Sikkema Gallery in New York. Shahzia Sikander took part in the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane, Australia; the Eighth International Istanbul Biennial in Turkey; the First International Biennial of Contemporary Art in Seville, Spain and the Fifty-first Venice Biennial in Italy. In recognition of her exceptional merit she was nominated as a 2006 recipient of the MacArthur Fellows Program, nicknamed the “genius grant.”

Artists like Muhammad Imran Qureshi, Aisha Khalid, Saira Wasim and Nusra Latif have also contributed enormously to the global appreciation of this distinctive art form as well, with their participation in highly regarded international group shows, such as the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale or “Playing with a Loaded Gun,” at Apexart in New York and the Fridericianum in Kassel; “Karkhana” at the Aldrich Museum Connecticut and the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. Some of these artists are represented by prominent European and American art galleries.

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155 The MacArthur Fellows Program or MacArthur Fellowship is an award given by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation each year to typically 20 to 40 citizens or residents of the US, of any age and working in any field, who show exceptional merit and promise for continued and enhanced creative work. The current amount of the award is US$ 500,000.
1.3.6 Different Directions: Where Does the Future Lie?

While one group of miniature painters prefers to stay within the traditional parameters, painting opaque watercolour on wasli, others move on and implant elements of traditional miniature painting into other media, which they see as more pertinent to the twenty first century:

Mughal gardens are set up as space installations by Bani Abidi or become the playground of an interactive computer game (Fig. 13). A famous Pahari painting\(^{56}\) mutates into a tableau vivant, re-enacted with live protagonists, the émigré miniature painter, Tazeen Qayyum amongst them (see 2.1.2.4), (Fig. 14).

Within the framework of an art workshop in India, Muhammad Imran Qureshi renders his distinctive imagery of blue leaves on the walls and floors of the courtyard of an old haveli and creates a highly sensitive in situ work. His leaves\(^{57}\), painted in brilliant Persian blue, meld beautifully with the architecture: the decadent walls and the geometric pattern of the floor tiles (Fig. 15). Reacting to a debate around the relevance of

\(^{56}\) The original was painted by the Master of the Early Rasamanjari Series c. 1660-1670 and is today in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

\(^{57}\) see footnote 141.
miniature painting that arose during his residency in Liverpool in 2001, he tore one of his paintings into small pieces, to display it later in a glass container in the final show (Fig. 16).

A residency programme in the Netherlands also inspired Aisha Khalid to probe other media; which, amongst others, resulted in the production of a remarkable video work with great political relevance within the post colonial debate. Portraying the stitching of a red rose by a dark complexioned hand on one screen and the simultaneous pulling out of the threads by a fair complexioned hand, on a second screen, she explores the destruction of cultural heritage in former colonies. The concept of violence is conveyed visually through the usage of needles, along with the distressing audible sound of the unpicking process. The whole work gains an additional level of complexity as the popular stylized rose motif, actually an image taken from her paintings, epitomizing the East here, has its roots in the bourgeois embroidery of Great Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Fig. 17).\(^{158}\)

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The NCA trained miniature painter Hamra Abbas, who is based away from home, in Germany, utilizes the versatility of the miniature genre. For instance with *Please Do Not Step*, 2004 (Fig. 18) a remarkable in-situ-installation initially created for the Fridericianum in Kassel, she examines cultural and religious tenets. She juxtaposes meticulously painted illustrations as well as text passages of the *Quran*, with those of the *Bible*. While on the floor, an exquisite Islamic pattern made of printed-paper strips is laid out.

Ali Kazim, one of the most promising emerging artists, decided to adopt the labour-intensive miniature technique for his “large-sized” paintings. “Ali Kazim’s paintings, painstakingly built like ‘saya [siyah] qalam,’ on a hand-prepared ‘pardakht’ invite us into an enchanted world that is unencumbered by conventional constraints and definitions,” the art critic Aasim Akhtar praises his work (Fig. 19).\(^{159}\)

The work of the computer artist, Rashid Rana is in some ways analogous to the *pardakht* method, which refers to building up a picture with single dabs of paint. He challenges the notion of the art of miniature in particular, with his work *I Love Miniature*, 2002, when he digitally reconstructs a portrait of the twenty-five year old Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, painted by Abu’l Hasan in c. 1616. Unexpectedly, it is achieved by assembling tiny multiple images of the commercial signboards from Lahore (see 2.1.3.4), (Fig. 20).

Shahzia Sikander, the pioneer of contemporary miniature painting, who emigrated to the United States of America in 1992 (see 1.3.2), initially pushed the restrictive frames and worked on a large scale. She transformed miniature paintings into murals and in-situ installations (Fig. 21). Recently, she has brought movement into the “frozen” miniature imagery with the help of digital technology. In animated films, calligraphy and figures deriving from Persian, Mughal and Pahari paintings come to life. Together with their surrounding architecture and

![Fig. 20 Rashid Rana, I Love Miniatures, 2002, digital print, 62 x 46 cm, courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte](image20)

![Fig. 19 Ali Kazim, King Priest, 2005, watercolour pigments on paper, 56 x 39 cm, collection of Keir Mcguinness](image19)
landscape, they go through the most phantasmagorical mutations (Fig. 22, 179, 180). “The parallels existing between a miniature painting on wasli paper and a high resolution screen are subjective at best, but primarily they exist in the usage of space and time. The focus is on communication, a technical understanding of a labour-intensive precision applied to both. The expression that evolves on screen has a lineage of its own, completely independent of what it stood for once on a flat paper surface... it now allows one to peek through old transparencies, through layers that secretly preserve the integrity of what remains behind,” the artist states in an interview with Salima Hashmi in 2003.  

“I have always found miniature painting a very conceptual activity. My interest remains in creating a dialogue with a traditional form. How to use tradition while engaging in a transformative task? Interested in the play, in the flirtation with tradition, my interest in the genre remains primarily conceptual, focussing on issues between scale and labour, precision and gesture, norm and its transgression.”

However, the majority of these artists live abroad or have spent some time away from home. The works listed here were produced especially for an international audience.

In contrast to them, the majority of artists, who prefer to stay within the small

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Fig. 21 Shahzia Sikander, *Chamman: Acts of Balance*, 2000, ink, gouache, acrylic on wall and paper, installation, Whitney Museum, New York (Installation view)

scale, live and work in Pakistan. Most of them belong to the circle around Muhammad Imran Qureshi and his wife Aisha Khalid, who themselves have had flirtations with other media but always returned to “wasli-painting.” Yet, this does not mean that only minor progress has taken place. To the contrary, within this “average 15 x 20 cm” the greatest revolution has occurred. Every experiment, beginning with radical reduction to complete destruction can be observed. The human figure together with its decorative padding disappears in favour of a new and contemporary vocabulary.

Within the last ten years the way of addressing political and social issues has become much bolder and more personal. Each year, graduates dare to take another audacious step, both conceptually and technically, leaving behind traditional formalities in the process; a development, which is regarded ambivalently by national art critics:

Akbar Naqvi interprets the movement as a dangerous “westernizing progress.” Referring to a solo show by Muhammad Imran Qureshi in 2002 he speaks of a “demonstration of ridiculous postmodernism of Pakistan” and describes his work as a “command performance of self-denial and cultural repudiation.” He further criticizes the ignorance regarding Pakistan’s art history, which allegedly is not taught at national art schools and does not hesitate to call their teachers as “no more than voluntary vassals of the Western art of bathos.” Referring

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63 Akbar Naqvi, “Plentitude of Smallness” 134-136.
64 Akbar Naqvi, “Plentitude of Smallness” 134-136.
to one of Muhammad Imran Qureshi’s paintings he writes, “his trendy western sensibility mocked *musawwiri* in a rather cruel manner, as if to proclaim that he was an artist of the contemporary mode. A single extraordinary *amal* of his traditional *qalam* depicting the *shabih* of a Liverpudlian punk demonstrated the intended distance between the artist’s authentic and assumed stance—the latter a ruin of the first”\(^\text{165}\) (Fig. 23).

Others, like Quddus Mirza, blame the fact that hardly anything apart from the small scale is left of the traditional style. He writes about a recent show on Pakistani miniature painting in Morocco in 2005; “[…] shown as the contemporary miniature painting from Pakistan, majority of the works do not meet the orthodox definition of miniature art. Neither were these paintings with a decorative or any other kind of border nor rendered in the traditional technique of *pardakht*. […] On the whole, the artworks on the show are contemporary, innovative and thought provoking. Perhaps the only element that makes them ‘miniature’ is their size.”\(^\text{166}\)

A year earlier he compares the works of the pioneers of contemporary miniature painting, such as Shahzia Sikander, Muhammad Imran Qureshi and Talha Rathore, with the new graduates and discerns a big generation gap. While the trailblazers, in their aim to revive and modernize, were blurring the boundaries within the traditional art concept, it appears that the new “artists have arrived at a stage where ‘newness and modernisation’ is irrelevant. […] One cannot help but ask as to what does the term miniature stand for today. In the true post-modern spirit every style in the history of art—may it be minimalism, abstract

\(^{165}\) Akbar Naqvi, “Plentitude of Smallness” 134-136.

expressionism or op art—is being appropriated and practised on the scale of miniature. Hence expanding its conceptual dimensions while remaining faithful to its historic small size.67

London based Hammad Nasar, the most successful curator and art promoter of Pakistani art in the international field today, frees contemporary miniature painting from its rigid definition through technique and tradition, when he declares it an “attitude.” Here, he ties in with Zahoor ul Akhlaq’s idea of opening a fruitful dialogue between traditional miniature painting and contemporary art disciplines and who himself played with the “attitude” of miniature in his own art practice for at least three decades, until his demise in 1999.

According to Hammad Nasar this particular “attitude” acts in multiple ways; as the distinctive “form,” as a “sensibility,” in the “intensity of experience” or in the “rigour of application” of the old principles.68 Here for instance he refers to Aisha Khalid’s video installation Conversation, 2002 (Fig. 17) see above, that is made in one single take. No cutting or editing was allowed. Every detail had to be conceptualized prior to filming. This complies perfectly with the building-up of miniatures in many interdependent layers: The result was never the product of spontaneous inspiration but had to be well thought out before the first stroke of the brush on the wasli (see 1.2.1).

Rather unemotionally, the trained economist69 counters the criticism over the loss of skills or dismantling of precious traditions, caused by recent trends. In his opinion tradition is and always was mutable. It has to progress and adapt to the times we are living in, regardless of loss.70

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69 Hammad Nasar is actually an investment analyst and holds an MBA from IMD, Lausanne Switzerland.
Finally it is interesting to note how Sir Gombrich comments on this complex issue: “[...] in art we cannot speak of ‘progress’ as such, because every gain in one respect is likely to be offset by a loss in another. This is as true of the present as it was of the past. It stands to reason, for instance, that the welcome gain in tolerance will also result in a loss of standards and that search for new thrills must also endanger that patience that made art-lovers of the past [...]” 7

CHAPTER II: HAIR VERSUS VEIL. TRACING TWO RECURRING METAPHORS

2.1 THE VEIL

Clothing exercises a profoundly determining influence upon living breathing bodies, affecting contours, weight, muscle development, posture movement and libidinal circulation. It is not the question of the body being under the veil, but the identity and the body of the woman painted by the artists. [...] The veiled and the unveiled women are both constructed positions, that the image of the veiled woman has become over-identified with an idea of a civilised and freethinking female subject.\cite{Akhtar2004}

2.1.1 The Veil: General Observations

2.1.1.1 Definition
Today the word “veil” has become a very complex term, as it stands for tradition, religion and political movements at the same time. It is interesting that the specific English term veil has no real counterpart in the Arabic, Persian or Urdu languages. The closest in meaning are the words *jilbab* or *hijab* or the more common terms in South Asia: *purdah* or *chaadar*. These expressions are extremely complicated in their meanings and are used to circumscribe the act of covering. In Arabic *jilbab* literally means “to cover,” *hijab* “to prevent” but both words embody “modesty” and “shame” as well.\footnote{John T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1884) 474.} While *chaadar* is also used by locals for “(metal) sheet” or “table cloth”, *purdah*, which

literally means “screen” or “curtain” in Persian, describes the entire custom of keeping women in seclusion, practiced through shrouding them with cloth as well as hiding them behind high walls.

Research in the dictionaries offers the following definition for the word “veil.” The Cambridge Dictionary differs between the “material” and the “unclear effect”: it describes the “veil” as “a piece of thin material worn by women to cover the face or head” (material) or as “a thin covering of something, which you can see through, but not very clearly” (unclear effect). Furthermore, the book explains its usage in the English language such as: “to draw a ‘veil’ over something: if you draw a ‘veil’ over a subject, you do not talk about it any more because it could cause trouble or make someone embarrassed” or “to take the ‘veil’: a Christian woman who takes the ‘veil,’ becomes a nun” and “to adopt the ‘veil’: a Muslim woman who takes or adopts the ‘veil’ decides to wear traditional Muslim clothing.”

Nowadays in the West, Europe and America, the “veil” is immediately associated with the debate on gender and women in Islam. One tends to forget its existence in European history. Fadwa El Guindi states in her comprehensive study on the “veil,” “veiling is a rich and nuanced phenomenon, a language that communicates social and cultural messages, a practice that has been present tangible from ancient times, a symbol ideologically fundamental to the Christian and particularly the Catholic, vision of womanhood and piety […]” One thinks of depictions of Madonna (Fig. 24) or the “legend of the lost veil,” in which the “veil” plays an important role in the foundation of Klosterneuburg near Vienna: Earl Leopold III laid the foundations for his abbey at the precise place where the lost “veil” of his wife, Agnes of Waiblingen was found.

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177 An important exception in European art history is the Immaculata, Virgin Mary, with the globe and dragon at her feet. She is always presented with loose flowing hair.
In Europe head-covering and veiling was quite a common custom: One just has to think of the “head scarf” rarely taken off by rural Austrian women or the thin tulle “veil,” which was fixed to the hats of noble-women only some decades ago. Today the “veil” is still used during wedding ceremonies, when the bride lifts the “veil” for the significant “kiss.”

The danger of Samuel P. Huntington’s thesis of “The Clash of Civilisations” arises, when he argues about the incompatible ideologies of the West and the East or rather between Christianity and Islam. Here the “veil” is no longer perceived as a mere piece of cloth, a cultural or religious artefact. It has come to be a symbol of Islam, a symbol of the “other,” unknown and threatening power and has become the centre of attention in the West. And in the Afghanistan war, in retaliation to September 11, 2001, the blue shuttlecock burqa became a mis-interpreted target. Its lifting was celebrated as a big victory and was used as justification for the thousands of victims and human tragedies.

In 1999 Fadwa El Guindi describes “the word ‘veil’ as ‘sexy’ and marketable in the West. It thus tends to be overused, invariably out of or without context in titles of books, articles, conferences, press, films and popular literature in a way disproportionate to the relative significance of the veil in Middle Eastern affairs, and irrespective of the quality of knowledge about the ‘veil.’ Some scholars of Islam have expressed concern that ‘veil’ has come to replace ‘crescent’

as a symbol of Islam in the West, which is outrageous. Rather, the ‘veil’ has come to replace the earlier obsession with ‘harems’ […] In the West ‘harem,’ ‘veil,’ ‘polygamy’ evoke Islam and are synonymous with female weakness and oppression.”

This image has inspired a large number of Muslim writers to try and correct the reputation of the “veil”: Leila Ahmed and Faegheh Shirazi, Fatima Mernissi and the above mentioned Fadwa El Guindi, all of whom have Muslim origins and were educated in the West, stress in their publications, among others arguments, that the “veil” is not an invention of Islam and refer to the practice of veiling in Pre-Islamic cultures.

2.1.1.2 The Veil in Pre-Islamic Cultures

The first known reference to the use of a “veil” was made in an Assyrian legal text of the thirteenth century BC. In this text, veiling is restricted to respectable women only. The “veil” is also mentioned in the Middle-Assyrian Laws (750-612 BC), more than twelve hundred years before the advent of Islam. Here a slave girl found improperly wearing a “veil” in the streets, is ordered to be brought to the palace for punishment. At that time, women of nobility wore the “veil” and the law is clear on the prohibition of veiling for slave-girls. The practice of veiling in the context of segregation and separation of men prevailed in Pre-Christian Greek societies, and in particular Classical Greek societies according to Leila Ahmed. “Men and women led separate lives, men spending most of their days in public areas, such as the marketplace and the gymnasion, while “respectable” women stayed at home. […] Their clothing concealed them from the eyes of strange men: a “shawl” was worn that could be drawn over the head as a hood.”

179 Fadwa El Guindi 10.
181 Leila Ahmed 28.
It is believed that the doctrines of Aristotle and Plato influenced the new religions; Christianity and Islam.

As Faegheh Shirazi simply concludes: “In the Assyrian, Greco-Roman, and Byzantine empires, as well as in Pre-Islamic Iran, veiling and seclusion were marks of prestige and symbols of status. Only wealthy families could afford to seclude their women. The veil was a sign of respectability but also of a lifestyle that did not require the performance of manual work. Slaves and women who laboured in the fields were not expected to wear the veil, which would have impeded their every movement.”

2.1.1.3 The Crux of the Prophet’s Teachings with the Veil

As far as is presently known, Islam did not invent or introduce the custom of veiling. Veiling for men and women had existed in the region prior to Islam—in Hellenic, Judaic, Byzantine, and Balkan cultures.

Fatima Mernissi, who according to Fadwa El Guindi: “admirably uses Arabic scholarly sources for locating historical facts, but then (she) leans on Christiano-European feminist ideology to interpret them” promotes this concept and tries to prove there is no evidence of any divine order for women to “veil.” To the contrary she points out that the Messenger of God tried hard to get rid of pre-Islamic customs, which contradicted the Islamic principles of equality such as the nomadic practice of female infanticide or the marking of nobles by a piece of cloth. While referring to passages of the Quran, Hadiths and the Sira, she explains them in a contemporary context. As a key reference to the hijab first mentioned in the Quran she quotes Surah XXXIII The Clans, verse 53:

O ye who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for the proper time, unless permission be granted you. But if ye are invited, enter, and, when your meal is ended, then disperse. Linger not for conversation. Lo! That would cause annoyance

\[182\] Faegheh Shirazi 4.
\[183\] Fadwa El Guindi 25.
to the Prophet, and he would be shy of (asking) you (to go); but Allah
is not shy of the truth. And when you ask of them (the wives of the
Prophet) anything, ask them from behind a curtain. That is purer for
your hearts and for their hearts.\textsuperscript{184}

Mernissi claims that here the “veil” or curtain descended not to put a barrier
between a woman and a man, but was sent from heaven to protect the intimacy
of the Prophet and his new bride.\textsuperscript{185}

To save the Prophet’s wife from harm, Allah reveals verse 59 of Surah XXXIII
The Clans: “O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the
believers to draw their cloak close round them (when they go abroad). That will
be better, that so they may be recognized and not annoyed.”\textsuperscript{186} Unfortunately,
Mernissi writes by excusing Prophet Mohammed, the conflict and debate, which
the “veil” caused in an Islam that aimed at equality, took place at the twilight
of the Prophet’s life, when he was militarily weak and was met with hostility by
the inhabitants of Medina. Due to the pressure from outside and the danger
his wives were exposed to, Prophet Mohammed agreed to the demands of his
followers. He advised his wives and all women who had converted to Islam to
adopt the “veil” to differentiate between respectable women and slaves.\textsuperscript{187} And
for Mernissi the Prophet’s vision of a society, wherein each member is honoured
and is provided with the same rights, irrespective of his/her origin, race or tribe
was shattered here already. “Paradoxically fifteen centuries later it was the
colonial power that would force the Muslim states to reopen the question of the
rights of the individual and of women. All debates on democracy get tied up
in the woman question and that piece of cloth that opponents of human rights
today claim to be very essence of Muslim identity.”\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{184} The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’an, trans. Marmaduke Pickthall (New York: A. A. Knopf,
surah33.html>.
\textsuperscript{185} Fatima Mernissi, \textit{The Veil and the Male Elite} 85.
\textsuperscript{186} Marmaduke Pickthall <http://www.al-sunnah.com/call_to_islam/quran/pickthall/surah33.
html>.
\textsuperscript{187} Fatima Mernissi, \textit{The Veil and the Male Elite} 185-187.
\textsuperscript{188} Fatima Mernissi, \textit{The Veil and the Male Elite} 188.
2.1.1.4 Mystery of the Oriental Woman
The representation of the Oriental woman became extraordinarily abundant in European art and literature at the beginning of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Indeed they constitute a key dimension of what Edward Said has described as a “citational” repertory of Orientalism.\textsuperscript{89}

The “veil” played an important role in the perception of the Oriental woman. The piece of fine fabric became the “Oriental attire most closely associated with the difference and mystery of the Orient.”\textsuperscript{90} The veiled woman was interpreted as an object of fantasy, excitement and desire by those painters, poets, photographers and other travellers, who invaded the Eastern colonies for their Oriental studies (Fig. 25).

More over “the ‘veil’ assumed the role of a cultural marker, a line of demarcation between Europe and the Orient, Christianity and Islam, secular and religious society, a powerful emblem of cultural difference.”\textsuperscript{91}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure25.png}
\caption{Henri Matisse, \textit{Woman with a Veil}, 1927, oil on canvas, 61.5 x 50.2 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York}
\end{figure}

2.1.1.5 The Abolition of the Veil as a First Step towards Women’s Liberation
At the turn of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century, reformers and early Muslim feminists in Egypt, like the French educated, upper-middle-class lawyer Qassim Amin and the young Egyptian, Huda Sha’rawi, who were taken

\begin{itemize}
\item Madeleine Dobie, \textit{Foreign Bodies, Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism} (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001) 3.
\item Madeleine Dobie 65.
\item Madeleine Dobie 65.
\end{itemize}
under the wings of well-meaning European feminists, saw in the abolition of the “veil” the first step for a social transformation.

“Veiling—to Western eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies—became the symbol now of both oppression of women […] and backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies.”

Only a decade later, in their Westernizing crusade, Muslim statesmen like Attaturk in Turkey, Reza Shah in Iran and Prince Daoud in Afghanistan banned the “veil.” The idea was to desegregate, to de-Islamize the system, to more or less introduce secularization. According to Ahmed, this resulted in a catastrophic dislocation of people’s lives that was not commensurate with socioeconomic progress. In Iran, Turkey and then in Afghanistan, state reform always seems to focus superficially on dress reform.

2.1.1.6 Re-Islamization: The Veil as a Symbol of Resistance

The answer to this cultural uprooting was widespread re-Islamization in the Seventies. Emanating from Egypt and Algeria, the movement spread over the entire Arab peninsula and finally reached almost all Muslim countries. Again the attention is focussed on the “veil”: Within the search for a new identity, which should clearly contrast with the West, it became a symbol of native resistance. In the beginning, the “veil” was a mechanism of resistance but its value for the social group remained very strong. The “veil” was worn because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier was bent on unveiling the conquered countries. In a second phase, the change occurred in connection with the revolution and under special circumstances, the “veil” was abandoned in the course of revolutionary action. What had been used to block the psychological or political offensives of the occupier became a means, an instrument. “The ‘veil’ helped Algerian women to meet the new

problems created by the struggle.” Frantz Fanon in his compelling study of the Algerian Revolution.

2.1.1.7 Tradition of Veiling in South Asia

In contrast to the international discourse on the “veil” and its Western parameters of perception, stands the historical tradition of veiling in South Asia. Like in many other cultures, the uncut cloth laid the foundation. Traditional societies have used it for draping the body. A toga-like garment is seen in a priest bust of the ancient Harappa civilization. Later on only the lower part of male figures is seen wrapped with cloth. The female sculptures are wearing fine, transparent, gossamer veils. Here the material is not used to hide or to protect parts of the body, but more to enhance, to provoke mystery and attention.

The length of fabric was originally used for covering one’s shame and protecting the head and body from the sun and other unpleasant weather conditions. Today its use can still be seen in India, where the majority of women wear the sari, six yards of skilfully woven fabric, beautifully arranged around the body. Pakistani women also wear the sari on special occasions. In addition one finds the lungi, a traditional textile, which for many centuries has covered the lower part of the body of women and men in Punjab. It is only worn by men in rural areas today. Even the pagri or turban is the result of an artistically wrapped piece of uncut fabric. Nowadays, the turban is the characteristic feature of the Sikhs, a minority in South Asia.

The different types of “veils” have distinctive names according to their origins. The abochni (shawl of a married woman), the odhni (woman’s headcover), the khombi (wedding shawl), the luddi (woollen shawl for Sindhi women), the

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94 The Indus Valley Civilization dating back to about 3500 BC has become known as the Harappan Civilization after the site where it was first discovered.
maleer (bridegroom’s shawl) and the rumal (handkerchief-like cloth used by men for protection from the sun) are only some examples of various “veils” used in South Asia. All of them are made of just one piece of fabric.

The “veil” in its early stages was gender free and used by both women and men. First of all as a protection against inclement weather conditions and secondly to protect the face from the evil eye. “The sehara, a ‘veil’ of flowers or pearls worn by the bridegroom in Northern India and Southern Pakistan was to protect him from the evil eye, as the bridegroom is seen to be at his most vulnerable when he goes to bring his bride home.”

Even in Islamic history veiling seems to have been a gender free matter:

In Turkish and Persian sacred imagination, Prophet Muhammad is portrayed with his face veiled in white. A Persian miniature of the sixteenth century depicts the Prophet on a camel meeting his first wife Khadija. While his face is veiled, Khadija looks out from the window of a high Arabian house with her face uncovered (Fig. 26).

Jasleen Dhamija asserts that the veiling of women, which was a way of gaining control over the female body, in other regions and cultures, transformed the Indian woman into an object of beauty and desire. While the “veil,” mostly a smoothly floating diaphanous material, was concealing, it was at the same time revealing her body in great softness. Jasleen Dhamija refers to Indian folk

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196 Jasleen Dhamija 101.
and classical poetry, which is full of narrations of beautiful veiled women.\footnote{Jasleen Dhamija 102.}

The dark gathering clouds.
The turbulent eastern winds.
My beautiful veil flows in waves.
Oh! Flies in the wind
Oh! My beloved.\footnote{Jasleen Dhamija 102.}

Romantic heroines are encountered in untold miniature paintings, mostly commissioned as illustrations of traditional love songs by the courts of India over many centuries. The “veil,” with its seductive features and magnetic appeal is not only their almost omnipresent companion but is also introduced as a supporting element to a painting’s dramatic effect.

“Hurrying for shelter from the oncoming storm, a lady pulls her veil over her head. The wind catches and fills it as she bends before the blast. Above a peacock sits on the edge of the roof, pleased at the prospect of rain and, by implication, of love. […] Despite the anticipation of pleasure in her face, the impassioned sweep of the lady’s veil mirrors the turmoil that must be in her heart,”\footnote{Ellison Banks Findly, \textit{From the Courts of India, Indian Miniatures in the Collection of the Worcester Art Museum} (Worcester, Massachusetts, Worcester Art Museum, 1981) 74.} Ellison Banks Findly describes a miniature painted in the Punjab Hills (Fig. 27).

Veiling of the face, Jasleen Dhamija further writes, came into practice in South Asia much later and was especially favoured in the north. She considers that the custom to hide the female person came with Central Asian and Middle Eastern influences.
2.1.1.8 Veiled Mughal Women

Soma Mukherjee in her study on “Royal Mughal Ladies” agrees with Jasleen Dhamija and describes veiling as an ancient custom in South Asia. The veiled woman has always been associated with respectable and aristocratic families in India and she also refers to Indian literature like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* or the *Brahma Purana*: “These epics and other ancient literatures of those times reveal that the women of those days enjoyed freedom of movement, speech, learning and sometimes even the liberty of choosing their own husband,” she writes and adds that “these things certainly could not have been possible with strict *purdah*\(^{201}\) prevailing in the society as they were no longer possible in the Hindu society after the coming of the Muslims to this country.”\(^{202}\)

Exploring the history of women in South Asia one recognises that the situation and freedom of women had already deteriorated dramatically during the era of Aryan dominance. The subservient role of women is advocated in Manu’s Code of Law (between 200 BC and 200 AD). “In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.”\(^{203}\)

This male “protection” of women was enforced during the ensuing attacks by several Muslim tribes.

Muhammad Bin Qasim’s conquest of Sindh in 711 AD marks the start of an Arab invasion of South Asia. The Abbasid Empire was subsequently ousted by the Turks, who later established the Delhi Sultanates. During this time a fruitful fusion of Islamic and Indian culture and spiritual values occurred and a natural synthesis of Islamic and Hindu living patterns took place.\(^{204}\)

According to André Singer, the institution of *purdah* (seclusion of women from

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\(^{201}\) *Purdah* is an anglicization of the Hindi word “pardaa.” In Persian it literally means “curtain,” refers to the segregation as well as to the veil worn by a Muslim woman.


public life) emerged in that particular period. “Purdah, which originally gave privacy to the women’s quarters of the households wealthy enough to afford them, has come to mean the whole system of restraints under which many women must live. It was observed in some form or another in most Islamic societies, but it was not a part of the early Muslim life. It originated in the tenth and eleventh century, 300 years or more after the death of the Prophet Mohammad,” the British anthropologist states.

The greatest challenge the Sultanates faced with the invasion of the hordes of Genghis Khan in the northern subcontinent in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Still, the Sultanates were able to withstand the invaders for more than two hundred years, until 1524, it fell to Babur, a descendant of the house of Timur. Babur (r. 1524-1530) was the founder of the dynasty of the Great Mughals, who reigned over India for almost 500 years.

“Mughal women spent their lives secluded and inside the emperor’s harem, where everything was governed by the strict rules of purdah,” Soma Mukherjee asserts. They did not have the liberty to leave the imperial palaces and whenever the “Muhammadan ladies” moved out, “they covered themselves from head to toe with white shrouds and burqas. […] Both Hindu and Muslim ladies covered their heads with an odhni or dupatta. […] This cloth hung down on both sides as low as the knees and was sometimes made of white calico. Sometimes Mughal princesses covered their heads with a shawl or mantilla made of the finest materials and dyed in delicate colours,” Soma Mukherjee writes and refers to the encounters of contemporary witnesses such as Pietro Della Valle, Niccolao Manucci, and Jean Baptiste Tavernier. Much earlier Gul-Badan Begum mentioned in the Humayunnama, the taq, “a cap worn by un-married girls” and the lachak, “a wife’s coiffure, a kerchief folded
crossways [and] tied under the chin by two corners.”

The Mughals were great lovers and patrons of the art. Manuscripts were painted by the imperial ateliers as chronicles of the era.

In the beginning women appear in paintings rather seldom and if they do so, then as Muslim heroines, or more or less as part of architectural landscapes, in windows or behind screens. An expression of the practice of purdah can be found in a drawing in which Akbar (r. 1556-1605) greets the palki (palanquin) in which his mother is riding. Not only is Hamida Banu (Maryam Makani) hidden from common view by a fine mesh screen, but her four women attendants in the lower left corner are heavily veiled as well

The depictions of two birth scenes, commissioned by the emperor to herald the much anticipated birth of his first son Salim (later Jahangir) and that of his second son Murad in the last decade of the sixteenth century (Fig. 114), are therefore quite exceptional. These paintings are unusually densely populated with female protagonists and represent a clear tribute to the mothers. They are shown in their chambers accompanied by the rest of the women folk, still veiled and encircled by the high walls of the imperial palace.

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Under Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) court women became more popular as the subject matter of painting. Servants, dancing girls, concubines and sometimes the Emperor’s wives were depicted during their entertainment and recreation in the imperial palaces, as well as in hunting scenes. Paintings of romantic lore replaced the older restrained modesty. Luxurious garments and jewellery adorn their idealized figures. Their hair is covered by a “veil,” made of the most gossamer-like material and often slipping backwards; it is there far more to entice, than to conceal (Fig. 29).

2.1.1.9 The Veil in Contemporary Pakistan
Today, many centuries later, the “veil” has become an essential part of the everyday life of Pakistani women. There are a number of different reasons for adopting a “veil.” It may be compulsory, it may be by choice or it may be the dress code of a particular society. 

Dupatta, chaadar and burqah are only three generic terms for a great number of varieties. They refer to various sizes and types of fabric that are arranged in different styles over the female body. They differ not only within but also between the different provinces of the country.

The most typical dress is the shalwar kameez, consisting of baggy trousers called the shalwar and a long loose shirt, known as kameez. Like a national costume, it is worn by both sexes. The female version is complemented by the dupatta.
Ready-made suits are available in urbanized areas but for the vast majority of women, *shalwar kameezes* are stitched at home or are tailor-made. The *dupatta* may coordinate or contrast with the *shalwar kameez* but is generally the most beautiful and decorated element of the outfit. Whether it is of diaphanous chiffon, opulent velvet or simple cotton, it can be worn in a myriad of ways. Elegantly draped over the shoulder of a cosmopolitan woman, it becomes a fashion accessory. Chastely wrapped around the bosom and head of a devout woman, the *dupatta* becomes an instrument of *purdah*. According to Surah XXIV Light 31 the “veil” should be arranged over the head or over the shoulders to cover the female charms.

“And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty, and that they should not display their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment […].”

Due to social customs and the religious doctrines, which were mostly forced on the female population in the eighties, women in Pakistan continue to wear the “veil” as they please and accept it as a “natural” part of their dress and their tradition, without questioning it. Young girls learn the importance of modesty from an early age and are eager to be old enough to wear the “veil.” With it they finally become a valued part of the family. (Maybe one can compare this childish longing with European girls walking around in the high-heels of their mothers.) Farida Batool asserts “that the traditional use of the *dupatta* is an important way of constructing an identity, which is very much her own, thrown on the floor or used as a prop, it is left with the women in the company of other female beings.” Indeed the *dupatta* in its multiple functionality is used by practical women as a sling for infants or as a collective handkerchief for wiping tears. Farida Batool further explores the creative use of the *dupatta* in the folk dance *Giddha*, wherein the *dupatta* is an important prop. By creating a huge belly with

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212 Farida Batool, *Figure: the Popular and the Political in Pakistan* (Lahore: ASR Publications, 2004) 94-96.
it, or by twisting, it becomes a phallus symbol. The “veil” is used here “to subvert the male authority; to celebrate the female body and sexuality in continuation of the cultural heritage which she has been a part of for generations.”

Benazir Bhutto, a former prime minister, famous for her elegant appearance, made the dupatta her unmistakable emblem. By wearing the shawl even at international political meetings, she introduced it to the rest of the world. Since then, her way of arranging it over the head, so that the hair on the forehead is still visible, became very popular. Today the dupatta is one of the elegant accessories of the modern middle and upper class woman in the big cities of Pakistan.

While the dupatta is mostly seen in urban areas, women in rural areas wear the larger chaadar, when they leave their homes (Fig. 30). It is placed on top of the head and covers the entire body. Sometimes a corner is pulled over the face to conceal the mouth. It is made of a thicker and heavier quality of fabric than the dupatta. In wintertime, the woollen chaadar keeps not only women warm, but also the men in the villages. It plays the role of the European winter coat.

Chaadar aur Chaardivari (lit.: the “shawl” and “four walls”) was the general term for the promised peace and security under the military regime of Zia ul-Haq in the late seventies and early eighties. The chaadar, which was until then a symbol for modesty, strongly rooted in the purdah tradition, suddenly became a political issue (see 2.1.3.1).

Compared to the dupatta and the chaadar, the burqah is the most orthodox

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213 Farida Batool 108.
form of veiling in Pakistan. It covers the woman from head to foot, including the face. There are two types: The shuttlecock burqa, which got its name due to its resemblance to the shuttlecock and the black burqa, which is comparable with the over-garment worn by women in the Middle East.

The blue shuttlecock burqa was introduced to the world through the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States of America (Fig. 31). It became the misinterpreted symbol of the war and its lifting became a reason to celebrate.

But “to expect, as did much of the Western media, that at the end of the Taliban regime women in Afghanistan would instantly discard their veil’s was naïve and betrayed ignorance of deeply entrenched social mores,” writes Samar Minallah and she stresses that the roots of wearing the burqa go further back into the history of the Pashtuns. The custom to don the burqa started in the early twentieth century, simultaneously with the newly achieved mobility, reports Raj Wali Khattak. King Amir Habibullah (r. 1901-1919) had introduced the automobile to Afghanistan and the royal women were eager to see the world. The burqa provided them seclusion from the masses during their travels, according to the principles of purdah. Made of silk and with precious embroidery it was soon adopted by the upper class. Primarily a symbol of prestige and class a simpler version (cotton or acrylic) later became the standard going out garment for many Afghani women, particularly in the cities. During the Taliban regime (1996-2001) any woman moving in public space was forced to wear the

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*burqah*, by law.

