

## **CUBISM IN PAKISTAN: “AN EVOLUTIONARY GLANCE”<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper reviews the cubist movement and its impact on the young artists in Pakistan. This practice-led research project investigates from an evolutionary perspective, how the Pakistani art scenario started to take a leap forward after the independence. Starting from Abdul Rahman Chughtai, Allah Bux and Sheikh Shujaullah's conventional style, the modernism of Shakir Ali was soon found dominating the art scene. No wonder Shakir Ali is regarded as the first daring artist, responsible for introducing cubism into Pakistan. This study thus proves that it was cubism, which proved a vital source of art propagation and acted as a pillar for initiating new trends in the art genre of Pakistan. In conclusion, cubism also served as a platform for those artists who were striving to get new vistas for self-expression.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a rapid series of artistic inventions in its first two decades which arose to mark a difference from the past: “The revolt against all form of naturalism was in full swing, new ideas and methods were put forward in painting, sculpture, architecture, in literature, music, philosophy and science as well and the radical inventions of these years underlie all later developments even today”<sup>2</sup>. These new artistic experimentations during 1905 to 1916 gave birth to several movements: the fauves, Die Bruke, Der blue Rieter, Futurism, Orphism, Suprematism, Constructivism, Votivism and Dadaism. These trends combined with the desire to break down preconceptions explored the expressive possibilities of material and techniques. One of the most influential movements in the history of art since the renaissance took place in the cubist movement. The advent of cubism marked a period of radical revolution in the arts, with a rapid spread of artistic innovations and a great diversification of styles and techniques<sup>3</sup>. Of all the revisions of pictorial language proposed in 20<sup>th</sup> century, cubism has been the most radical. Cubism was essentially an

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<sup>1</sup> The study covers the period of nearly 60 years of evolution of Cubist Art in Pakistan since the time of Independence of the country in 1947.

<sup>2</sup> Honour Hugh, *A World History Of Art* London, 1984, p.716.

<sup>3</sup> Marceau Jo, *Art a World History* London, 2002, p.580.

intellectualization by two painters, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, of certain practices that they noticed in the painting of Paul Cezanne<sup>4</sup>.

### The origin of Cubism

Paul Cezanne, French post impressionist painter was the originator of cubism as “the work of Cezanne led the way into the twentieth century and Matisse was not mistaken when, on the evening of Cezanne’s death in 1906, he saluted him, the great ancestor, “the father of us all”<sup>5</sup>. Cezanne’s theory to treat nature through the cylinder, the sphere and the cone provided strong support and a moving force to the great cubist painters such as Picasso and Braque and the other later associates. The very first phase of cubism (1910- 1912) is called Analytical Cubism. In the “analytical” phase of cubism, traditional subject matters are eliminated but still lifes, figures or landscapes are recorded by the process of faceting and turning about in space that the spectator observes the form at once from a multiple point of view without changing his own position before the canvas<sup>6</sup>. Analytical Cubism can be evidently seen in the portrait of *Ambroise Vollard* (Figure 1) and *Girl with mandolin* (Figure 2) by Pablo Picasso in which forms are abstracted by using an analytical approach to the object and painting through the basic geometric solid of the subject.



Figure 1: Ambroise Vollard by Picasso



Figure 2: Girl with mandolin by Picasso

The next distinct phase of cubism, which puts form back together and is bolder than the first, is called Synthetic Cubism. Synthetic Cubism, also known as Collage Cubism, is initiated by Picasso & Braque (actually it is not clear to whom the chief credit belongs) and we see its beginning in Picasso’s *Still life with chair caning* (Figure 3) of 1912 which

<sup>4</sup> Bowness Alan, *Modern European Art* London, 1972, p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Piot Christine, *The Ultimate Picasso* New York, 2002, p.126.

<sup>6</sup> Galloway John, *Origins of Modern Art* New York, 1965, p .20

includes oil cloth that imitates chair-caning pasted onto an oval canvas with text; and framed with a piece of actual rope.



Figure 3: Still life with chair caning by Picasso

The difference between the two phases of cubism may be defined in terms of picture space. Analytical Cubism retains a certain kind of depth so that the painted surface acts as a window through which we still perceive the remnants of the familiar perspective space of Renaissance. Though fragmented and refined, this space lies behind the picture plane and has no visible limits. Potentially it may even contain objects that are hidden from our view. In contrast, in Synthetic Cubism, the picture space lies in front of the plane<sup>7</sup>. Space is not created by an illusionistic device but by the overlapping of the pasted material.

