

“A MULTIMODAL AND VISUAL SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SACRED CALLIGRAPHY IN SADEQUAIN’S PAINTINGS”

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Abstract

This paper discusses the transformation of sacred calligraphy in the works of one of the most influential modern artists in Pakistan, the work produced by Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi (1930 to 1987). Unfamiliar with Islamic calligraphy, Sadequain was the pioneer of integrating modernist concepts of calligraphic cubism and painterly abstraction, transforming classical scripts into figurative and abstract forms of expression. The work has a multimodal and visual semiotic structure, based on social semiotics of multimodality by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (Images of Reading: The Grammar of Visual Design, 1996; 2006) and the theory of denotation and connotation of Roland Barthes (Rhetoric of the Image, 1964) which relies upon the sign theory developed by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916). The article explores the interplay between linguistic, visual, and spatial modalities to produce multi-layered spiritual and cultural meanings with close visual analysis of selected works by Ramadan including monumental Quranic murals, The Evolution of Mankind and the Frere Hall ceiling, calligraphic panels with verses in Surah Al Rehman, and figurative composition of his Parisian era of the 1960s. The discoveries show how Sadequain re-read the holy texts as living symbols, who connects the Islamic tradition with the modern expression and how he articulates the themes of divine unity, human struggle, and postcolonial cultural identity as a part of South Asian modernism.

Key Words: Sadequain, sacred calligraphy, multimodal analysis, visual semiotics, Islamic art, Qur'anic verses, mysticism.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background



Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi (1930-1987) is considered to be one of the most significant and a prolific contemporary artists in Pakistan. He was a revolutionary in the South Asian visual culture because of his experimental combination of Islamic calligraphy and modernist painting techniques. Sadequain was born in Amroha, India, in a family of Quranic calligraphy and after the Partition, he moved to Pakistan and over time, he gained popularity in the 1950s and 1960s. His initial acclaim was due to strong figurative drawings; and that which later led to a new form of work, in which sacred writing was the focus of the large scale paintings, murals and calligraphy abstractions. Mostly self trained, his artistic style was characterized by exaggerated angular strokes of the brush, elongated human body, cactus-like imagery, and melodramatic manipulations of the calligraphy. His qualities brought him recognition throughout the world, especially in his Paris years between 1961 and 1967 when he held

exhibitions globally and interacted with the Western culture in modernism even though he was deeply rooted in the Islamic artistic traditions. Sadequain is widely credited with reviving the Islamic calligraphy in Pakistan by turning its tradition of being an ornament into an effective tool of personal, spiritual and socio political statement. Rebellious to the fixed demarcations between the written and the visual, the sacred and the secular, the traditional and the contemporary, he transformed Quranic verses and poetic inscriptions into figurative and abstract forms, commonly referred to as calligraphic cubism or painterly abstraction

Research Problem:

Pakistan, the post colonized country, has been seeking a definite cultural identity, and the artists have been striving to seek a way out of this predicament through the colonialism and the rise of Islamic revitalization. The article by Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi is interesting in this sense due to its innovative style in applying sacred calligraphy. Nevertheless, reverence, discipline and aniconism were said to be the primary types of calligraphy that was divinely revealed in the traditional Islamic calligraphy. Sadequain re-created the script of Quran, though, imbuing it with motion and combining it with human figures and natural motives and monumental buildings to comment on the subject of human struggle, divine unity (tawhid) and power.

His masterpieces like The Evolution of Mankind (Lahore Museum) and the ceiling of the Frere Hall in Karachi, his calligraphic panels and paintings of Ramadan in Paris-period are some of the performances which could help him to integrate text of a religious character with modern visual arts. Even though Sadequain has had a considerable impact and disseminated his artistic work, most studies on Sadequain have mostly been biographical or descriptive with little mention being made on multimodal and visual semiotic.

This gap is made in this paper since his religious calligraphy is exposed to the frames of linguistic, visual and spatial interaction with the theoretical views of Kress and van Leeuwen, Barthes, and Saussure. By doing so, the research identifies the role played by Sadequain in developing the Islam tradition regarding the contemporary artistic expression within the South Asian postcolonial modernism.