Today in Pakistan the *shuttlecock burqah*, particularly the blue one, marks the presence of a Pashtun woman and is therefore found in Pashtun strongholds like Attock and Peshawar. The arrival of thousands of Afghan refugees in the eighties reinforced the tradition of wearing the *burqah*, particularly in the North West Frontier Area. However they are widespread all over Pakistan. In South Punjab, for example, one sees women covered with *shuttlecock burqahs* of thick white cotton. A full-length circular piece of material is worn with a round cap on the head. The fabric flows down until the ankles of the woman so that the whole body, including the face, disappears under the many metres of fabric. A small piece of net is stitched on, allowing the wearer to see.

Raj Wali Khattak presumes that the *shuttlecock burqah* developed from the round caps worn by men, due to the similar embroidery, which is found on the crown.27

The *black burqah* is made of black, silky material. It consists of two parts: a long coat and a waist length cape that covers the head and shoulders, and has up to three transparent veils that can cover or uncover the face (Fig. 32). This is the fashionable kind of *burqah* worn mostly by middle and lower middle class women in cities and towns. The *burqah* is seen as “the traditional instrument” of *purdah*. Women put on the *burqah* when they leave the boundaries of their homes.

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Tasneem, who teaches at a primary school, says she treasures “the freedom an otherwise stifling costume provides. I can go out without worrying about being teased or mocked at by society.” For many women the burqah gives them mobility and freedom, prerequisites in their desire for education or employment. In order to gain society’s support and acceptance, they are willing to pay a price in the form of an all-enveloping garment. To them, freedom is not necessarily characterised by the way one dresses but by more vital issues.

It is interesting to note that the number of women, who decide to don the black burqah has increased over the last few years. The reasons for this fact may be found in a search for identity as most of these women are brought up in two different worlds. Their Islamic culture and traditions collide with the British education system, and they are continually confronted by Western influences. World affairs, like the September 11, 2001, the Palestine conflict, or the war in Iraq have given rise to a crucial division of the world: the good and the bad, the West and the East, Christianity and Islam. These facts have created an immense desire to investigate their roots. In Pakistan, mosques and Islamic schools have mushroomed. Maybe another reason for the recent success of Islamic teaching is the high rate of illiteracy. Only 30% of the female population are able to read. Furthermore mosques are mainly visited by men, so there was no other way for women but to trust in the interpretation of the Quran by their male relatives.

Children educated in expensive elite schools, that follow the English medium system, are additionally send to private Islamic tutors, who teach the Arabic alphabet and to read the Quran. Islamic scholars, like Dr. Farhat Hashmi are much in demand and have become very popular, in circles of upper middleclass women in the cities. “The madam’s soft-spoken sermons have captured the hearts and minds of the daughters of the elite—breaking barriers of age and creed, if not class or sex, at home and abroad” writes Shimaila Matri in her Newsline article with the meaningful title “The Opiate of the Elite.”

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Women, who often come from well-off families with a liberal vision, find fulfilment by attending Dr. Hashmi’s dars and following the divine commandments, newly defined by their teacher. Some change their outfits overnight by covering up from head to toe with black fabric. Only the eyes stay visible. They take their children out of international schools to provide them with a proper Islamic education and try to convince their husbands to let their beards grow.

To show one’s piety has become trendy and the burqah has become fashionable for women in Pakistan, probably influenced by their rich sisters of the Arab Emirates. “Never before were here so many students wearing the burqah,” reports Durriya Kazi, head of the Department for Visual Arts at Karachi University. “They walk like mannequins. Their faces under black chiffon are permanently made-up with tons of cosmetics, any time ready to take off the black coat and to dance on the stage of the most exclusive beach party.”

Within the younger generation, one finds two extreme directions: Sex, drugs and raves, a lifestyle of excess culled from the West, on the one side. On the other, those seeking refuge in fundamentalist religiosity.

The contemporary miniature painters of Pakistan are all in their mid twenties or thirties. Most of them are from well-off and liberal minded families. They face this critical development in society and consequently these conflicts between native traditions, religious restrictions and Western influences, which promise so much freedom, are reflected in their bodies of work.

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220 Durriya Kazi, personal interview, 6 June 2004.
221 Co-education like at NCA in Lahore is still an exception rather than the norm, and so is the acceptance profession of an artist.
2.1.2 The Veil in Contemporary Miniature Painting

No motif has been depicted and examined by contemporary miniature painters as often as the “veiled woman” or the “veil” itself. Many miniature painters like Shahzia Sikander, Tazeen Qayyum, Saira Wasim and Waseem Ahmed have dedicated series of works to this particular theme. For others such as Aisha Khalid the “veil” represents the main focus of their artistic exploration.

2.1.2.1 Claustrophobia Transmutes into Female Power: Aisha Khalid

One artist, in whose work the motif of the “veil” is found throughout, is Aisha Khalid. Three years junior to Shahzia Sikander and married to Muhammad Imran Qureshi, she is counted today amongst the most successful miniaturists of Pakistan. Her paintings have been shown in renowned galleries all over the world. Her innovative approach plays an important role in the reinvention of the genre miniature painting and her influence is visible in the subsequent work of several artists.

Aisha Khalid’s work captivates with poster-like reduction. By concentrating on a few, but powerful symbols, she creates colourful modern images without the abundant detail of traditional miniature paintings. Referring to the iconography, Aasim Akhtar observes so pertinently, that it is “the importance of ‘femaleness’ in the Pakistani society,”\(^\text{222}\) that Aisha Khalid is exploring. And in this visual search for “femaleness,” the veil, or more specifically the burqah, plays a crucial role.

For Aisha Khalid the “veil” is not a theoretical matter. As the daughter of Indian immigrants, she grew up in the conservative environment of the feudal system in Shikarpur, in interior Sindh. Following local conventions Aisha Khalid had

to go to school with a headscarf from the age of seven years onwards. Her older sister and her mother wore the *burqa*. The artist reports, both of them donned the full-fledged *black burqa* while leaving the house very naturally. In an interesting anecdote, Aisha Khalid tells, that during their visits to Lahore they took the *burqahs* off and moved around in garments more appropriate to the fashion of bigger cities.\(^{223}\)

When Aisha Khalid turned seventeen her family decided to move to Lahore. Certain circumstances caused a second loss of most of their worldly possessions and the family had to make a fresh start again. Aisha Khalid still remembers the terrible experiences of dislocation, uncertainty and betrayal, she and her family felt. Enrolment at the National College of Arts opened up a new world for her. “I was not self-conscious and had so many complexes, which came from being a girl. I had no sense of myself; I was so shy, and coming to a co-educational set-up was so difficult.”\(^{224}\)

The Department of Miniature Painting with its strict discipline and authoritative teaching style by Bashir Ahmed embodied a kind of safe haven for the shy young woman (see 1.3.1). Blindly, she followed the rules and orders given by the strict *ustad*. The colours she wore, were the same colours she painted with, dull and dark.

**A happy marriage**

It was her marriage to Muhammad Imran Qureshi, her dynamic young teacher at the department that finally brought colour into her life! In 1998, they set up a *block-printing* workshop and started to experiment with colours and to create new designs. Soon her paintings were reflecting the same range of bright hues and some motifs found in her work, resemble patterns of the ancient technique of fabric decoration. Her own process of self-discovery as a young woman in a

\(^{223}\) Aisha Khalid, personal interview, 3 July 2004.

to those who are unable to have children, committed suicide, by spilling high inflammable kerosene oil over herself. This incident might have been the catalyst for going beyond the traditional boundaries of a very historical discipline and for turning her work more inwards.

Her early painting *Parday Kay Pechay I (What is Behind the Curtain?),* 2000 (Fig. 33) is interesting, in which a woman, dressed in *shalwar kameez* and covered by a red *chaadar,* turns around and leaves the stage through a white flowered curtain. She steps from the earthen ground into an unknown world defined by an illusory turquoise sky. The meadow in the front has isolated flowers growing in it, all of different species and the blue foil-like sky with a diffuse band of clouds on the top seem to be adapted from traditional miniatures, such as the glorious Mughal portraits for Shah Jahan painted by an imperial miniaturist around 1630 with the name Hashem (Fig. 33a). The title *Parday Kay Pechay I (What is Behind the Curtain?)* derives from an popular
lyric most probably of a Bollywood film.

One work in the *Conversation Series*, 1999/2000 (Fig. 34) shows four women wrapped in *chaadars* again, this time white with delicate floral embroideries. The women, portrayed in side profile, are chatting. The green stage has limited space. A dark blue curtain with a fruit pattern (*blockprint*) pushes the four women to the very front. The borderlines, again reminiscent of traditional miniatures, cut off much of the figures, so that only the heads and the upper parts of the bodies are visible. On top a cloudless blue sky arises. The way in which the women put their heads together and move their fingers, close to their mouths, makes one think of secret gossip, which is being shared. The fruit pattern on the dark curtain, beautifully arranged bananas, pomegranates, mangoes, apples and a bunch of grapes, symbolize female fertility.

The painting with the same title but produced one year later (Fig. 35) shows the same bunch of fruit, not only in the curtain pattern but also in the lap of a *burqa*-clad woman. Through the stitched grille she stares out of the painting.
The red colour of the shuttlecock burqah (see 2.1.1.9) stands for the blood that guarantees female fertility, but also represents the pain and sadness, which comes with it. The red shrouded lady is accompanied by five other women. Since their burqahs are made with the same “fruitful” fabric as the curtain, they seem to be absorbed by it, to become a unity. From this moment on Aisha Khalid’s women have lost their features. Clad in burqahs, any personal features are concealed and their identities stay unknown. But the conversation still goes on.

While the foil-like blue sky with wispy clouds on the top still remains, the ground has changed. The geometrical patterned tiles allude now to indoor ambience. “The tiled floors, the curtains and burqahs are all in my memories of a happy and well-protected childhood in the countryside,” explains Aisha Khalid.225 Later she creates beautifully arranged interiors. The shallow stage grows into a room. The burqah and the patterned floor become a constant and compelling presence. The curtain-“wall” shrinks to a viewless window. In some paintings the

225 Aisha Khalid, personal interview, 3 July 2004.
artist puts a short curtain in front that leads from one end of the image to the other and marks the private space. This change in the composition of the painted image happens simultaneously with the move together of the newly married couple. Bright, vivid colours and lovely decorations reflect the artist's happiness and joy in setting up her first own home. “Is this a legacy of ‘making’ things ‘beautiful,’ a need so familiar to women? Or is it the nostalgia that is part of a deep rooted human emotion that neither somnolent visionaries no fiery revolutionaries can steer clear of—an emotion that is typically human, born not of the body’s instincts, or needs of day to day existence, but of mind and memory and that inherent power of recall,” Salima Hashmi writes in *The Shock of the Blue*.²²⁶

A picture with the title *Pattern to Follow*, 2000 (Fig. 36) shows such a beautiful interior. Towards the very front the *burqah* is depicted yet again, this time in red with yellow roses printed on it. An anonymous woman looks through an oval frame of red roses (passion and sorrow)²²⁷ into a fully tiled room, and demarcates the viewer’s point of view. Interestingly, the room is composed with

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²²⁷ see also 1.3.6.
the help of linear perspective, made obvious with black lines at the meeting point of walls and floor. The square of the tiles stays surprisingly unchanged in size and format, from the first row until the last. In the centre, a small round table is placed, covered by a dark blue tablecloth. Overhead one finds the familiar arrangement of fruit. A sky-blue curtain suggests a window.

A juxtaposing of two- versus three-dimensions occurs. The plasticity of the drapery and flowers, contrasts with the non-perspective depiction of the floor and wall tiles. A clash takes place between the carefully painted plastic female elements (curtains, burqahs, tablecloths, and flowers) and the enclosing flat and rigid geometrical pattern (tiles, bricks, walls), which symbolize boundaries imposed by a male dominated society.228 Space is mostly expressed by layering figures and objects. The architecture functions more or less, as a grid to organize the composition.

The curtain’s fabric does not seem to be opaque enough to resist curious eyes. “One day my husband discovers that those painted eyes are all female with nicely trimmed eyebrows and long lashes”229, the artist recounts. For Aisha Khalid they symbolize neighbours and relatives watching, permanently hungry for new scandals. Furthermore the eyes, which become part of a recurring imagery, represent the fear of the “evil eye,” which is deeply rooted in Pakistani society and drummed into every child’s head from an early age (see 2.1.1.7).

In this picture the artist’s turn for inspiration to folk art becomes obvious. In Pakistan no item seems too shabby to be decorated. Financial considerations or the condition of the object do not seem to matter, in the decision for enrichment by painting. The most conspicuous are the aptly named “Mughals of the Road”230, colourful trucks painted with bright colours and symbol-laden

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228 Aisha Khalid, personal interview, 3 July 2004.
229 Aisha Khalid 3 July 2004.
230 Mughals of the Road, Docu-drama on Truck art and Highway culture in Pakistan, Sarmad Sehbai, dir., Islamabad: 1999.
motifs. Many other vehicles, like the horse drawn tongas, rickshaws, pick-ups and mini buses are also beautifully adorned with paintings, stickers, wood-carving, artificial flowers, tassels, and engraved metal decorations. They all have the same simplified motifs in common, the roses, animals and landscapes giving a slightly three-dimensional illusion, on flat monochrome areas, surrounded by various garlands and frames (Fig. 36a,b).

Similar patterns, like the wreath of roses recur in the dresses of Sindhi women or gipsy girls (Fig. 36c).

In Chandan pani (Perfumed Water), 2000 (Fig. 37) an anonymous lady, this time veiled by a white burqah moves in the centre of the room. She crouches mutely with her back to the viewer, a woman with hopes, longings, anxieties, grievances, and more, who may be about to pray.

The same bird's eye-view as in the previous painting (Fig. 36) is used, defined by diagonal walls, while the pattern of the floor space remains out of perspective. A similar phenomenon is found in Persian paintings. The short
curtain, which demarcates the front of the room, reappears. Remarkably, the white burqah grows out of a lotus flower. The tenderness of the delicately painted buds contrasts strongly with the deeply hued geometrical pattern of the tiles. Aisha Khalid employs a Hindu symbol here. The padma (lotus) is the epitome of purity and beauty and also represents spirituality, freedom from worldly affairs. “The lotus symbolizes purity and detachment, for the plant has its roots in the mud, while its floating blossoms and leaves remain untouched by water or earth,” Kendra Crossen Burroughs explains the classic Indian symbol. Furthermore, the lotus is the attribute of Lakshmi (lit.: luck and happiness), the Hindu goddess of female beauty, generosity, luck and success (Fig. 37a). Even

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Fig. 37 Aisha Khalid, Chandan Pani (Perfumed Water), 2000, opaque watercolour on wasli, 27 x 20.5 cm, collection of Tanvir Hasan
the manner in which the burqa-women are placed on lotus blossoms, is borrowed from representations of the Hindu goddess. The water surrounding the lotus, or “Mekka,” where the figure is placed, is depicted as wall-wash by Aisha Khalid: blue waves lap around the three walls, followed by the eyes of the remaining female. The poetic expression Chandan pani (perfumed water) relates to a popular Hindi love-song, in which love is compared with the lightning clouds and perfumed water:

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\text{Badal Bijli Chandan pani Jaisa Apna Pyar} \\
\text{Lena Hoga Janam Humein Kayi Kayi Baar} \\
\text{Our love is like the lightning clouds, like} \\
\text{perfumed water} \\
\text{We have to be reborn many, many times} \\
\]

The way of representing water with multiple intertwining stripes is borrowed from traditional paintings yet again. Referring to the Hamzanama, Anjan Chakraverty writes that here “the treatment of the water in swirling eddies […] became a convention of style,”233 (Fig. 37b).

The painting Silence with Pattern II, 2000 (Fig. 38) represents a repetition of Chandan pani, 2000 (Fig. 37). The crouching woman shrouded in a white burqa

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on a lotus blossom is cloned many times and becomes pattern-like and seems to get absorbed by the tiled walls.

Regarding her habit of portraying figures from the back Aisha Khalid finds reasons for it in her childhood experiences, "I was growing up in the interior of Sindh, a very conservative part of Pakistan. […] My parents were very strict and we were not allowed to have pictures that showed a face in my house. So I could only portray the backs of people. Interestingly, even now most of my work depicts the back of a person; curious how some things stick with you."  

"Aisha Khalid’s interiors frame women immersed in pattern: a metaphorical camouflage of purdah? They stand invisible yet resolute in their bhurkas, resistant behind veils of roses and lotus blossoms" writes Virginia Whiles in a catalogue text about Aisha Khalid’s work. Not much later the British anthropologist continues: "Aisha Khalid’s exquisite surfaces silence and seal family tension: beneath the jewelled crown lies a bed of thorns […]", and Dadi Iftkhar writes: “The beautifully painted burqa signifying the feminine body hovers uneasily with the rigid geometry in uncanny oscillation between acceptance and
Both refer to the subversion of Aisha Khalid’s beautifully arranged interiors. The sweet imagery with decorative patterns is laden with serious contents, all connected strongly with the local culture, like seclusion or expected reproduction. The artist plays with the ambivalence or hate-love of her own traditions; the warmth and security of “sweet” home may tip over at any time into claustrophobia and the suffocating experience of being enclosed.

The females multiply, hemmed in and covered by various layers of drapery, the burqa, the curtains, and they are encroached upon by windowless walls with distracting geometric patterns. No sign of any exit or possible escape from the Chaardivari (see 2.1.1.9) is visible.

The European Impact

An artist’s residency at the Rijksakademie of Amsterdam brought a big change in Aisha Khalid’s perspective and in the perception of her particular concerns. Her work took on an international relevance. The two years long stay in Holland gave Aisha Khalid the opportunity to explore the myths of freedom of European women. In a society where “curtains remain open and everything is visible,” states Aisha Khalid, “there is an illusion of freedom, of the “independent” woman.”

New motifs were adopted, while old proven symbols were scrutinized and redefined.

The confrontation and relationship between the West and East or rather between the Dutch and the Pakistani woman gains visibility in the series of diptychs: Covered/Uncovered and Exotic Bodies.

Covered/Uncovered II, 2002 (Fig. 39) presents a delicate drawing of a single tulip on the left. The translucent plant gets absolutely absorbed by a lush bright carmine ground. The red tiles of the wall in the second painting are identical

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to the pattern of the much bigger picture of the flower. In a tiny image (c. 14 x 10 cm) four “burqah-women” are semi portrayed with their backs to the viewer (Fig. 39a). Unlike the tulip they are surrounded by a thick black frame. Their veils are lifted and their eyes seem to observe the white curtain, which opens slightly. Through a slit, nothing but the aggressive red of the tiled wall appears. As previously seen in Pattern to Follow, 2000 (Fig. 36) the curtain is decorated with countless eyes. But this time the eyes rest also on the backs of the women. One can just feel the piercing gazes on their bodies. Beside the omnipresent fear of the evil eye the purpose of purdah is questioned, if walls, curtains and veils cannot provide protection from inquisitive gazes, and overwhelmingly red dangerous influences (vulgar society) even finds their way through thick walls and draped windows.

A visit to the red light district of Amsterdam, at the Voorbugwal Gracht, has extended the symbolic use of the colour red. While it stood before for female fertility and passion, it now symbolizes immorality and
female exploitation, as well.

In the series *Exotic Bodies* (Fig. 40, 41) the tulip emerges again. The Dutch trademark becomes a recurring motif from now onwards. It follows with the rose and the lotus flower of previous paintings. The occupation with and passion for plants, in particular flowers, is an old tradition in South Asia. Floral patterns were an integral part of Islamic art through the ages, found in the borders of paintings, carpets, architecture and ceramics. In Mughal India the common abstract and geometric style was supplanted by a more naturalistic floral image.239 Exquisite studies of flowers are found in the delicately painted borders of paintings (Fig. 40a) or in the *pietra dura* inlay decoration of celebrated buildings, particularly those commissioned by Shah Jahan (r. 1627-1659). He must have inherited his passion for plants from his forefathers, amongst them his great-great-grandfather Babur (r. 1526-1530) and his father Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) well known for their special interest in the local fauna and flora, which is not only reflected in works commissioned by them but also in their personal diaries.240 In painting it was Jahangir, in particular, who promoted detailed plant and animal studies in the naturalistic style familiar from European works. This finally resulted in the

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general Europeanization of the Mughal art in the 17th century. It was during Shah Jahan’s reign however when these trends were defined and systematized (see 1.2.3). Therefore Shah Jahan’s fascination for nature is the most visible, whether in painting or architecture, and it was his workshop that succeeded in the most naturalistic depictions. Beside isolated flowering plants set in decorative frames or painted landscapes he also commissioned studies of single plants, depicted against plain monochromatic backgrounds (Fig. 40b).

Later in the nineteenth century it was the East India Company that employed artists for the portrayal of Indian Natural History.

Research leads Aisha Khalid to the flower’s historical origins in the Middle East. “In 1554, a Dutch envoy who visited Istanbul brought back to Holland something that would change the nature of its national identity. Ogier Busbecq stumbled upon a secret on the shores of the Sweet Waters of Asia, a field of strange flowers. He had never seen anything like it before, and when he expressed his awe, someone presented him a sack of bulbs. These he planted that autumn on the flats near his home in Holland [...],” encounters Alev Lytle Croutier the story of the enchanting plant.

At one time its value was so high that its bulbs were weighed against gold. Now, many years later, through manipulation and with the help of genetic engineering it has been artificially altered to an impeccable, but scentless creation. “These

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241 A crucial role in this movement towards naturalism is probably the influence of European Art during that era.
242 Alev Lytle Croutier, *Harem: The World Behind the Veil* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989) 66; Mistakenly Busbecq is described here as a “Dutch envoy.” He actually was born in Flandern and was sent as the Austrian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire under the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent; see also Anna Pavord, *The Tulip* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999).
plant cultivations are in men’s hand,” the artist emphasizes and she does not hesitate to compare this pitiable, rootless plant with the Western or European woman. The permissive representation of the female body in public is regarded by Aisha Khalid as exhibitionism and exploitation of the woman. The consuming passion for ageless beauty and a perfect figure, defined by male fashion makers and the marketing industry gives the European woman tremendous stress in life and no freedom at all. Like the tulip, whose beauty was measured for decades only on externals—the size of the bud (female breast) and its colour (hair and skin)—one has forgotten about the sweet fragrance which escapes only from the inner core of the flower, some women might have lost their naturalness, too.

Exotic Bodies I, 2002 (Fig. 40) is divided into two vertical sections. On the right side, a delicate painted study of a tulip plant is portrayed on a garish red monochrome background. Its petals are white with red stripes running outwards at the centre and edges. They finish in sharp tips. The flower resembles the low-growing tulip plant, which is found in many gardens of Pakistan, in springtime. Half of the tulip’s bulb, which is painted in translucent watercolours (while the rest of the plant is opaque) is chopped off and emerges at the very top edge of the red rectangle. On the left, Aisha Khalid has created another interior, framed by a black border. Two walls in extreme diagonals, meet in a sharp corner. The walls are patterned with blue burqahs, so crowded that no empty spot is seen at

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all. Like the geometrical tiles and the water of previous paintings, the figures just continue over the floor and the walls without heeding any rules of perspective. In the same manner as before, three sharp black lines and some shading at the walls’ joints create the optical illusion of a three-dimensional room.

In *Exotic Bodies III*, 2002 (Fig. 41) the combination of the blue *shuttlecock burqa* with the uprooted flower is found again. This time it winds itself round the concealed woman, and may indicate the strong insistent influence of the West on Islamic tradition. The tulip bulb with its pathetic roots oscillates above the blue lady’s feet and the flower’s bud is placed just in front of her head. A conspicuous change is the artist’s depiction of blue *burqahs*; in previous paintings they were white and joyously patterned in floral designs (Fig. 35-38). After September 11, 2001 the “blue burqa” became famous all over the world through the media as a misinterpreted sign of cruelty and oppression exercised by the Taliban. As a result Aisha Khalid paid more attention to the old proven symbol and decided not only to adjust the colour of *burqahs* she depicted to the international blue image but also to present it in a new context (Fig. 39-41). While the earlier veiled figures were portrayed silently with their backs to the viewer, the new *burqa* -clad woman has turned around and goes for confrontation. From now on, she becomes the most compelling motif in Aisha Khalid’s work. The veil depicted in a new context has also altered its meaning. The ability to look around and counter the other’s gaze without being identified becomes exciting (Fig. 41, 44-48).

Coming out of a corner—the same room composition as in *Exotic Bodies I*, 2002 (Fig. 40)—the figure gets disturbed by camouflage pattern on the floor and walls. The restrictive geometric system contrasts strongly with the smooth, flowing drapery and the delicately painted flower. The blue *burqa* seems to be the woman’s guardian standing firm against outer influences, symbolized by the tulip (Western ideal of beauty, see above) and the camouflage pattern on

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244 Aisha Khalid, personal interview, 3 July 2004.
walls and floor (restrictive, violent, warlike society).
“The positioning of the female, once invisible, is now celebratory in its visibility. Even clad in the blue of the burqa (now universally recognisable thanks to the media relishing its Afghans folds) she is now willing to confront the viewer. Once the burqa figures were turned to the wall; they now turn full frontal to face the tulip.”

The series of works Birth of Venus, 2001 (Fig. 42, 43) literally demarcates the change in the symbolic use of the veil. “The title ‘Birth of Venus,’ was a sequential visual narrative,” writes Salima Hashmi in her essay for Aisha Khalid’s catalogue. “Curtains parted, revealing the lotus which subsequently disappeared, leaving its imprint behind. The rose takes its place, red with passion or with pain—perhaps the painter herself. The burqa is retained, its meaning now altered. Khalid observed that the notion of the veil, concretised in the burqa, also seemed to alter. The possibility of the women seeing all without been subjected to the reciprocal gaze became exciting.”

This time the burqa is depicted in the centre of a centric composition. Aisha Khalid uses the symbol of the mandala, which is the ancient Sanskrit word

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for circle and has been used throughout the world for self-expression, spiritual transformation and personal growth. The kaleidoscope-like pattern due to its geometrical floor depictions reminds of earlier works, but this time it appears to rotate. It gives the impression that the burqah is caught up by a whirlpool. Flowers again attribute the veiled figure. The lotus, white and tender, stands for purity. The rose is red with passion or pain. Four burqah-clad women emerge from the corners of the square painting. Their faces are directed to the core of the disc: the soaring burqah in the centre.

In 2001 on the way back from Europe to Pakistan the artist decided to make a stop over in Saudi Arabia and to go on Umrah. Her fascination for the Kaabah and its immense magnetic pull are reflected in her new composition. In Aisha Khalid’s paintings instead of the black stone it is the image of the burqah that is the centre of attention and circled seven times. Its shape reminds one of the female uterus. Placed in the middle of the painting it may indicate the natural wish for a baby after

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248 Bailey Cunningham, Mandala: Journey to the Centre (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2002).
being married happily for a couple of years. The observing women represent expecting grandmothers? Just two years later, Aisha Khalid gave birth to a healthy son.

The burqah has become the sole motif that determines everything. After September 11, 2001 the burqah has lost its virginity, which is manifested not only through the new choice of colour. Floral white material has been exchanged with the blue fabric that is better known internationally. For the exhibition in Preston, England in 2002 Aisha Khalid paints just big burqahs on tee-washed surfaces and accentuates them by setting them in nostalgic golden frames (Fig. 44, 45). From now on the veiled woman is no longer the mute and invisible being, placed like a decorative inventory in stylish indoor arrangements. To the contrary, the woman turns around, steps forward, confronts the viewer and breaks the “deafening” silence.

This abrupt modification of the meaning of the burqah corresponds with Leila

Fig. 44, 45  Aisha Khalid, Still Life with Blue Roses and Still Life with Eyes, 2002, opaque watercolour, tea wash on wasli, 36.5 x 25 cm, private collection, Zurich
Ahmed’s thesis, when she asserts, “the continuous reiteration of the veil and veiling as a site of struggle and contestation about the position of women in Islam over the decades has concealed a more fundamental struggle from the view, namely the historical struggle for national self-determination in opposition to colonialism.” And recent world affairs may “re-inscribe the contentions of the Arabic narrative of resistance as to the essentialness of preserving Muslim custom, particularly with regards to women, as a sign of resistance to imperialism, whether colonial or postcolonial.”

Fig. 46  Aisha Khalid, One Point Perspective, 2001, mixed technique on wasli, 22.8 x 15.2 cm, private collection, Lahore

Now burqahs melt joyfully with the pattern of the floor or walls. It reminds one of a childish “hide and seek” game: the figures blend in with the curtains or tiles and are hinted at by the suggestive drapery (Fig. 46, 47). “The contract between the burqah clad figure and the former so constricting surrounding was rewritten. A growing independency is recognizable. “The camouflage pattern of the table cloth can be taken as the power part of the burqah. The floor now becomes the burqah or the other way round.”

Post-European Phase
A more recent series carries the local name of the flower brought home:

Gul-e-lalah, 2004 (Fig. 48). One recognizes the same blue burqa lady occupied by the winding tulip plant of two years ago (Exotic Bodies III, 2002, Fig. 41). The only difference is that the veiled woman does not stand out from her environment anymore, like she did two years before. She has homogenized instead and become a part of it.

The term gul-e-lalah (literally in Persian: red flower or rose) seems to be a general term, as it describes any flower with red petals and a dark area in the centre, this can sometimes cause confusion. In this context for example, one finds a depiction of poppy flowers inscribed with “gul-i lala,” in the Small Clive Album from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century whereas the red
tulip is named “lala-i jughashu.” However, Aisha Khalid clearly refers to the *gul-e-lalah*, meaning tulip, which has a well-known tradition in Persian and then in Urdu literature, wherein it is celebrated for its beauty and sweet intoxicating fragrance. In Sufi poetry one finds the connection between *gul-e-lalah* and Laila the most famous beloved in history. Her love-story with Majnun, who lost his mind because of unfulfilled love, became the material of a legend. The flame-like flower appears in sacred art as indicative of Majnun’s love for Laila, like Allah’s love for humanity. The Persian word for tulip is “lalah,” which not only can be used as word play with Laila, but also has the same numerical value as the name of Allah. Laila, the beloved woman, or “lalah,” the flower, thus become names of the soul, which is of Allah, the last most perfect lover.

Annemarie Schimmel points to the roots of the love-story in early Arabic legends:

Die Geschichte von Quais, der in unerfüllter Liebe seinen Verstand verliert, *madschnun*, “besessen” wird, geht auf früharabische Überlieferungen zurück. […] Für ungezählte Dichter wurde Madschnun

zum Symbol für ihren eigenen Zustand (...), und wenn der von Liebe Verwirrte sogar Laila nicht mehr sehen wollte, weil er ganz in ihr lebte, so konnte die Geschichte dem Mystiker als Bild für seine völlige Versunkenheit in dem göttlichen Geliebten dienen.\textsuperscript{254}

To the German Islamic scholar, Laila appears in Arabic mystic poetry as a symbol for the longed-for divine creature. Further more she sees connections between the beloved woman and the \textit{Kaabah}, both are the highest goals to aspire for and she refers to the Islamic mystic, Molla Abdurrahman Jami's version of Laila and Majnun's love-story. When the obsessed pilgrim, Majnun, approaches the black veiled “stone” he can hardly differ between heavenly love and his love for Laila.\textsuperscript{255}

The Sufi mystic Amir Khusrau compares the cheeks of his beloved with the cup-like petals of the tulip.

\begin{quote}
I wonder what was the place where I was last night,  
All around me were half-slaughtered victims of love,  
tossing about in agony.  
There was a nymph-like beloved with cypress-like form and tulip-like face,  
Ruthlessly playing havoc with the hearts of the lovers.  
God himself was the master of ceremonies in that heavenly court,  
oh Khusrau, where (the face of) the Prophet too was shedding light like a candle.\textsuperscript{256}
\end{quote}

Of special interest is Allama Muhammad Iqbal’s symbolic use of the tulip: Pakistan’s most important poet-philosopher speaks of the Muslim community,

\textsuperscript{254} Annemarie Schimmel, \textit{Meine Seele ist eine Frau: Das Weibliche im Islam} (Munich: Kösel Verlag, 1995) 98.  
\textsuperscript{255} Annemarie Schimmel, \textit{Meine Seele ist eine Frau: Das Weibliche im Islam} 99.  

symbolised as a “Desert Tulip”\textsuperscript{257}, and he writes further “The compassionate tulip couldn’t flourish in the garden, this world of wheat and barley does not suit its nature”\textsuperscript{258} and formulates in \textit{The Message of the East}, “It is the desert air that suits our nature: the wafts of the garden breeze bring grief and death.”\textsuperscript{259} And indeed horticulturists advise hot, dry and sandy soil for growing tulips. Too much compost and humidity are detrimental.

Like Aisha Khalid, Muhammad Iqbal studied in Europe (1905-1908). There the influence of Western scholars widened his horizon and inspired his philosophical and political work. And again like Aisha Khalid, he, who on one hand had great admiration for European sciences, viewed the West very critically. He “even attacks Western imperialism, their portrayals of democracy, their concepts of colour and race, and their emptiness of soz (warmth), as Muhammad Iqbal coins it. He had a sip of wine from the cups of disparate civilizations—both the East, being shuddered into the wormholes of ignorance and bigotry, as well as the West, with all its signs of teeming progress. To him, the West was all glitter, with false standards, and soul-less ideals. Their lives were mere lives of humanoids, mechanically adjusting to daily needs.”\textsuperscript{260}

The Iqbal scholar Ikram Chaghatai points to other shades of this very favourite symbol of Muhammad Iqbal: “One is very common when he is impressed by the glowing redness of this flower. The other shade, that is very important, stands for the martyrdom, particularly the martyrdom of Imam Hussain at Karbala\textsuperscript{261}. Here, he uses this symbol for the blood. […] Iqbal’s poetry, both in Urdu and Persian, is replete with this symbol of tulip of the desert.”\textsuperscript{262}


\textsuperscript{261} Imam Hussain, the grandson of Muhammad the Prophet and third Imam was killed in the battle of Karbala. This event in 680 AD caused the first division between Islam believers.

\textsuperscript{262} Ikram Chaghatai, email to the author, 18 Nov. 2004.
While both the miniature painter and the philosopher correlate on some points, the meaning of the tulip contrasts in their works. While Muhammad Iqbal identifies himself and the Muslim people with the image of this distinctive flower, Aisha Khalid compares the plant in its over-sophisticated form with the European woman. But at home, isn’t there a chance of recovering from manipulation?—so that the harassed plant can regain its naturalness and scent the air with its original sweet fragrance.

The new paintings seem to indicate a happy fusion between the symbol-laden flower and the blue burqah, between modern influences and ancient traditions. With the help of the tulip the burqah-lady becomes Laila, the divine beloved. The tulip, which was interpreted before as the dreaded Western influence, metamorphoses into the gently embracing lover.

Aisha Khalid’s new work increases in lyrical abstraction. The figurative gets lost and an apparent abandonment of the earlier enchanting decor is visible. Her experience in Europe has not only caused a transformation in iconography and vocabulary, but has also brought with it a temporary attempt in other media. Yet, after a short maternity break, Aisha Khalid picks up the squirrel hairbrush again to paint on wasli. Obviously her experimenting with textile collages (Fig. 49) has released a new way of assessment, visible in great reduction. The group of works with the titles Veil or Song of Silence, 2004-2005, represent white burqahs (Fig. 50-51, 54). Entire burqah-figures diminish. Sections or only parts of the burqah appear on the wasli surface (Fig. 51-54). The discovery is fascinating here of a certain similarity with scenes of worship.
painted in the first part of the nineteenth century in Kotah, in particular, the upper half of the image with the ceiling fan made of gathered fabric, is strikingly reminiscent of Aisha Khalid’s “burqah relics” (Fig. 54a).  

In addition to the restrictive geometric pattern of the traditional tiles, the artist has introduced the lines of a notebook to juxtapose with the soft falling drapery. Aisha Khalid paints them so incredibly realistically that one easily presumes that the artist has used a page from a notebook as the subsurface for her painting (Fig. 50-53). Aptly, Marjorie Husain calls this delusion a trompe l’oeil. Representing a women’s journal or diary, the pages significantly are without text—a silent hint to the high illiterate rate of women in Pakistan?

It is remarkable that the interfering outlines disappear where the burqahs part slightly and a vivid red becomes visible. Like the tulip before, the gul-e-lalah, the red colour symbolizes passion and romantic love, which is hidden under drapery and flashes through a narrow slit (Fig. 45, 47, 50-54).

Devdutt Pattanaik writes that in Indian mythology, the colour red stands for the “juice of life,” menstruation blood, which signifies “fertility.” Married Hindi women apply a bindu (red mark), on their foreheads, wrap their bodies in red saris and paint their feet with red colour. Cinnabar dust plays an essential role at Hindi ceremonies. It increases fertility and attracts luck.

