

## Calligraphy as a Spiritual Experience Beyond the Script

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### Abstract

Calligraphy is a beautiful and expressive form of language for conveying tangible and intangible messages in various scripts. Other than its perceptible form and communicational message, it has the potential to be unveiled in various contexts such as the glorification of sacred language for valuing its status as an esthetic form or a mystic experience attaining spirituality through repetition of verbal invocation, and meditative marks. Applying a descriptive research method, this study will be explaining a brief history of the emergence of calligraphy in South Asia and its functional usage. Furthermore, the practice lead essay shall unveil the journey of learning traditional calligraphy into thematic commercial, lastly its transformation into an intellectual and spiritual experience and its concealed meanings and impacts on researcher. The descriptive visual essay presents an interesting practice-led experiential disclosure and reflection of its transformations for the lover of calligraphy and textual art through sensory and kinesthetic experience.

**Keywords:** Calligraphy; Calligram; Transformation; Spiritual; Mystical; Reflection; Sensory; Kinesthetic

### Introduction

#### Evolution of Script

It has been one of the vital needs to be expressive as humans from the ancient era till the present time. The Prehistoric era (300,000 years) provides images drawn by cavemen on the walls of caves in Europe and Asia. The stick images were drawn as a ritual to communicate human needs to their gods. Later on, as the humans of the ancient era civilized themselves, they invented language and ways of communication. Old civilizations like Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, and the Indus valley invented their writing system. The first writing system called cuneiform script is found to be invented by Mesopotamia in the 8<sup>th</sup> millennium BC counting system using clay tokens (Fig. I) multiple Until the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, it was used for accounting, and after that Sumerians, apprehension for afterlife provided foundations for the usage of literature through writing for funerary inscription shapes. <sup>1</sup>

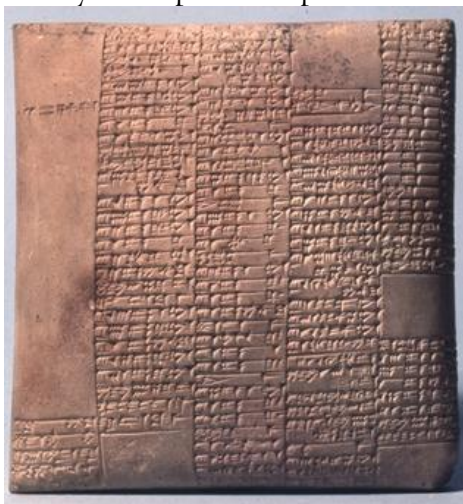


Figure I.

Clayton Ewan, *4,000-year-old tablet recording workers' wages*.  
*A History of Writing*, Photograph. British Library. (No Date).

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<https://www.bl.uk/history-of-writing/articles/where-did-writing-begin>

Egyptian writing started in 3200 BC. The art of writing consisted of iconographic images that were derived from the objects of daily use, humans, and flora and fauna which existed in Egyptian surroundings. The pictorial writing was named as term 'hieroglyphics' which was a simplified form of the

objects.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Chinese writing dates back to 1600-1046 BCE in Shang Dynasty and it originated from sketches of objects which recalled pictographs or logographs.<sup>3</sup> World History Encyclopedia describes the analysis of Scholar Patricia Buckley Ebrey as:

Exactly when writing was first used in China is not known since most writing would have been done on perishable materials like wood, bamboo, or silk. Symbols or emblems inscribed on late Neolithic pots may be early forms of Chinese graphs. Early Shang bronzes sometimes have similar symbols cast into them. From these divinatory inscriptions (fig.2.), there can be no doubt that the Shang used a language directly ancestral to modern Chinese and used a written script that evolved into the standard Chinese logographic writing system still in use today.<sup>4</sup>





























| Picture   | Evolution   | Modern character  | English   |          |
|---|---|---|---|----------|
|    | →    | →    | →    | sun      |
|    | →    | →    | →    | moon     |
|    | →    | →    | →    | tree     |
|    | →    | →    | →    | mountain |
|   | →   | →   | →   | water    |
|  | →  | →  | →  | field    |
|  | →  | →  | →  | door     |

Figure.2.

Li Wendan, *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy*,  
University of Hawaii Press Honolulu p 76, Illustration. (2009).

