

Reflection of Allama Iqbal's Ideological Discourse in Pakistani Art: A Reference to Instigate Self-Reliance in the Youth of Pakistan

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Abstract

Allama Muhammad Iqbal, an eminent poet and philosopher of South Asia became a source of stimulation in the 20th century among the Muslim *ummah* because of his revolutionary ideological poetry. He emphasized self-realization for the comprehension of Divine strength within humanity. His inspirational philosophical discourse left enormous influence on the younger generation of his time and on the bases of his nationalistic ideology, the creation of Pakistan became possible. He is considered to be the national poet of Pakistan and his ideologies provided the Pakistani artists of the formative period with inspiring theoretical frameworks which were expressed through visual representation. Art being an essential part of humanity, reflects the ideological, religious and socio-political settings of a society and in Pakistan, art also focuses on multiple conceptual panoramas. Artists like Abdur Rehman Chughtai, Sadequain and Aslam Kamal illustrated the philosophical references of Iqbal's poetry in direct yet symbolic manner with a reason to focus on the underlying stimulating context for inspiring the younger generation of Pakistan. In contemporary Pakistani art, his philosophy of *Khudi* has also been revisited as a reference to instigate a novel chapter of meaningful existence analyzing the contemporary challenges faced by the nation of Pakistan mainly after 9/11.

Keywords: *Khudi*, Pakistani Art, Abdur Rehman Chughtai, Sadequain, Aslam Kamal

Introduction

20th Century with political upheaval in the world stimulated the intellectuals in raising questions of identity central to the philosophy of self. Observing this panorama, the eminent philosopher poet of the East, Allama Muhammad Iqbal emerged on the scene with his highly intellectual and ideological discourse. The political cataclysm mainly in the Sub-continent during colonial period motivated him to present his ideology of *Khudī* focusing on the notions of self-integrity and its realization that became a beacon of light in the depressed environment for the Muslim *ummah*. His revolutionary philosophical reference worked as a ripple in the stagnant water, he emphasized self-realization for the comprehension of Divine strength within humanity leaving an enormous influence on the younger generation of his time. Iqbal was having a practical approach and he encouraged youngsters to rely on their own strength and struggle as an instrument for seeking success in all domains of life. In his poetic volume of *Zarb-i Kalim (Asrar-i Paida)*, he said it very clearly:

اُس قوم کو شمشیر کی حاجت نہیں ہوتی
پہ جس کے جوانوں کی خودی صورتِ فولاد

“*There is no need of swords in a nation*

That owns a youth gifted with a self of steel”

(Translation by the author)

Method & Material:

In reference to research methodology, qualitative method is used by applying CMS referencing style. Few books and articles by different scholars were taken under consideration to get authentic sources of information for conducting research on the selected subject. Visual references for both formal and critical analysis were taken from books, Internet sources, social media and author's personal collection.

Results

All the textual and visual references in context to this research were examined to get the final conclusion. In qualitative research methodology, the results vary according to the nature of the subject invested. This research focuses on the ideological discourse presented by Allama Iqbal which became inspirational and thought-provoking reference for some of the eminent Pakistani painters after post-partition period. Artworks of these selected artists were critically analyzed and emphasized as an influential reference that can be revisited with the intention to arouse self-consciousness among the nation of Pakistan in the contemporary age.

Discussion

Iqbal's main intention was to provoke the youth for realizing their inner forte that was a reflection of Divine characteristics. His strong ideology of nationalism resulted in the creation of Pakistan and because of his revolutionary contribution, he is considered to be the national poet of Pakistan. The formation of Pakistan was a result of a long struggle with an intention to provide its youth an independent place where they could use their strength in a productive manner and rely on their own abilities being independent.