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263 Many thanks to Ali Kazim, who hinted the concruity.
Fig. 50 Aisha Khalid, *Veil*, 2004, opaque watercolour on *wasli*, 40.8 x 30.4 cm (framed), private collection, Italy

Fig. 51 Aisha Khalid, *Veil*, 2004, opaque watercolour on *wasli*, 40.8 x 30.4 cm (framed), Asal Collection, London

Fig. 52 Aisha Khalid, *Veil*, 2005, opaque watercolour on *wasli*, 22 x 15.7 cm, private collection, New Delhi

Fig. 53 Aisha Khalid, *Song of Silence*, 2005, opaque watercolour on *wasli*, 40.8 x 30.4 cm, private collection, London
“Red was to be associated not only with power and position, fertility and auspiciousness, but more importantly with the many meanings and nuances of love and romance,” states Naval Krishna. Later he concludes, “while poets and dramatists have used red as colour of adornment of the nayika (romantic heroine in Indian arts) in times ancient it was not until the Rajput period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the idea bloomed into an artistic trend, […] And today, thanks to the poets and painters, red has become the metaphor of love, its passion and pathos, its moods of longing and belonging, its heart throbs and heartaches.”

Aisha Khalid succeeds by going beyond the traditional boundaries of miniature painting without leaving it behind totally. The established techniques in opaque watercolours, the wasli paper, the small scale and multiple frames are all retained, as well as some traditions like the use of space, the setting of the figures and objects and the obsession with flowers.

A new direction is the turn for inspiration to folk art, such as truck-painting or block-printing. This influence, a progressive reduction of figure and the concentration on a coherent vocabulary make her style unmistakable.

By using contemporary vision she successfully circumnavigates the constraints of the discipline. Instead of copying traditional images she articulates her personal concerns. And she does it as a child of a distinctive culture. Her work is marked by great euphemism, which is found throughout Pakistani society.

Aisha Khalid succeeds in veiling the female figures but also in concealing the serious facts with apparent beautification of the objects through attractively arranged curtains and flower garlands. Layers upon layers have to be lifted to be able to reach the intentional core of the painting. The viewer is never confronted by the stark reality, as the message is conveyed through veils; palliative metaphors—a phenomenon deeply rooted in Persian and Indian

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267 Naval Krishna 197.
When Aisha Khalid says that her work is totally tied up with her life, the iconographical development becomes comprehensible. The thematic focus is on “being a woman in a demanding society.” Her “femaleness” is omni-present in burqahs, curtains and flowers.

In her early work conflicts with her own traditions and a family incident, the suicide of her cousin, influence her work. Women are portrayed in a very figurative way. Wrapped in a chaadar their features are still visible. Later they don the burqah, turn around and immerse in disguise. Delicately painted blossoms underline their eternal femininity. Placed in beautifully decorated interiors the concealed women resist silently. The subversion of the cosiness of those homely rooms is felt in the experience of claustrophobia, being hemmed in by door- and windowless walls, by masses of draperies or by deafening patterns. Yet is there no sign of suffering or revolt. Aisha Khalid’s women instead remain mute and resistant under their veils, surrounded by beautiful flowers, as if preserving their delicate beauty and loveliness for another world.

The two years long fellowship in Europe has created a new context for her
work. More than ever the veil or rather the *burqah* becomes symbolic of the female presence. The acquaintance and comparison with women of different nations made her realise the existence of a common global struggle for freedom and equality. As a result the perception of her own culture has also changed. The happy return to her motherland, confidence in the future and the decision to permanently settle in Lahore\textsuperscript{268} becomes apparent with the purchase of land and the plans to build a home for her young family.

In her work a new arrangement with social constraints becomes visible. The *burqah*, which now occupies the entire space, turns around and confronts the viewer. It opens up and through a slit, all the power and passion gush out, which had become fallow under masses of drapery for many decades. The realisation that empowerment has to come from inside one’s own culture, if not from every single woman herself, determines the new direction of the artist’s focus. When Aasim Akhtar states that, “the veiled and the unveiled women are both constructed positions, that the image of the unveiled woman has become over-identified with an idea of a civilised and free-thinking female subject”\textsuperscript{269}, Aisha Khalid has subverted this for long time believed view, than she does not see the necessity to adopt Western strategies, such as the abolition of the veil, to win the struggle for equal rights and equal position in society. To the contrary her own traditions, in particular, the veil, make victory possible

\textsuperscript{268} In contrast to most of her artist colleagues, who have all emigrated.

2.1.2.2 The Desire to Possess and Dominate: Waseem Ahmed

In a woman’s domain the contribution of male artists is of special interest, particularly with regard to this crucial theme. Their approach clearly differs to that of female competitors.

Waseem Ahmed has dedicated a whole series to the issue of “veiling.” The paintings, all of them entitled the *Burqah Series*, show exquisite reproductions of celebrated nudes in Western art history. Draped with filament-thin see-through veils, they have been shrunk and relocated in contemporary miniatures frames.

For instance, Manet’s *Olympia*, 1863 (Fig. 55a) is shifted from her white bed to a more rustic setting indicating a camp (Fig. 55). The soft and cuddly white feather pillows are exchanged with a *gao-takkiyah*, a thick bolster, which was used by the Mughal Emperors. It is depicted in many paintings as an obligatory part of the throne. Voluptuous princesses are found also reclining on it, longing for their lovers (Fig. 55b).

The miniature painter leaves out the black maid who presents to the “scandal lady” a rich bouquet of flowers, a lover’s tribute. The black cat, which Edouard Manet painted on the right side of the picture, has also not been included. Instead of the dark interior, Waseem Ahmed creates an elusive background in

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270 Manet’s painting Olympia was a public scandal at the Salon in 1865.
tea wash technique. With orange curtains the new composition gains in staginess. Chubby apples pattern the carefully arranged drapery.

While the original background and the bed are altered or just pictorially suggested, *Olympia* is transferred with great meticulousness.

Madame has exactly the same posture as her predecessors; 500 years earlier, Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (Fig. 55c) and about 150 years ago Manet’s *Olympia* (Fig. 55a). The left hand rests in her bare lap and conceals the most secret part of the female body. The right hand grips the shawl, which was thought to cover her nudity, but instead has slid under her naked body.

Even detailed accessories like the tiny mesh on her throat, the gulden bracelet on her right arm as well as the slippers on her crossed legs are not missed out. The young artist did an amazing job in copying the old master piece. Only a few things betray the youth and inexperience of the miniature painter. One finger, of the original, strangely spread out hand is missing, and one foot has also disappeared. The mouth and ears also differ from the “petite cocotte.”

A new dimension is added to the painting through the concealment of the naked beauty with a thin gossamer *burqah*. Unlike Aisha Khalid’s work, where the female body disappears entirely, the translucent drapery underlines the luscious forms of the woman. Softly flowing, transparent gauze covers the head but

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reveals the rest of the voluptuous body. Moreover, the softness of the fine material stresses the beauty of the reclining nude, who gains in attraction.\textsuperscript{272} Garments of similar light material are worn by courtiers in traditional miniature painting (Fig. 55d). Made of the most superior muslins\textsuperscript{273} they were called by such poetic names as Ab-e-Rawan (running water), Baft Hawa (woven air) and Shabnam (evening dew).\textsuperscript{274} Although its purpose is ostensibly to veil, its effect is erotic rather than concealing.

Later Waseem Ahmed portrays Titian’s Venus (Fig. 56, 55c) in an oriental surrounding. A fence of banana leaves suggests the presence of males, while lotus flowers in a stream provide the female balance. They stand out of the water oddly on extremely long and slender stalks. To indicate flowing water he uses the wash-technique. In the background tea or coffee-stains illuminate a

\textsuperscript{272} Manet’s Olympia was criticised as a flat composition by Théophile Gautier, “The color of the flesh is dirty, the modelling non exist…,” Maria and Godfrey Blunden, \textit{Impressionists and Impressionism} (New York: Rizzoli, 1980) 57.

\textsuperscript{273} The finest Muslin was made originally from the finest cotton in Bengal, which was conquered by the Mughal emperor Akbar in 1585. British colonists developed a similar love for the gosammer fabric in the nineteenth and early twentieth century due to its lightness and coolness in the hot climate.

\textsuperscript{274} K.S. Lal, \textit{The Mughal Harem} (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1988) 122.
hilly landscape, sprinkled with tiny bunches of flowers.

The wash-technique was practised in Mughal painting as well. Thin layers of translucent watercolours, fed with natural pigments, were already used as illusionary, spacious backgrounds for portraits (Fig. 74a) and as well for animal studies (Fig. 56a). The quickly sketched application contrasts strongly with the meticulous execution of the figure. The concentration obviously lies more on textural nuances than on the imaginative surrounding. The framing and the rectangular subdivision are strongly influenced by the Hindu Ragamala painting (Fig. 56b). In the upper-part of the image the brown landscape (man) penetrates into the red zone (woman). A flimsy, hardly seen curtain appears to cover the fusion. White raindrops emerge on the upper border. On one side, they culminate in a rolling wave. Instead of the burqah Waseem Ahmed envelops the precious body of the Venus in a garment of leaves, which conceal the naked skin like scales. Only the head and face remain unveiled.

Albrecht Dürer’s Eve, 1507 (Fig. 57a) has obviously served as inspiration for one of the first works in this series. The naked lady still holds the fateful fruit, whose consumption (enjoyment) has instituted the first sense of shame. A tiny branch grasped with the other hand, probably from the “tree of knowledge,” provides the first concealment of the “mons veneris.” The affected sprawling out of the
little finger is exchanged into a more warning pointer-finger on the right hand. It is interesting that in the Quran there is no reference to Eve’s responsibility for the Fall of Man and the delivery of the first sin to earth. Islam does not teach about the “original sin.” Instead of the snake it was Satan, himself, who seduced both, Adam and Eve, to eat from the forbidden tree.

Thereupon Satan whispered unto the two with a view to making them conscious of their nakedness, of which [hitherto] they had been unaware; and he said: ‘Your Substainer has but forbidden you this tree lest you two become [as] angels, or lest you live forever.’ And thus he led them on with deluding thoughts. But as soon as the two had tasted [the fruit] of the tree, they became conscious of their nakedness; and they began to cover themselves with pieced together leaves from the garden. And their Sustainers called unto them: “Did I forbid that tree unto you and tell you, ‘Verily Satan is open foe?’”

Fig. 57a Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 1507. Oil on panel. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain (Detail)

Fig. 57 Waseem Ahmed, *Burqah Series*, 2003, gouache and tea wash on *wasli*, 35.6 x 25.4 cm, collection of Salima Hashmi

275 The Message of the Qur’an 205.
Similar to the Bible, there is no mention of the type of fruit, which was growing on the tree. The image of the apple has been adopted later in the Christian community, since the apple was a common and widespread fruit in the region where Christianity spread. Annemarie Schimmel writes that in Muslim legends the forbidden fruit was mostly depicted as grain (Fig. 57b).

In Greek mythology the apple plays an important role in the garden of Hesperides where golden apples, actually a gift to Hera on the occasion of her nuptial union with Zeus, grant eternal youth. Furthermore, Paris Alexandros symbolically presents an apple to Aphrodite, to declare her the most beautiful.

The German linguist Theo Vennemann, who has done a comprehensive research on the etymology of the apple, hypothesizes a converse development from the word “genitals” to the term “apple.” In his opinion, the Hamito-Semitic word “abol,” meaning “apple,” was transferred to the West from Indo-European before it changed its meaning (and/or was lost entirely) in Hamito-Semitic (Afro-Asiatic).

In Christianity the apple is the “fruit of knowledge,” after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. It has also been used as a symbol for health and prosperity, through the ages.

In South Asia, the apple is not as common and found only in higher and cooler regions. The apple orchards of Kashmir are very well known. The pomegranate

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276 Annemarie Schimmel, Meine Seele ist eine Frau: Das Weibliche im Islam (Munich: Kösel Verlag, 1995) 53.
277 Some scholars presume that the apples in the garden of the Hesperides were quinces, because of their golden colour.
comes very close to it in shape and colour. But the little stem, which crowns the fruit with the poetic name “paradise apple,” is not found in the painting. Waseem Ahmed may have chosen the fruit for similar reasons: its juiciness and round lush shape symbolise fertility and femininity. Interestingly, the apple is found in some other modern miniatures as well. Femaleness is juxtaposed with maleness, round forms with phallic shapes, apples with bananas leaves (Fig. 81, 82, 83).

The erect symbol behind the woman probably signifies the internationally recognised symbol for manhood. The direction of the arrow has been slightly altered. Similar to the face of Olympia (Fig. 55) and of other painted nudes, the features of Cranach’s Eve are still visible through the transparency of her veil. Yet her eyes are covered with the burqah’s grille. The beautiful Victorine Meurent, who had also posed for Manet’s scandalous Olympia is veiled again. This time Waseem Ahmed transfers the trio of Manet’s Le Dejeuner: sur l’Herbe, 1863 (Fig. 58, 58a) into an oriental environment. Here too he leaves out the detailed surroundings; the park-like landscape, the rowing boat and the lady, who comes out of the water after a pleasant bath. Of the leftovers from a picnic consumed already, only the tipped over fruit basket is
depicted. The bread-roll with its distinctive round shape as well as the metallic hip flask would hardly fit in an Islamic milieu-study. More typical is the *gao-takkiyah*, on which one of the nude’s companions is comfortably leaning. The man’s gesture leads the spectator’s gaze to the nude.

Waseem Ahmed’s background composition follows the semicircular setting of his resting ensemble. It looks like a big globe rising behind the group. Brown stains simulate the world’s continents. Little bushes familiar from previous works grow on the ridge. A carmine transparent screen brings another spacious layer into the composition. Victorine’s mischievous eyes, originally glancing at the viewer, are covered by the opaque white cap of Waseem Ahmed’s *burqah*. The rest of her bare body is still exposed. Once again the meticulous workmanship of the gosammer drapery is quite remarkable. The three hems depicted are identical to the skilfully stitched seams of real *shuttlecock burqahs*.

The same scheme is repeated with Sandro Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, c. 1485 (Fig. 59, 59a), Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingre’s *La Grande Odalisque*, 1814 (Fig. 60, 60a), with the protagonist of his painting *The Turkish Bath*, 1832 (Fig. 61, 61a), or the *La Baigneuse de Valpincon*, 1808 (Fig. 62, 62a). Waseem Ahmed pulls his own image of the *burqah* over all of them. The
inclusion of the round gao-takkiyah, which emphasizes the high rank of the person leaning on it, the tea-stained background with minimal plants (the puffy trees, the isolated flowering plants and the banana leaves) are known from traditional miniature paintings (Fig. 33a, 40a).

Exquisite and meticulously painted figures are juxtaposed, with elusive, roughly sketched backgrounds, whose appearances are created by change, according to the spontaneous tea-wash. This evidence represents the new South Asian context and unites all the paintings of Waseem Ahmed in the Burqah Series. Botticelli’s figure Flora (Fig. 59, 59a) is noteworthy for having shifted along with Venus from their Neo Platonic context into Waseem Ahmed’s realm. Yet she has had to exchange her flower patterned Renaissance dress with a more culturally appropriate outfit: a shalwar kameez (see 2.1.1.9). She is still holding the red shawl to conceal the nude goddess (which is still blown about by the wind produced by Mercur in the Renaissance picture). But the shawl has lost its relevance since Waseem Ahmed was quick in covering newly born Venus with an exquisite veil.

It is interesting to observe that the burqahs, intended for Ingre’s Grand Odalisque (Fig. 60, 60a) and the tanpura player of the The Turkish Bath, (Fig. 61, 61a), are hanging down from a cord—just like fishing nets they seem to fall
down on their catch. But, one time the “net” misses its victim: La Grand Odalisque (Fig. 60, 60a) is able to escape. Instead of being covered her alluring body reclines pieta-like on the lap of the spooky, hollow *burqah* character.

Amusingly, that *burqah* fails to capture the odalisque, who, in contrast to other models depicted explicitly represents the oriental woman. Hidden in the harem and not visible to ordinary eyes she serves for the sexual pleasures of her master.

A material study par excellence of the finest, translucent fabric represents the *burqah* in Waseem Ahmed’s interpretation of Ingre’s *Baigneuse de Valpincon* (Fig. 62, 62a). The extremely detailed depiction of the delicate embroidery on gossamer drapery that flows gently down one of the world’s most famous backs denotes amazing artistic skill.

“The challenge to compete with great old masters played a role in choosing the subject, but also my worship of them and a bare attempt to come close to their
artistic skills,” explains Waseem Ahmed in an interview.\textsuperscript{279}

The interest in the motif, naked idols of Western feminine beauties, is maybe not astonishing for a young man, who was brought up in an extremely conservative environment, where the *purdah* custom is followed strictly. Women are veiled completely from head to toe and the capture of a glimpse of female flesh is virtually unthinkable. The co-educational system of NCA and various lectures on European Art history at the institute may have created this interest.

The male desire for “possessing” the perfect woman—white complexion is seen as the ultimate beauty in South Asia (See 2.2.3.2) —can also be interpreted from the image. Here the artist’s approach agrees with the cliché of *male gaze*, elaborately analysed by feminist art historians. The term and concept is originally derived from a seminal article in 1975 called “Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema” by Laura Mulvey, a feminist film theorist.\textsuperscript{280} In her psychoanalytic studies of cinematic “spectatorship” Mulvey refers to Freud’s term of “scopophilic instinct”—the pleasure in looking at another person as

\textsuperscript{279} Waseem Ahmed, personal interview, 3 July 2004.

an erotic object. She declares, that “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.”

Traditional pictures present men as active, controlling subjects. Women are treated as passive objects of desire without allowance for being desiring sexual subjects in their own right. Women are objectified in relation to the controlling male gaze. Men do the looking; women are there to be looked at. The codes of popular pictures “are obsessively subordinated to the neurotic needs of the male ego.”

While painting objects of desire by building up layer upon layer of paint, the creator gets control over the female body. The enjoyment of “the erotically based assault on female form” is known from famous art practitioners like Renoir (“I paint with my prick”) and Picasso (“Painting, that is actual lovemaking”).

With the pulling-over of burqahs Waseem Ahmed has subjoined a new aspect. Beside the visual taking possession of the female, it now symbolizes the physical capture of the unreachable beloved. The burqah falls down on the (originally elusive) beloved just like a fishing net. Her veiling, the abduction from her original European context and her relocation into the artist’s own cultural environment indicates the typically patriarchal habit of taking possession of the female body.

It becomes subversive through the transparency of Waseem Ahmed’s burqahs. Unlike the local shuttlecock burqa that usually is made of thick opaque cotton and provides complete concealment, the exquisitely fine material painted by the miniature painter is like gossamer so that the appeal of the reclining nudes is not only visible but also heightened. Although the physiognomies are disguised, the rest of the body becomes more desirable since the transparent chiffon

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281 Laura Mulvey 19.
282 Laura Mulvey 26.
creates a soft haze and thus the illusion of the perfect naked body. Waseem Ahmed uses the veil in the same context as Oriental specialists dealt with it. In the nineteenth century European photographers and scholars discovered the veil as a symbol of mystique, exoticism and eroticism. Gazing through it, the veiled woman becomes an object of fantasy, excitement and desire.

The paintings become controversial for a second time, when the no less familiar orientalist gaze receives its revenge (see 2.1.1.4). As a postcolonial compensation it is now the Western woman, who is exposed to the voyeuristic gaze of Eastern spectators. Passively and mutely the celebrated European nudes have to allow their veiling and thus their recurring appropriation by an Eastern male miniature painter.

In his later works Waseem Ahmed experiments with the veil as an abstract sign
(Fig. 63, 64). He concentrates on hollow burqahs, leaving out the nude figures. As metaphors for femininity he juxtaposes them with symbols of manhood, banana leaves and arrows, whose direction is altered from the diagonally upward position widely known in the West. Charming compositions are developed. Exquisitely painted translucent burqahs, familiar from the Burqah Series, circle head to head above the male symbol. Converging on the inner centre, the formation brings to mind spinning wind-mills, or even more, flowers with delicate petals.

Salwat Ali sees “nuptial ceremonials, evoked through faint images of the shehnai, floral strands, and a flimsy veil.” The floral interpretation reappears in the lower part of the image. Green leaves in the shape of burqahs on strange long stems form fantastical vegetation. In Waseem Ahmed’s non-figurative work the burqa stands for femininity and the configuration of the circle, a well-known sign for the female sex, emphasizes its symbolic meaning.

2.1.2.3 Attracting Curiosity: Reeta Saeed

Quite a different approach to the theme of the veil is reflected in the works of Reeta Saeed. In 2002, the young NCA graduate paints the series Visible Veil. The first painting of this series, Visible Veil #1, 2002 (Fig. 65) shows a length of exquisite gossamer fabric draped over a greyish-blue background. Painted in neem rang, monochrome grey, it is reminiscent of a graphic study. In Visible Veil #2, 2002 (Fig. 66) the same material covers the portrait of a woman in profile. The fineness and thinness of the veil reveals the woman under it. Slightly bent, with lowered eyes, her demeanour is devout. The delicate execution of the subtle textile, the soft flow of the drapery as well as its translucence, all evince admiration of the artist’s skill. The surrounding space stays undefined.

In Visible Veil #3, 2002 (Fig. 67) Radha appears for the first time, that figure of Hindu mythology, who becomes a permanent protagonist in Reeta Saeed’s

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work from now onwards. The artist explains her interest in the divine figure: “The presentation of the female goddess Radha in *Pahari painting* is that of a very simple woman. I have used her images in the present context. I feel that her personality discusses the issues and problems and feelings of women in general.”

While the religious *puranas* describe Radha as the re-incarnation of the Hindu

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*Fig. 65* Reeta Saeed, *Visible Veil # 1*, 2002, opaque watercolour on *wasli*, 30.5 x 43.2 cm, collection of the artist

*Fig. 66* Reeta Saeed, *Visible Veil # 2*, 2002, opaque watercolour on *wasli*, 30.5 x 40.6 cm, collection of Salima Hashmi

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love goddess Lakshmi, whose rebirth as a milkmaid leads to the earthly re-union with Krishna, in folklore and popular literature she appears as an individual character. Over the centuries a transition with many stages has taken place and Radha metamorphoses from the classical “servile devotee” of Krishna into a “freewheeling heroine.” As a human being with the appearance of a common woman she experiences various emotions and sufferings, passionate longing for her lover, and social constraints, caused by her illicit liaison as a married woman. “The folk poets had been consistent in representing her as a heroine of the contemporary society of every age—whether living as a merry milkmaid among the cowherds in the pastoral environs […] or winding her way as an adulterous housewife to her secret evening tryst in a mediaeval Bengali village, or abusing a profligate husband as a neglected middle class wife in colonial Calcutta. Radha is the goddess who will remain the spokesperson of women in love,” Sumanta Banjerjee concludes her essay on Radha.²⁸⁶

In the later Pahari painting Radha is depicted as a cowherd girl meeting Krishna

in a pastoral landscape. She is often accompanied by her milkmaid friends, the gopis. The influence of the imperial masters on provincial workshops led to the development of finely painted, precise figures, embodying self-consciousness and grace. Slender bodies are drawn with long, curving lines and their exaggerated gesticulation stresses the dramatics of the depicted scenery. Radha and her companions are all a familiar cast of characters with identical features and juvenile silhouettes.

“In later Pahari painting the grace and sweetness of expression […] also becomes a formula as the shapes used to define people or landscape,” remarks Milo Cleveland Beach (Fig. 67a). It is this romantic image of the lovelorn Radha, created in the Punjab Hills in the second half of the eighteenth century that Reeta Saeed transplants into her work. With her theatrical gestures, she represents the Vasakasajja nayika, a woman distraught over her absent lover (Fig. 67b).

The Visible Veil #3, 2002 (Fig. 67) reveals the lovesick Radha through a lattice of threads. One hand touches her lips, un-kissed for too long, while the other

one rests on her “bleeding” heart.

For this painting the artist uses unusually strong hues. Attired in orange and located in a green aureole, the background seems to burn. Blazing red symbolizes the passion of love, while the red stains surrounding the image express the pain and suffering involved. With consummate skill the artist prepares the muslin, which overlaps the painting. Carefully she pulls out transverse threads and by stitching them together in small bunches she creates a see-through grille, just like the eye section of the shuttlecock burqaḥ.

But subversively, it is now the spectator who peers through it, to discover the world behind it. By doing this only partially, several censor-bars appear.

In Visible Veil #4, 2002 (Fig. 68) Radha appears just like one of the prototypes of the eighteenth century: a graceful juvenile figure with theatrical gestures. While her long, slender arms point side-wards up to the sky, her face lost in thought, rests on her left shoulder. Dressed in a choli (bodice), a ghagra (long skirt) and a diaphanous orhni (scarf) she complies with the fashion of the provincial courts

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**Fig. 68** Reeta Saeed, Visible Veil #4, 2002, gouache on hand made paper with scrim stitches on canvas, 40.6 x 30.5 cm, private collection

**Fig. 68a** Nainsukh of Guler (attributed to), Krishna Steals the Butter, c. 1765, Pahari: Basohli (?), ink and opaque watercolour on paper, 18 x 28 cm, Kronos Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
of the fading eighteenth century (Fig. 68a).
Like in the painting before, it is only the single figure that has been separated
from her original environment and relocated in a roughly drafted landscape.
Two layers of gossamer fabric, one of them altered, just like in Visible Veil #3,
2002 (Fig. 67) are applied to the surface. The carmine passe-partout, as part
of the work, not only matches the hues of the lady’s skirt, but also mediates the
passion and love, consuming the depicted woman.

With her new series, evocatively entitled Ego Hides Soul (Fig. 69-71) Reeta
Saeed returns to a very limited colour spectrum. Using the neem rang technique
(see 1.2.1) she concentrates on shades of grey and brown. The title Ego Hides
Soul is derived from the Vedic metaphysics, particularly from the Upanishads,
the inner and mystic teaching in Hinduism. The key idea of the “path of
knowledge” is to defeat the distraction provided by the “ego” or ordinary human
self-awareness, so that one can become aware of the divinity within one’s self,
which is at the same time the atman (soul). Human “ego” hides “soul” from self-
Reeta Saeed compares the “veil” with the “ego” which is driven by the materialistic desires and social demands of a possessive patriarchy. In her opinion it inhibits the development of one’s individual personality, the true self:

“For Pakistani women, cloth (shalwar kameez and dupatta) is the symbol of self respect and honour. I believe that it not only covers the full body of a woman but also put lots of restrictions on her personality. Cloth actually covers her soul. With this experience I have covered my paintings with cloth but some parts of the paintings are visible because of scrim.”

For Ego Hides Soul #1, 2002 (Fig. 69) she abducts not just single figures of the traditional miniatures but the whole group. She has chosen the amorous playfulness of Krishna and Radha, where Krishna, attributed with the divine crown, clasps the hand of the still resisting Radha. This particular image represents one aspect of those pictures that simultaneously show several successive scenes from the Gita Govinda (Song of the Herdsmen), which finally culminate in the sexual union of the lovers; compare with Krishna woos Radha, c. 1780 (Fig. 69a). Reeta Saeed has left out the rustic landscape. Instead she indicates the ground and horizon in brown wash. Behind Radha, water is dripping from a container. A mouth appears. Are those lips waiting to be kissed or are they ready to spread gossip about the illicit relationship? The translucent curtain, the stitched muslin, fogs the secret love affair. Three woven stripes on the left indicate the same delicate fabric carefully portrayed in

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290 Reeta Saeed, email to the author, 7 March 2003.
Visible Veil #1, 2002 (Fig. 65).

*Ego Hides Soul* #3, 2002 (Fig. 70) depicts a single figure, the same prototype as in *Visible Veil* #4, 2002 (Fig. 68). Painted in *siyah qalam* with coffee-wash, all the bright hues from the earlier work have faded. Omitting the colours has created a need for more delicate nuances and various shades of one and the same tone. The execution of the transparent veil and the tiny flower pattern on the bouffant ghagra skirt are sublimely delicate. The woman’s body seems to be ready for departure from the scene while her head and one arm are still turned back to something absorbing, from which the farewell is difficult. The stitched bars of the superimposed scrim move both horizontally and vertically, simulating a grid.

The last work in the series *Ego Hides Soul* (Fig. 71) shows the self-portrait of the artist. Ironically the wasli with her picture on it has been put into a corded up cloth bag. The medallion form mimics the portraits of Mughal dignitaries.
(Fig. 71a), which were influenced by European Art. Divergently, Reeta Saeed’s head, covered by a light veil and painted in grey *neem rang*, is not placed in the centre. Instead the green leaves of a *frangi pani* tree (Plumeria) come into sight, with its beguiling fragrance of rose blossoms. The flower is seen as the symbol of the fragile human life out of which should come the fragrance of devotion that allows the soul to merge with the mysterious essence of all life. In the spiritual symbolism of India the Plumeria flower has a special significance.

The five petals are said to be represent five qualities necessary for psychological perfection: sincerity, faith, aspiration, devotion and surrender.29

One year later, in 2003, Reeta Saeed paints a single nude. The white body executed in *neem rang* contrasts strongly with its subsurface, a blood red dyed *wasli*. The rough edged handmade paper is meant as, *A Stain*, 2003 (Fig. 72) according to the work’s title. Once more the figure is derived from later *Pahari paintings* and resembles one of the *gopis*, whose clothes are stolen by Krishna while bathing in the river Yamuna (Fig. 72a).

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On closer observation one recognizes a convexity of the woman’s belly. Bubble-like, empty and transparent the artist applies it to the woman’s abdomen. Diverging from traditional painting the pubic triangle is shown.

“While painting ‘A Stain,’ I was wondering about the pain and suffering of the actual process of giving birth, that experience every woman has at a certain time of life.”

This time the scrim reveals much more of the painting than ever before. Most of the figure is visible through the grille, due to the removal of the transverse threads and the stitching together of the vertical ones. Only the crucial parts, the breast, the growing belly and the vulva are covered by the censor-bars of muslin.

The same figure appears again in a new interpretation of the traditional theme (Fig. 73). Reusing an earlier work (Fig. 65) Reeta Saeed places her together with three other gopis (or are they “alter egos”? on the lower jadwal, the space between the former painting and the border (Fig. 72). Sketchily depicted, with black outlines

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only, parts of their bodies overlap the original. From a tree Krishna is amusingly watching the milkmaids, who desperately try to hide their nakedness.

The sensitive fusion of art and craft has brought tactile sensation to the work of Reeta Saeed. Its feminine charm is captivating, achieved through the delicate execution of the miniature and the effective combination with fine textiles. By concentrating on subdued colours like brown and grey or drawing just the outlines of the figures, which are conspicuously inspired by the heroines of the late *Pahari painting*, she empathizes with the sensitivity of her creatures. Their isolated setting, occasionally on bright red backdrops, adds to their vulnerability. By placing the veil on top of the painting the impression of the need of shelter becomes more apparent but at the same time also crucial. The piece of cloth, meant to protect, simultaneously evokes great curiosity as well as a deep longing to explore the hidden treasure.

Consciously, the artist plays with that subversion, since she writes, “When I exhibited my works people are more interested in the series *Ego Hides the Soul* because they want to see the hidden parts of the paintings (although they are well known traditional miniature paintings). Keeping this in mind I have already framed and veiled the paintings in a way that anyone can open the frame and take the painting out the veil. It was an interesting experience.”  

Reeta Saeed addresses a theme, usually hushed up or declared non-existent by male dominated societies on the one hand; on the other, it has a long tradition in South Asia. The romantic *nayika* or heroine serves as a catalyst for undeclared desires. Portrayed in amorous moments of desperate longing for the beloved, she is encountered in Hindu lyrics and equally in Sufi narratives (see also 2.1.2.1) Reeta Saeed has chosen Radha as her idol figure. “I feel that her personality discusses the issues, problems and feelings of women in general.”

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293 Reeta Saeed, email to the author, 7 March 2003.
Closer association with the artist enables one to draw parallels between her work and her life. Personal experiences have evoked her interest in the theme of the veil. Engaged soon after her admission to NCA, Reeta Saeed, the offspring of a liberal family, was suddenly confronted with Islamic dress codes. The complex relationship between Radha, the individual soul, and Krishna, the divine, together with the strong devoted love and all the suffering and pain reflect Reeta Saeed’s first experiences of an unhappy marriage and a forbidden love. With the help of her dupatta, the artist carefully covers the depiction of silent emotions and desires. Using the same means, as restrictive society does, she achieves the opposite effect. Through veiling and subdual, she attracts attention and subliminally communicates her state of mind, her own and inevitably that of many other women.

Fig. 73 Reeta Saeed, Visible Veil, 2002/2003, opaque watercolour on wasli, 43.2 x 30.5 cm, collection of the artist
2.1.2.4 Symbol of Suppression and Backwardness: Saira Wasim, Tazeen Qayyum, Shehrbano Qizilbash, Sarah Ali Khan

Saira Wasim

Saira Wasim has gained international acclaim with satirical political parodies (Fig. 10). Less humorous is a series dedicated to the ignominious issue of “honour killing,” those fatal offences (mostly) against women, which are tolerated by segments of Pakistani society in the name of honour and family pride. Murderers get off scot-free and hitherto there was no law to protect the victims.295

In her painting Water Lilies (Honour Killing Series), 2000 (Fig. 74) lotus flowers have metamorphosed into burqahs. Big white swords pierce the heads of the drifting beings, so that blood oozes from the wounds. Paper boats float by with white flags hoisted. The unusual scenery is located in a surrealistic landscape with round rock formations and minimal vegetation. Some stones are reflected in the stagnant water.

Classical Mughal paintings serve as an inspiration for the atmospheric vista. In particular one folio representing Shah Jahan with his son Dara Shikoh on horses (Fig. 74a) shows conspicuous similarities in composition. The painting style in thin colour washes, the worm’s eye-view and the placement of boulders on the horizon invoke Saira Wasim’s work. The setting and the two angular trees also appear to have been adopted directly from the more than 350 years older painting.

Saira Wasim compares abused women with flowers. Water lilies, ancient Hindu symbols, epitomize their

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295 In January 2005 President Musharraf has signed a criminal law that provides for the enhancement of punishment of honour-related crimes: “Karo-Kari law signed by president,” Dawn 5 Jan. 2005: 1.
purity and innocence (see also 2.1.2.1). Tethered by roots anchored in mud, free movement is impossible. Rocks, which enclose the pond from all sides, indicate the inescapable situation in a constricting society. The silent, static water evokes local gossip of incidents when disgraced female family members were pushed into citadels. Unscrupulously, scooping of the same water for drinking continues. Paper boats refer again to the helpless and fragile position of women.

In *Mourning Rocks*, 2000 (Fig. 75) Saira Wasim depicts rocks in the image of frozen *chaadars*. Their gestures show grief and suffering. The blazing red sky and dramatic cloud formation stress the tragedy. In the foreground a battlefield is visible. Swords are stuck in the core of dying plants resembling agaves, those “succulent” beings, which are neglected because of their humble, common image. A few lotus flowers struggle to survive, while the water in the pond seems to peter out. Hope may come from small white blossoms blooming on one of the leafless trees, which hem the central rock formation. The filmy painting of the stone connects with the mourning *chaadars* in a floating manner.

Ebba Koch points out that humanized rock formations have already appeared
in *Persian painting* and refers to Barbara Brend’s research on this particular theme.

“The rocks in *Persian painting* are sometimes embellished with the head of humans, humanoids and animals, which are represented, [...] as natural formation. [...] The origin and intention of rock faces is something as a puzzle. The feature is, I think, absent from paintings of the thirteenth century Arab school; it appears to arise in Persia in the mid or later fourteenth century.”

For instance, an illustrated *Khamseh* of 1435, attributed to Sultan Muhammad, shows the characteristically rendered rock formation in the *Safavid style*. Grotesque faces of animals arise in blue stone. “A male face, in profile, skilfully shaded to show the muscular structure round the mouth,” grins right away into the face of a passing prince (Fig. 75a). The top-centred rock formation shows parallels to Saira Wasim’s group of draped figures, who bend grief-stricken. While the young miniature painter chose “to show them without faces or black holes instead of portraits because such women can never restore that respect in society and they hide themselves in such *chaadars* and they are lost for ever”, unexpectedly, in the *Persian painting*, physiognomies seem to protrude. Saira Wasim’s leafless bushes with white flowers are therefore not surprising.

Four years later Saira Wasim picks up the same theme again (Fig. 76). In the meantime the leafless tree has lost its blossoms; an additional figure emerges from a lotus in the foreground. Living in the West has given the Pakistani painter

296 Ebba Koch, personal interview, 28 July 2003.
298 Barbara Brend 120.
fresh inspirations and new vocabulary. This time the daggers do not spare the innocent lotus. Only one of the lilies escapes the deadly thrust. A bare and bony creature emerges out of the lotus’ core. The emaciated body and its bent posture bring to mind figures painted in early Expressionism in Europe. The blond curls may be a hint. Peculiar cloud formations fizzle meteoroid-like on the filthy sky.