1.3 Objectives

- To analyze sacred calligraphy as a multimodal resource in Sadequain's paintings.
- To examine visual semiotic processes (denotation, connotation, myth) in conveying sacred themes.
- To investigate the cultural and spiritual implications in post-colonial Pakistani art.

2. Literature Review

Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi literature has gradually become less of a biography and description than of criticism and contextualization, yet little has been done in the way of critical and multimodal reading of his calligraphy of the divine. The earlier trailblazing works emphasize the style experimentation, prolific and significance of Sadequain in the Pakistani modern art. Image and Identity: fifty years of painting and sculpture in Pakistan portrays Akbar Naqvi (1998) as a significant artist in the evolution of art in the post-partition era during which he has employed imagery not only personal but also national strains in his pictures which are usually tense. This integration of calligraphy and figuration is discussed by Naqvi as Sadequain and the Culture of Enlightenment (2016) which deals with the philosophical nature of the practice of calligraphy and figuration, and which was based on so-called roshan khayali (enlightened thought), inspired by Sufi spirituality, humanism, and disgust at orthodoxy.

The writings of biographical and memoirs nature tell more about the personal and artistic life of Sadequain. In Sadequain: Artist and Poet A Memoir (2021), Saiyid Ali Naqvi emphasizes

his ambivalent identity as a visual artist and a poet, and tells about the initial experience of working with calligraphy in a conservative family and documenting some of the most notable social commissions of his art, such as the restaurant Mangla Dam mural. These accounts tend to underline the size of his work which is estimated to have been in the excess of fifteen thousand works, including large-scale murals at Frere Hall, the State Bank of Pakistan and the Lahore Museum, most of which are donated to be displayed publicly. This has been assisted by the publications of the Sadequain Foundation such as the book *Lines and drawings by Sadequain, The legend of Sadequain: Renaissance of calligraphic art in Pakistan* which have given a diverse visual archives besides accentuating his involvement in the revival of Islamic calligraphy in the modern art setting.

In the art historical literature, there is a new trend of placing Sadequain within the context of the world of modernism and cultural change of the postcolonial age. He is mentioned in his book *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (2010) by Iftikhar Dadi as one of the leading representatives of the calligraphic abstraction, particularly, in the postcolonial context. Dadi notes that Sadequain had a stay in Paris (1961-1967) and this stay had a significant role of merging Western modernist with Islamic calligraphic tradition. Dadi says that it was this synthesis that enabled Sadequain to refinance the classical script into a modern medium of expression, and to align his practice with more general tendencies, such as the Hurufiyya in which the written word served as the center of both individual and cultural identification. In more modern interviews, e.g. in his lecture, *Sadequain and Calligraphic Abstraction* (2023), Dadi goes further to tell us that the decolonization instinct in the work by Sadequain is not merely that his revisioning of his sacred texts as flowing painterly forms defies convention, but the spiritual and existential fears of the author.

This literature is also contributed by specialized research on the style of calligraphy of Sadequain. Khurshid Alam, in his work, *Gauhar Qalam: Khatt-e-Sadequain*, tells about the technical side of his calligraphy, which involves the arrangement of letters, their proportions and variations of styles. Other academic articles particularly those of the Punjab University see his grotesified forms not as grotesque but as Sufi defiance or humanistic criticism, and talk of the motifs of self-awareness and introspection which are repeated throughout his poetry and in his visual work. In spite of these noble attempts, a distinguishing lapse in the exploration is apparent since there is no research that has been carried out to analyze his sacred calligraphy critically in a current theoretical view of multimodality and visual semiotics. As much as issues of modernism and hybridity have also been addressed by other scholars like Dadi, few have systematically addressed how the Quranic text is involved in interacting with considerations of visuality like angularity, color symbolism, and space to form meaning. The existing literature to a significant degree is still devoted to biography, style, or celebration and the semiotic refinement of the sacred word in a postcolonial context has not been explored extensively. The objective of this paper is to fill such a gap by applying the multimodal social semiotics of Kress and van Leeuwen and Barthes visual semiotic theory to decipher the stratified spiritual and cultural connotation of the Sadequain's calligraphic work and hence contributing to the past art historical work in a theoretically rooted direction.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper will use a hybrid theoretical approach that will merge multimodal analysis and visual semiotics to discuss the transformation of sacred calligraphy in the paintings of Sadequain. Such methods give auxiliary items of learning the effect that several semiotic tools combine to produce meaning in visual art work, particularly where words and visual and spatial elements of the non-linguistic are merged.