Art and literature share a strong connection being fundamental part of a society and they both reflect the ideological, religious and socio-political settings of a society. In Pakistan, art also represented multi-dimensional vistas. Art in Pakistan flourished with the passage of time and it also went through ups and downs under political interference. Keeping in view, the quest for national and religious identity in the post-partition period of Pakistan, Pakistani artists of the formative period incorporated in their artworks Allama Iqbal's inspiring ideological framework for the youth to boost their strength which was expressed through visual discourse. Artists like Abdur Rehman Chughtai, Sadequain and Aslam Kamal emphasized the philosophical references of Iqbal's poetry in direct yet symbolic manner with a reason to focus on the underlying stimulating context for inspiring the younger generation of Pakistan so that they could remain intact with the purpose of their life.

Amal-i Chughtai, an exclusive illustrative folio inspired by the poetry of Allama Iqbal for the youngsters is credited to Abdur Rehman Chughtai

which was produced in the 1960's. Abdur Rehman Chughtai (1894-1975), the precursor of art in Pakistan was the first intellectual artist. His interest in poetry brought him closer to Allama Iqbal. His first exclusively illustrated manuscript was *Muraqqa-i Chughtai* (1928), which was based on the verses of Ghalib (a renowned poet of the Sub-continent), the foreword of which was written by Iqbal. After post-partition period, observing the political horizons for the younger generation Chughtai illustrated the inspiring ideological verses of Iqbal in the volume of *Amal-i Chughtai* in 1968.¹ It took approximately fifteen years in its completion.² Partha Mitter, an Indian scholar mentioned him in these words observing his inclination towards Muslim classics, "*The first Muslim to use Muslim classics in a personal manner, to express Muslim feelings of degeneration under colonialism*".³ Chughtai is credited with the uniqueness of his artistic style which was devised with the amalgamation of wash technique (an extension of the Bengal School), Ajanta, Persian, Mughal and Pahari painting style with the visual decorative references of Art Nouveau.⁴ He remained connected through his art with the cultural legacy of the sub-continent and in this reference his inclination towards the Pan-Asian philosophies brought him nearer to the ideological discourse of Allama Iqbal's poetry. In reference to stimulate the Muslim *ummah*, Iqbal selected legendary characters from Islamic history to present the concept of *mard-i momin* (men of faith) and this feature was taken up by Chughtai in most of the illustrative references of *Amal-i Chughtai*. The heroic characters were illustrated in his unique style where the subject was more influential rather than its depiction. The lyrical expression was highlighted with power and strength of the characters illustrated in a bold way. These heroic figures were having strong disposition with wide open eyes, high in spirit and individual characteristics. Marcella said about his work in these words,

*"Chughtai combined his own personal innovations with earlier traditions in Asian miniature painting to create a new aesthetic which provided an artistic identity for the recently formed Islamic nation."*⁵

Chughtai following Iqbal, wanted to express self-determination and for that he portrayed figures having the same gesture, their heads were shown in high spirit by erecting straight which represents perseverance and courage. To enhance the impact of the subject, he brought the main character close to the

foreground on the surface whereas the heroic men and women were draped in Muslim attire. Some of the inspiring subjects were *Khalifa Haroun Rashid*, *Zubeida Khatun*, *Tipu Sultan*, *Self-Revelation*, *The National Emblem*, *Will and Power* and *Son of the Soil* as mentioned by S. Amjad Ali in his book 'Painters of Pakistan'. The selected titles reflect his aspiration for bridging a link with the magnificent history of Muslim influential leaders for re-establishing Muslim identity.

One of Chughtai's paintings with the title *Tipu Sultan*, focused on the grandeur of a young Muslim leader who is shown as a warrior standing with the gesture of vigor as the focal point of the composition (fig.I). Whereas its background represents a cropped segment of a tank, a military weapon which is used for showing strength of the military and here it symbolically represents the strength of the heroic personality of a warrior who is not inferior than a tank in himself. In the middle ground, a triangular section of the ground at left is filled with stones and out of these a flower sprouts out. This part also represents that a flower can grow within tough conditions on the bases of courage, it also symbolizes and enhances the personality of the warrior i.e., *Tipu Sultan*. This single standing figure composition revolves around the concept of highlighting the will and power of the soldier by exaggerating the anatomy of the figure to emphasize its monumentality while ignoring realistic proportions. As mentioned by S. Amjad Ali,

*"To create the effect of massiveness and monumentality and grandeur, Chughtai uses in "Amal-i Chughtai" the stylistic device of inflating and enlarging the figures ignoring considerations of realism."*⁶

Analyzing the image closely, some features add more to the significance of this subject, the focused and determined warrior has placed his right hand over a sword in a very relaxed gesture. Sword is considered as a national emblem by Allama Iqbal which he expressed in *Tarana-i mili* (anthem of the nation).