All these were happening in the twentieth century and played a vital role to provide new directions and horizons for the coming artists to explore further and set new artistic trends in the history of art. Coming to the art scene in Pakistan prevailing after partition (when Pakistan became an independent state in 1947), Abdul Rahman Chughtai and Ustad Allah Bux's (Ustad means master) traditional style dominated the art arena. Chughtai was a romantic figure painter influenced mainly by Persian and Mughal miniatures (Figure 4). Chughtai was fully mature in his style and painted along romantic themes for his own pleasure. Allah Bux started his career as a carriage painter for Mughalpura Railway and as a scene painter for Agha Hasher Kashmiri's theatrical company. He also painted popular scenes from Hindu Mythology for his Hindu clients (Figure 5) and became famous by the name of Allah Bux Krishna (Krishna is one of Hindu gods). After independence in 1947, Allah Bux became a Punjab village painter, rather than 'Krishna painter' as he had no more hindu patrons. Sheikh Shujauallah painted in the traditional style of miniature paintings. All these senior and seminal artists (whom Pakistan inherited after independence in 1947) were representative of Pakistan's life in the past as well as its transition to the new era.

<sup>7</sup> Greens Joanne, *History Of Art* London, 1995, pp.770.772.



Figure 4: Painting by A. R Chughtai



Figure 5: Painting by Ustad Allah Bux

In the fifties a great change started to play on the art horizon and art in Pakistan took a great step forward from the orientalism of A.R Chughtai and Allah Bux towards the modernism. The next generation was looking forward to the modern tendencies of art rather than following in the footsteps of their elders to make art that represented their new nation. On this very stage of perplexity, Shakir Ali, a progressive artist, made a daring step forward by introducing modernism to the art of Pakistan in the shape of cubism. No doubt he is the ‘father of modernism and cubism’ in Pakistan. As a result, there were no pupils of traditional painters such as A.R Chughtai and Allah Bux to continue and preserve the traditional school of art. Another pioneer artist of the modern movement who preceded Shakir Ali’s appearance on the art scene was Zubaida Agha<sup>8</sup> but she was unable to create a profound influence that could yield a lasting inspiration to the young and progressive artists of Pakistan.

### Shakir Ali “Father of Cubism in Pakistan” (1916-1975)

Shakir Ali, born in Rampur India in 1916, did his masters at Jamsetjee Jeejebhoy (JJ) School of Arts Bombay and later gained further training in art at the Slade School of Art, London, and then in France and Prague. He was the first individual on the art with modern approach towards the esthetical values of his imageries and who had the most influence on the art movement of the fifties. Shakir Ali’s presence in Lahore acted as a moving force to the art society for his overpowering interest in the works of Cézanne and cubism, which he introduced in the 1950s. After his arrival in Pakistan in with an extensive education in art, he painted in the cubist style. His subjects were still lifes and other motifs ranging from boats, bulls and figures to the masks of tragedy and comedy<sup>9</sup>. His early work was executed in the manner of Braque. “He painted many Braque-like still lifes such as *Still life with*

<sup>8</sup> Hashmi Salima, *50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan* Lahore, 1997, p.20

<sup>9</sup> Sirhandi Marcella Nesom, *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan* Lahore, 1996, p.43.

*apple, Still life with bottle of Chianti, Still life with fruit.* The first was most characteristic of his style in which the apple was hardly noticeable while the picture was divided into many areas with straight lines and a few curves and each area differently coloured to make a puzzling pattern in which the big jug and the apple get lost<sup>10</sup>.

Another painting executed in cubist style is *Still life with scroll* (Figure 6), which has angularity of form. Shakir divides objects into geometrical shapes by using harsh, thick and crude emphatic black lines which shows primitivism. The divisions are according to the shape of the objects- broad curved and thick lines or scrolls create rhythmic and lyrical expressions in painting and help to move the eye in the picture. However such a picture is not much faceted like what we see in Picasso and Braque's analytical phase. Each divided area has a flat unsophisticated colour with heavy brush work which creates a textured surface. Another important element is that primary colours are applied in harsh manner.

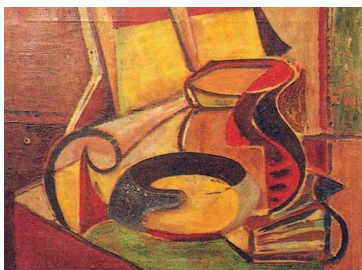


Figure 6: Still life with scroll by Shakir Ali

The colour red helps to move the eye from right to left and afterwards into the background and comes again on the objects, establishing a visual link that unifies the whole picture. Yellow is applied only in the central parts of the painting which controls and captures viewer's attention adroitly. Several eye levels are used in this painting, if we observe the eye level of the objects and the table on which the objects are placed, they do not fit together. The same idea was once adopted by the French Post-Impressionist painter, Paul Cezanne. Shakir Ali's imaginative distortionized patterns of space, the calculated juxtaposition of colour and audacious employment of textures, were a departure from the familiar and recognizable approach<sup>11</sup>. Shakir used rhythmic curved line and exiting colours which are compelling to the eye and intellect.