On the side of the South Asian region, the Harrapan script belongs to the Indus valley civilization. After a recent analysis of scholars, the sign language on the inscriptions was found to be Dravidian in past and presently close to the Brahui language in Western Pakistan, an area close to Harappan culture in Pakistan. The script comprises 2,000 old short inscriptions ranging from single to 20 characters which are compounds of two or more other signs. Other than these scripts, if we see the origin of the Arabic language, it is reported by the Thames in an article entitled, "The Phoenician Alphabet &

Language” that in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE Phoenician alphabets were adopted by Aramaeans and these were eventually turned into modern Arabic.<sup>5</sup>

### **Research Methodology and Objective**

The articles applied the descriptive research method and cited the best possible references for the study. As the purpose of the article is to focus on Arabic calligraphy; therefore, the researcher is intending to cover the possible relevant topics regarding Islamic calligraphy. The evolution of Western script which originated from Phoenician (Greek Alphabet, Britannica) is not the focus of this article. The objective of the article is to document the evolution and conversion of the original calligraphy scripts into diverse forms and styles. Although calligraphy scripts and their components were modified into various experimental forms by renowned and acknowledged calligraphers of the world who started learning from traditional conventional learning and later after having command of these scripts, they explored it as more than calligraphy or beyond calligraphy. It was not possible to document all the artists in this short essay, yet I covered three famous calligraphic artists of my inspiration like Nia Mahdaoui, Hassan Massoudy, and Haji Noor Deen. I find similarities of dimension, mediums, forms, and style and final artworks of mine with them but I did not make any comparative analysis of my work with theirs which is not the objective of the article because of the maintenance of individuality and significance of artists’ recognition.

### **Literature Review**

The significant literature was ‘The Phoenician Alphabet & Language’ by Thamis (2012) in World History Encyclopedia’. It described the evolution of writing in human history. The evolution of words in Islamic civilization is described in ‘The Written Word in Islamic’ by Weitzel, C. (2008). Through the study of ‘The Iconicity of Islamic Calligraphy in Turkey’ by Cemil, S. I. (2008), one can understand the use of iconography and the transformation of calligraphy into a calligram. For digging deep into calligraphy, the profound mystic elements were elaborated into two precious articles entitled ‘Islamic Calligraphy and Visions’ and ‘Figural representation in the Arabic calligraphy’ written by Teparić, M. Several websites helped to complete the article with relevant examples. The main focus of the article is to describe and relate personal work and its development, with conventional styles.

### **Calligraphic Modification**

After Latin script, the most widely used language is Arabic which was used for revelation on Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Although the Arabic language was used by natives of Arabia before revelation as it became the source of revelation, its importance increased much. There were many styles and origins of calligraphy before the advent of Islam which were either derivations, borrowed forms, or influencing each other. The Arabian natives were aware and admirers of literature and especially poetry. Poetry was appreciated as the beauty of knowledge and used to express their feelings in their routine life. They were experts in grammar and style of language. Arabic alphabets originated from Aramaic script and Nabataean from the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>6</sup> Even the styles were labeled by the name of the originated place and civilization these emerged from. It is mentioned as:

Before the invention of the “Kufi” script, the Arabs had several other scripts whose names derived from the place of origin, such as “Macci” common in Mecca, “Hiri” in Hira, or “Madani” in Madina. Tumari was another script, which was formulated by the direct order of Muavieh and became the royal script of the Ummayyad dynasty. Kufi was invented in the city of Kufa in Persia in the second decade of Islamic reign, taking its name from its city of origin.<sup>7</sup>

As Islam arrived through revelation, Muhammad (PBUP) appointed his trustworthy companions to write and record the words of revelation in Kufic, Makkan, Naskhi and Maail writing styles. It is stated in a research article entitled “The Master Calligrapher: Ibn Muqlah” that the first authentically sacred style of calligraphy was invented by Muhammad’s son-in-law ‘Ali (RA). Another significant calligrapher Ibn-e-Muqla (272. A.H – 328 A.H.) invented and formatted six styles of calligraphy called *al qalam al-sitta* which are Thuluth, Naskh, Rihan, Muhaqqaq, Rauqi explicated by Ibn-Muqlah. He set the principles for the right proportional balance of each letter for practicing and perfection. He introduced alif as the basic unit of the diameter of the circle and documented broadly the art of calligraphy and articulated theories of letter shapes.<sup>8</sup> Later on, many types of each style of the Arabic scripts developed that added quintessential Islamic and Iconic esthetics to the following scripts.

### Iconographic Calligraphy/ Calligrams

Other than evolving Islamic script into various esthetic developments, it was modified into calligraphic iconography. The practice of this esthetic conversion of calligraphy to image display ranges from animals like lions, camels, birds, and even human beings and parts of the body (fig.2).<sup>9</sup>



Figure. 2.

Schick Irvin Cemil, *Calligram Hand*,

*The Iconicity of Islamic Calligraphy in Turkey*, Illustration, 2008.

Res: *Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 53-54, 211–224. Retrieved from <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/RESvnIms256088I>

8.

Assessed on 17-10-2021.