تینوں کھتے میں ہم مل کر جواں ہوئے ہیں خنجر ہلال کا ہے قومی نشان ہمارا

"We reached maturity, nurtured under the shades of swords

The crescent-shaped moon is our national emblem"

The exaggerated height of the sword is designed in the similar fashion as can be seen in the portrayal of *Tipu Sultan*, elaborately decorated sword and the shield adds more to the designed vocabulary, Chughtai was a master of. The Muslim attire of the warrior with turban over his head gave it a dignified gesture, whereas the shoes also represent Persian influence. The warrior, covered from head to toe is shown with a face represented in profile having wide open eyes as if he has targeted something, it also shows that the meaning of life is in action. Analyzing the overall image, it seems as if the heroic gesture of the warrior from the chapter of history has been frozen by the artist as a reference of contemplation for the younger generation of the newly formed country.



Figure. I. Abdur Rehman Chughtai, *Tipu Sultan*, size unknown, gouache, 1968.

Another significant painting from *Amal-i Chughtai* was *The National Emblem* (fig. 2). Following the zeal for action, Chughtai very consciously selected subjects of courage and commitment. This painting has two main characters, one is the mother and the other is her young son and the interesting feature here is that a mother is presenting the national emblem “the sword” to her son as a symbol of devotion and strength for the nation. This image was an illustration of the same verse which was mentioned earlier in these words, “*There is no need of swords in a nation, that owns a youth gifted with a self of steel*”. A mother aspires her son to have a self of steel which adds more to the power of a nation. It conveys a symbolic message to all the mothers who nurtured their children with affection and devotion in order to prepare them for the future. Both these protagonists have wide-open eyes as a gesture of wakefulness representing their aptitude for action. The young boy is holding a book in his hand which shows that he has material knowledge whereas in the background within a niche, a book is shown open resting on a book holder which seems like Holy Quran symbolizing the spiritual knowledge. The worldly and the spiritual knowledge are meant for character building, so analyzing this reference all the elements add more to the significance of the subject. Another interesting feature of this composition which makes it unique is that the mother is having a garb over her head but the son has not, therefore the mother with her two hands holding the sword is shown in a gesture to shelter her son’s head. This aspect also connects with the previously mentioned verse, “*We reached maturity, nurtured under the shades of swords, the crescent-shaped moon is our national emblem*”. Abdur Rehman Chughtai with uniqueness of his own style attempted to address in a simple yet metaphorical manner, his yearning to influence the younger generation of the new country while referring to the revolutionary influential poetic verses. Chughtai was the first significant modern Muslim artist from South Asia and on the basis of his immense contribution in the field of art he was awarded with the Presidential medal for pride of performance in 1968.⁷



Figure. 2. Abdur Rehman Chughtai, *The National Emblem*, size unknown, gouache on paper, 1968.

Next to Chughtai, the most innovative artist was Sadequain, not only the way they expressed themselves but the way they analyzed literary references in visual form. Sadequain was a self-taught artist although he got education in the field of philosophy. Sadequain being an intellectual, combined art with philosophy, history, religion and literature in order to reflect towards his surroundings. Sadequain had a reflective soul which was well expressed in his work. His inclination towards reality of life brought him closer to the philosophical discourse of Iqbal. He fell under the influence of Iqbal's contemplative references of life which provoked humanity to search for their inner strength. Focusing on the strength of humanity, Sadequain conceptually represented Iqbal's humanistic philosophy to enhance the inner forte of mankind as a tool to decipher the secrets of the universe in one of his gigantic murals once executed at the ceiling of Lahore Museum with the title "*Evolution of Mankind*" (fig. 3). For this mural, Sadequain got reference

from Iqbal's poetic volume of *Bal-i Jibril* (Gabriel's Wings), focusing on the strength of mankind as a reminder of their forte that allows them to decipher in both the material and the celestial realm. It says:

تاروں سے آگے جہاں اور بھی ہیں ابھی عشق کے آتھن اور بھی ہیں
تہی زندگی سے نہیں فیض آئیں یہاں سیکڑوں کارواں اور بھی ہیں
قناعت نہ کر عالمِ رنگ و بو پر چمن اور بھی آستیاں اور بھی ہیں
الگ لگھو گیا انشیمین تو کیا نسیم مقاماتِ آہ و فغاں اور بھی ہیں
تو شاہیں بے پروا سے کام تیرا ترے سامنے سماں اور بھی ہیں
اسی روز و شب میں الجھ کر نہ رہ جا کہ تیرے زمانہ مکان اور بھی ہیں
گتے دن کہ تنہا تھا میں بسمن میں
یہاں اب کے رازداں اور بھی ہیں

"Beyond the stars exists other worlds

Other trials of love are yet to come

These open spaces do not lack life

Thousands of other caravans are yet to come

Do not confine yourself with the surrounded world of color and smell

There exists other gardens and homes for you

There is no need to worry if you have lost one nest?

There exist other places to lament and scream

You have the characteristics of eagle, flight is your aptitude

There exists in front of you other skies

*You don't need to snare yourself within the thoughtfulness of day and
night*

As you belong to other epochs and places

Days have gone by when I was alone in conference

Now I have more confidants here" (Translation by the author)

This thought-provoking reference which inspires mankind to look beyond the existing reality caught the attention of Sadequain which he used to express in visual discourse on the ceiling of Lahore Museum. Titled as *The Evolution of Mankind*, this mural incorporates the distinct characteristic features of Sadequain with the reference of cactus shaped hands at both the edges and the metaphorical representation of the world referring to both material and the spiritual. Cactus symbolize life in action within touch conditions, which he used for his self-image as well. Symbolizing hands of a strong man who can bear the pain of life and still thrives to evolve in any condition. Without limiting human potential, he aspires the youth to acknowledge their inner strength and the potentials that rests within themselves.

He used the existent universe as the central point for the worldly and the transcendental where he incorporated metaphorical vocabulary highlighting the cosmos, the sun, the stars, human hands in action, two human figures (probably a man and a woman) intertwined shown thrice in circular motion at different intervals of the composition, a clock representing time and an hour glass, calligraphic text both in realistic and expressionistic manner making abstract forms. Every element in the mural incorporates geometry as a tool of representation and arrangement as well. The concept of space and time has been focused where hands are shown in action as representatives of worldly and spiritual strength of mankind. It shows that time and space cannot restrain the potential of humanity if they have trust on their spiritual strength besides physical strength that uplifts their status of being *ashraf-ul makhluqāt* (superior of all creations). Over the gigantic size of the mural,

Sadequain created balance while repeating elements in a rhythmic motion swirling around the main context.



Figure. 3. Sadequain, *Evolution of Mankind*, oil and markers on canvas, size unknown, 1973, Lahore Museum's collection.

The background of the composition was colored blue by the artist to enhance the effect of infinity, it also represents celestial space. The most notable feature of this composition is the representation of the cosmos and the human hands that seems like the hands of magicians representing their desire to perform miracles, while controlling the visible to unlock the invisible. At the lower register, the center of the space has two hands holding two letters of Urdu i.e., *Alif mad'ā* and *Jīm* making the word *Āj* (today). The artist has consciously represented *Āj* in front of the sun, which shows that today is in light as a reference of visibility and availability of all resources, humanity can avail as they have to reveal other secrets of time which are yet to come. It also symbolizes the fire of passion within mankind on the bases of which they will be judged at the day of Judgement. Whereas rest of the hands are shown engaged with the cosmos, map of the world, hour glass and feather pen referring to their capabilities that can perform wonders for the time to come. They can write their own destiny; nothing is beyond their ability, that are meant for both the worlds as they have worldly and spiritual qualities as their forte. The overall impact of the composition creates visual commentary using the motivational poetry of Allama Iqbal making humanity as the center of God's creation. It is a contemplative piece of art that engages the viewer to decipher the metaphorical language of the visual with the reference of both realistic and abstract imagery whether of text or of other elements of engagement. Sadequain being an intellectual artist wanted his visual sermon to engage the viewers sensations, as mentioned by Akbar Naqvi (an art critic) that for Sadequain a painting is meant to think rather than being only a picture.⁸