The mourning group has been extended with more chaadar covered figures. Cowering on the rocks and painted in the same colour range as the stones, they melt in one big grey conglomerate. The strangely bent, golden dagger handles are very conspicuous and resemble teapot spouts rather than the common cross-shaped handles. Similar deviations were painted on weapons in the Punjab Hills or later in Calcutta (Fig. 76a).

Saira Wasim paints out of a sense of mission; “It was a need to touch this subject at a time and place where the majority of the country still believes victimizing women in the name of family honour is a sacred act. It is a story of those Pakistani and Afghani women in the world, who remain as invisible as possible in a society which considers living human beings with family honour
and shame so they physically abuse and kill them for their false pride and honour.”

“Pakistani women are as anguished and distressed as frozen ice-rocks or marble stones because their lives and deaths are controlled by the male members of their families” writes Saira Wasim and continues, “Unfortunately women are suffering because they are not aware about their own human rights and rights which Islam has given to them. Women have to remain as invisible as possible, behind the veil, in their homes, and are dismissed from work or study outside their homes. The flag of women’s chasteness is waved to prove the male superior.”

Saira Wasim is herself part of a religious minority. As a member of the little recognized and discriminated against Islamic sect in Pakistan, the Ahmadiyya, she uses her work as catalyst for her messages and as an artistic attempt to create a broader awareness of injustices and grievances.

Despite the adherence to a traditional technique and the elective inclusion of typical Persian landscape schemes, Hindu symbols (lotus) as well as images from European Art, she creates modern pictures of cutting-edge concerns with scathing criticism.

“Saira’s work, executed in a photo-realist style, is indeed traditional by Archer’s standards: ‘…minute attention to detail, characterisation and concern for drama’ (Archer 1959: 37) and yet its hyper consciousness of media effects makes it very post-modern. […] Her series from earlier this year was based on the so called “honour killings” … a subject untouched as yet in art and rarely mentioned in the Pakistani media,” writes Virginia Whiles for the catalogue of the groundbreaking exhibition Manoeuvering Miniatures in India, 2001.

“A kitschy aggressiveness which tends rather to the spectacular, than to the

300 Saira Wasim, email to the author, 10 July 2004.
301 Saira Wasim 10 July 2004.
reverential …,”³⁰⁴ she adds later to her statement on Saira Wasim’s work.

Distinctively and conforming to other miniature painters is the widespread use of floral metaphors as well as the symbol laden idioms. Lotus flowers, tulips, agaves, static water, tiny blossoms on trees and burqahs stand for females, while blood-besmeared daggers represent men. The symbol of the burqah stands clearly for the victimized women, who float injured and helpless in the abysmal pond (society) or are petrified by the grief and hopelessness of their situation.

“Here the symbol of the hijab or shuttlecock burqah is used because these living beings do not have their physical presence or identity, unfortunately here the veil is the only presence of them. So that is why I have related it with water lilies. Living in a filthy pond as such society where woman are chained in boundaries and daggers are piercing their heads.”³⁰⁵

A point of controversy is the fact that the artist, who employs the veil as a symbol of oppression and female helplessness in her work, has decided to


³⁰⁵ Saira Wasim 10 July 2004.
wear the headscarf and gown herself. Saira Wasim counts among the few art students who took the veil from an early age and kept on wearing it, despite encountering discrimination for being a “hijab girl” in the more liberal and Western oriented art circle. Very attached to her religion, the preaching of Ghulam Ahmad of Quaadiyaan, she believes in the divine request for women to cover themselves is the true teaching of Islam. For her the veil signifies respect and security for her personal life.\textsuperscript{306}

Tazeen Qayyum

Tazeen Qayyum, a class-fellow of Aisha Khalid, worked on a delicate and narrative series on women’s issues in 1999-2001. With a touch of satire she compares the progress of women in Pakistan with Charles Darwin’s “Theory of Evolution” (Fig. 77). While in Darwin’s theory the ape evolves into the homo sapiens sapiens, stagnation takes place for the Pakistani woman (Fig. 77a). In her case no development is visible. Unchanged, the Pakistani woman stays cloaked in the black burqa (Fig. 32). Walking upright on the “stream” of time (blue beam) she grows bigger and bigger. The white bud that she holds while passing through all stages of development alludes to her innocence and concealed beauty. The starting point is represented by a tree, whose leafless branches are multiply ramified. The high density of the sweet floral decoration on the “catwalk” correlates with the rich borders of traditional miniature painting. Circles stand for the wheels of time. Walking on them (like a hamster in a running wheel) makes advancement impossible. The background is built up with thin tea washes.

For Tazeen Qayyum the “veil” signifies stagnation and backwardness. In her painting the woman covered with the black burqa represents the endless struggle of the female population for their human rights in Pakistan. Tazeen Qayyum may refer to the impact of misogynistic politicians and oppressive traditions which have created the miserable status of women in the country

\textsuperscript{306} Saira Wasim, email to the author, 28 July 2004.
today, compiled in an essay by Jane Goodwin under the evocative title “One Step Forward Two Steps Back.”

Like most of her colleagues, Tazeen Qayyum left Pakistan. She emigrated to Canada in 2004. The influence of her new surroundings has led to a disciplinary extension of her artistic work. Interested in the performing arts since a long time, Tazeen Qayyum finally created a live version of a miniature, in the style of a *tableau vivant* (see 1.3.6), (Fig. 14).

Shehrbano Qizilbash

Shehrbano Qizilbash represents an outsider’s position in the discipline of contemporary miniature painting. As a recent (2003) graduate of Hunerkada College of Visual and Performing Arts in Lahore and a student of Waseem Ahmed, she is one of the few successful non NCA-graduates. Soon

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after graduation, she dedicated her work to the
“Emancipation of Women”\textsuperscript{308} and here in particular she
scrutinizes the tradition of covering the female body.
“Well, I have never actually worn the veil myself but
this issue has made me very sensitive and has forced
me to look at it from an angle which may be quite
alien to many in our male dominated society. The
confinement to the four walls all their life, the blurred
vision of the world through the cloth, the repression,
the fear and the insecurity once outside the walls—I
may not have experienced it but have seen it through
the eyes of many and have felt it deeply,” writes Shehrbano Qizilbash.\textsuperscript{309}
The repression and fear, described by the artist, becomes visible in her work
\textit{Untitled}, 2003 (Fig. 78). Eight women are captured under a huge sheet of

\textsuperscript{308} See also the eponymous series of work.
\textsuperscript{309} Shehrbano Qizilbash, email to the author, June 24, 2004.
cloth. The flow of drapery around their bodies is reminiscent of Hellenistic Greek statues. While on the left side, one figure seems to thrust outwards, not unlike the passionate movements of Nike of Samothrace (Fig. 78a) the rest of the group remains passive. Stoic features loom through the fabric, which sticks to the women’s faces, and makes breathing difficult. Buried under masses of drapery one can vividly imagine their feelings of suffocation and claustrophobia, and empathize with the sense of paralysis induced by an indoctrinated society. Yet, thousands of eyes are peering curiously through the cloth and query the purpose of the practice of veiling.

The Woman Emancipation Series, 2003 (Fig. 79, 80) is conspicuously traditional. The imagery as well as its composition derive their inspiration from the Safavid\textsuperscript{310} painting style. The coiled clouds in a gold sky, the strange rock formations as well as the water, which hangs over the framing lines, are

\begin{figure}[h]
  \centering
  \includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig79.png}
  \caption{Shehrbano Qizilbash, Women Emancipation, 2002, gouache on wasli, 25.4 x 22.9 cm, unknown collection}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
  \centering
  \includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig79a.png}
  \caption{Unknown artist, A Prince Visiting a Holy Man, c. 1560-70, Safavid: Qazvin, from a Matla al-Anvar of Amir Khusrau Dihlavi, pigments on paper, 22.5 x 16.4 cm, British Museum, London}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{310} Coincidentally, a tribe with the same name as the artist, “qizilbash” (lit.: red head, so-called for their distinctive red taj or cap), has played an important role for the rapid rise of the Safavids in Persia.
unmistakably borrowed from the “phantasmorgical” landscapes of Persian paintings in the sixteenth century (Fig. 79a, 75a) while putti were also favored by the Mughals (Fig. 11). Shehrbano Qizilbash imports just one little angel to hold a corner of the white chaadar, which falls on the landscape like an avalanche. Naked women, resembling the bathing gopis (see 2.1.2.3) who struggle to escape the mass of heavy drapery, but heavy chains fastened to their wrists make a get-away impossible.

A similar picture (Fig. 80) shows a group of nudes in a landscape setting; the major difference being that the white chaadar has not fallen yet, but hovers like the “Sword of Damocles” over their heads instead.

The individual figures appear to be borrowed from different sources. Decorated with traditional adornments (henna, ankle bells and bracelets) they are somehow awkward, and appear to be unhappily relocated. The young artist fails to establish cohesion and rapport; the group lacks homogeneity. The women are watched by curious people hidden in the woods, which border the water. Distinctive features betray them as male acquaintances of the artist. Like Krishna, after taking the clothes of the bathing gopis, they discreetly observe the naked beauties from the “forest of honey.”

While the water remains influenced by Persian art, the horizontal landscape
architecture as well as the bushy mango trees relate more to the popular depictions of the *Gita Govinda* in late *Pahari* paintings.

That very same year, Shehrbano Qizilbash changes her painting style completely. A radical reduction takes place. All the figures are left out and the focus is on the veil, preferably painted in white colour, and a few symbolic elements.

“The white *chaadar* has great significance for me. I paint the *chaadar* white because for me white is purity, loyalty, hope and dignity.”

The painting *Untitled*, 2003 (Fig. 81) seem to be the modern interpretation of the previously described theme: “*Gopis* bathing in the river Yamuna and being watched by Krishna” (Fig. 72a). The *gopis*, who symbolize simple women, are portrayed as ripe red apples, that biblical attribute which stands for female seduction.

Fig. 81 Shehrbano Qizilbash, *Untitled*, 2003, gouache on *wasli*, c. 21 x 21 cm, collection of Naazish Attaullah

Fig. 82 Shehrbano Qizilbash, *Untitled*, 2003, gouache on *wasli*, 10.2 x 12.7 cm, collection of Salima Hashmi

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311 Shehrbano Qizilbash, email to the author, June 24, 2004.
The curious surroundings with Peeping Toms, depicted as phallus-shaped banana leaves, encircles the pond, the wellspring of purity and innocence. Some leaves seem to long for the juicy fruits by trailing avidly in the sacral blue. Diaphanous veils fail to hide the pleasurable intermezzo; instead they impart an additional aura of exciting mystery and female tenderness.

The influence of her teacher and promoter Waseem Ahmed becomes conspicuous in the chosen symbolism (Fig. 55, 56, 59, 64), (see 2.1.2.2), in particular, the apple, the banana leaves and the circle.

The same pattern is followed in a few more works of the non-figural series. The work *Untitled*, 2003 (Fig. 82) depicts the male spectators as pineapples, standing neatly in two rows in a wooden green rectangle. In contrast the apples, representing the female presence, roll randomly and disorganized on a white *chaadar*. The borders of the threadbare and clipped piece of cloth are fixed with rusty nails to the rough ground. Its form alludes to the map of Pakistan.

In *Untitled*, 2003 (Fig. 83) many yards of gossamer cloth are futilely spanned into a tent-like shape. The use of ordinary iron nails, which penetrate the sensuous white material, underlines the violent act of an indoctrinated imposition, religiously justified by people determined to possess.

The arrangement of the *chaadar* in multiple layers detracts from the charm of the fine fabric. The single layer placed on top of the apples, this time lined up on a blue (water) rectangle, just like the pineapples before, stresses their seductive, female derrière-like shape.
Sarah Ali Khan
A similar aspect—repression of women due to male supremacy—is picked up by the recent NCA-graduate Sarah Ali Khan. The skilfully painted collage shows a socializing of controversial images (Fig. 84). Sequences of well-known pictures appear, carefully arranged in a meaningful puzzle. Scantily dressed dancing girls from Shah Jahan’s weighing scene depicted in the *Padshahnama* (Fig. 55e) c. 1635, are juxtaposed with images of *burqah* clad women of the twenty-first century. Fierce soldiers, armed to the teeth, face *nautch girls* and appear to be moral censors. The head of Khan Jahan Lodi is placed in the centre, whose barbarous beheading by imperial troops is shown hyper-realistically on folio # 94B of the *Padshahnama* (Fig. 84a), a silent premonition?

The two young gentlemen looking out of the picture are remarkable, as one is from the seventeenth century and the other one is 370 years younger. The inscription: “Are you a Muslim?” underscores the artistic statement of the painting.

“A creation of humour and terror by mingling fantasy and actuality,” Aasim Akhtar analyses Sarah Ali Khan’s work, “[…] From the *burqah*-clad Afghan
woman to the catwalk beauties, there are looming obstructions, even fiery catastrophes in front of the eyes. This premonition of disaster is evoked through clouds of colour, and in the shapes of prisms and grids, trapping a herded humanity.”312

2.1.2.5 The Beauty of the Veil: Hajrah Khan

With Muhammad Imran Qureshi as their teacher, a group of very talented artists emerged in December 2003, noted for their innovative and individual style. Hajrah Khan is one of them.

Hajrah Khan, who herself covers her head, criticizes the fact that the veil is very often depicted as something negative. As a reaction she “want(s) to show a positive point of view about the veil,” and expresses her feeling for it as “something pure and sacred.”313

Her thesis work *Fragile Arrangements I*, 2003 (Fig. 85) portrays a blue flower that has just broken through a red territory. The negative form can still be seen. It got rid of all the threads, which had hampered its final evolvement. With the willpower of youth, the flower lifts the white veil. Instead of a bulb, the artist has painted hundreds of roots that connect the bloom with the soil and nurture it with vital water. Was the covering and tight hold on it necessary to prevent an uncontrolled growing?

Did only the provided protection make

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a safe development possible?
The artist has chosen the blue iris, whose ravishing beauty has already inspired great masters such as van Gogh. In Greek Mythology the iris is the symbol of communication between heaven and earth. The name itself means “rainbow.”

In other languages, irises are called “flag” or “sword” lilies and signify royalty and heraldry. The early Arabic poet Ibn ar-Rumi highlights the precious value of the flower, with his expression, “The iris looked as if it had been dipped in lapis lazuli.”

Similarities to the lily plant may have led to a second interpretation as a symbol for purity and as an emblem associated with the Virgin Mary.

One year later, in 2004, Hajrah Khan paints her self-portrait, *Blue Image*, 2004 (Fig. 86) which shows her in a normal every day outfit; *shalwar kameez*, cardigan and headscarf. She appears twice. On one side in full solidity and on the other is her reflection, barely defined through the outlines. The earthly brown figure on the left contrasts with the spectral shape on the right.

Again it is a flower that builds the connection between the two worlds. Its stylized form brings to mind ancient Sanskrit symbols, the *mandala* or the *chakra*. Literally meaning wheel or disc, they represent spiritual transformation

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Hajrah Khan painted this picture immediately after her graduation from NCA. Torn between her protected and stable student life and the new uncertain future she portrays herself in the past (brown) and in the future (spherical blue).

Red threads traversing the blue space bar the figure from moving backwards. The brown figure tries to hold water in her hands, but it trickles away. This and the *dupatta* flowing down and passing the borderlines of the painting are metaphors for elapsed time. Flowers, fixed to the bottom corner, are there for remembrance, just like those laid on a grave.

“In life we move on but we never stop hoping and remembering” is the artist’s statement in the small catalogue, which was printed on behalf of the thesis exhibition.

The painting *Fragile Arrangements II* belongs to the same series (Fig. 87). The figures have disappeared and only a *chaadar* is left, a beautifully painted blue transparency. The torn, frayed fabric bears witness to it’s worn out condition and long usage. Without a doubt it has to be replaced soon. The white disc in the centre is full, so full that it is leaking out of its boundaries.

In the *Painting with Lily Pads*, 2005 (Fig. 1) a refreshing breeze blows (see the introduction). Finally the plunge is taken into the cold water. Painted in the traditional manner the water symbolizes, purity and newness, emphasized

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318 Hajrah Khan, email to the author, 2 March 2005.
through the depiction of the floating lotus (see also 2.1.2.1. and 2.1.2.4).
The body is already immersed in the brook, but the loose hair that beautifully
streams out is visible. The entire scene is covered with a gossamer veil,
pointedly fixed to the borderlines of the painting.
The past is hidden behind a sky blue curtain. Under it, the roots of newly
growing “flowers” become visible. Steadily they make their way through the
sandy embankment, probably in transit between the past and the unknown
future.
In the follow up painting *Pins*, 2005 (Fig. 88) the artist moves on with the
abstraction. Only the sensuous stream of black hair and the drapery of the white *chaadar* are left, both floating parallel to each other in a horizontal direction. Hairpins seem to keep the hair in order, while red strings knotted on a wooden stick prevent the hair from falling. Yet by looking closely one discovers that the threads have lost their purpose and dangle loosely with hair pins on their ends, like the roots trailing into the refreshing water in the previous image (Fig. 1); now the threads lead under the white veil.

The work is reminiscent of Naiza Khan’s series *Her Body in Four Parts*, 1995-2002 (Fig. 97), where the stream of black hair combined with pieces of the artist’s *dupatta* is also found (see 2.1.3.3 and 2.2.3.1). The red threads are familiar too; they may have been inspired by those blood red strands, which recently swarm through Naiza Khan’s work (Fig. 151).

Hajrah Khan peers curiously towards the future that lies uncertainly hidden under the clear water or the white veil. Trying to slowly detach herself from old chains (roots or threads) she finally takes the plunge.

Here, the artist presents a paradox: seductive black tresses, with their wide range of associations (see 2.2) are depicted beside flowing white fabric, which is actually supposed to cover the locks. This juxtaposition reignites the debate on the “veil” and the anticipation of upcoming work, is generating great excitement.
2.1.3 The Veil in Other Disciplines

2.1.3.1 Political Statement: Naazish Ataullah, Salima Hashmi

“Chaadar aur Chaardivari—Wrap her up in blankets and shut her up in the house, was the official pronouncement of Pakistan’s dictator Zia ul-Haq and his military regime concerning the question of women’s rights.”

With the help of the Sharia courts he or rather his repressive regime, which claimed power through a military coup in 1977, introduced unbelievably discriminatory and until now irreversible ordinances, ranging from the half-reduced validity of a female witness in court, to the stoning to death in case of an illicit relationship, including the incident of rape.

Taking these facts into consideration, the enforced wearing of the veil may have been the lesser evil.

While the rural population was touched only marginally by the new constitutional amendment, for educated women of the upper and middle classes this change meant a radical interference in their personal freedom and a drastic step backwards in their social status.

Suddenly, the chaadar, hitherto a symbol of respect and modesty, and strongly rooted in the sub-continental tradition of purdah, turned into a political issue. During this time of political upheaval, the veil became a subject of focus in the visual arts. While the veil appeared as an almost omnipresent companion of women depicted in the past, and was used to demarcate a woman’s status as well as acting as a supporting element in a painting’s dramatics, now its disengagement from the figure and its introduction as an autonomous motif occurred.

Naazish Ataullah

“The chaadar became a symbol of constraint, and tearing it apart became an act of defiance for artists like Naazish Ataullah.” Her *Chaadar* and *Shrouded Images* of the mid-eighties are strong political statements on the realities of living under General Zia’s dictatorship in Pakistan.

The aquatint, *Chaadar VI*, 1987 (Fig. 89) for example represents a *chaadar*. One part is pulled up tightly, while the other part has broken away from the obstructive setting. Ironically, the tear line reminds one of an upside down guillotine (Fig. 89a), the execution machine that played a crucial role in the fight for liberation during the French Revolution in 1792. The detached cloth soars upwards. Frayed edges and red stains recount of the strain and the bloodshed, the fight for freedom has caused.

The high quality of technical execution of the image is remarkable. The veil’s central part printed in obscure black is sprinkled with spots, a result of the granulated etching method. The translucent hem reveals every single thread of the crumpled textile. The two-dimensionality of the flatly

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spread veil is juxtaposed with the plasticity of the naturally flowing part that has been removed.

Salima Hashmi

On February 12, 1983 a group of activists went on the streets of Lahore to demonstrate against the newly proposed laws and was violently attacked by policemen armed with dandas or sticks (Fig. 89b); among them was Salima Hashmi. For her “the insistence that women should wear the chaadar in public forums, educational institutions and media became a focal point of rebellion.”

The artist, who explored the female body in its multiple facets in the seventies and early eighties, turns her work into a vehicle for political concerns. Instead of nudes, Salima Hashmi paints shrouded entities, delicately built up in many layers of transparent paint. Gloomy blackness fills the space usually meant for faces. By intermingling softly painted figures with printed images of hard facts, depictions of male violence or features

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321 see Introduction.
of women contorted with pain, the artist verbalizes her political message (Fig. 90).
Later, Salima Hashmi picked up the same theme again. Great dynamics characterize
the picture with the significant title *Day of Desires*, 1993 (Fig. 91), where shrouded figures take action and wave the red flag of revolution.
Inevitably, reminiscences of Eugène Delacroix’s *La Liberté Guidant le Peuple, le 28 Juillet 1830* (Fig. 91a) are evoked.
Portraying the painter’s own engagement with the French revolution in 1830, it represents one of the most famous political statements in modern art history. The outstanding figure of Liberty, enthusiastically holding aloft the tri-colour, is surrounded by vibrant fighters and the painter, himself, among them.
In place of the enraged Parisian bourgeoisie, Salima Hashmi paints women in white *chaadars*, scarcely emerging from layers of “dirty” brown wash. Stoic features are discernible as well as hands, upraised to arrest attention. The hoisted red banner and the energetic strokes of the brush make a plea for rebellion.
2.1.3.2 History and Tradition: Masuma Halai, Nausheen Saeed

The veil has lost its political explosiveness with different subsequent governments, but the winds of change are slow to blow. Many ordinances implemented under Zia ul-Haq’s regime became institutionalized in the following years and were not easily revoked. The realization that this represented only the tip of the iceberg and the actual reason for this development, buried deeply in the feudal structure of Pakistani society, is reflected in contemporary art production. The quest for answers, leads to an examination of one’s own history and traditions (see 2.1.1.7-9).

Masuma Halai

There is so much feeling of freedom and movement when cloth is left to flow uninterrupted. Sort of like the free flowing rivers that gave rise to this civilization that we are a part of. The sari too, took its origin in this very land. Six yards of cloth that flows freely when it is not entwined around a form, but the moment you tie it around someone it covers, binds and restricts […].\(^{323}\)

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\(^{323}\) Masuma Halai, email to the author, 28 June 2004.
Masuma Halai locates her artistic work in that historical context. With great sensitivity for the fabric, she creates masterpieces with powerful expressiveness. Just like the French psychiatrist and photographer Gaëtan Clérambault in the last century, it is the fascination for the relationship of women with fabric that is the focus of interest in her work. Obsessed with the wrinkling of the length of material, flowing over the body from head to toe, she paints superlative draperies. Presuming that for Clérambault it was curiosity for the unknown “other”, the exotic and erotic object that motivated him on his “razzia” for the “invisible gaze” so it is the silence and lethargy of the women under masses of cloth that fascinates Masuma Halai. Her pictures depict yards and yards of bright material, wrapped around the female body (Fig. 92, 93). As if caught in a whirlpool, flowing fabric swirls around the women. Now and then individual parts of the body gush out, a foot, a hand or the head. The stark photorealism is shocking and horrifies the observer. The artist develops her personal code of colours; yellow stands for hate, blue for night and red for

Fig. 94 Nausheen Saeed, *For Your Eyes Only*, 1994, 106.7 cm wide, fibre glass, paint, polythene sheet, collection of the artist

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rebellion. Green symbolizes the earth and at the same time, green is the colour of Islam and of the national flag of Pakistan.

Nausheen Saeed
The sculptor Nausheen Saeed approaches the issue of veiling from a similar angle. Her installation *Only For Your Eyes*, 2002 (Fig. 94) shows a woman seated on the floor, with her spine bent, just like a gymnastic exercise. Instead of fabric, transparent cellophane wraps the body. The synthetic, impermeable industrial product evokes a stifling, claustrophobic feeling. The restrictiveness and powerlessness felt in an indoctrinated society—particularly in marital life—is reflected in the image. While Masuma Halai’s women squirm and writhe under the masses of cloth and rebelliously try to tear them off, Nausheen Saeed’s figure remains in mute passivity.

2.1.3.3 A Sensuous Relationship:
Sabina Gillani, Naiza Khan
Sabina Gillani
Looking at Sabina Gillani’s work, the strong influence of Naazish Ataullah is indisputable, particularly regarding the formal and technical execution. Yet in contrast to her teacher, Sabina Gillani’s images are devoid of any political intention: her approach reflects her personal perception.

“I used a lot of fabric textures, maybe because I found fabric very sensuous. I don’t think of fabric as confining. I don’t think of it in the sense of the veil or purdah … perhaps I’ve never been forced into it. These etchings and
aquatints were a sensitive rendering of the female body in conflict, reticent yet demanding, struggling yet autonomous.”

In *Bright Prospects*, 1990 (Fig. 95) a nude lady in classical pose with crossed legs is encountered. Resting on the black border of the picture composed in miniature-style, her shoulders and head are located in the central white field. A *chaadar*, whose thin, roughly woven texture, familiar already from Naazish’ *Chaadar Series* (Fig. 89) covers her features. The material is as fine as gossamer and airily flowing, negotiating all borderlines, just as if beautiful thoughts are taking her away. No feelings of oppression or of violence arise while observing Sabina Gillani’s poetic work.

Naiza Khan
The desire to discover something elusive, an undiscovered reality, determines the oeuvre of Naiza Khan, who grew up in Lebanon and was educated in printmaking in Great Britain. Her work speaks of great sensuality, reflected in the high quality of technical execution and the subtle nature of processing her social concerns. The adaptation of the *dupatta* is part of her

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analysis of the female body, its sexuality and its perception as a political object (Fig. 96). The fine, shiny crinkled texture of silk organza resembles the velvety softness of human skin. Touching it provides private pleasure. Through spanning the veil on a board, drawing and printing it, she explores that complex relationship between woman and fabric, which offers so much intimacy.

The later combination of the dupatta visualized with hair in *Her Body in Three Parts*, 2002 (Fig. 97) or *Stain*, 2002 (Fig. 98) alludes to the actual purpose of the veil. Because of its seductive appeal, Muslim society, and others too, see female hair as provocative of sexual desires. This is one of the reasons that women are persistently encouraged to cover their head. The red stains of the latter image allude to the agony women experienced within this context (see 2.2.1.2 and 2.2.3.1).
2.1.3.4 The Ambivalence of the Burqah: Jamil Baloch, Yasna Sawar Khan, Afsheen Ali, Rashid Rana

Today’s popularity of the image of the “veil” was created undoubtedly by Western media during the United States’ war on Afghanistan. The burqah became the misinterpreted target of the war and its lifting, reason enough for a celebration. Ghostlike burqah-clad figures emerge on canvases or appear as life-sized sculptures all over the world.

Jamil Baloch

“I highlight the fact that here women are hopelessly bound with traditions,” explains Jamil Baloch regarding his black draped figures. In his opinion these women live the life of second-class citizens with no voice of their own. Underprivileged they are victims of abuse, rape and torture, often suffocated by barbaric customs like watta satta or axed to death as a kari. He sees these haunted burqahs like faces speak of agony, pain and misery and points out that already the word “burqah” is masculine.

With his sculptures he intends to show women draped in burqahs from various backgrounds, prosperous, the less privileged and the poor. The expressions are similar, despite differing circumstances, caged in old traditions, the reality of unbending values the same (Fig. 99).

Yasna Sawar Khan

Yasna Sawar Khan’s has caused sensation by pulling burqahs over celebrated nudes of Western Art History. For her computer manipulations she chooses

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327 Jamil Baloch, email to the author, 2 July 2004.
328 "watta satta" is the local term for exchange marriages and “karo kari” means honour killing.
“Susanna in the Bath”-sceneries by old masters like Jacobo Tintoretto or Louis Corinth and other classical themes, like the imprisoned Danae of Greek Mythology, who was impregnated by a gold shower—the Greek god of gods in disguise, painted by Jan Gossaert in 1527 (Fig. 100, 101).

Interim prints disclose the sophisticated technical process. In the pictures living models, probably the artist herself, pose in exactly the same manner as the famous nudes, with a big difference; this time they are all clad in totally concealing *burqahs*. Scanned and cut out they are superimposed on the Western masterpieces.

Yasna Sawar Khan experiences the great influence of the West on Eastern societies.

“Every field of life is x-rayed and interpreted by them, even our art,” she expresses her concern to the author by email.330

As a reaction the artist interprets Western art from the Islamic point of view and

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330 Yasna Sawar Khan, email to the author, 30 May 2002.
paradoxically she does this with the help of Western technology.
While in the last two centuries Western painters used to place their European ideals of beauties in “oriental” environments (mostly an excuse for depicting the female figure in erotic, seductive poses), Yasna Sawar Khan shifts *burqah* clad women to biblical or Greek mythological scenes and lets Islamic ideology invade the Western art world.
Yasna Sawar Khan depicts the confrontation between the exhibitionist West and the secretive East, by placing the manipulated images beside/below the original versions in diptychs.
“The imagery of my work is shifting between the lightness of internal thoughts and the weight of external (worldly) issues, where our society moulds the thoughts of middle class women. Simultaneously my work deals with current social and political issues, where I become the observer and commentator, revealing all sides of the picture.”

Afsheen Ali

Afsheen Ali’s installation reveals the double edge of the *burqah* (Fig. 102), when besides the feelings of restriction, women talk about having secret lives behind the *chaadar*. So that ironically it becomes at the same time both a means of confinement and a symbol of a type of independence and freedom.

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332 This analysis between the “outer” and “inner” was already pursued by women artists, like Naazish Ataullah, in the eighties (see above).
*burqa* grants access to certain public spaces, which are actually taboo for the female population (see 2.1.1.9).

A white *burqa* opens up for spectators and a strange accumulation of items becomes visible. On a tiny shelf small books stand in a row. They contain fairytales, which women may have heard in their childhood and other stories with impact. A painted window is closed with an immense lock and curiously the pair of sunglasses attached to it has printed eyes. The threshold of the walk-in sculpture and a poster displayed inside “Sample Now” invites one to enter an inner world, kept secret until now. Stamps with the words “rejected” or “fragile” are found all over the entire installation and allude to the parcel-like handling of women in a male-dominated society.

Rashid Rana

As a post 9/11 reaction, Rashid Rana challenges the viewer with a larger-than-life-size image of a counterfeit *burqa* (Fig. 103).

The perplexing first impression leads to the detection of thousands of micro images, a myriad of tiny photos that act like the hues and tones of a pointillist painting.

The pleasure of a kaleidoscopic experience is confused by the discovery of apparently pornographic scenes. A composite of minute prints of naked women in seductive poses, downloaded from the Internet, build up that synonym of modesty, the veiled woman.

With the help of sophisticated computer software, Rashid Rana generates
double layered, large-scale digital prints. The silent and familiar image becomes disturbing when viewed closely due to the contradictory contents of its mosaic tiles (see 1.3.6).

Dealing with the phenomena of two-way perception he makes use of the superficial and manipulated way of seeing things, prevalent in society. The complex relationship between the larger image and its components addresses crucial issues such as the purdah tradition and the voyeuristic “male gaze” (see 2.1.2.2).

For Quddus Mirza “both states of woman, the covered face and the naked body, deal with the activity of looking, and represent woman being an object of desire.”

The following consideration came to the mind of Kavita Singh while writing on Rasheed Rana’s work; “The justification for the veil is that it protects women from lustful gazes of men. One might not ask here why women are veiled, when blindfolding men would do the same job, and use less cloth to do it. This work is therefore equally about the “other” women—the ones who are captured in pornographic pictures, whose nakedness is as numbing and depersonalized as the veil. And then, it is not about women at all, but about men, about loveless lust, and the fear of this force within them.”

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2.1.4 Émigré Artists’ Interpretation of the Veil

Artists, living abroad, talk about the difficulties they faced, arriving in a foreign environment due to their background, stemming from a Muslim culture and lifestyle with class structure and segregation, and with different ambitions and different freedoms.

The prejudices and stereotypes, they are confronted with, perhaps give rise to the desire to investigate their own cultural commitments.

2.1.4.1 Blurring Stereotypes: Shahzia Sikander

Shahzia Sikander did a series of provocative images of the veil in her first years in the United States. Irritated and annoyed by being immediately categorized and compartmentalized according to her Muslim and South Asian origin and perhaps out of a desire to fathom out people’s expectations, she decided to perform in public with the *burqah*. “I actually wore a veil to elicit peoples reactions. I wore it to the grocery store, to the bar, to a classroom and discovered that people would get confused and intimidated.”

The anonymity experienced for the first time, the change in identity and the different attitude of people according to their perception of a type of garment was overwhelming and formative for her future work.

With the discovery of clothing as a powerful tool...

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Fig. 104 Shahzia Sikander, *Fleshy Weapons*, 1997, acrylic, dry pigment watercolour, tea wash on linen, 243.8 x 177.8 cm, collection of the artist
vehicle to manipulate characters and other peoples’ judgements she started to employ this phenomenon consciously in her pictorial vocabulary.

Like oxymorons, multiple-armed Hindu goddesses emerge, with heads covered with white veils (Fig. 104). “The veil in the West is connected to the Muslim identity, or Muslim woman in general and evokes loaded issues of oppression and terrorism, while in contrast the Hindu goddesses, like Kali or Durga, incorporate female power and black destruction,” the artist states, (Fig. 104a, 111).

Shahzia Sikander creates ambiguous entities, floating, dislocated with no feet. Instead, legs are connected with root-like strands. The body, equipped with rampant female forms, resembles ancient fertility goddesses, and yet embellished with distinctive features (the veil, the arms) make an explicit definition impossible.

“I am interested in the multi-dimensions of the female identity. The goddess could be a figure of power. It refers to empowerment definitely. And yet there is a certain sort of a dark side too, where there is reference to destruction. And whether it’s destruction of evil or good is left in the background. But here again, if the figure of the goddess is about this idea—a figure of power, the veil, when it comes on its head, does that mean that the veil is disempowering the figure? The idea of the veil is something that isn’t revealing; so do not underestimate what’s behind the veil either. So the minute I started mixing up these different traditions and meanings, it only led to a marriage of more meanings.”

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In 1999 Shahzia Sikander’s work, *The Resurgence of Islam* (Fig. 105) graced the cover of New York Times magazine.\(^{337}\)

The symbol of America per se, the Statue of Liberty, paradoxically veiled and multiple-armed, is embedded together with her Muslim counterpart, in the traditional composition of a Mughal album. The setting in various frames and the border decorated with *neem*

rang animal and plant motifs, mimics the portraits of great emperors (Fig. 105a). Many influential leaders in the history of Pakistan and Islam, like Muhammad Ali Jinnah, General Zia ul-Haq, Benazir Bhutto and controversial figures like Salman Rushdie as well as their famous statements encircle the two central women, who seem to be tearing an one-dollar bill. On the coveted banknote the artist adds to the original “in God we trust,” the Sura 55, Ar-Rahman, of the Quran, “Then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny?” in Arabic script. The American landmark is threatened by machine guns. An allusion to the covert arms trade?—a presumption that becomes more complex by recognizing the weapons as Russian Kalashnikovs. The familiar Hindu/Muslim hybrid from earlier works emerges behind the Eastern girl (Fig. 104). While the latter is joined by an unusually dark camel, the “ship of the desert,” Miss America is accompanied by a winged horse, Pegasus of Greek mythology. As a symbol for high-flying and powerful enterprises, Pegasus serves as a logo for one of the biggest American oil concerns.

Loaded with untold allusions to political transactions and mutual dependences between the East and the West and in particular, between Pakistan and the USA, this work represents a challenging culmination of cultural interactions. The weapons, the logo of the oil concern, dollar notes and Pakistani politicians patterned with the American flag are all in all indisputable indicators of undisclosed economical and political cooperation with the USA. Without a doubt enormous financial support of doctrinal regimes like those of the Taliban or of Zia ul-Haq in the eighties by the USA, are the reason for a constant growth of religious fundamentalism in the country.

The board inscription: “Who is veiled anyway?” held by the Pakistani lady raises the issue of identity, once again. Shahzia Sikander plays with the “veil” as an object of manipulation and pulls it over the Statue of Liberty just as she

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339 The “winged” horse finds its Islamic counterpart in *al-buraq* a white winged horse with a woman’s head, the legendary vehicle of prophet Muhammad.