3.1 Multimodal Theory

Multimodality is a concept that was invented by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, and it suggests that language is hardly sufficient to create meaning in communication. Rather, it is the result of the combination of several modes including images, words, color, layout, and even gesture. Kress and van Leeuwen develop the social semiotic theory of Michael Halliday in their best-selling book *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (1996/2006) to demonstrate how visual and textual messages interact to construct meaning. They accentuate that all modes have the possibilities of meaning, but all the modes enter the mutual cultural and social frameworks.

The core of this theory relates to the fact that it is the integration of modes, but not an isolated element, that creates meaning. Such combinations, which are referred to as modal ensembles enable various features to complement, reinforce or even contradict each other. Design is also regarded as a highly social process with artists and communicators making conscious decisions determined by their cultural and historical backgrounds. Kress and van Leeuwen also extend the concept that visual compositions may be explained in terms of three related functions namely: the representational dimension, which involves what can be seen; the interactive dimension and the compositional dimension which include how the visual elements are combined to create coherence and emphasis.

Applied to the art of Sadequain, this point of view exposes the way Quranic calligraphy engages with visual objects, including vivid colors, sharp lines and repetitive shapes and lines, such as thorns or fire and space like expansiveness and rhythm. These are things that combine to make a holy text a living image instead of a dead text. In such a mixture of its modes, Sadequain conveys the concepts of spiritual upliftment, human perseverance and postcolonial identity, urging the audience to perceive calligraphy as a potent, expressive language in its own right.

3.2 Visual Semiotics

Visual semiotics provides a means of comprehending images as a system of signs communicating a meaning more than meets the eye. This method is to a great extent based on the theory of the sign created by Ferdinand de Saussure, published in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). According to Saussure, a sign consists of two components: the signifier that is the material object that we perceive either in the form of a calligraphic stroke or a visual form and the signified which is the idea or concept that the form signifies. It is worth noting, therefore, that the connection between the two is not natural but rather, is influenced by social agreement, which leads us to remember that meaning is culturally constructed, not fixed.

These thoughts were later applied by Roland Barthes to the visual image in his essay, *Rhetoric of the Image* (1964). He postulated that images act at two levels of meaning. The former is denotation, the literal or surface meaning, what we can see, e.g., the Arabic letters that make up a Quranic verse. The second is connotation, the cultural, emotional, ideological connotations of that image, including the connection of the image with the divine authority, spirituality, the Islamic background, or the human struggle, mysticism, and adherence to strict rules in the reinterpretations of Sadequain. Barthes also came up with such concept as myth, these connotations are integrated into grander cultural narratives, which define how societies understand reality.

The connotation in the work of Sadequain, however, does not just support the established meanings but tend to challenge and reform them. Not only do his stylized scripts convey the literal text of the Quran, but also suggest a more philosophical notion of unity, transcendence and human perseverance. His reorganization of the relationship between the visual elements to each other by turning letters into figurative or abstract shapes generates new layers of

meaning that emphasize movement, embodiment and, self-expression by the postcolonial. In this perspective, the calligraphy of Sadequain appears not only as a vehicle of the sacred words but as an active visual language that provokes the reflection and reinterpretation.

Integrating the Frameworks

The multimodal model offers a framework of interpreting the play of various modalities in the paintings by Sadequain, whereas visual semiotics gives means of studying the stratum of meanings of the calligraphic signs. Collectively, they permit a strict analysis of the fact that sacred text is not passively described but is actually re-read as a living and multimodal system of signs. This dual lens illustrates how Sadequain combines the Islamic aniconic traditions with the modernist expression and explains the ideas of unified God, human action, and cultural identity in the South Asian art. It deals with the structural orchestration of meaning as well as cultural and ideological aspects of his transformative artistic practice.