Sadequain in this composition used philosophical means of engagement at three different levels, initially mankind should be aware of their strengths and of weaknesses today for their survival tomorrow and to recognize that they are gifted with a self that has a struggling nature to overcome any situation. They can change conditions for themselves relying on their strength as their forte. The recognition of their self is important at all stages which will lead them to perform miracles for humanity and this is what they are meant for. Sadequain through this mural stressed on the potential's humanity holds in

itself, the only need is self-comprehension which serves as the foundation for the aspiration of a better tomorrow. Rifaat Hassan in her research article mentioned that:

“Iqbal believes that it is the lot of human beings to share in the deeper aspirations of the universe around them and to shape their own destiny as well as that of the universe.”⁹

Like Iqbal who while referring to the universe, mentioned that the strength of mankind with all their potentials is beyond the secret of this universe, they can solve the mystery of this universe while employing their magical properties. In the same way, Sadequain has attempted to refer the gifted qualities of mankind for relying on their strength which will lead them to conquer the visible and the invisible. The contrast of light and dark, magical hands, swirling motion of human bodies (referring both male and female) and the calligraphic text adds more to the dramatic gesture of the composition. Within the visual account, the main intention of the artist is to emphasize that this universe is meant for human trial and with reasoning, contemplation and realization everything is in the reach of mankind. Humanity is superior than time and space, nothing can harm human capabilities except man himself.

Analyzing the works of Sadequain and Chughtai, it has been observed that both have expressed their visionary approach while revisiting Iqbal's ideological references as a stimulus to inspire and encourage the strength of Pakistani youth. Being true to their distinct styles, they have left enormous influence on making of art in Pakistan while holding different schools of thought they aspire the contemporary generation of art in Pakistan.

Later on, Aslam Kamal (usually known for his modern calligraphic works) also reflected his understanding of Iqbal's poetry in visual expression. It was more illustrative in terms of expression, in most of the works, the image of Iqbal was used as the protagonist with the infusion of certain elements taken from the poetry of Iqbal. In one of the illustrated works, Aslam Kamal focused on the poetic verses extracted from *Bal-i Jibril* (fig. 4).

وہ عرفِ ازلہ مجھ کو سکھایا ہے جنوں خدا مجھے نفسِ جبریل دے تو کہوں

ستاره کیا میری تقدیر کی خبر دے گا وہ خود فرائضی افلاک میں ہے نغمہ اور زبوں

“The word of secret taught me that passion,

I may express if God bestow me with the soul of Gabriel

How can a star predict what my fate holds?

Itself it roamed mystified within the infinitude of the skies.”

(Translation by the author)

These words by Iqbal gave stress to rely on the spirited knowledge that has been transferred to humanity for deciphering the secrets of this universe which bestowed a passion Gabriel had. This knowledge is superior than that of stars and can lead towards the desired goal to decode the unknown. To illustrate this verse, Aslam Kamal used the colossal image of Iqbal as a reference of humanity holding the Divine book to show his supremacy over the knowledge of stars on the bases of Divines knowledge that enabled him to design his own fortune. Star is represented in the background behind the interlaced design of architecture inspired by Mughal architecture. The monochromatic scheme of black and white has been used to emphasize the illustrative context in a direct way. He used the same style for creating other artworks focusing on the message of Iqbal for the youngsters.



Figure. 4. Aslam Kamal, *title unknown*, inks on canvas, size unknown, year unknown.