340 Mobil Oil.
did before with Hindu goddesses. Yet for the Muslim woman the artist chooses a *burqah* made of an extra fine gossamer fabric, which exposes more than it conceals and refers to its erotic and seductive connotations. Intriguingly she reveals not only wrongly interpreted dress codes but also concealed political nuances.

“Culturally, it [the veil] is not my experience of having grown up in Pakistan, but the minute you leave the country and you come here, it became such a significant topic of discussion that I let it come into my work, and on the other level I was having a hard time getting rid of it. And that aspect is what interests me. For me, I want to take on that challenge. And so it’s like veiling and revealing. There’s always two sides to a story.”

2.1.4.2 *Veiled Vanity: Sylvat Aziz*

Sylvat Aziz, who left Pakistan in the early 80’s for a scholarship at Pratt Institute in New York and who shifted from there to Montreal due to a job offer at Concordia University, sees herself today “as far less tolerant of crass patronizing that goes on in Pakistan, at all levels, across gender and ages, and more ready to critique and disagree with ideas … “ On the other hand she has developed a “tremendous respect for tradition and does sincerely believe that it graces life.”

She explains these insights with living abroad, rather than with her function within the university and her continuous research work and teaching.

Belonging to the same generation as Naazish Ataullah and Salima Hashmi she has experienced for herself the fatal changes and implications for women enforced by Zia ul-Haq’s military regime during her studies at the NCA (see 2.1.3.1).

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342 Sylvat Aziz, email to the author, 23 April 2005.
As a result she incessantly employs the veil in its political context. For her the veil represents, a “brake shoe” in the evolution and liberation of women in Pakistan, when she says in an interview with Salima Hashmi:

“[…] In the Pathan community so much potential is going to waste. There’s little you can do within the veil. This leads me into the political arena, since the veil is a political tool; it confines you, it restricts you physically. The society is divided into male and female squares, and devices such as female veiling are limitations… limits access to information, and restricts your function as a meaningful individual doing meaningful work in the social network,” Sylvat Aziz explains her concern.343

On the other hand she points out that her interpretation of the veil is not a monolithic one. “It is not just negative, my work, I hope, proposes to seek the full spectrum of the notion of veils. I think the veil is an identifying feature of dress which is rapidly becoming a potent political statement and is far more than an onerous covering, the concept has fascination connotations in Sufi philosophy, in metaphysics and interwoven into the fabric of tradition and culture.”344

Sylvat Aziz, actually a trained printmaker, works today in different media.

“I strongly believe that used judiciously and competently, a crossing of borders in the visual art is enriching, and makes more interesting art-making possible.”

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344 Sylvat Aziz, personal email to the author, 23 April 2005.
This is a statement, to which she later adds, but “mixing media is a risky business.”

The *Muqaddima* Series, 2001 shows monumental, mysterious shapes (Fig. 106). About three to five meters tall, they literally loom over one and make a frightening appearance. Welded steel covered with different materials is reminiscent of *burqahs*. However, these are made of copper shingles, nailed together just like a primitive hovel or even reminding one of a suit of armour and Darth Vader (Star Wars) rings a bell. Other figures are wrapped like mummies, tightly with cloth bandages. For some sculptures the artist uses the original *shuttlecock burqah* but due to the fact that she dyes them with enamel vanish, the fabric turns as stiff and suffocating as the other materials. The large scale of the installation enables accessibility and lets the spectator literally feel the coldness and inapproachability of the imagined prison.

Opposing and complimentary, at the same time, is the combination of the sculptures with a two-dimensional work from the *Maqamat* Series, 2000-2001. Here, on canvas, the distinctive figures appear again (Fig. 107), printed on the bright and floral patterned fabric of the *shamiana* (screen), traditionally used for gatherings like weddings or funeral to provide *purdah*.

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346 Arabic for “preface,” “foreword” or “introduction.”
347 Arabic for “standpoint” or “station” of a person’s standing in the “way.”
This time beautiful flowers entwine the *burqahs*. These and distinctive etching effects let them melt joyfully with the backdrop.

With the title the artist refers to classical literature, since *Maqamaat* represents one of those stations of the “path,” listed by the Persian Sufi Abdul Karim al Qushayri as repentance, withdrawal, silence, patience etc.

Her more recent installation *Mother of all Postcards or the Haha behind the Bush*, 2005 (Fig. 108) brings together the familiar *burqah* sculptures with an eye-catching painting on the wall. The monumental figures have lost their scary characters; instead two of them have developed into colourful appearances. Their blue and orange *burqahs* radiate nothing oppressing or helpless anymore. As a contrast, the paradise flower (*Strelitzia reginae*) entwines the body. Both seem to open slightly. A third standing figure, in bronze armour, wears a green blindfold, and turns to the orange *burqah*, as if searching for help. In front of
these three, another peculiar burqah-clad creature cowers on the ground, its drapery stiffly splayed. Exactly the same figure appears again, hovering over an accumulation of strange subjects depicted in the accompanying painting. The skull, the fish, the head of John the Baptist\textsuperscript{348} and the dancing ram are all references to Christian symbolism. In particular they are found in the Vanitas Still Lifes, painted with fondness by Dutch artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth century to highlight the vanity of worldly objects and the brevity of life (Fig. 108b).

The skull, the \textit{memento-mori} symbol par excellence, refers to death.

The ram with its distinctive sex drive stands for immoral instincts. In the Middle ages it was closely linked with Satan and witches.\textsuperscript{349}

The word “fish,” incorporates the initials of the Greek meaning of “Ichthys” (Iesus Christos Theou Yious Soter = Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Saviour), and was used in early Christianity as secret sign. In the \textit{Vanitas} Still Life the fish emerges besides other food for its quick perishableness.\textsuperscript{350} Here in particular, the artist refers to one of the most popular moralizing scenes drawn by Pieter Brueghel the Elder in 1557, with the title: \textit{Big Fish Eat Small Fish} (Fig. 108c).

The burqah metamorphoses into a witch riding a broomstick, since its spiky

\textsuperscript{348} The painting \textit{Salome}, c. 1530, by Lucas Cranach the Elder served as inspiration for this head (Fig. 108a).


headgear resembles a witch’s hat—or is it the hood of the Knights of the *Ku Klux Klan*, which has just the same sharp shape, the artist is referring to? A garland of bright flowers frames this image of horror. It refers to the highly decorated borders of *Mughal paintings* but also to the general popular culture with its legendary habit of palliating the unkind.

By living abroad, both artists, Shahzia Sikander and Sylvat Aziz, can scoop from a larger pool of imagery, as their new environment naturally provides new insights. Shahzia Sikander blurs stereotypes with a fusion of images, which have controversial meanings. She borrows them from different cultures, here in particular India and the USA, two nations, with whom Pakistan stands in perpetual conflict. Pakistan tends to deny this instinctive dependence, culturally with India and financially with the USA.

A clear interpretation of the figures created by Sylvat Aziz is equally challenging. Using the image of the *burqa* as a starting point, she modifies and transforms it into cultural hermaphrodites. She scrutinizes its stereotypical explanations by juxtaposing it with Christian symbols of immorality and perishability, painted with favour in Holland, in the seventeenth century.

Both use the image of the “veil” as a first sign for Muslim tradition and joyfully intermingle it with elements, adopted from other cultures. Affixing any cultural connotations becomes impossible and ambiguous figures counter earlier stereotypes.
2.1.4 The Veil: Summary

In contrast to the Western polarisation on the issue of the veil and its immediate linkage with oppression of women, for the artists in Pakistan, the veil, or rather the chaadar and the burqah, represent a self-evident component of their own culture. Its complex concept is interwoven into the fabric of tradition, which is apparent in many areas of life.

Traditional paintings represent the veil as an essential component of the daily apparel of women. Defining a woman’s status, it is introduced as a supporting element to a painting’s dramatic effect. With its seductive features and magnetic appeal, the veil is an almost omnipresent companion of princesses, dancing girls and heroines depicted in the past.

In the early eighties the political situation triggered the disengagement of the veil from the figure. It was during that period that the veil advanced to become an autonomous subject in visual art. As a reaction to political changes, artists like Naazish Ataullah and Salima Hashmi employed the symbol of the veil to proclaim their political concerns. Later, the succeeding generation of painters explored the concept of veiling in its wider spectrum of connotations, as in its history and sensuality.

The subject of the veil was never before as popular as for the emerging miniature painters. Belonging to a younger generation, they add new facets to the perception of the veil.

For Aisha Khalid the veil or rather the burqah-clad woman represents the conflict between the feeling of security and the experience of claustrophobia in a protected environment. Later the burqah metamorphoses into a symbol of female power, a “shield” against the judgement of harmful “arrows.” For her the veil becomes the “weapon” to fight against constraints within her own traditions. To meet the voyeuristic desire of the male gaze Waseem Ahmed employs the
veil rather less because of its concealing functionality than for its seductive appeal. The fact that the women whom he shrouds with the *burqa* are nude celebrities from European Art History provides post-colonial compensation for the *orientalist gaze*.

The implications of the veil differ yet again in Reeta Saeed’s work. Applying it in its physical form, as a piece of fabric, over her delicate paintings, she addresses the subversive nature of the issue. While the veil is meant to conceal and protect, at the same time it creates curiosity to explore the “hidden treasure.”

Shrouded figures are victims of ignominious crimes and indicate helplessness and loss of identity in Saira Wasim’s images addressing the issue of “honour killing.”

Tazeen Qayyum’s parody on Darwin’s “Theory of Evolution” shows women in *black burqahs*, which symbolize backwardness and stagnation in the development of women in Pakistan.

Similarly, Sarah Ali Khan analyses the progress of Muslim society, by juxtaposing scantily dressed dancing girls from the Mughal period with *burqa*-clad women from the present, and for Shehrbano Qizilbash the veil represents suffocating constraints in a conservative society.

Finally, Hajrah Khan defines the veil as a means of protection, like the cocoon for the caterpillar, which preserves purity and lets beauty grow.

The artists’ motivation for depicting the veil differs due to personal experiences and family environment. In Pakistan most girls are faced with the issue of covering up one day, as a result of social circumstances. If the tradition is not practised in the family, the issue arises later in college or at the work place.

Aisha Khalid experienced strict *purdah* during her childhood in rural Pakistan, while for Reeta Saeed the question of veiling arose for the first time through marriage to the scion of a conservative family. For Shahzia Sikander, her status
as an immigrant triggered her interest in the issue.

Some artists touch the topic only once or twice and then drop it, while others dedicate whole series to one and the same theme. For artists like Aisha Khalid, Waseem Ahmed and Reeta Saeed the veil has become a permanent vocabulary, which is found throughout their entire body of work. Within the circle of miniature painters, female artists who take the veil, clearly represent a minority, a fact, which may be explained by their family background. Most of them belong to (upper-) middle class families, settled in the bigger cities and have attended English medium schools. Their parents’ decision to send them to a co-educational institution reflects their liberal approach to life.

It is a dichotomy that Saira Wasim, a confident headscarf-wearer herself, employs the *chaadar* and *burqah* as symbols of oppression and female helplessness, while her younger veiled colleague, Hajrah Khan, aims to portray the beauty of the contested piece of cloth.

Inevitably the global media plays a decisive role in the choice of the subject, since hot issues promise actuality. The aspect of pleasing or operating for prospective buyers and a well-funded audience cannot be discounted.

An obvious tendency towards subtle indirectness adopted by miniature painters becomes evident when compared with contemporary works executed in other disciplines. While artists who work with other media like to play with the element of shock, the viewer of miniatures seems to be spared confrontation with stark reality.\(^{351}\) *Inaudible Cry* painted in oil by Masuma Halai (Fig. 93) literally sends shivers down one’s spine. And in the installation *Only for Your Eyes* by Nausheen Saeed (Fig. 94), the bent figure looks so real that one vividly feels the suffocation of being shrouded in impermeable plastic foil. The

\(^{351}\) A fact, which also differs from the past. See the brutal beheading of Khan Jahan Lodi depicted on folio 94B of the *Padshahnama* (Fig. 62b).
same claustrophobic feeling is hardly evoked as realistically “en miniature” in Shehrbano Qizilbash’ work Untitled, 2003 (Fig. 78). Sculptors like Jamil Baluch or Sylvat Aziz make use of a daunting effect with the creation of overawing shapes. The utilization of space enables accessibility and allows a tactile experience.

Is the message of artists, like Sylvat Aziz and Aisha Khalid comparable, when both decorate burqahs with beautiful flower garlands to withstand the immoralities surrounding them? “Miniature-burqahs” will never have the same effect as the sculptures (Fig. 44, 106). Instead of monumental scale, the latter captivate with minuteness and meticulousness that attracts attention and makes the viewer stop, to come closer.

Miniatures innately incorporate an obscure character; painted on small loose folia they were thought to disappear easily in an album. The tiny scale sometimes seems to protect, while the hashia (typical border), may be interpreted as chaardivari (four walls). Due to the highly sophisticated technique, built up in various layers, any spontaneity or expressivity becomes difficult. Instead great unobtrusiveness pervades. This characteristic is utilized very successfully, when artists try to address crucial issues in a modest way. By dedicating an entire series of work to the theme of “honour killing” in 2000, Saira Wasim is the first artist who dared to scrutinize this crime, concealed until then in a socially maintained silence. Portraying the victims in burqahs as fragrant water lilies floating in a pond, perfectly complies with the covert traditions of South Asia.

It is interesting to note that the artists seem to deliberately highlight these given features of unobtrusiveness through additional concealment. Reeta Saeed applies an extra layer of fabric over her delicate neem rang painting, whereas others tend to favour a paraphrasing language with metaphors and symbols. The selection of the veil as a motif represents only a mere continuation of that principle.
Ultimately, the conversation with the viewer resembles a childish “hike and seek” game.

After fifteen years practicing contemporary miniature painting, a development has taken place. The narrative and decorative character has declined and a tendency to experiment with modern elements is evident. Like casting off ballast, the meticulously executed details disappear slowly and the human figure also makes itself scarce on the wasli. Instead, attributes, in particular the veil with all its variations (burqah/chaadar/dupatta), remain, serving as a mere hint for the physical female presence.

While in other art forms the veil was introduced as an autonomous subject in the politically turbulent eighties, it took some time for the veil to become an independent motif in contemporary miniatures, probably explained by the painter’s attachment to the traditional style and it’s ingrained formal vocabulary. The stages of disengagement from the figure are clearly visible in the evolution of the work of Aisha Khalid. In early works, the chaadar appears as a part of the female garment (Fig. 33, 34), yet soon after the artist switches to burqahs, faceless forms covered from head to toe. Placed primarily in neatly decorated homes beside other female metaphors, she later concentrates exclusively on the burqah and makes it the main and only subject (Fig. 37-48). In her most recent work the reduction was carried to the extent that only parts of it emerge (Fig. 51-54).

Reeta Saeed had already dedicated a delicate brush drawing to the veil in 2002 (Fig. 75). Shehrbano Qizilbash depicts the veil entirely separated from the human figure and uses the image of the white chaadar as an icon for traditional constraints, along with masculine and feminine symbols (Fig. 81-83). The tacit and implicit usage of the veil as an independent motif is reflected in Hajrah Khan’s thesis work of 2003 (Fig. 87).

Indisputably all images of the veil are strongly linked to the theme of womanhood. Its depiction not only announces the woman’s physical presence, but also communicates her inner feelings, her sorrows, her struggles and her
desires. More recently the veil symbolizes purity or grants inner power.

No matter which aspect is addressed, the usage of the image of the veil as a vehicle for their serious personal concerns, is common to all miniature painters. Astonishingly, miniature painters achieve the very same effect by veiling and implying, as others do through unveiling and exposing, namely attracting attention to their concerns.
2.2 THE HAIR

Traditionally, a woman’s hair has been considered her “crowning glory,” a symbol of wisdom, and an aspect of her essentially feminine nature. Brides of Christ, vestal virgins, and orthodox Jewish brides have been made to sacrifice their long, seductive and ensnaring hair. Woman’s hair has been cut and bound and covered in an effort to separate her from the goddess-given sexually seductive power.  

2.2.1 Female Hair: General Observations

2.2.1.1 Definition

In contrast to the veil, which is a unique societal artefact, hair might be viewed as something mundane, as a ubiquitous and trivial matter, as all human beings are naturally endowed with hair.

Hair belongs to the body, but disassociated from it, in some ways. As sensation ends at the scalp, there is no feeling connected to hair. It can be cut, dyed, frizzed and ironed without causing any pain to be transmitted to the nerve centres of the brain. Hair grows from the human body, but also survives also without it, in contrast with other body parts that decay when their connection is severed.

In medicine, hairs are defined as “cylindrical, keratinized, often pigmented filaments characteristically growing from the epidermis of a mammal. They form the coat of an animal or cover the scalp of a human.”

The *Columbia Encyclopaedia*’s comprehensive description states that hair

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is a “slender threadlike outgrowth from the skin of mammals. […] Each hair filament originates in a deep pouch like depression of the epidermis, called a hair follicle, which penetrates into the dermis. The root of the hair extends down into the hair follicle and widens into an indented bulb at its base. Extending into the indentation is the papilla, the centre of hair growth, which contains the capillaries and nerves that supply the hair. Newly dividing cells at the base of the hair multiply, forcing the cells above them upward. […] Straight-textured hair, round in cross section, is common among Native Americans, Eskimos, and Mongoloid peoples. Kinky or woolly hair, flat in cross section, prevails among the dark peoples of Africa, Australia, and elsewhere. Wavy or curly hair, common among Caucasians, is oval in cross section. The colour of hair is determined by the amount of pigment and air spaces in the cortex and medulla. Hair colour and texture are inherited characteristics.”

2.2.1.2 Social Significance of Hair in Different Cultures

“Hair is a cultural investigation with a strong narrative momentum and a commitment to individual personalities, because it is both personal and very public,” Diane Simon writes in the synopsis to her book *Hair: Public, Political, Extremely Personal*. Hair norms and policies are defined by cultural, racial, class and gender boundaries. As hair can easily be manipulated at will, it is used as a means to transmit a variety of socially significant messages. The style of grooming can denote not only origin and age but also social affiliation, and sometimes it can even convey a personal declaration of faith.

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Diane Apostolos-Cappadona sees hair as a “symbol of energy and power.” Among the ancient Egyptians, hair signified the receptacle of physical, if not secret power. Isis cut off a lock of her hair as an emblem of mourning for the death of Osiris. Her hair incorporates magic powers of protection, of resurrection and incarnation. She re-awakes Osiris to new life, “by shaking out her hair above him.”

In Assyrian and classical Mediterranean culture, young unmarried women wore their hair loose and flowing, while respectable matrons covered their hair with veils (see 2.1.1.2).

In Christianity loose flowing hair became associated with penitence when Mary Magdalene used her long hair to wipe the feet of Jesus after sprinkling them with her tears. In general the Christian patriarchy had a hostile attitude towards female hair, because of its heathenish sexual association. And according to Paul, women should cover their hair out of respect for the “angels,” while praying and speaking of prophets. Therefore the sacrifice of hair, such as the tonsure of nuns, is seen as a sign of “devotion and allegiance or penance.” Later on the apostle states, that it is a woman’s glory to have long hair, because “long hair is given to her as a covering.”

In art history, nudity of female saints, like Agnes, Mary Aegyptiaca and Mary Magdalene, is generally covered by their long tresses. (Fig. 109, 110).

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357 Diane Apostolos-Cappadona 161.
360 Paul, “1 Corinthians 11:5.”
361 Diane Apostolos-Cappadona 161.
362 Paul, “1 Corinthians 11:15.”
Andrew Campbell, who writes about Hellenic weddings, notes “the first element of the [wedding] ceremony was the progameia, a sacrifice at which the bride cut off her hair and dedicated it to Artemis and Moirai.”

And Diana Simon consolidates the historical and religious aspects: “at the same time, Judeo-Christian, and later Muslim, standards of modesty long required women’s hair to be covered, since it was considered so personal an appendage, and thus, so seductive a revelation. [...] Women’s hair has always been connected to women’s sexuality, the difference being that this female sexuality is often construed as a danger to men: Medusa’s snaky locks propelled enemies toward her eyes; Lorelei, mythical siren of the Rhine, untangled her golden tresses while she awaited unsuspecting sailors; and medieval Europeans shaved suspected witches because it was thought that evil demons that guided them nested in their hair.”

2.2.1.3 Ancient Hair Tropes in South Asia

“In ancient epistemologies and religions of South Asia the female hair features a deep symbolic and spiritual meaning. The tantric measures promulgate that the binding and loosening can unleash cosmic powers of creation and

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destruction,” the American researcher on female symbols Barbara G. Walker reports by pointing to Philip Rawson’s descriptions of *The Art of Tantra*.

The perception of hair in the Buddhist tradition may have influenced the later nuances of hair in South Asia. Statues of Buddha often depict hair tied up in a bun at the top of the head, which was traditionally associated with royalty but in a Buddhist context indicates the Buddha’s wisdom.

However, the legend of the “Buddha-in-the-making” says that later he “severed his long and beautiful hair with princely blade,” because he thought, locks were not suited to a monk. Long hair is seen as an indication of attachment to the world, therefore Buddhist monks and saints are shown with shaved heads, indicating their renunciation of the world.

In *The Path of Purification*, one of Buddhism’s founding texts, Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa comments on the passage in which Buddah directs attention to the “repulsiveness” of the body’s thirty-two aspects. Herein he submits hair to a kind of phenomenological reduction, which he describes as part of “the development of Mindfulness Occupied with the Body as a meditation subject.”

In meditation the primacy of hair is very evident. Not just representative of all kinds of the body’s impurities, hair tops the list, beside nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, and urine. Further on, he comprehensively describes the characteristics that make hair so repugnant, namely: “the colour, the shape, the odour, the habitat, and location.” And the German Indologist Heinrich Zimmer states,

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368 Heinrich R. Zimmer 160.
370 Buddhaghosa was an important scholar and commentator of the Theravada Buddhism. He was born in the 4th century.
“the ascetic hostility to the hair of the human organism is so excessive in the extreme sect of the Jains that they will tolerate no hair whatsoever on the person of an ordained holy-man. Part of their ritual ordination consists in a thorough weeding out of every single hair growing on the head and body.”

Even today this aspect of impurity hair stands out clearly in the native perception in South Asia. Together with nails, hair is regarded as ordure, “made of the impure waste produced in the process of digesting food, and that cutting hair and nails is similar to voiding excrement,” postulates Patrick Olivelle and in this connection he refers not only to Buddhist sources but also to ancient Vedic texts and a *Sinhala* belief.

According to Devdutt Pattanaik, in Indian myths the hair serves as a symbol of femininity, in particular, and as a symbol of fertility in general. Therefore he interprets hair plaited in a braid, without floral adornment, as “the dormant fertility of a pre-pubertal virgin,” while decorated, plaited hair represents for him the “awaken fertility of an unmarried maiden.” If hair is parted and plaited, one understands that the fertility of that woman is tied by the knot of marriage.

In contrast, unadorned “loose” hair, especially of women, is a sign of domestic informality and of sexual intimacy. In sculptures and miniatures, erotic couples

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373 Heinrich R. Zimmer 166.
are depicted with loose and falling hair (Fig. 69a). Flying hair indicates “free and wild fertility” or “the demonic and outside of male control, female” in Hindu mythology, and are represented for example with Kumari, the divine warrior or with Kali, the black goddess (Fig. 111). At the same time a woman with loose and, in particular, dishevelled hair may signal the desire for temporary separation, for example due to the onset of menstruation.

Punjabi women often allude to their status in the biological cycle with the expression “I have to wash my head.” The notion of impurity makes them untouchable so that any intercourse with them is not permitted. Washing hair and the removal of the pubic hair indicates the end of the separation. It signals readiness for sexual intercourse.

But there is yet another meaning: Loose and dishevelled hair is also a sign of mourning, “another ritually impure state, when normal ritual activities and social relations are suspended,” Patrick Olivelle observes.

A painting from Tabriz, dated 1505, depicts The Suicide of Shirin from a Khamseh of Nizami, testifies to the fact that the custom was also practiced in Persia (Fig. 112). The figure of Shirin is surrounded by various women tearing

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376 Devdutt Pattanaik 219.
377 Patrick Olivelle 16.
378 Paul Hershman, “Hair, Sex, Dirt,” Man, IX, 1974: 278.
379 Patrick Olivelle 16.
out their loose flowing hair. However, the most significant manipulation of hair in South Asian societies is shaving the head. The caula (first cutting of a child’s hair) is an ancient Hindu rite, which marks transition and the reception of the child into society. The ceremony, which is still practiced in India, is generally performed when the child is about three years old and is said to insure a long life for the child.380

Thus, the philosophy underlying the shaving of the head of Buddhist monks and orthodox Hindu widows is different. Both live an austere life and are expected not to adorn themselves or to participate in amusements. “Both are shaven headed, both are forbidden to have sexual relations,” Patrick Olivelle concludes.381 And Devudutt Pattanaik sees in the shaven heads of Hindu widows or in those of nuns “the destroyed fertility.”382

Patrick Olivelle mentions the unconscious association between hair and sexuality, which plays an important role in the rites and which helps to explain some interesting features of ascetic behaviour toward hair.383 Hair represents the fertile sexuality of its owner and a person’s appeal depends on its density and its shining condition. The growth of hair, specifically facial and pubic hair signifies sexual maturity.

Consequently the cutting of hair or shaving would be viewed as equivalent to castration.384 According to Paul Hershman, the mechanism of displacement—particularly associated with modern dream interpretation, where the (bald) head substitutes for the penis—is also known to the Punjabis. For them “hair is subconsciously associated with the anal-genital organs and processes.”385 Since “sexuality” is a highly taboo theme, words for sexual organs and hair are

380 Patrick Olivelle 18.
381 Patrick Olivelle 22.
382 Devudutt Pattanaik 219.
383 Patrick Olivelle 20-22.
384 Compare the biblical story of Samson, whose power was gone, when Delilah cut his hair.
385 Paul Hershman, “Hair, Sex and Dirt,” Man, IX, 1974: 274.
rarely used and are interchanged reciprocally.

The native connection of hair to grass and other plants is of relevance, and reinforces Devudutt Pattanaik’s theory of the relationship between hair and fertility. For Jan Gonda healthy hair connotes vitality, since hair on the human body bears a striking similarity to grass on earth; both grow again when they are cut and both testify to the vitality and the fertility of their respective hosts. Hair and grass share a certain physical resemblance as well.\textsuperscript{386}

2.2.1.4 Symbolism of Female Hair in Indo-Persian Poetry

Mystical Islamic poetry shaped the poetic tradition of South Asia, especially throughout the Mughal era.

“Metaphor is absolutely necessary, as reality can never be expressed in human words,” Annemarie Schimmel describes the philosophy of the Persian mystics, which was clearly absorbed by poets composing Persian and Urdu verses in the sub-continent.\textsuperscript{387}

In mystical Islamic poetry, hair is often used as a metaphor for the beloved-human and divine as well as for the union of the two. It is a symbol of desiring and desirability; the glimpsed strand that inspires a search for the seemingly unattainable whole.

The ode by the great mystic Shams-i-Tabriz (disappeared 1247) is well known: “Clasping in one hand the wine cup, in one hand the Loved One’s hair, Thus my doom would I envisage, dancing through the market-square.”\textsuperscript{388} The touch of the


beloved’s hair is equated with other intoxicating pleasures such as drinking or
dancing, and is declared as the man’s nemesis.
The Persian poet Muhammad Shamsuddin Hafez (1319-1389?) refers to the
braided hair of beautiful girls as “chains that imprison the lover.”389
A similar comparison is found in many interpretations of the classical Arabic love
story of Majnun and Laila (see 2.1.2.1), when the Delhi based Amir Khusrau
(d. 1325) asks with amusement, why Majnun, like every madman, was put into
chains, though were not Laila’s tresses chain enough for him?390
The Turkish poet Fuzuli (d. 1556) describes Majnun as the obsessed lover, who
has lost his heart and is compared to a bird in the dark curls of the beloved:
“The nest of the bird Heart is in your dishevelled tresses […]”391
Annemarie Schimmel points to another wordplay with Laila’s name (see also
2.1.2.1) namely, the Arabic word layl, “night” may stand for her black tresses or
even to the complete ‘blackout’ that Majnun experienced in her love.392

In the Sufi romance “Mirigavati” the author Qutban compares the curls of the
beloved with a poisonous snake on a lotus:

Her beautiful hair was bee-coloured, black,
coiled like cobras around her sandal-scented neck.
When she opened her topknot, the day darkened,
it was suddenly the sixth night of Bhadon393!
The curl that hang down on her cheek
Was a black poisonous snake on a lotus.
Whoever sees it is stung by deadly venom.
No medicine, nor root, nor physician can help!

389 “Persian poetry with English translation: Ahmad Shamlu reads a poem of Hafez,”
390 Amir Khusrau, Diwan-I Kamil, ed. Mahmud Darwish (Tehran: Jawidan, 1965) 566 and
Annemarie Schimmel, A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry (1992; Lahore:
391 Fuzuli, Divani, ed. Abdülbaqi Gölpinarlı (Istanbul: Inkilap Kitabevi, 1948) 96 and Annemarie
392 Annemarie Schimmel, A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry 133.
393 Bhadon: 6th month of Hindu calender.
From head to foot her curls hung there,
like poisonous serpents in waves upon waves.
That poison was the shears of death to me,
and I fell down in a shiver and fainted.\textsuperscript{394}

The Urdu poet Naji (1690?-1744) alludes to the fact that the beloved’s hair is
sometimes described as sun rays that kiss the dew drops on the rose, when he
says: “If you desire union with the sun, keep your eyes wet with tears, like the
dew.”\textsuperscript{395}

In the nineteenth century the Iranian mystic and founder of the Baha’i religion,
Baha’u’llah, extended the metaphor of the hair to establish a visual connection
between the hair of the beloved and the letters that move across the page;
calligraphy inspired by the lover’s longing for reunion. “The linking of two
actions, the growth of hair and the formation of letters is employed in his
writings to evoke the divine presence that unifies and animates all material
forms,” explains the artist Martin Derbyshire.\textsuperscript{396}

\textbf{2.2.1.5 The Hair of Mughal and Rajput Princesses}
Royal women laid great emphasis on hair care and decoration. Different
techniques were used to dye hair, to prevent hair loss and to remove unwanted
hair. Soma Mukherjee writes in her book on “Royal Mughal Ladies”\textsuperscript{397} that
long hair was considered a hallmark of beauty and refers to the encounters
of Niccolao Manucci, who reports that “their hair is always very well dressed,

\textsuperscript{394} Qutban, \textit{Mirigavati}, ed. D.F. Plukker, 1503, (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam
\textsuperscript{396} Martin Derbyshire, interview with Wendy van Overmeeren, \textit{bafa & arts dialogue}, June 2002,
\textsuperscript{397} Soma Mukherjee, \textit{Royal Mughal Ladies, And their Contribution} (New Delhi: Gyan, 2001) 74.
plaited and perfumed with scented oil." Women embellished their hair with jewels and flowers like marigold and jasmine. Some elegant coiffure styles were named after birds, like Santhali or Lotan. The few Mughal women depicted in early album painting demonstrate that hairstyles changed several times over the years. Female characters in the *Hamzanama*, one of the earliest commissioned books by the Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1558-1605), have their hair plaited in long pigtails.

Adorned with diaphanous veils and pearls, the braids are lengthened with decorative tassels, so that they almost reach the floor (Fig. 113). One folio of the *Akbarnama*, dedicated to the birth of Akbar’s second son Murad, and painted almost twenty years later, shows the women folk still with their long black plaits, but with half twisted into a bun at the back of the head. The centre parting allows the hair to cascade in front of the ears, most probably a temporary fashion, which is also popular with men of that era (Fig. 114).

During the reign of Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) not only the themes but also the

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appearance of the women changed a lot. The women are dressed in the most noble and fine flowing fabrics and are highly bejewelled. The hair is worn loosely with a centre parting, and most of the time under an extra diaphanous veil (see 2.1.1.8). Thin hair with ragged ends show that trimming hair was not a common custom (see 2.2.1.6), (Fig. 29).

From then on loose hair, in combination with a thin veil, is found through out album painting in South Asia until the nineteenth century (Fig. 115, 116). The glory of uncovered hair is portrayed, in the eighteenth century, when Pahari painters produced numerous depictions of toilette scenes (Fig. 117, 118, 55c). Not unlike the popular Susanna-In-the-Bath motif in the European Renaissance, scantily clad women are shown in the moments immediately following their bath, engaged with arranging their hair, wringing out their wet locks or combing their tresses, in all likelihood, preparing for a lover (Fig. 119, 120).

Fig. 114 Bhura with faces by Basawan, Rejoicings at Fathpur on the Birth of Akbar’s second son, c. 1590-95, watercolour and gold on paper, 33.2 x 19.5 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Fig. 115 Ruknuddin, Ladies on a Terrace, 1665, Rajasthan: Bikaner, ink, opaque watercolour and gold on paper, 22.7 x 15.1 cm, Kronos Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Detail)
The artist and patrons at that time clearly favoured the romantic heroine, the *nayika*, who represents one of the favourite protagonists in the romantic lyrics of ancient Indian literature. Primary embodied by Radha, the *nayika* is depicted during various leisurely activities and with postures often affected by melancholy or longing for the awaited lover (see 2.1.2.3). However, the particular image of the bathing woman wringing out her wet hair is identified by Joan Cummins as *Karpuramnjarī*, the heroine of the romantic comedy, written by Rajashekhara in the early tenth century. A king spied out the Deccani princess and fell in love with her at first sight:

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Oh wonderful, wonderful!
Since the tips of her curls locks yet
sticks to her face,
Since her eyes are red with the washed off collyrium,
Since drops are a-tremble
on the massy tresses she holds
in her hand […]

Regarding the depiction of hair in Pahari painting Vishwa Chander Ohri points out that while in Kangra painting (Fig. 12a, 67a, 170a) the hair is painted as a “flat mass of black colour,” the Basohli and Guler style depicts it in loose strands, if not each single hair is drawn seperately. Here the black pigment is mixed with cinnabar what creates brown shades and hightens the beautiful effect of the hair (Fig. 55f, 117).

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2.2.1.6 Ancient Rituals and their Exegesis in Contemporary Pakistan

The hair rituals performed in contemporary Pakistan derive from various traditions. It often happens that a custom thought to be fundamentally Islamic turns out to be practised in a similar way in neighbouring India, where the same tradition is rooted deeply in ancient Vedic, Buddhist or Hindu culture.

Generally, the hair of an adult woman is “groomed” and arranged close to the head. While most adult males have short hair preferably with a moustache or a full beard, a woman’s hair, especially of a married one, is long and restrained by a knot or by an oiled plait. The distinctive way, in which the hair is worn, clearly symbolizes the different gender roles and complies with Islamic ordinances, found in the Hadith (7:774-O.B).

The miniature artist Aisha Khalid observes that traditionally women are not allowed to cut their hair. Her grandmother, who emigrated from India after the partition in 1947, has never trimmed her hair. It was confined to a joora (bun) her entire adult life, (see 2.1.2). The conventional Pakistani woman still wears her hair untrimmed, braided and covered with the dupatta in public. This habit is explained as a basic religious obligation but ironically this stipulation is not found in any Islamic source. The only advice about a Muslim woman’s hair style in the Hadith is that she should not favour a man’s hair style, that she should not wear false hair and that both (men and women), are required to dye their hair.

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402 Some Pakistanis say that this is an Islamic rule but the same tradition is also found among Hindus.

403 Aisha Khalid, personal interview, 23 May 2005.


when it turns grey.\textsuperscript{405} It would be an offence if a woman gathers her hair on top of the head: “The women who would be naked in spite of their being dressed, who are seduced (to wrong paths) and seduce others with their hair high like humps. These women would not get into Paradise and they would not perceive the odour of Paradise.”\textsuperscript{406}

In an interview the miniature painter Hajrah Khan reveals that a girl with loose hair is regarded as having loose morals (see 2.2.1.2).

However, in the cities, some upper (-middle) class women seem to ignore the “so called” religious requirements and put a lot of effort in the perfect presentation of their thick, black and shiny hair. Their hairstyles are trendy and conform to the latest international fashion. A weekly visit to the beauty salon is common, for a trim, dye and highlights. In addition, traditional rituals for hair care are practiced, such as head massages with mustard or coconut oil. Most of them keep their hair long, as short hair is an exception. The few girls, who decide to cut their long tresses, mostly belong to well-to-do families, and clearly represent with that step, their existentialist attitude to life. There is also a group of politically active women, all around 50, who cut their hair in the seventies as a symbol of women’s emancipation (see 2.1.3.1).