4. Methodology

The research design of this study is a qualitative interpretive research design that dwells into the descriptive and analytical aspects to examine the multimodal and visual semiotic aspects of the paintings by Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi in terms of sacred calligraphy. Being an art historical and semiotic investigation, the method puts a higher emphasis on close visual analysis as opposed to measuring it numerically. This method is based on the traditions of humanities based research whereby the interpretation of cultural artifacts is made in theoretical terms by theories suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen and Roland Barthes. The design is particularly appropriate in the study of how the elements of art can relay spiritual, cultural, and postcolonial meaning as it is designed to be profoundly experiential in interpretation rather than the intention of getting generalizable findings. Although the given study might seem to be a qualitative descriptive research, it should rather be defined as a qualitative interpretive analysis since it involves more than surface description and it touches upon deep meaning and modal interaction.

4.1 Data Selection

The basic material of this study are visual materials in terms of paintings of Sadequain, which uses sacred calligraphy. These pieces are a part of his long artistic career that lasted between 1950s and 1980s. In order to have a balance and representative sample, paintings were chosen based on a number of things. These comprised thematic topicality including the inclusion of Quranic verses or sacred imagery, stylistic variety between calligraphic cubism and painterly abstraction and figurative assimilation, variation in scale between small canvases and monumental murals, and indication of the various stages in his career including the pre Paris, Paris and post Paris periods. Some ten to fifteen paintings were selectively sampled, using available sources, including exhibition catalogs, museum archives, including Lahore Museum and Frere Hall, published monographs by the Sadequain Foundation, and high resolution digital reproductions found at scholarly databases and online repositories. Both smaller canvases and larger scale murals are represented by the sample and there are a variety of stylistic strategies, including angular Kufic inspired distortions, Naskh influences, and abstract figurative forms mixed. The paintings were divided into three categories in order to be systematically analyzed. These types have monumental murals like The Evolution of Mankind in Frere Hall, calligraphic panels at Ramadan displays with Surah Al Rahman, and figurative abstractions like Paris period self portraits with inscriptions of poetry or sacred texts. This categorization allows making comparative observations and paying attention to the diversity of the Sadequain body of work.

4.2 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis is performed in two stages so as to retain depth and breadth and also direct the reader through a stratified interpretation of the visual content. During the first stage, a close

visual analysis of three representative paintings, one chosen in each of the stipulated categories, is conducted in detail. This procedure illustrates the process of implementing the theoretical framework and it gives clear examples to the readers. High resolution images are studied thoroughly to find linguistic modes like Quranic text, the visual modes such as color, texture and form and the spatial modes like composition, hierarchy and scale. Then the principles of visual semiotics are applied to the analysis of the denotation (the actual look of scripts and images) and connotation (spiritual, struggle, or self-identification). The syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships are also taken into account in the analysis to determine how a certain element combines with other elements in a composition and how a certain element is stylistically chosen among the alternatives. In the process, the visual description is intertwined with cultural interpretation and allusions to the historical and biographical backgrounds of Sadequain such that even the readers who are not familiar with the terminology of semiotic analysis can also track the discourse.

The second stage involves the analysis of the broader sample that consists of fifteen to twenty paintings. These works are reviewed in the categories in order to see some common motifs and tendencies in modal interaction and semiotic meaning. An example is that the motifs of thorns are usually a symbol of endurance and strength and scripts that are changed to flames can be a symbol of divine enlightenment. The aspect of scale and style is also taken into account, with the smaller works possibly being the depiction of personal mysticism and larger murals tending to be more of a collective spirituality. The similarities and the variation in the dataset are done by a comparative approach. Through repetitive notes and contemplative note taking, emerging themes like unity of God, human conflict, and postcolonial identity are identified. It does not depend on computer software and is based on manual visual inspection instead of digital technology, and is at times done in sketches to map out composition structure and trace the relationship between visual elements.

This research paper focuses on ethical issues especially on how to respect the sacred Quran text and avoid misinterpretation. The sources of the images are duly credited. Some of the limitations are also identified which include the use of secondary visual reproductions which can interfere with colour accuracy and the subjectivity of semiotic interpretation. These weaknesses are met by basing the analysis on the existing theoretical frameworks and cross checking the obtained findings with the available academic literature. All in all, it is a meticulous yet accessible methodology of the comprehension of how the sacred calligraphy of Sadequain is an intercession of the tradition with the modern form of artistic expression.