By the late fifties, Shakir began to move away from cubism and his paintings became more complex, stylized and bigger. From a European viewpoint, there was nothing new, original or noteworthy about these paintings, but for Pakistan he was the first painter with first-hand experience from abroad to paint in a 'modern' western manner.<sup>12</sup> Many young artists came under his influence and modern vision became the fashionable mode attempted

<sup>10</sup> Ali S. Amjad, *Painters Of Pakistan* Islamabad, 1995, p.47.

<sup>11</sup> Ali Wijdan, *Contemporary Art from The Islamic World* London, 1989, p.222.

<sup>12</sup> Sirhandi Marcella Nesom, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

by many of the artists. This new trend gave courage to the young artist to break away from the academic styles and to work with the modern idioms. Among the members of the Lahore art circle, there were Moen Najmi, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Ahmed Pervez, Sheikh Safdar, Qutub Sheikh, Raheel Akber Javed and Ali Imam who did not show much appreciation for the work of Abdul Rehman Chughtai and Ustad Allah Bux, as being old-fashioned and lagging behind the spirit of the times.<sup>13</sup> Dr Akbar Naqvi, an eminent writer and art critic, in his book, *Image and Identity*, gave them the title of Shakir Ali's Panj Piyare (meaning 'the five beloved ones' in Punjabi).

These young artists adopted contemporary styles that varied from Impressionism to Expressionism, Cubism, and Abstraction. Their early concerns were the landscapes - urban and rural scenes and portraiture, but Shakir Ali transferred their concerns towards abstraction. In *Contemporary Paintings in Pakistan*, Marcella Nesom writes "according to Ali Imam, Shakir not only influenced but also subtly guided painters like Shemza, Ahmed Pervez, Safdar, Moen Najmi, myself and many others by his views and philosophical discourses on modern art".

### **Moen Najmi (1928)**

Moen Najmi (1928) studied painting with well-known Russian Landscape artist S. Roerich at Sulalha Simla Hills, 1946-47, and was for many years organized art classes at the Punjab Arts Council. His early work was based on capturing landscapes and street scenes in naturalistic way but later he turned towards abstraction related to cubism. His painting *Mughal Garden* (Figure 7) is related to his latest style in which landscape and architectural features are used to create the cubist effect. Moen combined architectural structures with elements of landscape using angular divisions and geometrical shapes by extracting certain elements from particular scenes and rearranging them with other objects. But these elements are difficult to recognize and in this way Moen's work categorized in modern painters.

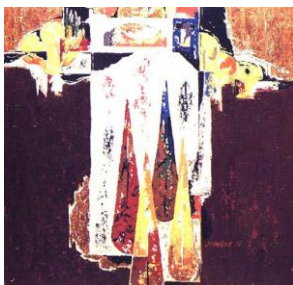


Figure 7: Mughal Garden by Moen Najmi



Figure 8: Lahore by Moen Najmi

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<sup>13</sup> Ali Wijdan, *op. cit.*, p. 222.





Figure 9: violin and Guitar by Picasso

With reference to Figure 7, the central part of this painting stands like column in which he has painted four Cypress trees, directly leading to the architectural like structure. Colours are roughly and unsophisticatedly applied which create a textured surface and lines are not sharp and clear as found in Shakir's paintings. In this painting, the architectural facade, walls and bushy trees are reminiscent of Shalimar Garden (Shalimar Garden was built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan) in Lahore.<sup>14</sup> There is another painting by Moen - *Lahore* (Figure 8) which appears stylistically similar to Picasso's *Violin and Guitar*. Both Moen's and Picasso's paintings have affinity in colours and the way they are dissected into geometric and angular forms. Both paintings are silhouette and static. Although in Moen's Paintings one can find a few stylized arch forms which are the prominent feature of old Lahore city's architecture.

Moen has tried to get rid of his early style and made an attempt to move forward to the cubist style. The shift from representational paintings to abstract designs, based on form patterns and texture was the result of the study of western cubism and his close companionship with Shakir Ali and Anwar Jalal Shemza. Shemza's early phase was also cubist like the others in the Lahore art group.

### **Anwar. Jalal. Shemza (1928 – 1985)**

Anwar Jalal Shemza was writer and artist. He received a diploma in fine arts in 1947 from the Mayo School of Arts, Lahore, and studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, London (1959–60). Although trained in traditional miniature techniques, calligraphy and formal tessellated pattern making, in his early work he propagated a modernist, iconoclastic approach to painting, creating cubistic cityscapes and still-lives in oil on canvas<sup>15</sup>. He began by painting village women entitled *Jatti* whose forms were made up of triangles and other geometrical shapes and whose faces were distorted in cubist manner in an effort to combine the profile and front view. It was painted in bright yellow ochre and burnt sienna<sup>16</sup>. Coming

<sup>14</sup> Sirhandi Marcella Nesom, *op. cit.*, p.47.