Irvin Cemil Schick describes in a chapter “The Content of Form: Islamic Calligraphy between Text and Representation” that During the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century in Khorasan and Mesopotamia, the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic inscriptions became a trend. He quoted as saying of Richard Ettinghausen as, “rather remarkable phenomenon . . . seems to stem mainly from two converging impulses: the general tendency to elaborate the letters, and the tendency between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries to develop floral and another ornament into birds, animals, or human beings.” The iconic style of calligraphy was named as *Waqwag* by the famous art critic Barbra Brend. In

the second category, the entire animal figure (fig. 3) was composed whereas in the third was the animal fill in the spaces between individual letters.<sup>10</sup>

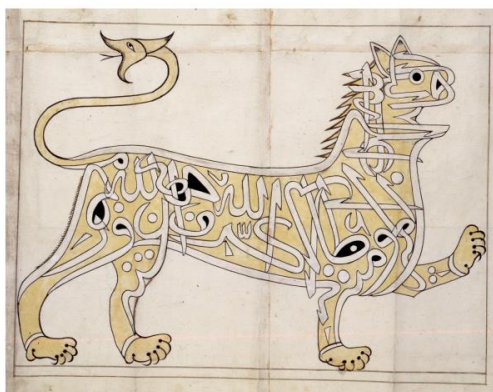


Figure. 3.

Freeman, Jennifer Awes, *Calligram Sign and Design: Script as Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective (300–1600ce)*, Illustration, Edited by Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak and Jeffrey F. HaSmburger. Dumbarton Oaks Symposia and Colloquia. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016. Church History. 86. 839-841.

Other than these, the merge of picture and image types called *Gulzār* style (fig.4) popular in nineteenth-century Iran, in which the outlines of letters are filled in with pictures. This can also be related to inscriptions in the *ghubarī* (dust) script (fig.5), in which the outlines of letters or pictures are filled in with microcalligraphy.<sup>11</sup>



Figure. 4.

Figure. 4. Ali Taqi, a-h b. *A Panel of Gulzar Calligraphy: the words 'Adad al-Mulk'*, Illustration, (19th century), Qajar Iran,

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.Ink on paper, 6½ x 9¼in. (16.5 x 23.5cm.)  
<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5556238>



Figure. 5.

----,----. *Calligraphic Composition in Ghubari Script*  
(Second half 19th century: Iran).

Medium: Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper, Illustration,

Dimensions: H. 10 in. (25.4 cm) W. 15 5/8 in. (39.6 cm)

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/665823>

Written words of calligraphy became a source of conveying messages for the physical world and extracting faith from the meanings of the conveyed messages. Reading and understanding the Quran became an obligation and a source of spreading universal faith. The calligraphy became a mode of modifying words into gorgeous visuals which spread the visual beauty of Islamic calligraphy throughout the world.

### **Ebru, Tezheeb, and Iconography as Value Added Esthetics**

With the written word, the complementary skills of illumination, illustration, and bookbinding became an associated complementary art form that added an esthetic value to the art of calligraphy. For translating or enhancing the text value, illustrations are used to describe the content's inner meanings. Bookbinding was also used to gather all the information in one place to create the book volumes. For this purpose, the art of bookbinding was invented and for decoration of the page layouts and book covers, the art of illumination termed Tezheeb is formed. Other than a book illustration, the image

representation of objects used in routine life like containers and oil lamps, animals like camels, lions, birds, were used with calligraphic art.

According to Valerie Gonzalez images in this kind of artwork acquire more dominant status than calligraphic text. She categorized these as “figural or representational regime,” and those in which the text dominates the image, which she calls the “scriptural regime.”<sup>12</sup>

### Calligraphy as an Agent of Spirituality

Calligraphy as a significant art form retains its sacredness and potential spiritual character as an experience. The art is considered sacred from its evolution and due to its being attached to a mystical dimension, it is believed that these letters possess power and energy of some numerical value. It has its symbolism and connotation. Due to the objective of gaining energy, these letters were used in amulets. On the other side, mystics adopted the practice of invoking these letters such as “HU” recommended by their spiritual mentor. During this dhikr or remembrance of God Almighty, mystics used to contemplate these words inside their physical body to contemplate and get these associated energies within their body and soul (fig.9).<sup>13</sup>

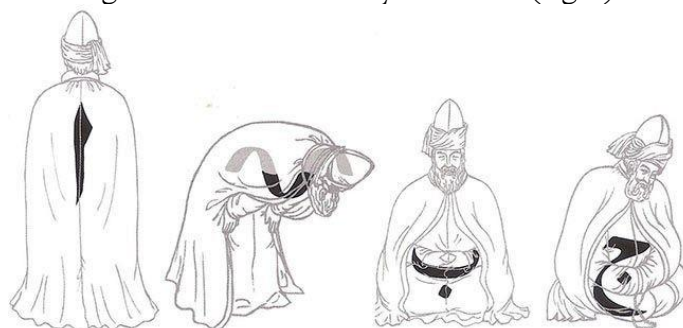


Figure. 9.