The ritual of shaving a child’s head is part of the Islamic \textit{Aqeeqah} feast, taking place a few days after the baby’s birth. The complete hair cut is accompanied by the custom of sacrificing a sheep on behalf of the child and naming the child. Following the ancient Islamic ritual, the weight of the cut off hair is balanced with gold or silver, which is then distributed among the poor.\textsuperscript{407}

Contemporary respondents equate this custom with the belief that totally


shaving a baby’s head enables the fast and dense growth of new hair, while others see it more as an act of purification, since the hair of the newborn is regarded as impure, after being so long in the mother’s womb, see more above.

Much emphasis is laid on the careful disposal of the hair, as according to native belief, hair is a popular fetish for black magic. Therefore the removed hair is buried or burned immediately after the ritual. With reference to Al-Muwatta’s comment in the Hadith: “The Messenger of Allah got his hair cut by the barber, his Companions came round him and they eagerly wanted that no hair should fall but in the hand of a person.”408

The Pakistani filmmaker Samar Minallah reveals, that she and her siblings were trained from a young age to immediately dispose of stray hairs from the brush and elsewhere to avoid a misuse.409

The fear of misuse and black magic using hair goes back to events from the Hadith, where Aisha Khalid narrates that the Prophet’s comb, the gathered hair on it and the outer skin of the pollen of the male date-palm was used by Jewish magicians.410

The miniature painter Saima Munawar remembers her grandmother collecting hairs in a brown paper bag and adding stones before throwing it into a river, once a month.411

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411 Saima Munawar, personal interview, 9 Sep. 2006.
Female Hair in Contemporary Miniature Painting

To signify a new stage in her life the miniature painter Hajrah Khan lifts the veil (Fig. 1, 88), and the leitmotif that determines the following chapter is revealed: female hair. Besides the veil, which intriguingly conceals it, female hair serves as another powerful symbol for depicting femininity in art.

Interestingly, it is predominantly the younger generation of miniature painters in particular, such as Saira Sheikh, Mahreen Zuberi, and Muhammad Zeeshan, who choose the hair as an appropriate metaphor for the female presence. It is noteworthy that émigré artists, like Shahzia Sikander, Ambreen Butt and Saima Munawar favour the symbolism of hair as well, but with a different approach than their colleagues, back home.

The Plait is Severed for a New Start: Saira Sheikh

Artistically paralyzed by the constraints of an unhappy marriage for years, Saira Sheikh started to analyse her traumatic life through her artwork. She had trained miniature painting and was originally part of the conservative faction, as one of Bashir Ahmed’s most prominent and devoted students. The search for convincing images that would express her inner feelings turned out to be quite a formidable task for an artist who was drilled to stay within traditional parameters (see 1.3.2).

Her success in abandoning some of the restraints of the past helped her not only to evolve a new artistic style but also to embark on a fresh start in life. Technical experiments with the application of paint, by letting it to flow and spread on the smooth subsurface of the wasli as well as the decision to use translucent colours instead of opaque, allows greater spontaneity. Nothing is hidden anymore. The newly found courage to pierce holes into the immaculate wasli shows the readiness of the artist to tear down cultural restrictions. For
that she has created her own very personal vocabulary, which is brimming with heavy symbolism. Amongst the various images, one is recurrent: the hair.

In *Encroachments*, 2003 (Fig. 121) the artist’s engagement ceremony is the portrayed. Adhesive corners for photographs placed below the upper *jadwal* allude to it as a real happening. The couple sits side by side dressed in white clothes. A transparent "cage," hinted at through fine red lines, separates the bride from the groom. Both facial expressions are serious and lacking in affection for each other. No sign of an inner bond such, as a silent touch is visible: the stiff formality is in keeping with traditional wedding conventions.

The groom’s *halo* (a sign of respect and honour) hovers above. Grass is whimsically encroaching upon the image. It grows around the feet as well as in the *halo*. It is there to represent the passage of time and is echoed by the braid of golden hair, the artist explains. Fixed over the scenery yellow crochet threads are pulled through pierced holes in the *wasli*. Dangling in front of the scenery it resembles a curtain. Tied into a large braid, the viewer is nevertheless free to peek at the ceremonial couple.

Does the imagery points to Surah XXXIII The Clans, verse 53, wherein a veil or

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curtain was sent from heaven to protect the privacy of the newly weds (see 2.1.1.3)?

The act of plaiting a woman’s hair is linked to the acceptance of social commitments and restrictions. With reference to hair being a symbol for femininity and female fertility the Indian scholar Devdutt Pattanaik interprets parted and plaited hair as a sign of woman’s fertility being under control, tied by the knot of marriage (see 2.2.1.3).

The golden yellow colour of the thread gives a holy blessing to the fateful betrothal ceremony: “It is a desire that when I look at this image, I wish it undone, but cannot, as what has once been is unchangeable, its reality is not refutable. The facts remain the same, the memory tarnishes,” the artist elucidates her innermost feelings.43

Baal char is a dreaded disease, medically known as alopecia areata. Literally in Urdu baal char means “the hair is falling off.” In 2003 Saira Sheikh dedicated one painting to that particular theme, Baal Char, 2003 (Fig. 122). “For Pakistani men baal char represents a great fear in life, since hair is traditionally equated with virility and power,” the artist explains and continues, “while the male population is chatting about baal char women in Pakistan are struggling with the

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real tragic problems of life.\textsuperscript{414} In the lower part of her painting portraits of seven friendly looking gentlemen appear. Some are bald and most of them sport a beard, the latter representing a fundamentalist religious statement in Pakistan. The portraits are of prominent national politicians and poets, personalities who are the focus of public attention, like Ashfaq Ahmad, GM Sayeed, Zia ul-Haq, and Jam Ali Sadiq. In the very front the profile of a young gentleman is visible—the artist’s husband? One man winds a single hair around his finger: An absurd child’s play to show the man’s crotch.

A blue stain marks the central part of the painting. Its translucent quality reveals another spot, whose shape brings to mind the loose tresses of a woman. A golden halo ennobles her. Pakistani society expects women to have long hair. This perception, the artist deems to be deeply rooted in the Sufi poetry of the region, wherein the beauty of the beloved is described through the splendour of her hair. There it plays an essential role in amorous dalliance (see 2.2.1.4). Poets prize the beloved not only for the beauty of her hair, but also, compare her with the sweet seductive scent of the tulip or with the preciousness of the blue iris, “which looked as it had been dipped in lapis lazuli”\textsuperscript{415} (see 2.1.2.1 and 2.1.2.5). Both flowers emerge in the field above the halo. Placed in a regular pattern, they give the effect of wallpaper. Both sections, the flowers and the men, are separated by bars of minute stippling of red ink, resembling grass but also thousands of tiny tears of blood.

The irises, known also from Christianity as “the Seven Sorrows of Mary and her suffering during the Passion,”\textsuperscript{416} emerge from the battlefield of blood by growing above it (see 2.1.2.5). With time the tears and spots, which pepper the scenery, will finally dry. After cutting, the grass or hair will grow again and hide the wounds of the past.

\textsuperscript{414} Saira Sheikh, personal interview, 3 July 2004.


Just like in the earlier painting, a three-dimensional plait is placed on top. This time it is made of red threads and connects all three sections with each other.

Red stippling reappears in the work *Red Grass*, 2003 (Fig. 123), which Saira Sheikh painted some months later.

A pinup girl sits with long gorgeous legs crossed, in the left part of the painting. With cropped hair and short, tight fitting clothes, her appearance places her in the non-Muslim world, probably cut out from a Western fashion magazine. The same woman is painted a second time, but in mirror image, on the right side. In contrast to the silky smooth, cleanly shaven legs on the left, her entire body is covered with red stippled hairs. Half of her head is obscured by an oval shaped halo, again extensively masked by the red stippling. Within it the artist’s portrait is hardly recognizable. The hilly landscape, seeded with the red grass/hair, alludes to a body part, a female breast perhaps? On the hill’s summit the earth/flesh opens and a blood red stream ascends vertically into a rectangle. Loose golden hair forms another voluptuous body.
The artist’s message becomes clear with the depiction of an electric razor in the very front of the painting. Here, Saira Sheikh addresses the paradox a woman is confronted with her entire life: hair on the head is considered to be a “crowning glory” whereas facial or body hair is condemned as repugnant. “Since ever I have been flooded by these beliefs, at home through my mother and various other relations, and in the media that is always proposing some new remedy for the asset as well as the affliction. I have always had long, black, straight hair on the head, and lots of unwanted facial hair as well. On a superficial level, this would be a comment on the prescribed notions of feminine beauty, which are not as much biologically ordained as culturally and/or socially determined. On another level, these standards for me, translate into the obligations and constraints that I have had to deal with for being a woman,”\textsuperscript{47} the artist explains her personal predicament with this particular issue.

The subsequent art piece, \textit{The Cupboard Within}, 2004 (Fig. 124) appears to be a rebellion or perhaps the logical consequence of her state of mind. In a glass cabinet the artist displays a black plait. It is the memento of one of the most

crucial decisions she has taken in her life. “It is a new beginning. The long cared for braid is cut off in all its glory and there is a feeling of liberation alongside one of long endured pain and suffering,” Saira Sheikh writes in her work description for Rohtas II. She subversively accentuates the erotic connotations of the hair. A woman’s tresses, which play an important role in the intimacy between man and woman, are suddenly cut off and signal in their detached condition, the end of a painful affair.

The artist’s former identity as a desirable (sexual) object is now virtually hung up and locked in a cabinet; while the key is still left in the lock. Strongly bound and tied with red yarn, causing contortion, it represents a sad souvenir of past experiences.

Small pieces of the same red wool along with several photographs are scattered along the bottom of the cabinet (Fig. 125). The digital images document the act of cutting off the plait. Despite three-dimensionality and its sculptural qualities the whole art piece remarkably resembles a miniature painting.

The obligatory *jadwal* is formed by the cabinet’s sidewalls and the window represents the central painting field. The background is peppered with black spots while the snippets of red wool comply with the familiar red stippling

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of earlier paintings. Even the painting’s embellishments and narratives are repeated in the new medium. Yet the personal involvement of the viewer with the excision of a part of the artist’s body creates an unfamiliar discomfort.

A more recent work repeats the image of the black plait, *Remains of a Day*, 2005 (Fig. 126). The central field is divided with a cross into four rectangles of the same size. On the right top, the classic oval, usually favoured for portraits, becomes visible (see 2.1.2.3). But instead of a head and shoulders, a red dress is left there, just as if someone has slipped it off quickly. Looking further down one observes, a person about to disappear from sight. Only the black plait, which is erected because of the airflow caused by the speedy exit, is still visible. In form and content the scenery is reminiscent of Hajrah Khan’s painting *Painting with Lily Pads*, 2005 (Fig. 1). Both artists address a change or a new start in life. However, while Hajrah Khan’s figure is immersed in pristine water (see 2.1.2.5), Saira Sheikh’s appears to be in a lush green meadow. The spontaneous and loose graphite drawing on the left looks like dispersed dust particles and therefore underlines the dynamic flow in the picture.

Saira Sheikh’s artwork is a manifest revelation of her own life. Her vocabulary is extremely personal and as Salima Hashmi so accurately expresses, it “is reflective of a visceral rather than an intellectual response […].”419 The artist herself writes, “What I paint is what I am… it is not the experiences that pass through the sieve of my self, but the sieve itself… what I feel and think compels me. The poignancy of the mundane like the hair and the grass, strikes me with awe… As do customs, taboos and other things—that we associate with! […] The works, being deeply personal derive from the core of the individual; but this ‘individual’ in turn becomes universal …”420

419 Salima Hashmi, Re-inventing Narratives: Contemporary Miniatures from Pakistan (Rabat, Morocco: Gallery Mohamed el Fassi, 2005) n. pag.
Saira Sheikh challenges the myths of the hair in its various cultural and traditional aspects. The relevance of place, where the hair is growing and the biological analogies between hair and grass are frequently expressed themes (see 2.2.1.3). The plaited braid is a constantly recurring theme. Initially it appears to be an added dimension to the painted scenery: made of brightly coloured yarn, it seems nothing more than a decorative accessory, which partly veils the scene. The subsequent use of her own shorn off plait as a synonym for her molested body and psyche defies the appeal of her earlier works. The physical involvement with a real element of the body becomes disturbing when seen against the backdrop of the rather unobtrusive paintings, particularly since the undertone as well as the classic metaphoric embellishment of the traditional medium determines the images. It appears that the sacrifice of the “glory of the head” was necessary, to break with the past.

While Saira Sheikh has succeeded in creating her own personal vocabulary, the
formal and compositional construction of her work is still strongly influenced by
the rules that were inculcated by the doctrinaire teaching style of Ustad Bashir.
It seems that it required another generation, to jettison the decorativeness and
sweetness that governs the first period of contemporary miniature painting.

2.2.2.2  Intimacy and Sexuality: Mahreen Zuberi

Mahreen Zuberi was born into a family, whose name has always been
connected to Modern Art in Pakistan. The Zuberi sisters, Rabia and Hajrah
founded the first School of Art in Karachi, in the early sixties. Today Rabia is still
the head of that institution and is one of the famous sculptors of Pakistan. Zafar
Zuberi manages the administration of the Indus Valley School of Arts in Karachi,
while her distant relative, Mobina Zuberi, is a renowned painter and owner of an
art gallery in Islamabad.

Mahreen Zuberi belongs to the group of Muhammad Imran Qureshi’s students
that graduated in 2003 and whose members are recognised as the most
revolutionary miniature painters of Pakistan. Due to their radicalism they are
often censured by art critics, who argue that apart from the small scale, hardly
anything else meets the orthodox definition of miniature art (see 1.3.2 and
1.3.6).

At her thesis show Mahreen Zuberi gained attention through her truly
unique vocabulary. Without hesitation she ignores almost all the parameters
of traditional miniature painting (see 1.1.2). Never before in history were
miniatures as empty, as spacious and as reduced. Instead of using the
traditional figural repertoire, the artist prefers to look elsewhere for inspiration.
In search of a personal vocabulary she came across Marcel Duchamp. His bold
“coup dell’ arte,” daring to place the industrial fabricated Porte-bouteilles (bottle
rack), 1914, a simple object of utility, in the holy halls of a museum made a
strong impact—an act that caused a reassessment of all normative values of art
so far.

The influence of the French Dadaist is found throughout Mahreen Zuberi’s work.
Bathrooms and sanitary installations determine the imagery of her work. The *Duchamp Series* for her thesis exhibition in 2003 shows the main object of her fascination, *La Fountaine*, 1917 (Fig. 127a). The white porcelain urinal, almost non-existent in Pakistan, is portrayed in multiple images on Mahreen Zuberi’s *waslis*. Meticulously depicted from different points of view, the work complies more with the parameters of technical drawing than with miniature painting (Fig. 127-129).

Marcel Duchamp may have placed his ready-mades on plinths to display them as art works; however, Mahreen Zuberi decided to use the traditional tools of album painting to create the desired revaluation, by gold
plating the particular object (see 1.2.1). As a Sufi emblem for light, gold is traditionally applied to lend the image splendour or as Larisa Dodkhudoeva expresses: the biblical concept of glory, for which the Persian term *hwarna* stands.\(^4\)

Hence the act of elevating an object like the urinal is an act of boldness and may be seen in the spiritual context as a provocation.

The opaque quality of the gold leaf makes the view into the internal part of the drawing impossible and the object’s functionality is disguised. The hollow, bowl-shaped form (female) transmutes into a compact something—a baby bottle teat or is it more a gilded phallus (male)?

“My work is an exploration of sexuality, taking inspiration from objects around me to the extent that they become subtle provocations,” the artist writes on this  

in an email to the author. In Vacant/Occupied, 2004 (Fig. 30) an unusual bathroom scene is shown. Water, painted in the traditional “swirling eddies,” (see 2.1.2.1) marks the lower part of the image, while in the upper part the grid of squares from earlier works is repeated with white tiles. One tile is left out to make place for a drain, which is clogged by long black hair. A black pipe connects the tiled area with the water. Just like miniature painters in the past, Mahreen Zuberi plays with different points of view by ignoring the laws of physics. In aerial perspective the tiles could form the floor, but then the placement of the water and the direction of the drainage pipe are physically untenable. A small detail at the lower right of the painting, a skirting board lets the tiles and the water appear in front elevation. But how then have the hairs reached the drain?

According to the artist the bathroom represents the most private and intimate

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Fig. 129 Mahreen Zuberi, Duchamp Series 4, 2003, gouache on wasli, 23 x 27 cm, collection of Imran Qureshi

422 Mahreen Zuberi, email to the author, 2 March 2005.
place in a home, “here one can open up and be sure not to be bothered by any unexpected invaders,” she states in discussion of her work. And Aasim Akhtar discovers in her *Vacant/Occupied* paintings, “a pleasure in celebrating the privacy of the washroom/bathroom space—clinical and pristine—as if feeling comfortable in one’s own skin [...].”

Numerous artists have exploited this intimate scene, where women feel unobserved, and the woman’s bath became one of the most popular subject matters in art history (see 2.1.2.3, 2.1.3.4, and 2.2.1.5).

But unlike the beloved Susanna or the bathing *gopis*, in Mahreen Zuberi’s

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423 Mahreen Zuberi, Talk on her work, Karachi, Studio of Naiza Khan, 28 April 2005.
425 I think here in particular of the Renaissance painters: Tintoretto, Peter Paul Rubens or of the Impressionist Edgar Degas, who painted the Boudoir girls of Paris while being engaged in their toilette.
scenery only traces of the presence of a woman are visible: a cascade of tangled hair caught in the drain-hole.

The pipes epitomize males in the bathrooms without doors. Mahreen Zuberi refers to the situation of women restricted by a male-dominated society, where the way to the outside world is controlled by them. Traditionally, Pakistani females are only allowed to travel in the company of a male relative. However, the outlet is blocked by a sieve and slowly, but steadily, hairs succeed in seeping through.

In another work in the *Vacant/Occupied Series* (Fig. 131) the tiled floor reappears, occupied by two brushes both clogged with strands of hair. On the right side the familiar urinal is visible. This particular perspective with the long pipe leading down from the porcelain “pelvis,” suggests the juxtaposition of
male and female elements. On the top a thick black bar weighs heavily.

“Society asks you to groom your hair, but brushing is very painful,” the artist states, who herself has unusual dense and curly hair and she relates the painful tearing out of hair with “giving away a part of oneself.”

The last painting of this series (Fig. 132) is reduced to such an extent that only the tiled floor/wall is left. The left border is slightly flooded by water. Painted with translucent watercolours the image is like previous ones, a cut out of a bathroom scene. Again functionality and perspective are barely

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426 Mahreen Zuberi, Talk on her work, Studio of Naiza Khan, Karachi, 28 April 2005.
427 Cutting-out is a traditional technique and therefore found in historical paintings, such as the Akbarnama, where often big parts of figures or animals disappear behind the painted borderlines (Fig. 28).
comprehensible. One tile succeeds in breaking out of the grid. Its borders are damaged and tinted red. Single hairs are glued to the rough edges. These and cracks testify to the force, with which the tiles were pressed into the rigid framework. A few long female hairs dare to emerge through tiny chinks in the spotless white paving.

In her series *Extensions*, 2004 (Fig. 133, 134) the artist explores objects and their relationship with gender and sexuality in a social context.

So for example an ashtray, primarily an object utilized by men with a female shape, is used to stub out cigarettes—which the artist interprets as a violent sexual act.

“Although being part of a society where sexuality is tabooed, the woman here, is not a victim (in fact in my work she is never a victim), though still not understanding she is discovering. The ashtray, I decided to use as a symbol for the male. […] On the whole the image becomes a study of sexuality from a female point of view.”

One work in the series shows an adumbrated ashtray. Inside and above it,

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428 In Pakistan smoking is considered a male habit. If a woman smokes she will be assumed to have loose morals.
429 Mahreen Zuberi, email to the author, 7 April 2006.
430 Mahreen Zuberi, email to the author, 2 March 2005.
curls of hair are painted, resembling annular plumes of smoke. The white of the ashtray, contrary to its function of containing waste, highlights its purity, while the hair in the ashtray questions the woman’s status.\footnote{Mahreen Zuberi, email to the author, 7 April 2006.}

Later the artist uses a tangle of hair, obviously female, to densely wrap the same ashtray (Fig. 134). The hairy veiling causes the object’s identity to become unfathomable. Black hair disguises the “site of violence”\footnote{Mahreen Zuberi, email to the author, 2 March 2005.} and at the same time it protects and takes possession of it. A slit, resembling the vulva, emphasizes the female control over it.

Mahreen Zuberi’s paintings possess the pleasures and secrets of intimacy, as well as the horrors of dirt and defilement at the same time. Significantly, the artist chooses that precise ambivalence of hair as a metaphor for the complex figure of the woman, whereas the male gender is represented by objects that accumulate waste: the urinal, the ashtray or the drainpipe.

### 2.2.2.3 Hairy Weapons: Muhammad Zeeshan

The usage of human hair as a symbolic metaphor is found in the work of Muhammad Zeeshan, a fellow student of Mahreen Zuberi, as well.

From a modest background in rural Pakistan, Muhammad Zeeshan was overwhelmed by new impressions in the vibrating city of Lahore, where he came to obtain an academic degree in Fine Arts. The ease of interaction between the two genders at the co-educational National...
College of Arts initially astonished the young man, brought up in one of the most conservative environments, in rural Sindh. In addition the ubiquity of the media, and the ceaseless exposure to giant images of attractive models and actresses, smiling alluringly from thousands of billboards throughout the city, have influenced his early work. Manipulation by the advertising industry and the correlated transformation of old traditions are the thematic focus. Images of a bra advertisement transferred to wasli and the bare breasts of a young woman juxtaposed with an infant’s milk bottle testify to the artist’s fascination with the commercial use of the female stereotype. Later gigantic film heroes toting heavy weapons and accompanied by seductive girls with swaying hips, influence his imagery. The series with the title of a popular Punjabi song *Main Aan Hussun the Kalashancove* (I am a Kalashnikov of lethal beauty) relates to the underlying risk of glamorising violence and banalizing a tool of destruction in the media (Fig. 135, 136). “Guns are not uncommon in rural and urban Pakistan. Many innocent people and children are fed with a gun-mentality by evil minds,” the artist states and expresses this visually by drilling a pistol stock into the flesh of a banana. For Muhammad Zeeshan the banana represents the ultimate symbol of innocence, since it is the first fruit fed to infants, while he paints the pistol because of its ambiguous character; first of all it is there to protect (good), he says, but at the same time it is an instrument of murder (bad).
With time the overt violence is reduced and the grim heroes vanish. Only their attributes are left, embodied in the gun, apparently strong enough to represent a man’s powerful virility. Interestingly the female figure remains for a while, until she is also replaced by metaphorical images:

In 2004 the artist experiments with the medium of collage by combining the cutout of a photograph with the technique of miniature painting (Fig. 137). The snapshot shows the profile of a young girl whose pretty face is superseded by the collision of two pistols and a banana. The shape of a pistol is also cut out from the girl’s shining hair, while another revolver appears in comparison. Yet there, the smooth lines of calligraphy have softened its threatening aura. “The pistol (man) is there to do well, to protect the woman, at the same time the gun (woman) is made feminine.”

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433 Paradoxically the Urdu term for “gun” is always feminine. Generally, attributes or objects of men have the female gender and their possessors tend to handle them with love and adorn them. See also the decorated trucks of Pakistan see 2.1.2.1.

434 The girl is Muhammad Zeeshan’s love. He married her in April 2006.
time it/he may hurt or even destroy her,” the artist states.

A year later the weapon is sheathed again by the banana peel (Fig. 38).

This time Muhammad Zeeshan replaces the girl’s image with an oval or egg, the worldwide symbol for the origin of life and for the female womb. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona points to its dual meaning, “first for hope and resurrection as the chick broke out of the egg at birth; and second of chastity and purity like the innocence of the new born chick.” 435

Muhammad Zeeshan’s sparsely covers his egg with long curly hairs, a clear indication of the physical presence of a woman in the image. The collage is not real anymore, but affected by an illusory naturalistic impression.

The tension between the two opposites is apparent. As the rifle plunges into the

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banana sheath, the trigger can be pulled anytime. Its crowning telescope promises an accurate shot. Still, the fragile opposite persists in remaining.

In the work *High Notes I* (Fig. 139) Muhammad Zeeshan examines the multi-faceted meanings of hair. Divided again into two sections, this time the egg’s oval determines both sides, a composition form found frequently in *Kangra painting* (Fig. 139a). On the left, austere looking profiles of a group of gentlemen distinctly resemble courtiers depicted innumerable times during the *darbar* receptions of the Mughal or Pahari sovereigns. The distinctive form of the turbans, and the lifted arms lead to a concrete source from a Holi procession most probably painted for Raja Sansar Chand around 1800 (Fig. 139b).

In contrast to their faces and headgear, which remain in pale outlines, their beards are highlighted by detailed execution and strong colouration. The oval, on the other side, accommodates the familiar firearm, this time not forged from solid steel, but put together from delicately painted wisps of hair.

Rendered on a green rectangle the pistol has totally lost its dangerous image. Billows of smoke, formed by tufts of hair again escape from the green field of new life and freedom.
Hair on a man’s face asserts his virility and particularly in Islamic countries a beard conveys a high rank in religious communities. Generally, men, who have a beard, are held in great respect. Why then is hair growing on a woman’s face seen as disturbing and repulsive, the artist queries, while when gracing a woman’s head it denotes beauty? Does the same hair now make the pistol beautiful or repulsive? Parodying the aspect of location and playing with the ambivalent meaning of objects and traditions the artist points to the shape of men’s hairstyles, which closely resembles elegant lady’s shoes.

Without being arid or repetitive, the pistol, the hair and the egg become recurrent motifs. *Well Directed*, 2004 (Fig. 140) presents four eggs placed in a

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436 Mohammad Zeeshan, personal interview, 23 May 2005.
grid. Their peaks are directed towards the four cardinal points and all of them are threatened by pistols. Since the scene is moved away from the centre, to the right, only one weapon is fully visible. However, the four eggs do not appear to be victims: to the contrary, a particular aura surrounds them. Seemingly invulnerable they are able to withstand the dangerous threat. The oval of the egg is considered to be the most perfect form in nature. Its unique shape makes it possible for an egg to bear the heaviest weight.

In Muhammad Zeeshan’s painting, the pistols seem to be powerless. Wads of smoke made of female hair do not emerge from the barrels as usual but emanate from the eggs instead to embrace the lethal enemy and render him defenceless.

Hairy bullet holes testify to a fiery penetration in *High Notes*, 2005 (Fig. 141). A few letters become visible behind the round openings underneath the *wasli*. The apparent cause, a pistol, depicted with faint outlines rests innocently in between. The left section of the work—note the reading order from right to left—shows the results of the act of violence, emphasized by the colour orange. Here again, parts of the deadly weapons are vigorously covered by thousands of hairs. Some have even been dissolved by the invasion.

In subsequent works evidence of this process becomes visible. Hairs are growing smoothly above the robust form of the pistol. Consequently the pistol loses on substance. The metal seems to end in “hairy” smoke so that its elusive character is more reminiscent of Persian cloud formations than of a fearsome firearm (Fig. 75a, 142, 142a).

On a spherical blue subsurface Muhammad Zeeshan paints a pistol completely enwrapped by long strands of hair (Fig. 143). Instead of targeting the victim, the barrel points resignedly to the floor. On its left a blazing fireball arises. Scantily covered with hair it implies the presence of a woman. One strand of hair reaches out to the gun and like fetters, it winds around the hard body of the weapon with the result that the trigger becomes inaccessible.
Throughout this evolution, opposites define the paintings: Masculine virility (pistol) juxtaposes with feminine gentleness (hair); violence (pistol) with innocence (egg, banana); technical achievement (pistol) with indomitable nature (hair); a metal substance (pistol) with an organic material (hair); a means of killing (pistol) with the source of life (egg) and male dominance (pistol) with female innocence (egg).

These contrasts create a metaphysical tension evolving into productive power. Slowly but steadily, the boundaries dissolve. The hair reaches out to touch the gun. The extremes move closer, until finally union takes place (Fig. 144, 145). Salima Hashmi describes this process in Muhammad Zeeshan’s paintings as “sufi-like.” By manipulation the “imagery is lifted out of the world of banal
violence and gives it a dignified sense of self,” she articulates poetically.\(^ {438}\)

Now the metallic look is gone completely; instead, flimsy hairlines are growing smoothly in the shape of the pistol. Spreading unrestrainedly in all directions and ignoring the former sharp outlines of the cold device, a net of threads is needed to protect and keep it in the right form. Punched openings in the wasli create the illusion of holding the painted white twine (Fig. 145). Marjorie Husain praises the delicacy of this work, when she calls it “a triumph of ‘trompe l’oeil.’ […] one examines the painting very carefully to find the threads were after all magically painted,” she writes on the work *Well Directed*.\(^ {439}\)

Finally the wispy quality of hair and particularly in this picture, the incarnadine colour of the wasli have taken away the coldness and aloofness, which primarily circumscribed the weapon; with the result that the formerly threatening object

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has transformed into a breathing being.

“When I began working with my imagery, banana and gun held a different kind of message for me. They were symbols of sexuality and represented male dominance versus female innocence. But my imagery has developed further. Today these symbols hold more for me than just sexual connotations. They become a way of life, a nourishing form,” the artists describes the transformation going on in his work.

The hair as the symbolic counterpart makes this progress possible. In an interview the artists explains his fascination for hair. He, himself let his hair grow long, praises the beauty of long hair and speaks of the joy of touching it. The artist points to the fact that the subtle and fragile nature of hair perfectly complies with the character of the miniature painting, which generally is admired for its delicate and precise execution of tiniest details. However, only a skilful stroke with the finest qalam provides the realistic appearance found in Muhammad Zeeshan’s paintings.

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440 Muhammad Zeeshan, “Muhammad Zeeshan,” Contemporary Chronicles in Miniature Art from India and Pakistan (Delhi: Art Alive Gallery, 2005) 64.

441 Muhammad Zeeshan, personal interview, Lahore, 24 March 2006.
2.2.3 The Hair in Other Disciplines

Searching for the depiction of hair in the art history of Pakistan one is immediately directed to the work of two artists: Naiza Khan and Masooma Syed. From the mid nineties onwards, Naiza Khan employs the image of hair as an autonomous synonym for female vulnerability and sensibility. In 2002 it was Masooma Syed, who first decided to work in sculpture with the dead skin follicles. Her vision transformed these abject materials into elegant objects of admiration.

2.2.3.1 Hair, Synonym for Female Identity: Naiza Khan

Naiza Khan has been exploring the complex relationship between the female body and the female identity for the last few years, influenced by the discourse on patriarchy. By introducing traditional and non-traditional materials into her imagery, she tries to epitomize a female subjectivity. Substances like hair, silk, organza or latex resemble the human skin and promise great sensuousness, while the tools of patriarchal control that are depicted, such as the chastity belt or the straight jacket, reflect the pain women had to bear through the ages.

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442 In the biological context, hair is uncanny invulnerable—just visualize mummies.
“The falling down hair stands for the female physicality,” the artist explains the image of hair in her work *Her Body in Four Parts*, 1995 (Fig. 146, 146a). A composition of four canvases, exhibits the view of a woman’s back on one platform. Floating long dark hair defines the image, while pale outlines offer just a hint of the rest of the body. The softness of the artist’s charcoal drawing convincingly captures the sensuous character of the cascade of hair that frames the voluptuous body.

One year later, in 1996, Naiza Khan commented poignantly on the self-immolation of two women who despaired of receiving justice. The incident happened in the interior of Sindh where eleven members of a family were killed. Since an army major was involved in the murder, nobody was convicted. Two female family members decided to stage a protest, and set themselves on fire in front of the law court in Hyderabad. One of the women was pregnant. She died a week afterwards in a hospital close to the artist’s house. The distress caused by this tragic event led Naiza Khan to create a remarkable art book with the enigmatic title *Hair Falls As Night*, 1996 (Fig. 147).

Black ink prints of long dark hair bear evidence of all that remained of the women. Gossamer layers of transparent Japanese paper veil the depressing imagery, which is accompanied by lyric verses printed in bold black letters. “A fragile work laced with the pain of poetry as fragile as the hair and skin of the burning women,” writes Salima Hashmi in her essay on Naiza Khan in her book *Unveiling the Visible*.

Naiza Khan uses hair here as a prime symbol of life in death. An association, which is found in many cultures and which derives most probably from its biological character, as hair does not perish when separated from its source.

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444 Naiza Khan, personal interview, 2 June 2005.
445 Naiza Khan studied bookmaking at Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford from 1987 until 1990.
446 “Hair falls as night,” is a line from a poem the artist came upon while working on the art book.
While other parts of the body go through stages of decay and decomposition after death, the hair survives, a fact that inspired the ritual practice of using hair as mementoes and relics.

“Hair is at once the most delicate and lasting of our materials, and survives us like love. It is so light, so gentle, so escaping from the idea of death, […]” one finds written in Godey’s Lady’s Book of 1860.\textsuperscript{448}

In subsequent works the association of hair with death is abandoned, in favour of a renewed focus on its sensuous and seductive nature. However, later Naiza Khan paints a diptych with the same title as the art book, \textit{Hair Falls As Night}, 1996 (Fig. 148).

On the left a hairpiece, apparently the back of a woman’s head, is drawn with pencil on white canvas, while the other side depicts its negative image; white acrylic on a black background. This time the artist does it completely without the outlines of the female figure and just the soft waves of the falling hair give the impression of a human shape.

The same format is repeated in \textit{Homage to Utamaro}, 1996 (Fig. 149) where a

subtle pencil drawing is found on the left, with the transposed colours appearing on the right. As before, each single hair seems to be precisely captured on the canvas: tumbling from the hairline, it lies softly on the shoulders of a woman. Softness and fragility are created by the light shining through the fine hair, so that the strands glow in different shades.

In these drawings the artist accentuates the seductive power of hair. The gorgeous joyfully cascading over bare shoulders represent a classical image recurring thousand times in art history. As a well-known provocateur of desire the hair is consciously employed here to lead male gaze. Due to its attractive sensuousness hair incorporates important qualities for its role in love play. “The locks represent the perfect par pro toto,” the Swiss psychoanalyst Cornelia Meyer writes, “there is always the desire to touch, to stroke or to tousle the hair of the beloved.”*

The fact that it is a woman, the artist Naiza Khan, who has chosen that famous

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Fig. 148 Naiza Khan, *Hair Falls As Night*, 1996, pencil on canvas with acrylic, 61 x 122 cm, collection of Khurram Kasim

Fig. 149 Naiza Khan, *Homage to Utamaro*, 1996, pencil on canvas, 61 x 122 cm, collection of Simone Wille

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image of female seduction, her image is no longer the passive object of desire anymore, but become the subject, who desires. The hair might be seen here as an invitation, or as an expression of a silent yearning to be touched and caressed.

Naiza Khan dedicates her later work in this series to Kitagawa Utamaro (1750-1806) whose art is celebrated for his most sensitive depiction of women. “I have always loved his work,” the artist explains her admiration for the Japanese Ukiyo printmaker, “there is a series of images he made of female pearl divers […] and it is the way the wet hair of these women falls, it is so free and starkly different to the traditional Japanese courtesan hair-dos,”450 (Fig. 149b).

Six years later a maverick image of the black hair occurs again. This time the hair is printed on photo silkscreen and appears as thick, jet-black locks. It has lost all the seductive fragility of the hairpieces from the earlier works (Fig. 97, 98, 150, 151). In Her Body in Three Parts, 2002 (Fig. 97) two black strands of hair border the image of the silk organza dupatta, whose fine, shiny texture greatly resembles the human skin. The hair expounds a political statement with reference to the issue of purdah in fundamentalist religious circles (see 2.1.3.3). But the suffering

and pain caused by suppressive and misogynistic societies are reflected more conspicuously in works like *Stain*, 2002 (Fig. 98, 151). Here, blood-red stains, spattered all over the delicate fabric, testify to the endless bloodshed within that context.

Besides printmaking, conceptual drawing is a major form of artistic expression for Naiza Khan. It is the female body again that is portrayed almost exclusively. The female figure appears roughly sketched with open outlines. A constant rubbing out and working-over takes place again and again; as the artist struggles to get hold of something elusive and inaccessible. At times attention is drawn to particular parts of the body, like the vagina or the hands. These are worked out in detail, while others remain faintly sketched or are left out altogether. Interestingly, most of these figures lack hair on the head. “Hair is something very personal. Like features, the hair would provide my figures an unwanted identity,” explains Naiza Khan in an interview, “as bold icons they would stand for womanhood in general and bear all the pain and suffering of each single
woman of Pakistan," 45

Uncharacteristically, in 2004, a woman appears depicted with long tresses of black hair and well-defined features.