<sup>15</sup> [ <http://www.artfact.com/artist/shemza-anwar-jalal-ba9oolgff7>]

<sup>16</sup> Ali S. Amjad, *op.cit.*, pp. 42. 148.

from a family of carpet traders, he was interested in traditional patterns and designs. His early work revealed a natural flair for ornamentation. At this stage the influence of Synthetic Cubism is obvious. Analytical cubism did not suit this purpose: it was not only too esoteric but it also greatly curbed his stylistic freedom and expression. Synthetic Cubism provided him with a relatively free field to express and invent<sup>17</sup>. Later he changed his style, influenced by Paul Klee and Arabic Persian calligraphy, he evolved a personal style with rhythmic lines, to create esthetically satisfying patterns.

### Ahmad Pervez (1926-1979)

Pervez was one of the remarkable, emotional, and passionate artist who received such widespread acclaim abroad in England. Pervez used straight curved arcs and ellipses abundantly. In certain moods, these curves turn into a series of angular lines in a rugged manner under cubist influence<sup>18</sup>. Figure of *Eve* (Figure 10) is rendered in very much style of Matisse's figure in his painting *Decorative figure against ornamental background*. In this painting, Pervez used some motifs which work as symbols reflecting the main theme of the picture: The lady stands isolated from nature and her life seems to be like a running stone, just like a speck of cloud moving in the vast sky in its isolated state. There is a tree immediately behind the figure representing some sort of fruit and it may be that this *Eve* is longing for fertility and she has come down here in this barren landscape with a blossom tree hoping that her barrenness may be redeemed by her fervent prayer under this tree of fertility. A dark outline is used but not very thick. The leaves and background of the painting are treated in cubist manner - having triangular and cubical forms of primitiveness and crudeness.

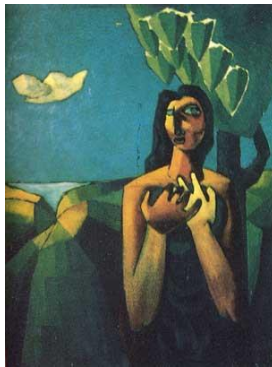


Figure 10: Eve by Ahmad Pervez

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<sup>17</sup> Hassan Ijaz Ul, *Painting in Pakistan* Lahore, 1996, p.68.

<sup>18</sup> Ali S. Amjad, *op.cit.*,p.135.



“His female forms were probably influenced by the erotic pen drawings of Picasso’s nymphs and other nude studies of Picasso’s classical period; it was mainly through the influence of Picasso that he later tried to emulate cubist paintings and he was particularly delighted by the still lifes and collages of Picasso and Braque”<sup>19</sup>. His many still lifes of those days are in the manner of Braque. Thus in the same picture the object would be shown as if seen from many angles. The body of the vase is drawn as if seen at the eye level while the mouth is seen from higher up, and the outline too would be distorted as if under tremendous pressure<sup>20</sup>. His companionship with Shakir Ali and scrupulous study of Picasso made him a cubist painter. Later he gave up still life painting in the style of Braque and Picasso and his work became non figurative, stylized, full of curves and angularities which shows primitivism and his passionate and emotional temperament.

### Sheikh Safdar (1924-1983)

Another self-taught artist among the Lahore art circle during the fifties was Sheikh Safdar who was one of those who rejuvenated the post-Partition modern art. Safdar’s painting of ‘Mother and child’ was ornamental and carried liberal signs of modern art, Safdar was greatly influenced by Shakir Ali’s work; for instance, a painting done by him in the fifties “*Untitled*” (Fig 11) shows Shakir Ali’s pervasive influence. He applied sharp dark outlines with an earthy colour scheme and roughly applied colours that create texture divisions of forms, all reminiscent of Shakir’s influence.

A much later painting *Untitled* (Fig 12) which is displayed in the Lahore museum has cubist structures in which Safdar divided the whole area of painting with rectangles, squares and some circular shapes and the divisions carry a heavy thick black outline. On the very right side he painted a maiden holding a water pitcher, which demonstrates a native aspect while focusing on modern style of painting. Overall the rectangular patterns suggest a cubist rendering. Values of blue and green dominate the whole picture. Here the linear pattern of this painting - the dark outline resembles to the linear pattern of Piet Mondrian’s *Tableau No 1*. Both paintings have horizontal, vertical patterns and the composition of these paintings is faded from the corners thus it seems to grow outward from the centre. S. Safdar has combined the cubist approach with the abstract style of Piet Mondrian.



Figure 11: *Untitled* by S.Safdar



Figure 12: *Untitled* by S.Safdar

<sup>19</sup> Hassan Ijaz Ul, *op. cit.*, p.69.

<sup>20</sup> Ali S. Amjad, *op. cit.*, p.135.

### Syed Ali Imam (1924-2002)

Ali Imam, a great art promoter, is another artist of the first generation of Pakistani artists. Imam's romantic landscapes underwent a change when Shakir Ali introduced him to cubism and Cezanne. In his painting (Figure 13), the influence of Paul Cezanne can be seen very clearly the way he has managed the brush strokes. There are no prominent lines and divisions are made but in rendering of brush strokes the cubical manner is evident. This painting appears stylistically similar to one of Paul Cezanne's painting "*Sainte Victoire Mountain*" (Figure 14) in terms of brush strokes.