Shumaila Islam, *Untitled*, Pintrest, Illustrated Image, 2021.  
<https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/736479345312053798/>

Calligraphy is a Greek originated word from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and its etymological evolution calligraphic, from kallos ‘beauty’ + graphein ‘write’. which means ‘beautiful writing’ with a special pen or brush (Definition Calligraphy).<sup>14</sup> The legacy of the Islamic art of calligraphy started from Ali (RA) and gained religious legitimacy and its roots were traced back to Allah (SWT) through the celestial Quran. After Ali (RA) Ibn e Muqla not only invented geometrical and mathematical principles but incorporated a feel of melodious harmony as experiential esthetics by setting rules of measurements,

angles, and geometric shapes. The calligraphers paved a way for the development of fine words to convert into fine art as a spiritual experience.<sup>15</sup> It is recorded in history that God created the first thing as a tool of knowledge was the Celestial pen and the Heavenly books were created and the spiritual messages were sent through Tablets on mount Sina. These were the first-ever celestial archetype of calligraphic arts and are considered a principal of plastic arts. Within this context, to a certain limit, the art of calligraphy relates to the methodology or Sufi rituals (tariqats) with an immersion in folk art. The kind of calligraphy called Calligrams (the calligraphy with objects or human imagery) can be found in the Sufi circles which mostly belonged to Shi'i circles of Persian art.<sup>16</sup>

### Calligraphy as an Abstract Modern Art

A Tunisian calligrapher Nia Mahdaoui is famous for his exploration of signs in traditional art. The important elements of his calligraphy are Arabic letters, words, abstract compositions, and the traditional form of calligraphy (fig. 10). A modern trend naming 'Hurufiyah' of the early 1950s was followed by him. For creating a prominent individual style to approach this style, Mahdaoui has focused on the abstraction of calligraphic letters and shapes.<sup>17</sup>



Figure.10.

NJA Mahdaoui, *Untitled*, China Ink,  
Gold and Silver paint on parchment, Photograph, 2005.

Size: 90 x 90 cm- 35 3/8 x 35 3/8 in

<https://www.meemartgallery.com/artists/66-nja-mahdaoui/works/170-nja-mahdaoui-parchment-8-2005-07/>

Hassan Massoudy who is an Iraqi national, learned various styles of calligraphy accepted the influences of various Arabic masters and but also by the artist's Leger, Matisse, Soulages, and Picasso (fig.I I). Having the quality of enormous sculptural quality, he added the characteristics of energy and speed in his modern calligraphy that added a value to the creation of texts with far greater character relates to spaces, he says, and to his appreciation of the importance of space (fig. I2 a & b). Same is described by him as, "Beforehand, I thought that the letter was the only important aspect of calligraphy," he says. "Now I realize that the space around the letters is another part of calligraphy — the letters and spaces must work together in harmony."<sup>18</sup>



Figure.I I.

Hassan Massoudy, *Celui qui accorde*,  
Photograph, 2007. Water-based pigments on paper, 75 x 55 cm.  
<https://octobergallery.co.uk/artists/massoudy>

He described his interesting process as:

When I find a poetic verse, one that includes an image that I can see perfectly in my mind, I take its most beautiful words and spend days imagining the poet writing those words and how to formally reach a new expression through the new construction of a word," Massoudi explains. "I also try to think of what can be added to enrich the painting. For example, the use of colors, as I am a person who tries his

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best to achieve perfection. When I speak of perfection, my goal is to create something as close as possible to the vision the poet had in mind. Therefore, I write the same word multiple times in a different size, even if it (differs) just by a few millimeters.



Figure. 12 a&b

Hassan Massoudy, *Dawn is the age of roses & Raqs al Haroof*, Photograph, 2005.

Ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 in. (74.9 x 55.1 cm.)

02/23/2017–03/25/2017

For understanding his thought process for the construction of semi-abstract compositions, the quotes are significant and describe it as:

Between words and form, you need something. The quotes that I chose are quotes that evoke images After is always visual research. I always think about the architecture of the world. For example, these words climb, climb and climb and then they meet. When I take words, I try to break them up and reconstruct them according to their rhythm. For example, I think the negative spaces. Here Rumi speaks about his heart and the desert. So, I told myself, in this sentence, I see the word heart, but in my head what I see in the desert. Since he says his heart was lost in the desert, I drew

some signs that reminded me of dunes that flossy with the wind. I went to Paris to study the shape of the body, faces, lines of how you build a painting. . . . . For me, letters are connected to a man and an interpenetration. Thus, it is a matter of me knowing myself, as well. Every time, I write a phrase, I try to find something unexpected.<sup>19</sup>

Haji Noor Deen is a Chinese calligrapher. He celebrates the glory of God Almighty with the verses of the Holy Quran. A huge variety of characteristics of both literal and figurative senses can be seen in his calligraphic arts like beautiful usage of artistic complexities and geometric patterns by way of circles, flowers, vases, fruits, triangles, fans, scepters, swords, minarets, and rhombuses. His art executes the splendor of Islamic artistry, wonderful expression, and preservation of the Quranic messages through its words. The most interesting innovation of his work is that he presents is an intricate blending of Islamic and Chinese calligraphy (fig. I3) in a creative, balanced, and harmonized way. He describes his methodology as, “As a Chinese Muslim calligrapher, I have a deep sense of responsibility in promoting, propagating, and carrying forward this intricate art form and precious cultural heritage,” Deen said.<sup>20</sup>



Figure. I3.