5. Analysis

5.1 Multimodal Integration of Sacred Calligraphy

"The Ship of Divine Question (Surah Ar-Rahman)"

The central verse of the painting is:

قِلْيَيْ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا ثُكَّبَانَ

"Then which of the favors of your Lord will you both (jinns and men) deny?"

اور تم اپسے پروردگار کی کون کون سی نعمتوں کو جھٹلاؤ گے



Fig.01

This painting can be discussed in the context of the multimodal integration as Sadequain turns a Quranic verse into a strong imagery and spiritual impressions by integrating linguistic, visual, and compositional features into a single form. Reiterating the inscription of the verse of Surah Ar-Rahman, Fabaith to my lord through thy mercy to thee, he builds the figure of a giant ship and transfers the text of the sacred content into the form of a structural image, which makes symbolic the human course of life under the guidance of the Creator. Musically, the verse explores the themes of gratitude, mercy, and accountability, whereas, a metaphorical ship in the visuals indicates that the verse is about safety, direction, and depending on God in life irrespective of its uncertainties. The dark and light blue colors remind of the immensity and calmness of the divine Ocean of Mercy, which adds to the perceptions of spiritual peace and infinity, and the bright strokes of calligraphy symbolize the lightness, hope, and divine light that will help the human race to overcome adversity.

The composition makes the viewer attracted to the main form, and allows thinking and emotional experience. This smooth communication of text, colour, form and space allow Sadequain to transcend illustration and have a semiotic identity in which sacred language becomes a breathing visual metaphor that even non-Arabic speaking people can interpret, all working to lead to universal themes of faith, protection and spiritual strength.

"Two Gardens for the God Fearing"



Fig.02

وَ لِمَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ جَنَّنٌ (٤٦)

- But for he who has feared the position of his Lord are two gardens
- اور اس شخص کے لئے جو اپنے رب کے سامنے کھڑا ہونے سے ڈرا دو جتنیں ہیں۔

In this piece, the calligraphy of Sadequain shows the multimodal smooth combination of the linguistic, visual, and compositional modes. Linguistic mode presents the text of the Quran, and the visual one presents letters, which are dynamic, vertical, and this form is indicative of growth and structure, and the brushstrokes of bright green and blue give a sense of depth and symbolism. The compositional mode creates an upper and lower part of the painting: the upper part is a divine promise, and the bottom part focuses more on the rhetorical question as it is more visually emphasized and directs the attention of the viewer. Lack of borders results in fusion of text and background that forms fluidity of space. Figurative abstraction is represented by vertical lines with the creation of the trees of the garden, and painterly abstraction is expressed by the gesture in the background. Collectively, these modes combine to make sacred text a live visual experience, and meaning is created by the coordinated action of the script, color, form and space and not by the words on their own.

"The Vessels of the Word (Safina-e-Nooh)"



Fig.03

Sadequain in The Vessels of the Word (Safina-e-Nooh), uses three verses of the Quran to create a single multimodal piece where the modes of language, the visual, and the space combine to create multifaceted, spiritual and cultural significances. The leftmost vessel, "Nun. By the pen and that they write with" (Surah Al-Qalam), makes the gesture of the writing a living sign, sweeps of the "Nun" reminds us of the action of the pen and the divine position of the verse connecting the celestial knowledge to the world of human beings. The central vessel, "Qaf. Using bold, structural calligraphy as a visual frame of reference, by the honored Quran" (Surah Qaf), the text is translated into spatial mass and the Quran as the driving power through human struggle.

The rightmost vessel, "Sad. The reminder" (Surah Sad) by the Quran serves as a visual reminder, and thus, the narrative is complete in the horizontal chain of creation to spiritual remembrance. Human struggle and violence are captured in painterly abstraction in the choppy, gesture motions of the Bahr-ul-Ilm (Ocean of Knowledge), and the unity of God is portrayed in the cohesion of the color palette in the sky, the sails, and the sea. With this masterful interaction of script, form, color, and composition, Sadequain transforms religious text into an active, living, and available image meditation.