Figure 13: painting b Ali Imam



Figure 14: Sainte Victoire Mountain by Cezanne

He painted still lifes and other motifs in flat cubist manner with muted colours, emphasizing pigment textures. From heavily outlined landscapes and his cubist-structure still lifes, Ali Imam evolved a unique personal style.<sup>21</sup> In an art exhibition in 1959 an art critic G.M. Butcher, who wrote of Imam's work, said the following, "...he inverts the principle of Cubism and emerges with a decorative system or reference to natural objects." Stephen Bone of the Manchester Guardian wrote: "Ali Imam paints with strong black outlines or with carefully defined silhouettes piling up simplified buildings into bright coloured compositions or carefully designing some small groups of figures. He seems almost to design as if for some heavy sort of weaving or appliqué embroidery, or perhaps stained-glass or earthenware tiles. At his best he is a serious and convincing artist"<sup>22</sup>.

### The East Pakistani painters: Zainul Abedien, Murtaza Bashir, and Abdul Basit

Now I would discuss the East Pakistani (now Bangladesh) painters who played an important role in the art prospect in Pakistan: Zainul Abedien, Murtaza Bashir, and Abdul Basit.

<sup>21</sup> Sirhandi Marcella Nesom, *op. cit.*, p.69.

<sup>22</sup> [[http://www.pakistanartreview.net/9th\\_Issue/9th\\_Page\\_2.html#2](http://www.pakistanartreview.net/9th_Issue/9th_Page_2.html#2)]

### Zainul Abedien (1914 –1976)

Zainul Abedien is called East Pakistan's 'Father of Modern Art'. He painted and drew caricatures of famine sketches, having exaggeration and stylization of the figure in the folk style to create a rhythm not only in the outline but also in the painted areas. Apart from his later style, Zainul developed cubist paintings during the early fifties based on Bengal's folk art. A painting belongs to this phase is *Poise* (Figure 15) in which he analyzed and simplified the observed reality into geometric shapes. Black outline works to separate the areas from each other; textural shading is somehow created by brush work, showing a woman in her Bengali dress in a standing position.



Figure 15: Poise by Zainul Abedien

Zainul has applied the principle of weight shift (in which the weight of the body rests on one leg) which was practiced copiously by the artists and sculptors of Renaissance and was introduced by the sculptors of Greek civilization much earlier. The colours, red and black, are used lavishly and he frequently applied angular and curvature lines as observed by him in East Pakistan Bengal where small boats with their mast glide on the surface of the rippling water in abundance. Obviously these forms and shapes are in the mind of Zainul Abedien so much that unconsciously all these referred shapes appear in *Poise*. If for a moment the figure of the lady is eliminated, it would look like a sailing boat with a red mast mixed with black.

### Murtaza Bashir (1932)

East Pakistani artist who came on the art scene and participated regularly in West Pakistan's exhibitions was Murtaza Bashir. His painting *Girl with a book* (Figure 16), executed in the cubist approach shows a girl in a resting position reading a book. Not the whole area of the painting but only the girl's dress is divided in angular forms according to the structure of the body. These geometrical divisions are separated by the black outline which is not very thick

as we see in Shakir Ali's work. Values of green are repeated throughout her clothes. The girl shows her wholehearted interest in reading the book moreover the painting is flat and two dimensional, having exaggeration and stylization of forms demonstrates Murtaza's early attachment to cubism.



Figure 16: Girl with a book by Murtaza Bashir

### **Abdul Basit (1935)**

Abdul Basit another East Pakistani falls in the category of cubists, as his 1963 painting *Untitled* (Figure 17) walks strongly on the cubist road as geometrical shapes, stylization, exaggeration and distortion are found in this painting. Abdul Basit used earthy colours whereas the line is subdued. The figure is in a reclining position and composition is faded from the corners. He rendered this topic of child and bird in the cubist manner with broken colour techniques where the ultimate desire is to create patterns.



Figure 17: Untitled by Abdul Basit

### **Mansoor Rahi (1939)**

A leading abstractionist painter who belongs to East Pakistan but started cubism in Karachi and continued to live in Pakistan is Mansur Rahi. His early work was based on water colour paintings in a light impressionistic style. Mansoor Rahi moved towards cubism as he was attracted by the earlier works of Picasso and Braque's analytical cubism. Rahi categorized his own development into periods: Academic Realism (1957), Cubical Analytical Fractionism (1968), Organical Mysticism (1973), Rayonistic Cubical Formalism (1979),

Neo-Precisionism (1990), Synthetic Cubism and Neo Social Realism.<sup>23</sup> His painting *The Thinker* (Figure 18) belongs to his analytical phase of cubism in which he painted a male figure having geometrical divisions with anatomical accuracy but the lines of each area are emphasized geometrically and not realistically. His lines show his full command of the human anatomy. The thick black emphasized lines with textured shading draw Man's figure and the background at the same time. His sitting posture and placement of hands show him in deep thought. The hands are emphasized by light as compared to the whole body. The background is darker which makes the figure more prominent. Carefully composed geometric shapes and overlapping planes unite the foreground and background. A monochromatic application of colour is found and one can feel the weight of the solid form of the body and its anatomical accuracy.