Haji Noor Deen, Untitled, Scroll Artworks, Photograph, No Date.

Retrieved: <https://www.hajinoordeen.com/special-artworks/scroll-brush>

### Calligraphy as Mysticism

The art of calligraphy often was ascribed with a mystical dimension through the attainment of spiritualistic messages, Sufistic vision, and immersed symbolism. To reflect the practitioners' spiritual level, the skill of Islamic calligraphy was adopted to be perfected with all esthetics and canons by mystics and Sufis. The art under mystic transformation is characterized by the crystallization of spirit, expressed through the beauty of letters. The elements of purity and beauty of lines were considered as a parallel to the purity of the soul. Thus, a distinctive science of letters entitled "Ilm al-Huruf" has been developed. The realization of the essence of things and their connection to the enhancement of the soul was the genre of mysticism that was gained through cognition by sacred knowledge, secret practice, and the illumination of the heart. As a result, practitioners gained true perceptive cognition through illumination, visions, revelations, or experiences of contemplation that were understandable.

Mystics were often artists, calligraphers, or poets too who described their, emotional attachment to God Almighty and His Prophets, visionary experiences through the invocation of *Isma ul- Husna*, poetry, and calligraphed it using their skills (fig.14). Therefore, a strong bonding of calligraphy proved a mystic practice and a source of healing of heart and soul to mystic practitioners. As a process of contemplation through visionary sensibility for attaining the beauty of calligraphy to the soul of a mystic practitioner, mystics used to practice watching calligraphic writing strokes, words, phrases, and even adopted postures while contemplation.<sup>21</sup> The ritual of invoking Gods' names (dhikr) by repetition using tongue, heart, and the act of writing in calligraphic method reached its peak in the Ottoman period.<sup>22</sup>



Figure. I4.

Khan, *Arabic Calligraphy Design*, Digital Illustration, Pinterest, No Date.  
Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/bezmiasikan>

## Reflective Art Practice

### Phase I: Invocation & Practice of Traditional Calligraphy

The journey of calligraphic aesthetic started from the experience of meditation when researcher closed the eyes started to invoke the sacred names of Almighty for the purification of my soul and connecting myself to the divine. Through a prior mode of meditation, Researcher focused on meditation towards cleanliness of the soul which resulted in cleanliness and purification of one's heart. After the next phase of meditation was to explore the sacred words by practicing them on papers from initial learning as a student from beginner level till the final production of artworks. The creative process of learning offered an interesting routine of practicing the skill of writing letters repetitively. In the beginning, the produced work was in raw form and I started practicing individual letters to get them perfected (fig.15) and later the compositions in mentioned scripts were perfected (fig.16). The phase was a bit slow but later on, continuity of applying strokes, a certain rhythm and pattern of repetitive movements of the set rules brought a serious impact on the nature and quality of the work produced. During the process, it is felt that the same feeling of peace and focus of hand on writing. The displayed themes in which the red piece particularly presents Karbala

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happenings (fig. 20). This work has been displayed in a calligraphy exhibition in Turkey (fig. 21). The contemplation and meditative invocation by the pen is converted into art pieces and experiences. The practice started from learning oriental scripts named Nastaleeqe (fig. 17 & 18), Kufic (fig.19 & 22), and Tuluth.