In *Dream-1996*, 2004 (Fig. 155) the same woman stands upright, completely nude, with an unusually open mouth. Loose hair playing sensuously around her full breasts and the dense pubic hair around the vulva are further enhanced. The tapestry behind the figure shows delicate drawings in red colour. On closer observation, one finds all sorts

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45 Naiza Khan, personal interview, 2 June 2005.
of chastity belts embellished with tender floral tendrils.

In *On the Pile*, 2004 (Fig. 156) the viewer is confronted with a very realistic portrait of a nude woman, –the artist herself? In a sitting position, her head rests on unusually large hands. Thick, dark matted hair cascades down. Her eyes seem to be closed. Instead of a chair or any other seat, a pile of red strands emerges wormlike from the woman’s posterior that makes the composition disturbing and disorientating.

Naiza Khan refers to these by the local term *bikhri*, which amongst other meanings is used for the verb “to vent,” “to breath,” “to let off steam,” but also “to let off anger.” According to her this term is also found in connection with hair not only in Sufi love poems⁴⁵², but also in pop music. When, for example, in the Bollywood film *Dil to Pagal Hai*⁴⁵³ Pooja (Madhuri Dixit) falls in love with Rahul (Shah Rukh Khan), she sings:

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Le gayi le gayi, dil le gayi le gayi
Bikhri bikhri zulfein, yeh baheki baheki chaal
Haal yeh mera dekhenge, poochhenge log sawaal
Ab jaaoon main kaise ghar, chorichori chhup chhupkar [...]⁴⁵⁴
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⁴⁵² Naiza Khan 2 June 2005.
⁴⁵³ Bollywood film with Shahrukh Khan, director: Yash Chopra, first screened in India in October 1996.
Here, the dancing girl describes her condition while besotted with love for her teacher Rahul.
Promised to someone else, she shows emotional distress by losing control, metaphorically characterised by the *bikhri zulfein* (scattered locks) and her *baheki chaal* (staggered walk).

Nevertheless, the concretely defined hair on Naiza Khan’s figure remains an exception. After *On the Pile*, 2004 (Fig. 156) and in *Dream-1996*, 2004 (Fig. 155) her protagonists are bold again. Instead of hair, wormlike strands emerge not only from the head, but also from other parts of the body, see *Exhale*, 2004 (Fig. 157). Dense hatching gives indistinct clues to the figure’s appearance but it is obviously there to disguise rather than to define any individual features. In one of her recent works, *Straight Jacket*, 2005 (Fig. 158) compact hatching covers the strained and distorted features of the in a strait jacked jammed person, not unlike straggly hair hanging down from the forehead.
2.2.3.2 Hairy Jewels: Masooma Syed

"My works developed out of an anxiety and boredom, concerning form and image, the ways in which they can relate to my art, to my life specially at the time when to focus and to hold on to something was the last thing I could do [...]" Masooma Syed explains the unusual choice of material for her art pieces.

Unsatisfied with her progress in finding a personal vocabulary to communicate her concerns within academic fine arts disciplines, the artist, who did her Masters in painting at the National College of Arts in 2002, started to look for alternatives. Immensely attracted to the craft of jewellery making, along with a prior fascination for women's tools—nothing seems to be too unworthy to be collected—may somehow explain the change of course.

"I found the sudden breakthrough in the material, strange and ambiguous but exciting as having an affinity with my own ambiguous feelings at that time. The sensitive, fragile and tiny prickly surfaces of human nails, hair, metal shavings and sewing needles provided me an opportunity to occupy my hand and my mind in something that needs lot of care and patience. The combing of the hair [...] absorbed all my concentration. The careful handling of the material thus brings back all the focus once again," the artist describes the new orientation to her career.

She later adds, "I like the feel of these materials in my hand, tiny fragile and bare, like feelings inside my heart. They come out straight on my palm and get shaped into garlands of nails and hair to ornament the body once again."

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455 Masooma Syed, "Masooma Syed," Art South Asia: Shisha, the international agency for contemporary South Asian Crafts and Visual arts (Manchester: Cornerhouse publications, 2002) n. pg.
456 For example lipstick or nail polish are found already in earlier works.
457 Masooma Syed, "Masooma Syed," Art South Asia: Shisha, the international agency for contemporary South Asian Crafts and Visual arts (Manchester: Cornerhouse publications, 2002) n. pg.
The Necklace, 2002 (Fig. 59) is made of synthetic hair, which she cut from a wig, found earlier in her aunt’s beauty saloon. After washing and straightening she glues them together, hair-by-hair, into a thin film. The wispy quality of the hair is edged by the gleam of steel sewing needles, to be seen as dainty tassels, hanging heavily from the lower tips of hair. Their golden “eyes” correspond perfectly with the golden tint of the blond strands. The whole assembly is loosely fixed to a transparent fishing line and therefore becomes a three-dimensional pendant for a necklace.

It is exclusively her mother’s hair that Masooma Syed has used for the sculpture Blacks and Browns, 2002 (Fig. 160). Interestingly, this hairpiece displays different shades of brown, the obvious result of frequent dyeing. Over many years, the chemical process has made the hair dull and
brittle. The thin ends are frayed. A bar made of fifty black hairpins seems to hold them together. In contrast to the fragile human hair, the pins look strong and unbreakable. Their black varnish is shining brightly. Pins and needles have the same shape as hair, thin and long. Yet, compared to hair’s organic composition, they are perfectly formed all exactly in the same length, and made by humans, they are there to bring order into chaos, to tame the unruly.

Hinting at social restrictions regarding female beauty, Masooma Syed addresses also the fact that throughout Asian society the fairness of skin, hair and eyes are the absolute bench-marks of beauty and like elsewhere in the world Pakistani women try hard to meet the criteria for this ideal.

Generally today a fair complexion with a brightened hair colour is clearly preferred to the original darker colour. It subsequently becomes a mark of class

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459 Fairness has been a benchmark for beauty throughout the ages in most cultures and societies, from Europe to Latin America to Africa. It indicated affluence as light skinned women didn’t have to work outdoors but used hats, parasol, and bleaching agents to stay fair. It is interesting that also the Quran refers to pale skin, when the verses 22 and 23 in Surah LVI, Al Waquiah, promise believers that they will be rewarded with houris in paradise, “22. fair ones with wide, lovely eyes, 23. like unto hidden pearls,” Verses 22 and 23 in Surah LVI, Al Waquiah,” The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’an, trans. Marmaduke Pickthall (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1930) Call to Islam, 10.9.2006 <http://www.al-sunnah.com/call_to_islam/quran/pickthall/surah56.html>. 

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Fig. 161 Masooma Syed, *Untitled*, 2002, hennaed human hair, black jewellery box, 4.8 x 19.2 x 3 cm, collection of the artist
differences as well, being able to afford the costs of dying and maintaining the desirable shades is a symbol of status. Masooma Syed’s art piece does not disguise the consequences of counteracting nature, the dull hairpiece contrasts so evidently with the bright shining black pins. As before, the object is loosely hanging from two little dots, where the transparent nylon thread is fixed.

Strands of hennaed hair are displayed in a black jewellery box, Untitled, 2002 (Fig. 161) just like those used for precious necklaces. Simply combed and left in its natural state its uncut ends and fine stripes of the original grey at the hairline are a reference to the origin and age of the owner. Here, the viewer discovers the hair of the artist’s domestic employee. The much healthier henna powder is generally used for dyeing hair by those who are less affluent in Pakistan where the “orange red head” immediately connotes village people.

With the work Curl Gets Straight, 2002 (Fig. 162) the artist addresses another social prejudice. Frizzy hair does not conform to the widespread notion of beauty. Like dark skin, kinky hair is considered a sign of primitivism and therefore often straightened. In Masooma Syed’s work a section of greyish, almost colourless hair is visible.
By gluing and combing the artist has smoothed down any unevenness. Here again, the hair looks lifeless and dull. The fragility becomes even more apparent when the artist demands, “Curl gets straight,” by writing the command on the delicate surface. Like sealing wax, the blood-red glitter seems to be branded into it.

Masooma Syed, who herself has extremely frizzy hair, remembers that in her childhood people always noticed her hair, and quickly emphasized that others would pay a fortune to have similar hair. Her struggle might be perfectly described by Diane Simon, when she writes about her own experience with curly hair: “Wild, bristly, my hair has drawn me out of the soft circle of smooth-haired girls and left me on the margins, an onlooker with a kink in her curl. It’s not that I tried to rebel—indeed, I longed to conform—but my hair made it impossible. If only there had been a way to subdue it, to force it to adopt a manageable shape and a palatable texture, then I know I would have gone along, but there never was. I shaved it close in patterns, grew it long, and dyed it black, then red, then blond. [...] But it didn’t hold forever, and I had to return to myself. I’m a stranger in a straight-hair world. Like the author of the book *Hair: Public, Political, Extremely Personal*, Masooma Syed seems to search for a satisfying appearance by changing her appearance periodically.

*Curly Tree*, 2002 (Fig. 163) takes up the same issue again. However, this time the artist lets the hair lie naturally. The strand of dark brown hair curls up beautifully. Glue and hairspray are utilised to hold it there. Turning with each curve, the slim strands are strongly reminiscent of the magnificence

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461 When I met Masooma Syed first in spring 2003 she had just cut her hair very short. In 2006 her hair had grown long again.
of Arabic calligraphy. Its three-dimensionality is mirrored by the shadow on the white wall. Salima Hashmi sees in the calligraphic swirl of the lock of hair, “a coy reference to female sexuality.”

Finally, *The Crown*, 2002 (Fig. 164) contradicts the previous sense of impulsiveness (see 2.2.1.3). She builds up a “queen’s headdress” exclusive from human hair to be sent to an exhibition in the United Kingdom, of all countries. Displayed under a glass dome and placed on a plinth, it can be admired just like the most precious exhibits of the museum. Differences in shades, thickness and length suggest different contributors, but

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462 Salima Hashmi, *Threads, Dreams, Desires*, Art South Asia: Shisha the international agency for contemporary South Asian crafts and visual arts (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 2002) n.pg.

all of them derive from a single source, from her mother’s head. Her relentlessly dyed hair, already used in a previous work (Fig. 60) takes the place of gold and gems to build something unique, interwoven like filigree, it attracts attention to its beauty.

After a break of two years, Masooma Syed creates a new sculpture, which includes a real hairpiece again. Dense strands of black hair are fixed to a belt buckle that comprises the fiery features of a dragon (Fig. 165).

Originally considered as a suspended object, particularly, as a sperm whirling around⁴⁶⁴, the work was somehow perceived as a sword by viewers during its first unveiling. The presentation on orange silk in a black wooden box might have caused that deceptive impression. The colour of the bed, on which the artwork was neatly placed, is responsible for its title: *Saffron*, 2004.

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⁴⁶⁴ Masooma Syed, personal interview, 24 March 2006.
“Strands of long dark hair were glued together to form a sword. The impact of the sword was enhanced by the metal piece that served as the handle. The initial frailty of the material was overshadowed due to the idea of the strength attached to the weapon,” the art critic, Quddus Mirza, interprets the work and points to a political connection, since the saffron silk base carries the colour associated with fundamentalists in India. Besides the aesthetic, it is primarily the taboo material that attracts attention while viewing the work of Masooma Syed. Her decision to introduce human hair into art has been one of the most radical steps an artist has ever taken in Pakistan.

Over the years an impact of various negative connotations have made the representation of hair in public quite a risky task. Masooma Syed’s “recycling process” of hairpieces within the context of art effects the loss of its character of repulsiveness. The disparaged becomes art. Beyond this the artist shatters the age-old concept of separation between private and public life. Not only are brushing or cutting one’s hair considered a very intimate and private act, but also the sight of an uncovered female head is considered sinful by certain religious groups in Pakistan, due to its paradoxical connotations of female beauty and seduction.

Therefore, a prodigious transformation takes place: The distasteful and ignominious substance is remoulded into an acclaimed and exquisite artwork. Masooma Syed’s skilful ability converts these controversial elements, into delightful Minimalist art pieces. She challenges rigid assessments and cultural habits, reaching back to the early roots of sub-continental societies. “She flirts with what might be called ‘gross out aesthetics’ but manages to find just the right balance between the comic and the grotesque, attraction and repulsion,” concludes the photographer and art critic Aasim Akhtar.

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466 While Europe has an long tradition of hair recycling—particularly, in the nineteenth century jewellery and pictures made of human hair were widely spread—there is not such a found in South Asia.
2.2.4 Émigré Artists’ Image of Hair

New influences and inspirations stimulate artists living in a foreign country. Fresh vistas open up, that are reflected in their work. Emigrant artists like Shahzia Sikander, Ambreen Butt and Saima Munawar, all are graduates of the Miniature Department in Lahore, have made a life abroad, either in the United States or in the United Kingdom. Although they differ in every aspect in their artistic approaches, issues like identity, political tensions, or cultural conflicts characterize their bodies of work. In the consequent fusion of Eastern and Western motifs the symbol of hair is consciously employed again as a medium of artistic expression.

2.2.4.1 (Hair-) Roots to the Past: Ambreen Butt

In the mid-nineties the miniature painter Ambreen Butt came to Boston to study for her Masters in Fine Arts from the Massachusetts College of Arts. After graduation she decided to stay. Today she is a successful artist, whose works are regularly shown in galleries and institutions all over the United States.

The fact that she makes herself the protagonist is especially remarkable about her work. “It’s me, my body, my figure, my thoughts and feelings, I know the best,” the artist says in an interview. Kahlo-esque, she confronts the viewer with her austere countenance. Visual similarities with the Mexican artist, like the black bushy eyebrows and the long dark hair, become apparent.

Ambreen Butt projects herself as a “modern nayika,” the heroine frequently encountered in Indian miniature paintings and literature (see 2.1.2.3 and 2.2.1.5). The major difference is that her protagonist is no longer the romantic, perpetually lovesick damsel so idealistically portrayed by male artists in the

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468 Ambreen Butt, personal interview, 1 Sep. 2006.
469 Ambreen Butt 1 Sep. 2006.
past, but a real, modern woman, living in the twenty-first century. While in the past the theme of love in all its aspects and facets defined the image of the classical nayika, here personal struggles with cultural conflicts and traditional restrictions are the leitmotif.

Like the historical figure, Ambreen Butt “seduces the viewer into the painting,” not through the sexual appeal of past artworks but by generating attention through intriguing body transformations or by getting entanglement with mythical creatures.

In the following works Ambreen Butt depicts herself with unnaturally long hair. Inextricably the hair is connected to other objects or evolves into something else altogether.

The series Bed Of My Own Making, painted in 1999 (Fig. 166-168) resonates with the artist’s personal struggle. Living as a South Asian émigré in the United States of America, she experiences a constant tussle with cultural questions and contradictions. Through her work she projects the efforts she made to achieve independence from previous restrictions and challenges stereotypes, generally associated with women in Islam—“yet always guarding the spirit of time honoured traditions.”

That seesaw between two disparate cultures is manifested not only thematically but is also reflected in her visual approach. When she for instance innovatively combines self-depiction, a means of expression hardly found in South Asian art, with the techniques and rich symbolism of the centuries old painting tradition. The purpose of using layers of transparent mylar\cite{167} sheets instead of the actual wasli she explains “was to find a parallel process that could resonate the ritualistic meditation performed during the paper making process.”\cite{168}

In one painting in the series *The Bed Of My Own Making*, 1999 (Fig. 166) a woman stands bare foot on the slithery scales a fish. The traditionally attired woman has hooked a “big fish” with her fishing rod. Carefully she turns the reel to wind the catch up. Looking closer, one realizes that the fishing line is curiously made from the protagonist’s hair, falling down in a conventional plait, and leading through the hook in the carp’s open mouth up to the fishing rod. By cranking it up to get hold of the big fish, she is simultaneously pulling “the rug (the fish) from under her,” the slippery surface of the fish’ scales guaranteeing a smooth descent.

\cite{167} Translucent painting surfaces are not unknown in South Asia. Something similar to mylar was used for the *Company Painting: mica* (talc) sheets; Mildred Archer, *Company Painting: Indian Paintings of the British Period* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1992) 19, 193-215; Many thanks to Ebba Koch for the advice.

\cite{168} Ambreen Butt 20 Sep. 2006.
Here the artist articulates the difficulties in getting a hold on something new: the fear of making decisions, of moving forwards which always means leaving something behind or the distress losing one’s identity or security. And it is herself, her history, her personality and her background that are the actual hindrances.

In another work in the same series an enormous mass of hair imprisons the female figure like a whirl-wind (Fig. 167). Emerging from her head and being at the same time deeply rooted in the soil under her feet, escape is virtually impossible. The woman tries to grasp her unruly mane with one hand, while the other hand is in the very act to chopping it off: A momentous act of rebellion against orthodoxy? A clear sign of readiness for a new start? But, there are still her traditional clothes, the Indian choli and the voluminous shalwar, she loves to wear.

Soon after that the same woman holds a pot with a miniature tree growing in it, while kneeling on a small crest (Fig. 168). Her braid follows the tree’s round shape, going over the crown and finally disappears in the lower border of the image.

The large tree bears no fruit and remains barren, while the small tree in the woman’s hands is bushy and full of juicy green leaves.
The bigger tree in the background clearly symbolises the past. It stands for commitments and decisions, for ideas and concepts the protagonist has indulged in over the years—perhaps a fruitless (no leaves) relationship? In contrast the small tree in her hands heralds a new start, a promising future. An immersive tension between old and new is released.

“She is a victim,” the artist says, “growing the tree was a little selfish act. She has grown something for herself, the tree from her hair. Now she must let go. It’s the human psyche: Today she’s the victim. Tomorrow, she’s the oppressor.”

Four years later Ambreen Butt paints the series *I Must Utter What Comes To My Lips*, 2003 (Fig. 169-172). Now the nayika is seen lying on her back. Her hair has grown roots in the ground below her, from where a huge willow has sprung up. A flock of birds hauls her by her feet, while she clings to a leafless branch as she is dragged away (Fig. 169). Finally it breaks and the birds succeed in lifting her, but the tree, connected through her hair, keeps her grounded (Fig. 170). Like in the series before, the barren tree epitomizes the past, her cultural

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heritage, and the values she was imbued with throughout her childhood. It is impossible to cut off these roots, as they have become part of her body. The fact that they flow into her head—being transformed into hair—emphasizes the spiritual connection with her history.

Therefore, when the birds pull her away, she anxiously tries to latch onto these values. Who knows where her abductors may take her—into an uncertain future?

Historically, birds are known as the loyal companions of the *nayika*. Countless miniatures painted in the courts of the Rajput kingdoms of Rajasthan and the hills of Punjab are replete with them (Fig. 119, 170a,b). Peacocks, cranes, pigeons and parrots accompany the romantic heroine to convey messages of love or are shown as her confidantes and guardians of silent secrets.

In Ambreen Butt’s picture, the birds do not carry the message of love but are engrossed in trying to lift her as they drag on the chain to carry her away. The long, slender neck of the birds distinguishes them as cranes, a species, which do not enjoy much respect and affection in South Asia, as they are known in folk tales for their cunning and deceitful character.

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“You think of a bird as this innocent and harmless creature. In the painting they’re appearing out of somewhere, unexpected like an event that is shaking you,” and the artist points to their shape and colour that is reminiscent of American fighter jets.

Interestingly, the nayika’s new appearance points in the same direction, as its colour combination (red t-shirt and blue trousers) alludes to the national flag of the United States of America, even the stars signifying the states are glowing on the trouser legs.

Ambreen Butt discloses that she has painted the series *I Must Utter What Comes To My Lips*, as a personal response to the events after September 11, 2001. At that particular time of upheaval and turmoil in her immediate environment, a strong desire to seek the truth influenced her subsequent art work: “As an artist I feel the need to express that certain things are right and wrong.”

At that time she was listening to an Indian pop song, which is based on a poem by the Punjabi Sufi poet Bulleh Shah and refers to exactly the same issue she was mulling over.

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Speaking the truth creates chaos
Telling a lie saves one scarce.
I am afraid of both these;
Afraid I am both here and there.
I must utter what comes to my lips.\textsuperscript{479}

For Ambreen Butt that three hundred year old poem has great relevance to the present and in her mind it precisely defines the problematic aspects of identifying the truth.

In another painting of the same series (Fig. 171) the artist confronts the viewer face on. Her strange raster-like hair stands erect. Affixed to a white stick it creates a cage for a colourful bird, which furiously spits towards an orange fireball, hovering above the figures, marking the sinister legacy of one of the many heroic missile tests by the great super power: The United States of America.\textsuperscript{480}

The image of a lady with a birdcage is yet again a recurring motif in the arts of South Asia and goes back to early illustrations of the \textit{Shukasaptati} (Seventy Tales of the Parrot) a collection of popular folk tales in India.\textsuperscript{481} There a caged bird keeps narrating fables to a young woman in order to dissuade her from committing adultery, while her merchant-husband is travelling. The bird becomes her protector and moral advisor.

However, Ambreen Butt’s bird, sitting in her bizarre “hair cage,” does not appear as the loquacious parrot of the \textit{Shukasaptati}: it looks far more like a dragon, or a fantastical beast.

Is it the Phoenix, the mythical sacred firebird, which is said to be equipped

\textsuperscript{480} Ambreen Butt, personal interview, 1 Sep. 2006.
\textsuperscript{481} Most famous are the illustrations commissioned by Emperor Akbar (re. 1556-1605) in 1560-65 and 1580-85 which are based on its Persian Version, the so called \textit{Tutinama}, compiled by Ziya-ud-Din Nakhshabi in 1330.
with beautiful gold and red plumage? Originating in ancient Egyptian mythology and subsequently very popular in early Christianity, it is a symbol for immortality and resurrection. The fireball in the left corner of the painting might point to its reincarnation in the hot flames of an inferno. Chinese mythology chronicles a “phoenix,” named Fenghuang who reigns over all birds and is historically associated with the Empress, whereas the dragon refers to the Emperor.

The image of the Fenghuang is a symbol of femininity, connected with high virtue and grace. Its Persian counterpart is the Simorgh. As a winged creature it is mostly depicted in the shape of a peacock. According to Iranian legend, it is said that the Simorgh is so old that it has seen the destruction of the world three times over and it has learned so much by living so long that it is thought to possess the knowledge of all ages. The Simorgh is the king of the bird and represents the Divine, whom the birds of the world seek in Farid ud-Din Attar’s poem
Mantaq ut-Tair (The Conference of the Birds). The Simorgh made “her” most famous appearance in Ferdowsi’s epic *Shahnama*, where the mystical bird brings up the abandoned Prince Zal (Fig. 171a). The loving Simorgh teaches him wisdom and protects him throughout his life.

Like the parrot in the *Shukasaptati*, who protects the deserted wife from adultery, the Simorgh too, is described as the messenger of wisdom and morality.

The artist’s decision to cage this fabulous bird in the strands of her not only corresponds with the Buddhist connotation of hair, as the seat of wisdom (see 2.1.1.3) but also claims that sagacity for herself. So her messiah-like pose, her wounded palms, her wide open eyes and large red heart beating on her breast is clearly recognized as proof of enlightenment.

However, this interpretation becomes questionable when that particular bird is found in a later painting dropping bombs (Fig. 172), which perfectly conforms to Bulleh Shah’s poem on the treacherous task of defining the truth.

“The Sufi poet tell us not only to go out to search for and fight against the devil, but also to look into ourselves and to fight first of all with our own conscience,” explains the artist and refers not only to Bulleh Shah but also to the message of Attar’s poem *Mantaq ut-Tair*, when at the end of an arduous journey a large

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484 Ambreen Butt in: Cate McQuaid C27.
group of thirty birds reaches the Simorgh’s palace to discover the true meaning of Simorgh: it stands for nothing other than themselves.\(^{485}\)

Analyzing Ambreen Butt’s work, the curator of the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts, Susan Stoops asserts, “The outcome of this is not certain, as her figures are not heroics. It is hard to see, with this subject, what the outcome is going to be. What we see her in, usually is a dilemma.”\(^{486}\)

Ambreen Butt’s fantasies are based on real battles, fears, and confusions. A constant struggle with questions about identity and desire affects her very personalized work. Therefore it is always her own figure, that is involved with surreal creatures and whimsical events occur. The recurring image of the elongated hair represents the roots to her past, to her cultural origin. Like the umbilical cord the “hair roots” have nourished her, have made her grow into


the individual she has become today. They have nurtured her with values and ideals, which cannot be obliterated. At the same time the “hair roots” restrain her and make an onward move difficult. The temptation to chop off that “hairy” connection is immense, but the fear of its consequences, underlies the hesitancy of taking the first step, “as a person without roots would lose ground and would be constantly floating,” —the artist foresees the grave repercussions of the venture.

2.2.4.2 Veils of Hair: Saima Munawar

Lonely princess, enclosed in the beautiful quarters of a royal palace, yearns for her lover. Behind the marble balustrades a nocturnal sea view, including a drifting island at the horizon, becomes visible. The painting Lost Love, 2002 (Fig. 173) by Saima Munawar, depicts a stereotypical terrace scene, painted with favour in the late eighteenth century (Fig. 173a). The image is obviously a blend of different styles. While the damsels are derived directly a Ragini Kakubha painting from Deccan (Fig. 173b), the architecture points to sources from Basohli or Nurpur, and the romantic landscape with lake and island is mostly found in later Mughal paintings. A contemporary painting containing a subject, popular around three hundred years ago,

Fig. 173 Saima Munawar, Love Lost, 2002, gouache and tea-wash on wasli, 31.8 x 22.9 cm, collection of Mr. and Mrs. Farooq Jaffrey, London

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487 Ambreen Butt, personal interview, 1 Sep. 2006.
would be described as traditional, formulaic and rather boring, if it wasn’t for that bizarre mass of hair. Long strands of dark hair swirling wildly shroud the *nayika* to the extent that the face and body are hidden.

The contemporary miniature painter rebelliously challenges the traditional depiction of females, as they were always marked by a great idealization and stylization and their identical faces resembled masks. By covering the expressionless face with loose tresses she creates cloaks, the features and acts within the premises of the *purdah*-tradition, but simultaneously she betrays the custom by revealing something socially encoded with associations of intimacy and sexuality: loose hair (see 2.2.1.3).

Saima Munawar, originally a graduate of textile design at NCA, changed her direction and studied miniature painting with Bashir Ahmed, in an exclusively arranged apprenticeship over nine months (see 1.3.1). *Lost Love* represents the very beginning of her career as a freelance miniature painter, who has chosen to live abroad, particularly in London. Influenced by the restrictions propounded by the rather orthodox *ustad* she started the composition traditionally by borrowing classical elements from late *Mughal* and *Pahari paintings*.

“The idea to cover the woman’s face came up during the act of painting,” the artist reveals. Delighted by the controversial vision that enriched her work, she chose to continue in exactly the same direction.489

489 Saima Munawar 9 Sep. 2006.
The tragedy of September 11, 2001 released a global discussion about Islamic traditions wherein the segregation of women, and in particular the veil, became a huge issue. Like for many other artists, for Saima Munawar, who had just moved to London that was the catalyst that enabled her to deal with the subject of women in Islamic societies. “For the first time in my life I bothered about ‘honour killing’ and the habit of ‘wedding’ women to the Quran. I was badly affected by the suffering of these helpless women all over the world. Their oppressive existence became epitomized for me in their long hair, uncut and ever in need of attention,” the artist describes her state of mind at that time.

The first painting after Lost Love could not have been more radical. White Mischief, 2002 (Fig. 174-176) represents the beginning of a series of three paintings, which drastically deviate from the classic style. The traditionally colourful and richly embellished environment is omitted in favour of a neutral white background that allows total concentration on a particular subject. A geometric division with a circle or a rectangle emphasizes that focus. In the first image (Fig. 174) the protagonist is actually hidden behind a white cloth—“an ordinary bed sheet,” the artist discloses. Only the fingers holding

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491 Saima Munawar chooses a significant title for this series “White Mischief” the well-known film based on the Happy Valley murder case in Kenya in 1941. Set against the spectacular backdrop of East Africa, this movie is a tale of love, lust, revenge, and destruction, and expertly captures the look and feel of the waning British colonial era.
492 Saima Munawar 9 Sep. 2006.
the cloth tightly to provide a cloaking curtain are visible. Here, the artist gives reverent attention to the depiction of the flowing white cloth. She sketches the drapery cavorting on the ground, with great skill.

The “mischief” increases in painting number two, where the chaadar lowers to reveal the head of the hidden person (Fig. 175). But instead of the face, the hair is revealed, painted with remarkable sensitivity in its full length, au naturel, as dictated by tradition.

Finally, in the third image the white cloth has dropped completely. Bare legs become visible, while the long hair still covers the rest of the figure (Fig. 176). With one foot the protagonist is about to step out of the frame.

In the later work Lock & Load⁴⁹³, 2003 (Fig. 177) the image of the hair is replicated three times. Here, the reduction has advanced to such an extent that only the three women’s magnificent heads of hair remain. The

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⁴⁹³ “Lock and Load” is a metaphor of military origin. Its current, mainstream use is in the sense “to prepare oneself for imminent action or confrontation.” In other words, “Get ready!”
rest of their bodies are completely discarded. They confront the viewer side by side within in a grid of borderlines. A bullet hole in the centre of the painting identifies them as vulnerable targets.

The painting is dedicated to the artist’s sister, who was experiencing martial troubles at that time. The other two sisters, one of them the artist herself, accompany her like two angels. Locked away, within the same grid of social jadwal (borderlines) and exposed to the loaded gun, they are just as helpless as her.

With the depiction of the long, untrimmed hair Saima Munawar refers to a tradition she experienced herself. From early childhood, the artist recalls, she and her two sisters were told by their female relatives that hair signifies the beauty of a woman. She also remembers their ayah brushing and oiling their hair for many painful hours every week. Consequently, she had extraordinary long lush tresses as a teenager. She felt admired just for her beautiful hair and not for her inner self, and eventually she cut her long strands off. Today she interprets this act as a rebellion against conservative South Asian society.

Later, living in the U.K., “where the maintaining of extra long hair has become very inconvenient,” Saima Munawar came across a neighbour, a girl with equally long hair that she herself had once been admired for. For her the girl, who has just moved from Pakistan to England because of her marriage to a

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Fig. 177  Saima Munawar, Lock & Load, 2003, gouache and watercolour on wasli, 21.6 x 17.8 cm, private collection, Karachi

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494 Saima Munawar, personal interview, 9 Sep. 2006.
British resident, represented “innocence par excellence.” But Saima Munawar felt that the girl was not happy with her situation and compares her a roaming apparition. The magnificent long hair was, like a veil, a beautiful pall. Both are there to distract from the real being behind it. Eventually she asked her to act as her model.

"My narratives are reactions to my experience of the complexity of being a female in an Islamic culture," the artist Saima Munawar explains her work, as she attempts to raise questions about cultural customs related to Islamic traditions.

Like other artists before, Saima Munawar examines the ambiguous notions of veiling. Distinctively, she employs not only the chaadar, a piece of material, but also the woman’s hair as a veil and her imagery links up with the corresponding Christian association, when the Apostle Paul asserts that a woman’s “long hair is given to her as a covering” (see 2.2.1.2).

By shrouding her figures with hair, she makes them unidentifiable and conforms to one aspect of cultural obligations, but she simultaneously betrays that orthodox morality by exposing female hair to the public view.

The white chaadar as well as the long, untrimmed hair in her series represent “purity.” With the controversial title “Mischief,” the artist refers to the absurd ambivalence of that term.

Saima Munawar consciously plays here with the sexual attraction of the female gender and in particular, with the erotic notion of the hair. The holding of the chaddar (here: bed sheet) actually becomes an act of provocation. The temptation continues when she lowers the white cloth to her neck, allowing her

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495 Saima Munawar 9 Sep. 2006.
hair to spill over the top.

When in the end the girl's body is revealed, her posture is awkward and unsure. Though her face remains hidden, she appears exposed, like a defenceless target, which is further emphasized by the round shape of the *jadwal*.

Saima Munawar's women are "sinful beings, conscious of their gender and vulnerability, hidden behind their hair. Tradition has compelled women to cover their head with a shawl or scarf to prevent them from becoming objects of sexual desires. Saima Munawar appropriated this very notion and covers her women in long stands of dark hair. She thus constructed a character which was not only an embodiment of beauty but also betrayed the social norms," Quddus Mirza writes.⁴⁹⁸

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2.2.4.3 Spiritual Wires: Shahzia Sikander

Finally, Shahzia Sikander (see 1.3.2. and 2.1.4.1) employs the image of hair as a metaphor for feminine spirituality as well as the intellectual connection to a particular juncture in life.

In 2005 she collaborated with the Indian dancer Sharmila Desai to produce a performance entitled *Out of the Blue* (Fig. 178). Sharmila Desai, who is inspired by classical Indian dance and yoga, performed an original eleven-minute piece. On a mat hand painted by the pioneer of contemporary miniature painters, the dancer’s long hair reiterates the painted lines as she navigates the space, and through her hair, at times, her entire body becomes conflated with the painting, confirming the commonalities the artists find in each other’s work.

In *SpiNN*⁴⁹⁹, 2004 (Fig. 179) her animated film, Shahzia Sikander addresses gender and power hierarchies, when she makes *gopis*, the milkmaids of Krishna, invade the *darbar*, that venerable hall, where Mughal emperors held their audiences (see 2.1.2.3). Shahzia Sikander adopts in particular the *jharoka* (balcony) of the court in Manu, which was established by Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) to meet his son Prince Khurram and was painted by

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⁴⁹⁹ The title *SpiNN* is a pun on CNN, the media giant. It is a short digital movie that deals amongst others with issues concerning the realities of perception.
Ramdas for the Padshahnama\textsuperscript{500} c. 1640. Gradually the female intruders conquer this symbol of male supremacy. During the digitally animated phantasmagoria the black hairdos of the gopis detach and swarm, bat-like, through the historical architecture to meet each other again in a different environment.

The same mops of hair appear again, bundled up as black shadows of trees in the video animation Pursuit Curve\textsuperscript{501} of 2004 (Fig. 180). Where, not much later also fluttering turbans (see 2.1.2.2) emerge and start to intermingle with the gopis' hairpieces. The artist has apparently borrowed the landscape setting from a Dasavatara Series painted by Mahesh of Chamba in the mid eighteenth century (Fig. 180a). Her “battleground” features the same ocean water in the foreground with similar uneven rhombi of thin parallel veins in grey. Even the three stylised trees that appear on the curved horizon in the backdrop are consistent with the Mahesh paintings.

\textsuperscript{500} Milo Cleveland Beach, “The manuscript,” King of the World: The Padshahnama (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997) 35.

\textsuperscript{501} “Pursuit curve” is a term from mathematics and was considered by the French scientist Pierre Bouguer in 1732. A pursuit curve is the path an object takes when chasing another object.
Incarnation and disintegration, union and separation, supremacy and inferiority continually take turns in Shahzia Sikander's work, whose artistic intention is to blur hierarchies, polarized interpretations and the time differences between past and present.

She deliberately chooses the figure of the *gopi*, as it represents a multilayered figure from literature: “Gopis are the lovers of the blue god Krishna in Hindu mythology. Their primary reason for existence tends to be to worship him. Using the *gopi* over the last several years has lead me to see it in a variety of ways—one being to use humour to address gender and power hierarchies,” Shahzia Sikander reveals her rationale. “The *gopi* functions as a formal device for abstraction. The multiplicity of the *gopis* symbolizes the importance of women’s view of their own spirituality in contrast to the male dominated view of religion and spirituality. The archetype of the Great Mother in different religious traditions is an example of how women have never failed to create their own spiritual space regardless of being marginalized. Also very important is the restoration and the strengthening of the feminine dimensions in different religious traditions.”

By leaving behind the “earthly” bodies and reducing them to flying black mops Shahzia Sikander emphasizes her desire to “paint” feminine spirituality.

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2.2.5 The Hair: Summary

Differing from the “veil,” which has become a global symbol for Islam and the suppression of women, the image of the “hair” is linked far less to any particular religious conviction or social injustice.

In all cultures hair is a loaded substance that provokes divergent reactions. Hair is regarded in varying degrees with obsession or abhorrence, suggesting and invoking both desire and repulsion. Thus, it is styled, covered or removed to conform to religious principles, secular ideals of beauty and traditional rituals of purification.

Throughout history artists from South Asia have depicted hair as an indispensable part of the human figure but also as element of expression. Over the years not only the purpose of this depiction but also its meaning has changed. Portrayed for its beauty and seductive power in the past, the conceptual use of its controversial connotations is more or less a phenomenon of contemporary Pakistan.