Figure 18: The Thinker by Mansoor Rahi



Figure 19: Resurrect Rock series by Mansoor Rahi

*Revolution* is another painting of his, executed in the cubist manner, with strong awareness of the structure and emphasis on the body form. Hands and feet are outsized both in *Thinker* and *Revolution*. The most noteworthy achievement of this phase is the work entitled *Peace* dated 1969. It shows a man with a child and the figures have been subjected to analysis and the limbs reduced to geometrical shapes bounded by straight lines or curves. The background is treated in the manner of Synthetic Cubism, in which flat areas, as if cut out of paper are placed alongside or overlapping each other. A thick line is used to emphasize the basic sweep and thirst of design and particularly the rhythmic element which

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p. 69.

is also important in Rahi's work<sup>24</sup>. "Rahi is a socially conscious artist and his later works became a blend of many techniques and resulted in constructivism<sup>25</sup>". Marjorie Husain, a famous writer and art critic wrote about Rahi's work; "His 'Resurrect Rock' (Fig 19) series portrays his endeavour to portray the softness of the human form while maintaining the sculptural quality of the rocks. Although the void is empty without texture or value, the field direction of the line from the structure towards the void area integrates active and negative areas, a technique, Rahi explains, that Shakir Ali employed successfully. Rahi's work holds a strong cubist character and individuality and shows a strong affinity to the work of Picasso and Baraque"<sup>26</sup>.

### Rommana Said (1935)

One of the pioneers of abstract art in Karachi during the sixties is Rommana Said. Rommana painted the dilapidated remains of Thatta, a historical town, a few miles from Karachi. In her painting *Thatta* (Figure 20), squares and rectangles in a wide range of bright colours are juxtaposed to create the impression of attached dwellings while dabs of darker colours suggest windows and doors<sup>27</sup>. The colour blue of the same intensity is used in the background and foreground as well; there is no line to separate the rectangles from each other as this relates to the semi cubist style. We can find cubical divisions but not as bold as Picasso, Shakir and Rahi's work.



Figure 20: Thatta by Rommana Said

### Colin David (1937-2008)

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<sup>24</sup> Ali S Amjad, *op.cit.*, p.124.

<sup>25</sup> Ali S Amjad, *Mansur Rahi* Islamabad, 1985.

<sup>26</sup> [<http://archives.dawn.com/weekly/gallery/archive/020105/gallery4.htm>]

<sup>27</sup> Sirhandi Marcella Nesom, *op. cit.*, p.67.

A top ranking and one of the finest artists to graduate from the Department of Fine Arts, Punjab University, and who belonged to the Lahore art circle during the sixties and who later developed his own personal style based on Neo Realism is Colin David. Colin's early phase was also cubist. In one of his paintings *Cubist Landscape* (Figure 21), he painted a scene from old Lahore showing the arches of a house or *Havaily* from the front view. The picture is not much faceted but is divided into large rectangles and squares. The line is subdued but as far as the colours are concerned, they are local, naturalistic and unsophisticatedly applied whereas the treatment is cubist.



Figure 21: Cubist Landscape by Colin David

Two tree trunks appear right from the foreground having no divisions but the branches afterwards turn to create rectangles and squares. A kite is shown between the branches of these trees, reflecting the *Basant Festival* which is specially associated with Lahore. In this composition, vertical and horizontal lines have been most sensitively and effectively woven together. A rhythmic movement has been achieved in the painting from one side to the other through interconnecting lines in the cubical way.

### **Raheel Akbar Javed (1939-1985)**

Rheel Akbar Javed who started painting in the early fifties was heavily influenced by Shakir Ali, Moen Najmi and Zainul Abedein<sup>28</sup>, Raheel experienced a cubist style similar to that of Rommana. His paintings during the seventies - *The Streets of Lahore, Sleep Walker's Street, Night and the City and Anarkali*- are examples of his work done in semi cubist style. In *Anarkali*, Raheel (Figure 22) painted street of old Lahore which is known as *Anarkali* (Anarkali name was given to one of the favourite dancing girl of Mughal Emporer Akber during his time) by using patches of colours to suggest rectangles and squares which are then separated by black outlines, shows Shakir Ali's influence. His other paintings (Figure 23) are deprived of this very outline. Brush strokes are used lavishly with a cubist effect, similar to that of Cezanne and Rommana's style.

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 90.