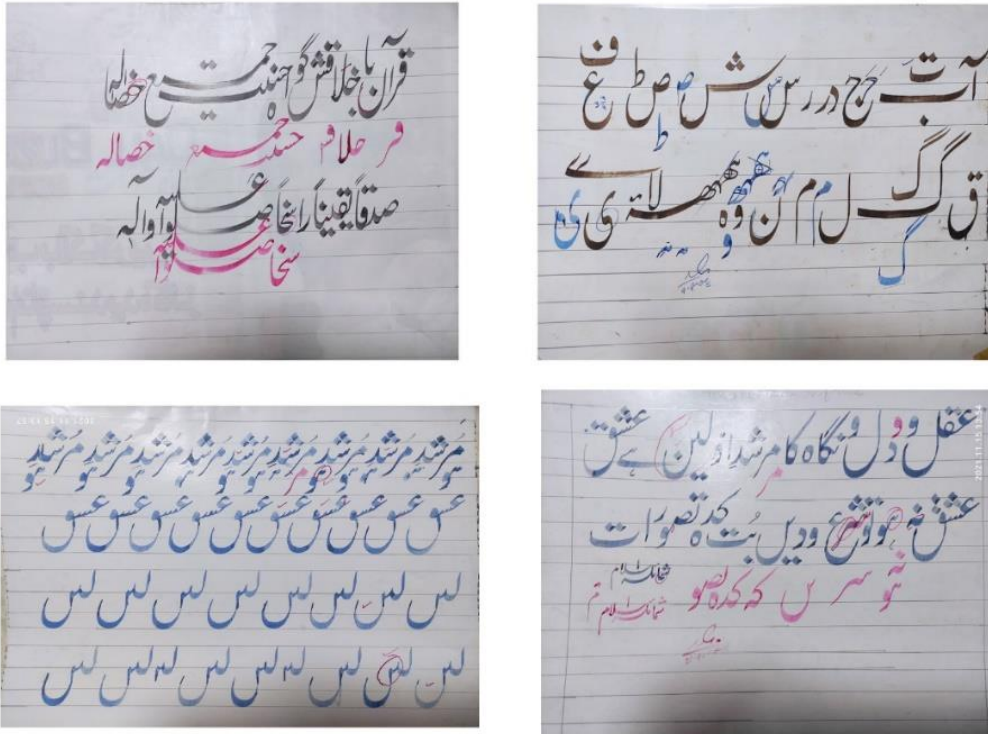


Figure.15.

Shumaila Islam, *Calligraphy Practices of Letters and Words in Nastaleeqe Script*. Photograph, 2008-9. Personal Collection by the Artist.



Figure. I6.

Shumaila Islam, *Calligraphy Sketches of Word Allah & Muhammad in Kufic Script*. Photograph, 2008-9, Personal Collection by the Artist.

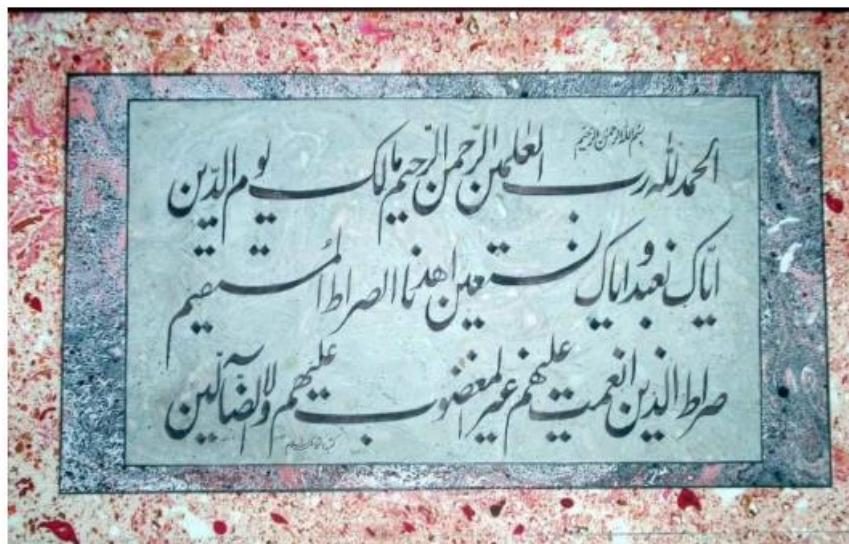


Figure. I7.

Shumaila Islam, *Composition (Katba) Surah Fatiha with Abru Borders and Background in Nastaleeq Script*, Photograph, 2008-9, Personal Collection by the Artist.



Figure. 18.  
Shumaila Islam, *Katba (Composition) Kalma*  
with *Turkish Illumination Borders in Nastaleeq Script*, 2008-9,  
Personal Collection by the Artist.



Figure. 19.  
Islam, S. (2008-9). *Composition inspired by Gulzar Style*  
(*Katba*) *Ayyat e Quran with Turkish Illumination and*  
*Golden Ebru Borders in Kufic Script*. Personal Collection by the Artist.



Figure. 20.

Shumaila Islam, *Katba (Composition) Verse on Karbala with Turkish Illumination Borders and Ebru Background in Nastaleeqe Script*, Photograph, 2008-9, Personal Collection by the Artist.



Figure. 21.

Shumaila Islam, *Katba (Composition) Verse on Karbala with Turkish Illumination Borders and Ebru Background in Nastaleeqe Script*, Photograph, 2008-9.

Displayed in Turkey International Calligraphy Exhibition.  
Personal Collection by the Artist.



Figure.22.