5.2 Semiotic Layers in Selected Examples

5.2.1 Denotation

The phrase As-Sama'i wal-Ard (The Sky and the Earth) is the central denotative reference in the visual sample under analysis of Fig.04, and it creates a duality that is fundamental in nature and that defines the totality of the physical existence. The signifier in both linguistic terms asama (lsm) literally means the sky realm or the heavens, whereas wal-ard (wl'rD) refers to the earthly realm or the material earth. Being connected to each, by the coordinating conjunction wa (and), these two lexical units act as a single signifier representing the cosmos in its the most literal and visible expression.

At this denotative level, the text is an objective depiction of the spatial markers of the human experience the space above and the ground below. This literal mapping of the universe is supported by the visualization of the script and its particular weight of type and space. It gives a definite, undisguised starting point to the viewer whereby a text is the direct indicator of the physical world in the presence of no other secondary connotation of a spiritual or metaphorical nature. This is basically a form of creating a linguistic horizon, where the totality of the fashioned world is enclosed by one, unifying phrase.



Fig.04

The verse of the Quran, which is discussed in Fig. 05, is "Innamal mu'minuna ikhwatun..." (Indeed, the believers are brothers...) is a linguistic and semiotic model of the communal organization and Godly sense of responsibility. The first lexical unit, "Innamal mu'minuna ikhwatun" (inWama lmuw'minuwna ikhwa@un), is a state of complete fraternity, the particle of restriction (innama) literally defines the identity of a group of people who believe through the prism of biological-like fraternity. This is then succeeded by the command faslihu (fa'aSliHuw), the direct meaning of which is the reconciliation or restoration or rather the rebuilding of the conflict between the two parties identified.

The last part of the verse, wa-ttaq Allah la'allakum turhamun (watWaQuw llWaha la`alWakum turHamuwna) adds the vertical aspect of the sign. Wa-ttaqu Allah refers to the legal necessity of the God-consciousness or piety whereas turhamun refers to the acquisition of mercy as a direct consequence of the prior activities. At this denotative level, the text functions as a very clear, educational system: it refers to a social group (brothers), demands a certain action (peace-making), and creates a literal causative relationship between the human behavior and the divine reaction. This semantic organization of the verse is therefore an

objective roadmap to social harmony, with the literal meaning of brotherhood and mercy as the sign posters to the greater semiotic discourse.



Fig .05

5.2.2 Connotation

In terms of semiotics, the expression of Fig 07, As-Sama'i wal-Ard (The Heavens and the Earth) is the main denotative anchor of the composition, and forms a structural duality that locates the physical totality of the universe. The lexical units used in this primary analysis are the objective signifiers: asama is the sky, whereas wal ard refers to the earth. But, when the analysis enters into connotative sphere, these signs increase to denote the macrocosmic law of Tawhid (Divine Unity). The heaven and the earth cease to be a physical place but they acquire symbolic definitions of the invisible and the visible, the infinite and the finite. The researcher can see the text create an apparent unified sign of the cosmos by seeing how the text creates an apparent Universal Harmony in which the celestial and the terrestrial are in a state of silent, unending subjection to one Creative Will.

Based on this cosmic orientation, the analysis is taken to the level of socio-ethical by the verse Innamal mu'minuna ikhwatun... (Brothers indeed the believers...). On the denotative level, it represents a real precept of instruction, where the particle of restriction (innama) is used to establish the identity of the believer in terms of the literal prism of fraternal kinship. This linguistic option subjects the act of islaah (reconciliation) as an actual social need. Connotatively, the researcher views this as a religious, spiritual fraternity that supersedes the ties of blood or geographical region which makes the Ummah one, living organism. This social contract is connected with the notions of Taqwa (God-consciousness) and Rahma (Mercy) so that the semiotic framework implies, a divine grace is not an abstract or accidental phenomenon but a direct harvest picked by the seeds of the solidarity and ethical behavior of the community.