In Mughal paintings the hairstyles, visible only behind diaphanous veils, varied with the trends of the times. Like so many other attributes the hairdo was an essential feature of female adornment. Pahari painters played with the erotic appeal of loose hair to emphasize the nayika’s allure. Generally the depiction of hair—be that the whiskers of courtiers or the curly locks of damsels—reaps great admiration for its sensitive and skilful rendition.

In the first part of the art history of Pakistan not much attention was paid to the image of hair, in particular, nor does it appear as an independent theme. In the late nineties it was Naiza Khan who dedicated an entire series to a woman’s hair. In her opinion, it perfectly reflects the complexity of the female character, its sensitivity, vulnerability and sensuousness as well as its sexual appeal. Thus,
she employs it as a metaphor for female physicality.
Whereas Masooma Syed was the first who dared to incorporate real strands of
hair to explore the ambivalence elicited by hair in its detached state, by creating
precious jewellery-objects from it.

In contemporary miniature painting the depiction of hair as an autonomous
symbol for the female presence is the pioneering work of the “younger”
generation. The first time that detached hairs appear is in Mahreen Zuberi’s
intimate bathroom scenes of 2003 (Fig. 130-132). There, tufts of hair,
accumulating on the floor or in the drain, stand for the female presence. With
an extremely reduced language the artist challenges contentious issues like
*purdah* as well as traditional myths.

For Mohammad Zeeshan too, hair represents the female character. As a symbol
of life, humanity and peace he juxtaposes it with icons of male power, violence
and heroism. A situation fraught with tension between the two genders eases,
when hair grows over the pistol’s stock and renders it impotent (Fig. 145).

One consistently finds the connection of long female hair with traditional mores,
past events or social expectations. Female artists, like Saira Sheikh, Masooma
Syed and Saima Munawar, recollect from childhood experiences, when caring
*ayas* spent painful hours with oiling and brushing their long hair. Finally, the
decision to cut the strands off signifies “rebellion,” a turning away from old
traditions, or rather a new beginning.

Saira Sheikh and Saima Munawar work in different styles, both however use
long flowing tresses as a symbol for servitude, both have their own private story
and both cut their originally long braided hair.

For Ambreen Butt the depiction of her fancifully long hair epitomizes an
intellectual connection to her past and traditions. Their transformation into roots
characterizes her instinctive dependence, since it is her roots, which have nourished her and made her grow into the individual she has become today. Like her colleagues she considers chopping off these roots to liberate herself, yet at the same time she fears the danger of losing ground.

Looking for reasons for the portrayal of female hair, one comes across a variety of possible rationales.

In fundamentalist Islamic societies women are required to cover their hair in public, due to its implied erotic associations. Superstition requires the disposal of fallen hairs, so that they are out of the sight of others (see 2.2.1.6). Consequently any sort of portrayal of female hair could be considered as an act of rebellion, an expression of denying these religious conventions and customs.

Surprisingly, the depiction of hair is used to cause distress or create attention as the artists’ discover its compelling features, such as its sensuousness, sexiness and vulnerability as well as its strength as hairs are often the only remnants of the decaying body. For some artists it is just this ambivalence, being admired and despised at the same time, that reflects the status of women in certain societies.

It is apparent that for most of the artists female hair still represents a very intimate, personal matter. Its implied privacy is visually expressed in Mahreen Zuberi’s series, *Vaccant/Occupied* (Fig. 130-132). For Naiza Khan the depiction of someone’s hair would reveal her or his identity. Hair grows on the head, the seat of the brain and origin of all thinking, so it is easily viewed as “prolonged thoughts” and expected to reflect inner conflicts (Fig. 157). When Ambreen Butt paints herself with amazingly long strands she refers to her intellectual connection to the past and her South Asian origin, to the ideas and morals she grew up with (Fig. 166-170). Whereas in the case of Hajrah Khan’s work, the long stream of hair not only replaces her figure in the picture but also describes
her “floating” condition, a hovering in incertitude between the protected past and an unknown future (Fig. 1, 88).

The hair’s controversial and multilayered symbolism is of great significance to artists like Shahzia Sikander, who are not interested in direct illustration as for them an open ended presentation is far more compelling.

Masooma Syed and Mahreen Zuberi address the ambivalent perceptions surrounding hair as well. Both deliberately choose to employ the less worthy aspect, the repulsive notion of hair, which Masooma Syed playfully transforms into beauty (Fig. 164).

Another possible motivation for choosing hair as a pictorial motif is the exacting task of its realistic depiction. The sensitive portrayal of every single strand presents a great technical challenge for every artists and it seems to be just the right challenge for the young miniature painter to prove her or his mastery of artistic skills (see 2.2.2.3).

No miniature painter has exclusively dedicated her or his work to the theme of hair, like Aisha Khalid has done with the veil (see 2.1.2.1). However, the hair motif is found extensively in sequences of works produced by local and émigré artists.

Naturally, the works of the expatriate painters reflect the different context they were created in, both in their formalistic approach as well as in the widespread fusion of motifs of South Asian tradition with those of their new environment. So for example, Saima Munawar, based in London, borrows a symbol of Christianity, by veiling her nude with long tresses (see 2.2.1.2) or Ambreen Butt, who lives and works in Boston, uses her self-image as the prime subject, which is very unusual in her homeland and more a phenomenon of the Western feminist art scene.
However, no matter which aspect is addressed or which formalistic approach is used, all the works discussed here have one thing in common: the employment of the image of hair as a metaphor for the complexity of femaleness, be that a woman’s beauty and sexuality, her vulnerability, her sensitivity, her struggles within a restrictive society, her suffering of violence and injustices against herself and other women, as well as the ambivalent perception of her in society.
CONCLUSION

Contemporary Miniature Painting

Investigation of the phenomenal movement in miniature painting in Pakistan reveals an epic evolution since its renaissance in 1992. Step by step the miniature painters exclusively trained at the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore have succeeded in detaching their work from conventionalism and in blurring principles indoctrinated in the art form over the ages. Subject matters relevant to the modern age, as well as a growing ease with the handling of traditional patterns and receptiveness to new stylistic inspirations have changed the rigidly conservative art form into an innovative contemporary discipline.

The controversy around the accuracy of the term “miniature painting”—misleadingly introduced by the British in colonial India—has arisen again. The appellation has been integrated into the art lingo of South Asia and refers to an abstract expression of a distinctive art practice: the historical book and album painting developed in Mughal, Pahari and Rajput workshops between the fifteenth and eighteenth century.

Today more than ever the definition for contemporary miniature painting goes far beyond the conventional technical and formal parameters and therefore requires recognition in a much wider context.

At present, contemporary miniature painting refers to an art form practised by a group of artists, exclusively trained at the Miniature Department at the NCA in Lahore, who have managed to integrate traditional skills and knowledge to create relevant and remarkable artworks in the twenty-first century. Thereby the question of the medial accomplishment of an art piece seem to dissolve continuously.503

An inquiry into the circumstances responsible for the revival of the art discipline

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503 In the meantime some artists have found ways to use their craftsmanship and knowledge for alternative media like animated film (Shahzia Sikander) or insitu installation (Hamra Abbas).
itself shows that an explanation can be found in the political situation in Pakistan. Since its partition from India in 1947, the newly established Islamic Republic has experienced a major identity crisis. An intentional avoidance of the common indigenous heritage with India can be equated with cutting off one’s roots. Consequently, an enduring nostalgia for the glorious era of the Islamic Mughal Empire arose and a special interest in the cultural heirlooms, reflecting the grandiosity and splendour of that time, is evident. Supported by rulers like Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Zia ul-Haq the resumption of “miniature painting” as an academic subject took place within the Visual Arts department at the National College of Arts.

To make an art form that had been frozen and unappreciated for decades pertinent to the outgoing twentieth century visionaries were needed, people like the artist and teacher Zahoor ul Akhlaq, who recognized the potential of miniature painting for a new era. Educated in the West he opened up a dialogue between traditional *Mughal painting* and modern art movements.

Resurrecting the dormant discipline, artists began to copy old paintings preferably those produced in Persian and Mughal workshops, mainly to preserve the knowledge of these sophisticated skills. Consequently intellectual curiosity was suppressed and the exploration of contemporary issues discouraged. It took almost a decade for artists to successfully free themselves from the old constraints. Finally, in 1992, Shahzia Sikander incorporates a personal vision of the twentieth century into her miniature painting for the first time.

Later it was Muhammad Imran Qureshi, in particular, who spearheaded this remarkable movement, which has received appreciation in his home country as well as abroad. His vision of contemporizing the historic discipline of miniature painting by lifting it out of its exotic and decorative legacy and making it fit for the international art arena is reflected not only in his art practice over the last fifteen years but also in the work of the next generations of artists. Together with his wife, Aisha Khalid, and their close circle of colleagues, followers and
students they have ignored orthodox restraints thereby pushing the boundaries of the old traditions, without destroying them. All of them work closely together which consequently leads to an interchange of vocabulary and strategies. Always endeavouring to make up for the evolution in art that was missed out, they appear to try to surpass each other in innovation and boldness. So it was Muhammad Imran Qureshi, for instance, who introduced the aspect of spontaneity into miniature painting, by the adoption of Surrealist automatism, which in fact is totally contradictory to the predetermined process of composing a miniature painting. Mahreen Zuberi chose to draw attention by depicting variations of Marcel Duchamp’s “Fountain” on wasli.

Reproaches of “deconstruction of a most precious heritage” due to the disregard and neglect of the elaborate skills and basic principles of composition are dismissed with the argument that a new beginning always requires something to be left behind. In these circumstances the repudiation of old conventions is a crucial part of the evolution.

Accusations of eclecticism, syncretism or hybridism with the West are countered by pointing to the refined Mughal style that is already a blend various cultural influences, due to the effective collaboration of artists of Persian, Hindu and Jain origins in the imperial workshops. Mughal folios are full of apparent emulations of European art works, provided by the traders of the time. In this context one is tempted to argue that contemporary miniature painters are just following a strategy their forefathers (see here in particular Shah Jahan) initiated five hundred years ago: the systematising of distinctive traditional and foreign art styles for the transmission of political and personal statements (see 1.2.3). Beside the exploration of Western art history it can be observed that one school

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504 The decline of commissions and diminishing demand during the late eighteenth century froze the art of book and album painting at its status quo, along with its figurativeness, narrativity, and romanticization, popular elements at that time. “Miniature painting” remained quiescent throughout the developments taking place elsewhere, starting from Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Constructivism and Abstractivism, just to mention some of the movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth century that have changed the whole idea of art.
of traditional painting, in particular, functions as a treasure house of inspiration. Contemporary artists seem to have a specific interest in the Pahari style, those paintings produced for Hindu kingdoms in the Punjab Hills. The Mughal style is comparatively under-represented and references to the Persian style are negligible. This reveals another interesting aspect; while the issues discussed in the works generally originate in an Islamic environment, the artists like to express their concerns and desires with the icons and idioms of other cultures and religions. The reasons for this prevalence can be found in the artists’ perception that these are more suitable for the expression of art in the twenty-first century. The enthusiasm for Hindi motifs can also be explained with the nostalgia for the historic connection between the Hindu and Muslim cultures, which prevailed in the subcontinent for hundreds of years prior to the partition of 1947.

The success of miniature painting today within the country of origin and abroad has become legendary and excels clearly from the international awareness of the other art production in the country. In the quest for the secret of this achievement the following facts were considered significant:

Art curators or art historians may like the miniature discipline because of its distinguishing characteristics; the fusion of excellent craftsmanship with a high degree of innovation and actuality in content. In their opinion works produced in the spirit of miniature painting clearly stand out amongst global art production, due to its originality, and “otherness.” Collectors may buy contemporary miniature paintings for their handleability; the small scale together with the subtle style of addressing explosive issues assure a place on the walls of distinguished drawing rooms. Furthermore the connotation with history and cultural heritage may influence patriotic buyers. The artists may have discovered in contemporary miniature painting a discipline that offers a comfortable feeling of being in accordance with one’s own tradition and national beliefs. After all the grand Mughal heritage was promoted as the
true Islamic legacy of Pakistan in the seventies. The overt formalities, like the wasli and small scale, seem to provide a “safe haven” within which they have the freedom of expression. At the same time the historical association provides support and identity. Participating in the international art arena they have realized their own cultural tradition embodies their greatest potential and assures distinctiveness from the art practice of the rest of the world.

For art students the prospect of international success and acknowledgement—Shahzia Sikander is a major role model—makes them select the subject of miniature painting. Besides succulent mangoes, miniature paintings are known as the “most appreciated export” of Pakistan.

The economic issue can therefore not be ignored; the knowledge of being able to sell one’s works and to make a living from them, plays an important role in the choice of career for young artists, living in a country, where galleries are almost exclusively run on a commercial basis and state funds are virtually non-existent.

All these factors, be they political, economic or other, grant the discipline of contemporary miniature painting an increased significance, in comparison to other art practices in the country. The fact that borderlines between the different art practices seem to be dissolving, as an apparent interchange not only in form and content but also in the medium of implementation takes place, will hopefully make the disagreeable “ranking of art disciplines” obsolete one day.

**Paraphrasing the Female Figure**

The second part of this investigation had to prove the thesis introduced earlier of a certain “paraphrasing mentality” within the approach to woman’s concerns in contemporary miniature painting.

The analysis of more than a hundred works, all produced by miniature painters, who recently graduated from National College of Arts, Lahore, confirms that the females depicted have concealed identities. They appear as fragments or
remain inapproachable and untouchable allusions. A shy reserve marks this artistic form of expression.

The female presence has to be imagined through traces, left behind earlier. The artists are remarkably creative in finding alternatives to overtly portraying women. In the few cases where the figure appears, the woman remains faceless. She either turns her back on the observer or comes into view heavily shrouded from head to toe (Aisha Khalid). Some artists rely on “ready-mades,” often well known protagonists from classical paintings like the Padshahnama (Sarah Ali Khan, Shahzia Sikander) or famous folios of the Pahari paintings (Reeta Saeed, Muhammad Zeeshan, Saima Munawar). Others reach out further by importing nude celebrities from European Art History (Waseem Ahmed). Another “goldmine” for attractive women is the advertising industry, when, for example the seductively posed heroines of monumental cinema hoardings are scaled down into small scale paintings (Muhammad Zeeshan, Saira Sheikh).

Generally, however, these faceless “dummies” are denoted by evocative signs, symbols or metaphors, if they are not replaced by them altogether.

Out of a large pool of female allegories mainly stemming from the three biggest spiritual traditions of South Asia, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, the image of the veil and of the hair are recurring female attributes or substitutes in contemporary miniature painting. Both are particularly interesting due to their interconnected and ambiguous meanings.

The exhaustive analysis of miniature paintings featuring the “veil” or the “female hair” produced in the last eight years identifies a list of immensely versatile usages of these two particular motifs.

In South Asian art history both formerly acted as “features” of adornment for damsels or nayikas, and have presently become loaded signs with a myriad of messages relating to womanhood.

Aisha Khalid, for instance, employs the chaadar or burqah in her early work to signify the inner conflict of women within the traditional purdah system.
(seclusion of females); the experience of claustrophobia and the simultaneous feeling of security. Later on her burqa image metamorphoses into a symbol of personal comfort within her own culture and as a practical tool to safeguard an individual's freedom and privacy. Waseem Ahmed uses the translucent burqa within the regional historic context of emphasizing the seductive powers of the beauties depicted, with the only difference that the shrouded women are nudes imported from European Art History. Reeta Saeed takes advantage of the ambivalent nature of the act of veiling, by covering her delicate neem rangs with fabric. She thereby stresses the preciousness of her artwork and deliberately creates curiosity. Saira Wasim uses the image of the burqa to address political issues, by pointing to hushed up crimes like “honour killing.” For her and other artists like Tazeen Qayyum, Sarah Ali Khan and Shehrbano Qizilbash the burqa and chaadar manifest backwardness and repression of women. Finally, Hajrah Khan defines the veil as a medium of security, guaranteeing a protected life in a threatening society and allowing the preservation of purity and beauty.

The plurality of the aspects that are employed is found equally in the list of works discussed that feature the hair as a female substitute; when for instance in Mahreen Zuberi's work tufts of hair on the bathroom tiles provide evidence of a prior female presence. Besides addressing women’s issues like purdah and female sexuality, the artist compares antithetical perspectives of looking at hair with the treatment of women in conservative and fundamentalist societies. For Muhammad Zeeshan the beauty along with the subtle and fragile qualities of hair represent the female character par excellence. He juxtaposes it with the icon of male potency, the gun, and accentuates gender tensions. Other artists undermine cultural myths surrounding the female hair. For instance Saima Munawar, Saira Sheikh and Ambreen Butt employ long flowing tresses as a symbol for servitude, and consider the act of chopping them off as a synonym for deliverance from social constrictions and male suppression.

This examination has shown the veil and the hair not only function as
substitutes for the female figure, but go far beyond that task by describing
the female character, her inner feelings, fears and personal struggles. These
features are not only epitomized through the meanings imbued in the symbols
but also through the physical qualities of the materials depicted. The skilled
naturalistic renditions of the young miniature painters is quite outstanding,
such as the delicate softness of gossamer organza visualized so sensitively
by Waseem Ahmed or the finesse and vulnerability of each single hair in
Muhammad Zeeshan’s paintings.

**Hair versus Veil**

After the profusion of images of the veil in the immediate aftermath
of September 11, 2001, one considers that the act of revealing hair in
contemporary miniature painting—found slightly later chronologically—can be
interpreted as a logical subsequence. While some may see its depiction as a
step forward, one surprisingly finds out, that it encompasses similar concerns
to those symbolized by the veil. Claustrophobia and suppression within the
patriarchal social system are themes shared by artists working with either
symbol, amongst them Aisha Khalid, Saira Wasim, Tazeen Qayyum, Shehrbano
Qizilbash, Sarah Ali Khan, Mahreen Zuberi, Saima Munawar, Saira Sheikh and
Ambreen Butt.

In questioning the reasons for the specific approach of paraphrasing the female
figure, one finds there is more than one possible relevant rationale:
Considering that the history of modern art has often been described as “a
history of the disappearance and/or destruction of the body image,” I dare
to suggest this phenomenon is a mere attempt to correspond with global art
trends. The clear rejection of traditional narrative figurativeness can therefore

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be interpreted as a crucial strategy in the ongoing modernizing process of the discipline of miniature painting, in favour of a more indirect conceptual approach.

A further rationale is represented by that fact the female figure has been imbued with too many stereotypes in the past so that a multifaceted metaphor would comply in a far better way with the complexity of womanhood.

The possibility of a link with political and social circumstances was traced, whereby the habit of disguising the female was found to be a common custom. Interwoven into the South Asian social system it can be observed throughout every day life in Pakistan. Here in particular the tradition of purdah, a system of gender segregation, which is practiced by keeping women in seclusion and requires them to be veiled in public, was recognized as relevant. Purdah has an impact on the style of clothing (enshrouding garments), and on architecture (high walls). Local dialects are replete with intricate paraphrases and floral metaphors for issues concerning women.

Referring to the arts, over the centuries the court painters depicted the few women as ageless stereotypes with idealized features. Only by dropping little hints and incorporating signs (for example a finger on the lips)—readable only to insiders—they managed to communicate emotions. The Persian and Urdu poets almost surpass themselves by inventing imaginative names for the beloved. Regarding this the Islamic Scholar Annemarie Schimmel writes, “one needs to be aware of the immense wealth of allusions […], one needs to know the entire complicated system of symbols and signs that are at the basis. Only then can it be fully enjoyed.”

While investigating the interchange of ideas and stimuli within the immediate

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environment of contemporary art production in Pakistan, I found the female artists’ movement against the new fundamentalist Islamic regime in the eighties, with the artists Naazish Ataullah and Salima Hashmi amongst them, as pioneering the employment of female metaphors to articulate women’s concerns. The enforced banishment of the human figure as part of the new Islamization process during that time may have played a role in the search for alternative female substitutes. However, the trend of paraphrasing the female figure can also be observed in the subsequent years.

Besides their use as political statements the artists discovered their potential for expressing a realm leading much deeper into a woman’s personality, with the result that the messages became more personal and reflect the artists’ own experiences.

Naiza Khan plays a particularly crucial role, as her body of work was always a great source of inspirations for younger artists. From the mid nineties onwards Naiza Khan has employed traditional and non-traditional materials in her imagery to epitomize female identity. For her the delicate quality of the female hair or the fineness of her organza dupatta complies perfectly with female sensuousness, vulnerability and sexuality.

Similarly important for this development are Masooma Syed’s hairy jewels. Her bold decision to use a material with traditionally repulsive connotations marks a revolutionary step in Pakistan’s art history. The impact of her work can be found in subsequent art production such as in works of Mahreen Zuberi or Muhammad Zeeshan.

Looking across the world one finds a liking for the same motifs by émigré artists from Pakistan. Artists like Shahzia Sikander, Sylvat Aziz, Saima Munawar and Ambreen Butt employ symbols like the veil and the hair to express the difficulties of finding their way in a foreign society and their efforts to overcome current prejudices towards women who originate from a Muslim environment. It is interesting to note that there the abandonment of the figure is far less conspicuous and that the artist’s self portrait is not barred from the canvas.
Yet, despite the similarities, the discipline of miniature painting is distinct from artworks produced in alternative media.

Though all artists are provocative and break cultural taboos, miniature painters have a different approach. The observer is not immediately affected by feelings of suffocation when viewing tiny miniature paintings as he/she is when confronted by the daunting oversized sculptures made by Sylvat Aziz or Jamil Baloch. The use of real hair in Masooma Syed’s sculptures will always be more stomach turning than hair in its painted form, even if it is as realistically rendered as in Muhammad Zeeshan’s paintings.

A certain silence and unobtrusiveness marks the discipline of miniature painting, which will always remain more indirect.

Physically miniatures already incorporate an enigmatic character. Painted on a small loose folio, they were thought to “disappear” easily in an album. The tiny scale of the painted scene provides protection from the unwanted intrusive glance, while the hashia (typical border) distracts and may be interpreted as the chaardivari (four walls). Due to the highly sophisticated technique, built up in various layers, any spontaneity or expressivity becomes difficult. Instead great unobtrusiveness pervades.

Finally the artists’ choice of motifs like the veil or chaadar would literally equates with a mere continuation of these principles, of building up the image in different layers. It appears that artists deliberately make use of these, when for example Reeta Saeed applies an extra layer of fabric over her delicate neem rang not only to stress the preciousness of her painting but also to generate additional attention. Ultimately, the conversation with the viewer resembles a childish “hike and seek” game.

Others employ these features to address crucial issues in reticent manner: In 2000 Saira Wasim dedicated an entire series of work to the theme of “honour killing,” and is the first artist who dared to expose this crime. Yet portraying her victims as burqahs, like beautiful water lilies floating in a pond she conforms perfectly to the camouflaging mechanisms of Pakistani politics.
However, miniature painters like Saira Wasim will always have to face the criticism of being euphemistic and trivializing important themes just as the “swimming pool idyll” by Hajrah Khan is considered as “too sweet and nice” for some tastes. Yet, this investigation has found just these disparaged features as remarkable and identified them as the distinctive characteristics of contemporary miniature painting.

Like every other art practice, the artistic concept or approach of a miniature painting reflects the confluence of various factors. Here extraordinarily many of these factors are deeply rooted in indigenous traditions. The effort of the artists to work within these inherited parameters and to use them as a base for the development of their own contemporaneous and innovative language, grants their works great authenticity.

Thus, it is this particularly subtle and unobtrusive approach and the artists’ resistance to global trends of artistic expression that makes contemporary miniature painting so fascinating and disconcerting at the same time.
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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdul Karim al Qushayri</td>
<td>Persian mystic (d. 1074)</td>
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<tr>
<td>abochni</td>
<td>shawl of a married woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ahmadiyya</td>
<td>a religious minority who believe Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian (1835-1908) was the prophet who appeared after Prophet Mohammed</td>
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<td>Ain-i-Akbari</td>
<td>administrative rules and regulations framed by Akbar</td>
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<td>Akbar</td>
<td>Mughal emperor (r. 1558-1605)</td>
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<td>Akbarnama</td>
<td>a biographical account of important events in Akbar’s life, written in Persian by Abul Fazl Allami</td>
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<tr>
<td>Al-buraq</td>
<td>a white winged horse with a woman’s face; the legendary vehicle of prophet Muhammad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allama Muhammad Iqbal</td>
<td>poet, philosopher and politician (1877-1938), recognized as the national poet of Pakistan, contributed to the creation of the country</td>
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<tr>
<td>amal</td>
<td>hope, expectation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amir Khusrau</td>
<td>Sufi mystic (1253-1325); credited with the founding of Classical music, and Qawwali in South Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anarkali</td>
<td>pomegranate blossom; the name of a legendary dancing girl of the Mughal era</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aphrodite</td>
<td>the goddess of love in Greek mythology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aqeeqah</td>
<td>naming ceremony and ritual of shaving a newborn’s head, customarily on the seventh day after birth</td>
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<tr>
<td>atman</td>
<td>philosophical term used within Hinduism and Vedanta to identify the soul</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aurangzeb</td>
<td>Mughal emperor (r. 1659-1707)</td>
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ayah  nanny
baal char  a disease, where the hair falls off
Babur  Mughal emperor (r. 1526-1530)
Baburnama  memoirs of Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty
Benazir Bhutto  the only female Prime Minister of Pakistan who was in power 1988-1990 and 1993-1996
Bhagavata Purana  loving devotions to the Supreme Lord; stories of the life and adventures of Krishna; the most popular and widely recited amongst the 18 puranas
bikhri  to sale, to vent, to let off steam
bindi  the red dot painted on the forehead of a Hindu woman
black burqah  two piece black garment that covers the entire body and face
block-printing  an ancient method of textile printing with wooden blocks
Brahama Purana  one of the 18 puranas; narrates the story behind the creation of the cosmos, details the life and deeds of Rama and Krishna
Bulleh Shah  Punjabi Sufi poet (1680-1757)
burqah  a tent-like covering that veils the entire body from head to foot; the traditional instrument of purdah
caula  the first cutting of a child’s hair
chaadar  a large shawl which covers the entire body; a sheet, a table cloth, a coverlet or a sheet of iron
Chaadar aur Chaardivari  slogan of military ruler Zia-ul Haq regarding a woman’s place in society
chaardivari  four walls, a courtyard, enclosure
chakra  a wheel, disc; in Bhuddism and Hinduism considered as the nexus of metaphysical and biophysical energy of the human body

chandan pani  perfumed water; poetic expression from a popular Hindi song

chiaroscura  a type of Renaissance drawing on coloured paper with strong contrasts between light and dark

choli  a short, close fitting bodice; worn with a sari or ghagra

Gaëtan Clérambault  French psychiatrist and photographer (1872-1934)

Company painting  a special type of Indian painting, which was produced for Europeans and therefore heavily influenced by European taste

dandas  the sticks used by the police in Pakistan

darbar  court, audience hall; an official audience given by the emperor

daroghah  guardian, supervisor; the deputy librarian of the kitabkhana

dars  the reading of the Quran

Deccan  the southern part of India

dupatta  a veil worn over the head and shoulders; lighter version of the chaadar

Durga  Hindu goddess, depicted as a warrior riding a lion or a tiger with multiple hands carrying weapons; the embodiment of feminine and creative energy

Farhat Hashmi  Islamic scholar, whose lectures are very popular within upper/middleclass women in contemporary Pakistan
**Farid ud-Din Attar Persian**  
Sufi poet (c. 1142-1220), wrote the poem *Mantaq ut-Tair* (The Conference of the Birds)

**Ferdowsi**  
Persian poet (c. 935-1020), author of the *Shahnama*, the national epic of Persia

**Fuzuli**  
Turkic poet (c. 1483-1556)

**gao-takkiyah**  
a large pillow roll or bolster

**Genghis Khan**  
Mongol political and military leader (r. 1206-1227); united the tribes to found the Mongol Empire

**ghagra**  
a long skirt

**Giddha**  
a traditional folk dance of the Punjab, performed by women

**Gita Govinda**  
the song of the herdsmen

**gopis**  
cowherd girls and milkmaids; the companions of Krishna

**guch rang**  
painting in opaque colours

**gul-e-lalah**  
red flower; poppy, tulip

**gum arabic**  
a binder used in watercolour paint

**Hadith**  
the sayings of Prophet Muhammad

**Hamida Banu**  
the mother of Akbar

**Hamzanama**  
a series of fantastic tales based loosely on the exploits of Hamza, an uncle of Prophet Muhammad

**Harappa**  
an Indus Valley civilization dating back to about 3300 BC

**hashia**  
the illuminated border of miniatures

**hijab**  
the veil; an expression for screen, modesty, or morality

**hookah**  
a long stemmed water pipe for smoking tobacco

**houris**  
fair skinned maidens, companions of believers in paradise
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humayun</strong></td>
<td>Mughal emperor (r. 1530-1540 and 1555-1556)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Humayunnama</strong></td>
<td>the story of the life of Humayun written by his sister Gul-Badan Begum</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>hwarna</strong></td>
<td>splendour, the concept of glory</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Imam Hussain</strong></td>
<td>the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and third Imam of Shiah Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>jadwal</strong></td>
<td>the linear frame of miniatures; masks the physical join between the central window and the illuminated <em>hashia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jahangir</strong></td>
<td>Mughal emperor (r. 1605-1627)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jainism</strong></td>
<td>a religion and philosophy originating in ancient India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>jharoka</strong></td>
<td>a balcony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>jilbab</strong></td>
<td>a wide shirt or long veil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>joora</strong></td>
<td>a bun, traditional hairstyle of South Asian women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kaabah</strong></td>
<td>the “Sacred House” in Mecca; the holiest place of Islam</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kali</strong></td>
<td>black Hindu goddess, depicted with multiple arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>karkhana</strong></td>
<td>the workshop, where manuscripts and folios were prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Karpuramanjari</strong></td>
<td>a Deccani princess; the title of a romantic comedy written by Rajashekhara in the early tenth century</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Khadija</strong></td>
<td>first wife of Prophet Muhammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Khamseh</strong></td>
<td>five Persian epic poems written by Nezami Ganjavi (d. 1209)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>khombi</strong></td>
<td>a wedding shawl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>kitabkhana</strong></td>
<td>house of books; court workshops, where books were prepared and collected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kitagawa Utamaro  Japanese *Ukiyo* printmaker (1750-1806)

Krishna  Hindu god, mostly depicted as a young cowherd with blue skin tones; the eighth incarnation of Vishnu

Ku Klux Klan  an extreme, white supremacist organisation

Kumari  a divine warrior in Hindu mythology

lachak  a woman’s head scarf

*Laila & Majnun*  the love-story of Laila & Majnun reaches back to early Arabic legends

Lakshmi  Hindu goddess for luck and happiness; wife of Vishnu

luddi  a woollen shawl worn by Sindhi women

lungi  a cotton or silk sarong; traditional costume of the men and women in the Punjab

Mahabharata  one of the major Hindu epics; discusses the human goals

maleer  the bridegroom’s shawl

mandala  an ancient Sanskrit word for circle; used throughout the world for self-expression, spiritual transformation and personal growth

maqamaat  the stations in the journey of life

*Molla Abdurrahman Jami*  Iranian poet and mystic (d. 1492)

munavvat  the raised effect in miniature painting

muqaddima  the Arabic word for beginning, vanguard, forehead, preface; in Urdu also used for a court case or litigation

muraqqa  an album, which contains a collection of paintings and calligraphic sheets

musawwir  painter; artist of the imperial workshop

musawwiri  the act of painting or drawing

*Naji*  Urdu poet (c. 1690-1744)
naqqashkhana the house of the painter
nautch girls dancing girls
nayika dancing girl, romantic heroine in South Asian arts
neem rang a painting with the combination of three transparent colours and ten percent guch rang
Nezami romantic epic poet in Iranian literature (c. 1141-1209)
odhni a woman’s shawl or head cover
padma lotus
Padshahnama an imperial manuscript depicting most important events during the reign of Shah Jahan
pagri turban
Pahari painting a broad name given to a genre of painting with numerous sub-schools, placed in a geographical confine with the states of Jammu, Kangra, Basohli, Guler, Kulu, Nurpur, Chamba, Mandi and Bilaspur
Pakhtuns or Pashtuns, or Pathans belonging to the tribes of the Northwest Frontier and Baluchistan provinces
palki palanquin
panchatantra the collection of Sanskrit animal fables in verse and prose
pardakht the laborious application of colour with small dots or strokes to create finest shades; three different methods are used: little dots, dana pardakht, crossed lines, jalidar pardakht, or small parallel lines, khat pardakht
progameia a sacrifice at which the bride cut off her hair and dedicated it to Artemis and Moirai
Punjab a region in Pakistan and Northwest India

purana tales

purdah refers to the system of segregation of women as well as to the veil worn by a Muslim woman

qalam the extremely fine brush made of the hairs of a squirrel’s tail

Qawwali the devotional music of the Sufis in South Asia

Qazwini Shah Jahan’s court historian until 1638

Qutban the author of the Sufi romance Mirigavati written in 1503

Radha the foremost of the gopis who plays with Krishna

Ragamala painting the concept of illustrating musical modes in pictorial form

Ramakrishna a famous Brahman (1836-1886)

Ramayana one of the great Hindu epics; attributed to poet Vlamiki; tells the story of prince Rama, whose wife Sita is abducted by the demon king of Lanka

Ramdas one of the painters of the Padshahnama

rumal a handkerchief, used by men for protection from the sun

safeida the white hue responsible for the opaque effect of watercolours

Safavid style was developed during the dynasty of the Safavids (1501-1722) in Azerbaijan and Persia

sari length of silk or cotton elaborately draped around the body; traditional garment of South Asian woman

sehara a “veil” of flowers or pearls worn by the bridegroom in Northern India and Pakistan
shabih  likeness, image
shagird  apprentice
Shah Jahan  Mughal emperor (r. 1627-1659)
Shahnama  the book of kings; national epic written by Ferdowsi around 1000
shalwar kameez  loose, pleated trousers, and long tunic; typical attire of men and women in Pakistan
shamiana  marquee, made of patterned fabric and installed for festive occasions
Shams-i-Tabriz  Persian Sufi mystic (d. 1247)
Shamsuddin Hafez  Persian poet (c. 1319-1389)
sharia  the body of Islamic law
shehnai  the North Indian oboe
Shirin  the Azerbaijani Christian wife of Khusrau II, Shahanshah (the king of kings)
Shukasaptati  seventy tales of a parrot; a collection of popular folk tales in India
shuttlecock burqah  an all encompassing veil; resembles a shuttlecock
Sikhs  an adherent of Sikhism, a religious minority
Simorgh  a fabulous mythical creature in the shape of a bird, depicted in Persian art
Sinhala  the majority ethnic group in Sri Lanka
Sira  study of the life of the Holy Prophet
siyah qalam  washes or drawings in monotones
soz  the heat, the passion; the pain
suikari  a needle work; used in miniature painting to trace figures
tableau vivant  a reconstitution of a famous painting using human bodies
taj  crown, royal cap
tanpura a long necked, round bodied lute
tapai a stippling method of paint application
taq a cap worn by unmarried girls mentioned by Gul-Badan Begum in the *Humayunnama*
tarh a drawing
Tazuk-i-Jahangiri the memoirs of Jahangir
trompe l’oeil an art technique involving extremely realistic imagery in order to create an optical illusion
Tutinama tales of a parrot; a collection of 52 fables compiled by the Persian writer Ziya-ud-Din Nakhshabi in the fourteenth century
Ukiyo prints Japanese wood-block prints, picturing the “Floating world” (red light district) of Edo (ancient Tokyo)
Umrah minor pilgrimage to Mecca
ustad master; professor
Vasakasajja nayika the heroine distraught over her absent lover
Vedic age a South Asian civilization (c. 1500-500 BC)
Venus the goddess of love in Roman mythology
Vishnu the major god in Hinduism and Indian mythology; thought as the preserver of the universe
wasli handmade paper used for miniatures; three or four paper sheets glued together and shell-burnished
wasligar the person who fabricates the wasli
Zia-ul Haq military ruler of Pakistan (r. 1977-1988)
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ABSTRACT

In Pakistan contemporary miniature painting has experienced a phenomenal evolution since its advent in 1992. This PhD thesis represents not only an evaluation of formal and stylistic changes of this traditional art practice but also brings to light the problems that have arisen due to a radical contemporizing progress in the last fifteen years. An investigation of the possible reasons for the national and international success of this movement is juxtaposed with a critical analysis of the relevance of contemporary miniature painting for art practice in the twenty-first century.

The focus on two frequently recurring metaphors, the “veil” and the “hair,” in the second part of this thesis is the first detailed iconographical discussion of a group of representative works. The trend of paraphrasing the female figure, in particular, is identified and examined for feasible motivations due to the social and cultural environment.


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