Shumaila Islam, *Calligraphy Work (Katba) of Word Allah Kufic Script*,  
Photograph, 2019,  
Displayed at National Calligraphy Exhibition, Alhamra Arts Council.  
Personal Collection by the Artist.

### Experimental Phase of Visionary Modification

The experience was not limited to the repetition of strokes that started from a dot to line and line to forms of alphabets and alphabets to words (fig.23). The initial learning was tactile and visionary and engaged hand movements, memorization, and imagination on a confined paper surface. Through the practice, the experience of holding on breath, a touch of a tool on the surface, sensitization, and concentration resulted in form of amalgamation of words, calligraphic strokes, and Sufi images (fig.24). The manifested forms were realistic and semi-abstract. The style was developed keeping in mind the whirling movements of Dervishes. The images of whirling Darwish present their state of ecstasy during the Sema ceremony.<sup>23</sup>

Both works are symbolizing an imagination in which tangible and intangible are amalgamated and through painting, the presence is experienced. By whirling in harmony, the Semazians confirm the revolving state of objects of nature in-universe from the smallest cells to the stars of cosmology. By doing so they connect, pray, contemplate and become grateful to God.



Figure. 23.

Shumaila Islam, *Noor Ala Noor Contemporary Calligraphy in Tuluth Script*, Photograph of Artwork, 2012, Acrylics on Canvas, Personal Collection by the Artist.



Figure. 24.

Shumaila Islam, (2014). *Ishq in Contemporary style Calligram*, 2014, Acrylics on Canvas. Photograph of Artwork, Personal Collection by the Artist.

Kinesthetic Experience through Abstract Calligraphic Marks/Imagery

The further stage of enhancing my experience into a larger format became a more interesting interplay of body, mind, and soul. At this stage, to discover or explore is an artistic instinct that compels me to engage my whole body with the experience of creating visual vocabulary as marks or semi and abstract visual patterns were more than calligraphy writing (fig. 25 & 26 a&b). It was an experience of joy, freedom, and enlightenment.



Figure. 25 a&b.

Shumaila Islam, *Semi-Abstract Linear Calligraphic Marks in Contemporary style (free of script)*, 2015,  
Ink on Paper by Qalam. Photograph of artwork,  
Personal Collection by the Artist.

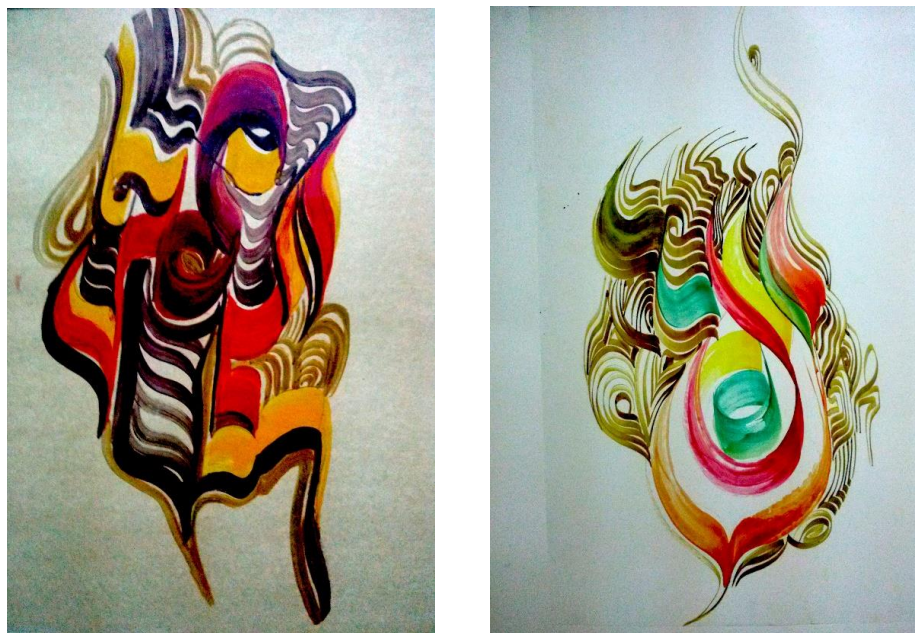


Figure. 26 a & b.

Shumaila Islam, *Abstract Linear Calligraphic Marks in Contemporary style (free of script)*,  
Ink on Paper by Qalam, 2015, Photograph of Artwork,  
Personal Collection by the Artist.

Followings are selected sketches in mixed mediums that represent the transformation and developments of calligraphic expression in elongated vertical dimensions, symbolic and minimalistic manners. Here I have started to experience my calligraphic strikes as something more and beyond than calligraphy; it represents my mental and physical state exploring mind, body, and spiritual energy. The experience engaged the concentration of my breath, mind, and body on a single focus of drawing and manifesting the expressive calligraphic strokes that became more than calligraphy. During this process, my body was interacting with space as I am moving into the space of the universe in my imagination.