The intertextual connection between the two layers of language demonstrates an immense semiotic construct between the divine order and the human agency. The stage of the infinite, macrocosmic, is furnished by the “Heavens and the Earth, and the stage of the microcosmic, human script by the Brotherhood of Believers. This study indicates that it is a moving visual meditation; according to this study, there should be the same Divine Law of the orbits of the

stars, that should govern the hearts and relations of the faithful. In the end, combining the immensity of the physical universe and the closeness of social morals the piece alters the sacred text into a framework that can be approached and where spiritual profundity and social accountability are demonstrated to be interwoven in the majestic structure of the creation.



Fig.06

5.2.3 Myth

In the mythological dimension of Sadequain's Kalma Tauheed, the artist reconfigures the sacred declaration into a sign of organic resistance and primordial energy, transcending traditional piety to create a new cultural "myth" of the Modern-Eastern man. According to Sadequain's own artistic philosophy—often termed his "cactus aesthetic"—the bold, jagged, and elongated strokes of the Kalma do not merely represent the word of God; they "naturalize" the myth of a faith that survives and thrives in the harsh, arid landscapes of human struggle. For Sadequain, the Kalma became a structural skeleton of the universe, where the myth of Tauheed (Divine Unity) is presented as an unbreakable, architectural truth that mirrors the resilience of the human spirit.

By treating the Arabic script as a living, sinewy form rather than a static religious artifact, Sadequain constructs a myth of "Spiritual Sovereignty" that is deeply rooted in the post-colonial identity of Pakistan. He often described himself not as a traditional calligrapher, but as a "laborer" (mazdoor) of art; thus, his rendering of the Kalma functions semiotically as the myth of the "Heroic Scribe." In this context, the painting suggests that the divine truth is only fully realized through the physical and intellectual struggle of the artist. Ultimately, Sadequain's Kalma Tauheed functions as a visual myth that bridges the gap between the infinite power of the Creator and the restless, creative agony of the modern individual, positioning the sacred text as a dynamic force for both spiritual and national liberation as in the Fig 08.

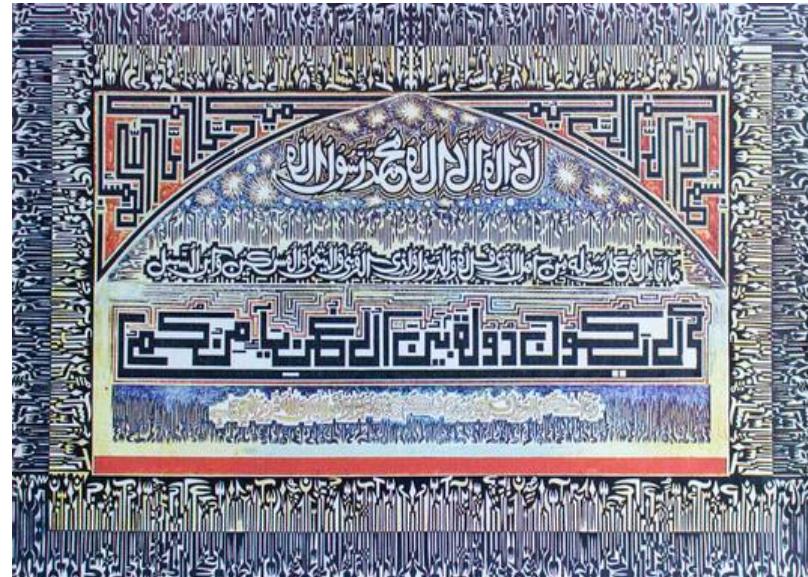


Fig.09

6. Findings and Discussion

As the multimodal and visual semiotic analysis of sacred calligraphy in the painting by Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi depicts, a transformation of the classic Quranic script into the active and living visual language is amazing. His work is the one that fuses both the Arabic spiritual tradition and modernists in a manner that is not only innovative but very deeply resonant. In all the works chosen, comprising of monumental murals, calligraphic panels and figurative abstractions, Sadequain always uses linguistic, visual and spatial elements together to give a layered meaning that transcends decoration. The themes, which are discussed in these works, include divine unity, human struggle and resilience, spiritual quests and reclaiming cultural identity in a postcolonial setting.