In the contemporary age, analyzing the challenging socio-political conditions of Pakistan mainly after 9/11, Allama Iqbal's philosophy of *Khudī* has also been revisited as a reference to instigate self-reliance among the youth of Pakistan. It is also suggested after analyzing the shift of contemporary trends in politics around the globe that Muslim community needs to reinforce the concept of self-consciousness that allows them to identify within themselves the God gifted Divine strength with broader panorama, not only for the sake of themselves but for humanity in general to pursue a better tomorrow. Being a contemporary Pakistani artist and research scholar, I have incorporated this meaningful reference of self-realization in my visual practice that focusing on Iqbal's philosophical discourse in search of a better tomorrow. The metaphorical representation of figure has been used as a budding reference to engage the viewer in visual communication (fig. 5). In, a reference of

contemplation has been taken under consideration from *Bang-i dara, Jawab-i Khizar* that says:

خام ہے جب تک تو ہے مٹی کا اک انبار تو
پنختہ ہو جائے تو ہے شیر بے زنہار تو

*“Before reaching maturity, you are a just a pile of dust
Attaining maturity will make you an irresistible sword.”*

(Translation by the author)

In this visual reference, a human figure is visible which is originally made of mud and has taken the form of a mount erected vertical symbolizing the strength of humanity. It refers, although mankind has been created with a mix of mud/soil and on the bases of its innate capabilities it can work like a steel. Realization of its strength and abilities can develop a soulful spirit in humanity which is much needed at this age of turbulence. The green leaves surrounding the figure suggests prosperous future that can be achieved by believing in Divine aptitude gifted by God.

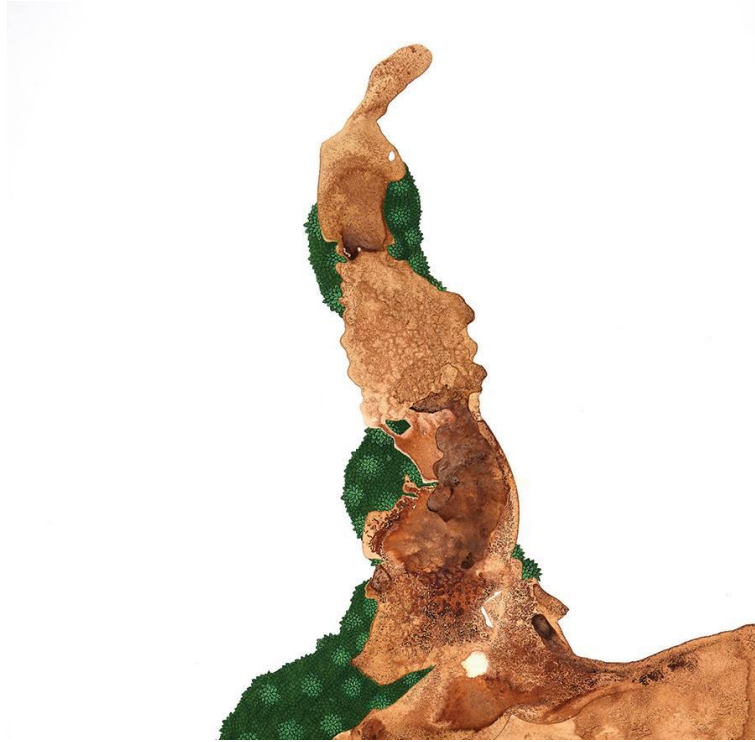


Figure. 5. Farah Khan, *Know Thyself-III*, mixed media on wasli, 20" x 26", 2018.

Conclusion

Analyzing all the references presented in the paper, it can be concluded by saying that in the contemporary age, positive attitude towards life is much needed. Past, present and future in one way or another are always connected with each other. By learning from the mistakes of past in the present, one can proceed towards a better future and in this context the ideological discourse available in the poetry of Iqbal leads the youth of every age for believing in their abilities through realization of being. The meaningful visual vocabulary of the selected artists reflects the same notion in a creative gesture with an intension to guide the youth for pursuing a prosperous future.

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