The work mainly modified and break the elements of calligraphy like lines, dots, and repetitive strokes having an idea of the contemplation and whirling of Dervishes as earlier done by researcher. Through longer and lines, the idea of space and time is executed. The other elements like dots (Nuqta), and minimal semi-circles in repetition provide a sense of motion in an even static

position. The cyclic repetition signifies the notion of the oneness of human experience, our inner darkness, and its being illuminating from the same source of origin. The three essential components such as the mind as knowledge and thought, the heart through the expression of feelings, poetry, and music, and the body by activating life by the turning are involved by human nature that is the part of the whirling ritual. The ritual offers to experience these three requisite components as a theory of meditation and practice.

Through the play, It created rhythmic patterns that indicates a particular movement that was in researcher's subconscious; the circular whirling forms (fig. 28). The forms unconsciously were derived from the movements of whirling Dervishes of Kunia (Turkey) (fig. 29 a&b and 30). The enlightened experience resulted in the development of tactile, visual, and kinesthetic esthetics.



Figure. 28.

Shumaila Islam, *Untitled; Abstract Linear Calligraphic Marks and Imagery in Contemporary style* (Horizontal Dimension), Ink on Paper 22 yards Scholar sheet Scroll by Broad Brushes, Qalam and Markers. 201



Figure. 29. Shumaila Islam, *Abstract Linear Calligraphic Marks, Imagery in Contemporary style*, Ink on 22 yards Scholar sheet Scroll  
Annamolka Art Gallery, College of Art & Design, University of the Punjab.  
Photograph, Personal Collection by the Artist.



Figure. 30  
Shumaila Islam. (2016).  
*Untitled; Abstract Linear Calligraphic Marks and Imagery in Contemporary style*,  
Ink on 22 yards Tracing sheet Roll,  
Annamolka Art Gallery, College of Art & Design, University of the Punjab.  
Photograph, Personal Collection by the Artist.

The overall essence of the idea is that the Sema ceremony signifies the spiritual journey of a mystic soul by the means of intellect and compassion till its enlightenment and perfection (Kamal). The perfection which turns a mystic into the truth cultivates love (Ishq), surpasses the ego, encounters the truth, and arrives at Perfection. After fulfilling the objective of the soul with nourishment the mystic reaches maturity and modifies himself as a humble servant of humanity. The experiential part was not just sensory but also spiritual that nurtures the notion of compassion and devotion by establishing connections between exquisiteness, silence, pleasure, and mysticism through manipulations of the calligraphic forms. The display of the project pushed the boundary of traditional calligraphic forms and transformed the artistic experience into a mystical one that aimed to accomplish ecstasy in more ways than one.

### **Conclusion**

During the mid of seventh century from the revelation of the Quran, Arabic calligraphy possesses a long history of evolution, modification, and innovation. The skill of calligraphy offers its comprehension of varied styles and forms. Arabic calligraphers used sections of the Quran such as Ayat's and the vocabulary of qur'anic words for practicing and acquiring the skill they needed furthermore, they experimented with the Arabic letters and words in complex compositions. The calligraphic imprints are visible in mosques and calligraphic painting displays. The sacred art displays a set standard for traditional calligraphy whereas it demonstrates the refined manually modified writing skill.

The visionary part of Islamic calligraphic has its impact on its development, and affected by worldliness, the Divine message, and later through Sufism, it was submerged in profound imagery as well. Being a divine, was one of the main attributes of Sufism, which reflected directly onto the artistry of calligraphy, to which they were inclined. Particularly the Mawlawi and Bektashis Sufi orders. Sufis or spiritualists, a large number of them rehearsed the calligraphic skills as a ceremonial ritual. Many creators emphasized a trademark Sufi contemplation of praying God's names (dhikr) as one of the significant elements for arriving at style, for example, capacity to see its inward excellence and lastly acknowledge it. It is a little astonishing that numerous famous calligraphic specialists were themselves Sufi mentors, or their devotees, followers, who had set creative guidelines that became

authorized. In this manner, trademark calligraphic works were made, with original and creative visual compositions, which became unambiguous to Sufi calligraphic skill. In this paper, my point was to unveil the calligraphic syntheses, which have some mysterious quality and imagery. Calligraphic skill is overall dependent on the concept from the profound sacred world and since its commencement further unveils through different types of visions and reflections. As mentioned above that the sacred art of calligraphy was taken as a skill with set scientific and mathematical canons which were implementable through the calligraphic equipment and experiential practices that occur as a result of mystic rituals. The combination of both intensifies the manifestation of spirit and the reflection of the condition of its practitioner's spirit, and this way with time, the enlightened heart becomes a lightning candle and his sophisticated calligraphic reflections become a burning soul.

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