Figure 22: Anarkali by Raheel Akber Javed



Figure 23: Painting by Raheel Akber Javed

### **Ozzir Zuby (1922)**

Ozzir Zuby who was mainly a sculptor in 1944 graduated from the Mayo School of Art and went in 1950 to Italy for higher education. In 1953 he settled in Karachi. Cubism can be found in Zuby's paintings which he created during the eighties, namely, the folk tales of the four provinces and the family groups of the four provinces. In the folk tales, "he depicted *Sassi Punnu* for Sindh, *Sohni Mahiwal* for Punjab, *Adam Khan* for the frontier and *Shah Murad and Hani* for Balochistan"<sup>29</sup>. In these paintings the approach is highly stylized whereas the canvas is divided into geometric forms and big curves. Handling is very much like that of Murtaza Bashir's *Girl with a book*. Each area is flatly painted and each painting has two figures in it. Figures wear their regional dresses and there is no outline in these paintings. The divisions are emphasized through light and dark areas to clarify the design. Everything moves under the law of harmony, balance and proportions.

### **Maqsood Ali (1936-2008)**

A leading abstract painter Maqsood Ali was a great admirer of Shakir ali which led him to the way of cubism. Sindhi handicrafts fascinated Maqsood enormously and he painted many paintings of Sindh (province of Pakistan) in a realistic way before moving to the realms of cubist abstraction. Maqsood's painting *Sindh Village Scene*, painted in semi abstract style, depicts the cubist handling of forms. Patches of various colours are applied in the cubist manner showing a Sindhi woman carrying her son and a pitcher of water on her head, but not with harshly applied lines as we see in Safdar's work. The painting reflects his personal style and still retains the link to the local environment.

His later painting *Still life with vase and flowers* retains the patterns of squares that characterized his previous work but introduces tangible objects. Maqsood used chequer patterns to show simple division of areas and varied colouring of the different squares to build up an attractive design with violent force. He also painted vase and flowers by using sensitive geometrical patterns like four squares around a central square to make a flower.

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<sup>29</sup> Ali S Amjad, *op.cit.*, p.204.

This painting (Figure 24) has excessive divisions of squares which are more like delicate geometric patterns. In these paintings Maqsood not only experienced cubism but also glorified Sindhi culture. With checkered board patterns of embroidery on Sindhi women's dresses, Maqsood developed Cubist compositions therefore he is known as "checkered master".



Figure 24: Still life by Maqsood Ali

### Jamil Naqsh (1938)

Jamil Naqsh artist from Karachi is obsessed by the subject of "women and pigeon" and painting erotic female nudes. According to Akbar Naqvi he is "Painter of nudes"<sup>30</sup>. His source of inspiration is certainly coming from Picasso; and another great French neo-classicist painter Jean-Dominique Ingres.

He loves to paint the pigeons, or of women and pigeons combined. The "Picasso pigeons" (Figure 25) shows his fondness toward Picasso and cubism which is evident the way he has drawn the pigeons, is stylistically cubist. These pigeons have a deep personal meaning for him. As a child, he saw them flying in and out of the courtyard of the family house. In personal terms, they offer a nostalgic glance backwards – a glimpse of the familiar, the domestic, the soothing of the pleasures of traditional family life, snatched away from him by the trauma of his mother's early death, followed by the violence of partition.



Figure 25: Picasso Pigeons

<sup>30</sup> [<http://jamilnaqsh.co.uk/akbar-naqvi>]



Figure 26: Portrait with pigeon



Figure 27: Figure with pigeon

One can see the cubical structure in Jamil's paintings above that show influence from Picasso's work. By painting "Picasso Pigeon" he is paying homage to Picasso. Strong affinity with Picasso and cubism can be seen in his painting "Portrait with pigeon" (Figure 26) and "figure with pigeon" (Figure 27). "Portrait with pigeon" is very much similar in execution to Picasso's "Head of a woman". His paintings reflect an earthy colour scheme having an emphatic outline, forming cubes all over the painting with a feeling of texture and totality.

### Tariq Javed (1952)

A well renowned senior artist Tariq Javed is another abstract belongs to Karachi and a painter, sculptor and ceramist as well. For many years his art was dominated by the influence of his teacher Mansur Rahi. He did not bind himself into a particular style. As a result, through the last three decades he has explored a wide field of art, from realistic to semi-abstract and abstract. He has painted the subject of "Rajhistani women" (Figure 28) quite frequently. Two women are dressed up in Rajhistani attire and are busy in conversation which is evident through their gestures. The bangles in the whole arms and the way they have covered their faces with *Dupatta* (Shawl) show the tradition of that region. His cubist approach with the juxtaposition of colours gives the viewer an aesthetic appeal. Tariq's female figures carry femininity in them whereas this element is missing in Jamil Naqsh's female as they give a bit rigid feel.

In his *Landscape with Kites* (Figure 29), Tariq created a cluster of small and large rectangles and triangles like Rahi. Houses are defined by the cubist division of forms and these divisions are dynamic and full of movement. Each area is differently coloured and the colours are naturalistic but the treatment is cubist and there is no outline.