Results of In-Depth Analysis of Statistical Results.

In the historical monumental mural "The Evolution of Mankind" (Lahore Museum, circa 1973), Sadequain combines motifs of Quranic inspiration and calligraphy in an immense history of human evolution. Even the script itself resonates with verses about creation and human potential, relying on Surah Al-Baqarah and thematic echoes about Iqbal philosophy. The angular, thorn-like shapes and the earthly ochre-blue colors give the visual impression of perseverance in case of hardship. The large format of the mural, with sweeping lines of huge hands, symbolic instruments and interrelated figures, gives the impression of the interrelation between the earthly and the cosmic. The calligraphy used in this case symbolizes the power of the scripture and divine gift of humanity and combines the word and the form to express the way of enlightenment.

The calligraphic panels that are showcased in the month of Ramadan including verses of Surah Al-Rehman (1970s-1980s) are directed towards pure abstraction. In this case, the stylized letters are converted into flames, birds or waves which symbolize the divine mercy and creation. The use of vivid contrasts, flow distortions, and light colors creates the rhythmic repetition of blessings in the surah that begs the viewer to contemplate. The main melodies bring the spectator into a mystical state of unity with God. Sadequain folds the classical texts into novel shapes to make the third-person revelation come alive as an experience and a way of knowing the divine, which is a Sufi-inspired reinvention of scripture. The play of modes culminates in his figurative compositions of the 1960s in Paris, such as self-portraits and series of works applying Urdu poems to echoes of the Quran. Divine texts blend with long and muscular bodies of humans and spiraling spatial patterns. The script is a

direct depiction of literal but it represents the commitment of the artist to art and the existential hardships of humanity. Painful images like thorns imply pain and vibrant schemes imply exaltation. Such works are a consequence of a postcolonial hybridity in which Islamic signs enter into a dialogue with western modernist influences, such as cubism.

7. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi (1930-1987) has revolutionized the art of sacred calligraphy in his work to make verses of the Quran and traditional themes more living and dynamic as opposed to purely decorative. Through deft play of language, visual form and space and referring to social semiotics and visual theory, Sadequain produced practices that mediate the Islamic artistic tradition with the modernist novelty. His calligraphy is used to create a sense of cosmic order and collective spirituality in monumental murals like The Evolution of Mankind and the Frere Hall ceiling. In calligraphic panels of Ramadan, dedicated to Surah Al-Rehman, there are fluid distortions of script that express mystical energy and the mercy of God. In his figurative compositions in Paris in the 1960s, the struggle, the resilience, and existence are conveyed to the human bodies through the expression of the sacred letters. Through a broader range of 15-20 works, the repetitive motifs, including the use of thorn as an image of perseverance, the central compositional form with the focus on the divine unity, and the inventive distortions of the orthodoxy, we find a tendency that brings the sacred closer to people and allows it to transform them.

His innovations make Sadequain the center of the postcolonial rebirth of the Islamic calligraphy in South Asia and Pakistan. His work, Iftikhar Dadi says, is a decolonizing aesthetic, rediscovering Arabic and Urdu script in a global modernist discourse, and is exposed to cubist influences during his time in Paris. This hybrid rejuvenated calligraphy as a strong tool of expression and brought it out of the merely decorative or aniconic realm and created a distinctly South Asian visual language. His large-scale outdoor murals, frequently donated to organisations, are a sign of his commitment to art as social and spiritual education, glorifying human action, cultural identity and dissent against fixed rules.

Finally, the legacy of Sadequain is an ode to the strength of the ineffable expressed through visual signs. His combination of a holy text and human experience gave him works of art that are still rich and full of meaning to be interpreted. His paintings remain sources of interdisciplinary endeavor in the history of art, semiotics, theology, and postcolonial studies, demonstrating how the tradition may be used to generate creativity that is modern and modernist. Sadequain is a prophet in the modern changing visual society whose calligraphy brings the past and the present, the spiritual and the earthly together in search of something more profound. Future studies could talk about his poetry, his lesser known drawings or how he can be compared to other calligraphic abstractionists thus continue to shed more light on his enduring influence on the South Asian and Islamic visual arts.

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