Figure 28: Rajhistani women

Figure 29: Landscape with kites



Figure 30: Calligraphy

His painting *Semi abstract painting suggesting village scene* is executed in the same manner. He introduced houses and people and glimpses of their activities into his paintings. For instance, compositions of gypsies - their houses or huts are painted by the cubical division, women are busy in their activities, and two ladies are carrying pitchers on their heads. “He introduced frankly figurative elements - village women in rustic finery engaged in daily chores but looking like the cast of a ballet. Only the faces and arms were clearly painted and the rest are rendered in free brush work and many ambiguous abstract forms”.<sup>31</sup> Cubical divisions can be noticed in his calligraphic work (Figure 30) as Tariq likes complexity of divisions and manages it well. He is well known in the Karachi art circle and is one of the most promising painters in Pakistan.

### Mashkoor Raza (1950)

Mashkoor Raza an inexhaustible and creative artist from Karachi also belongs to cubism school of thought. This world renowned artist likes to paint the subject of horses and women. Mashkoor is well-known Figurative, Abstract, and Calligraphy painter. He is master in creating transparency with basic forms of square, circle and triangles on his canvases, merging along abstract images of woman and horse. He conveys his messages, concepts by showing versatility of treating his theme, paints, and comprise according to his inner vision<sup>32</sup>.



Figure 31: Nude with Horse by Mashkoor Raza



Figure 32: Untitled by Mashkoor Raza

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p.155.

<sup>32</sup> [<http://artocraft.blogspot.com/2010/09/mashkoor-raza-karachi-pakistans-famous.html>]

The above shown paintings give an idea about his rich palette and dynamic composition in cubist style. All his paintings have an outline which becomes prominent in the focal point and remains fade in rest of the composition. By using diagonal lines in his manifestation and juxtaposition of colours and contrast Mashkooor achieves totality and tremendous aesthetic appeal. Such an intellect is successful to capture the soul and inner visualization of the viewers. Despite his applying exaggeration and distortion in the paintings, one can still perceive his power to draw human figures and horses as well. He is a magnificent cubist painter and has gained international fame.

## **Conclusion**

The fifties was a rich decade as far as cubism is concerned, as most of the cubist and semi cubist styles evolved on the art scene of Lahore and then Karachi. Lahore and Karachi have always been a centre of art and culture. Shakir Ali came first in Lahore and became the principal of Mayo School of art (now National College of Arts). He was not only influential artist but also the enlightened avant-garde in the art of Pakistan who strongly motivated the young generation of that time. Anwar Jalal Shamza, Moeen Najmi, Sheikh Safdar, Ahmad Pervez, Ali Imam, and Raheel Akbar Javed were among those who followed this terrain of cubist style and cubism became an initial phase for many of these artists. Later Shamza, Ahmad Pervez and Ali Imam they moved on to other styles<sup>33</sup>.

The cubist paintings discussed in this paper may have derived ideas from the western artists but the Pakistani painters have made their style by incorporating native and personal elements and created something that is authentic, noteworthy and admirable. Moeen Najmi and Raheel Akbar Javed painted old architecture of Lahore whereas Romanna painted historical town "Thatta". Ali Imam painted few still lifes in cubist mode. In comparison, Colin and Ozzir Zubby produced few cubist paintings in their careers. Later Colin started producing figurative work, mainly nude painting and Ozir Zubby became interested in sculpture.

Among East Pakistani painters Zainul Abedien, Abdul Basit and Murtaza Bashir they moved to Bangladesh (East Pakistan, now Bangladesh). Mansoor Rahi is the only East Pakistani painter who remained in Pakistan and is devotedly working in cubism. In Quetta, Peshawar, Hyderabad, art activity started in the seventies. No cubist painter were found during fifties to nineties in these regions.

Maqsood Ali's, rigorous checkered derived from "Sindhi" culture on the other hand showed his unique style and his love and closeness to his soil. Jamil Naqsh, Tariq Javed and Mashkooor Raza are still practicing in cubist approach. The indigenous element we find in Tariq Javed, paintings of Rajhistani women with incorporation of cubist style which shows his love to his homeland. Jamil Naqsh paints women with pigeon and pigeon has a deep nostalgic meaning for him. All these artists are world acclaimed for their individuality of work.

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The typical cubism which was done by Picasso and Baraque could not hold for very long among the artists in Pakistan. As time passed, the sensibility and intellectual necessity of the artist to have something more in their work than just repeating the cubism of these masters grew. The style of cubism, which was introduced in Pakistan by Shakir Ali, clearly has laid the required initial foundations for avant-garde in the country. However as each artist has a natural flair of pursuing his own intellectual and philosophical directions, the modern-day art has gone beyond Shakir Ali and has created its own identity which is attracting art lovers and connoisseurs the world over.

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